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Learning how to "Tease da Otha' Race:" Ethnic-Racial Socialization through Multicultural Literature

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ABSTRACT

While multicultural education is lauded in the U.S. as a culturally-relevant teaching and learning approach that upholds diversity and inclusion, its emphasis of group differences often leads to essentialism, which may result in racial and gendered stereotypes that label non-white, non-binary, non-U.S. American/European students as deviations from dominant groups. This discordance is clear in acritical and ahistorical narratives that paint Hawai'i and its education system as a model multicultural society despite an abundance of evidence pointing to the existence of institutionalized racism and sexism. Using a critical race theoretical lens and a critical race content analytical framework to examine three Hawai'i-focused texts, this article exposes racial microaggressions about Communities of Color layered within multicultural discourse. Furthermore, the analysis theorizes potential long-term consequences of consistent exposure to racial microaggressions for Students of Color through an acritical, multicultural educational approach. This includes an internalization of racist ideologies and discourses that contribute to intragroup and intergroup conflict and a low self-regard.

KEYWORDS

Multicultural education, ethnic-racial socialization, critical race theory, racial microaggressions, racism

Introduction

In the closing lines of "Mr. Sun Cho Lee," a popular song about Hawai'i's diverse racial/ethnic population, the narrator realizes, "All us guys we tease da otha' race / It's amazing we can live in da same place"[1] (The Beamer Brothers, 1975, stanza 7). This notion that teasing outgroup members contributes to Hawai'i's exceptionalism typifies longstanding political myths of the islands as a model multicultural society and a multiracial paradise (Labrador, 2022). Simultaneously, the narrator's use of plural pronouns signals collective participation, thereby naming race-based teasing as a social practice and challenging majoritarian narratives that insist Hawai'i's locals[2] are "less racist" than people from racially homogeneous places (Darrah-Okike, 2020, p. 1). From a media culture perspective, the song provides a snapshot of race relations in Hawai'i during the late-twentieth century, including stereotypical beliefs that some locals held about Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino immigrants and the Indigenous Hawaiian[3] peoples. From a critical race theoretical (CRT) lens, "Mr. Sun Cho Lee" is a cultural text that communicates racial microaggressions, defined as

1 The lyrics for this song are written in Hawai'i Pidgin English, a localized language that developed during the nineteenth-century plantation era among Native Hawaiians and immigrants from Asia and Europe.

2 Hawai'i locals are residents who are either born or raised, and socialized in the islands. A person born in Hawai'i and raised elsewhere does not fit this definition. However, a person who was born elsewhere but raised and socialized in Hawai'i does.

3 Native Hawaiian and Hawaiian are used interchangeably to refer to the Indigenous Peoples of the ancestral homelands presently considered the U.S. state of Hawai'i. This definition does not apply to settlers or descendants of settlers in the way an individual may be called a "Californian" or "Washingtonian" based on state residency. White settlers are not and have never been Hawaiian or Native Hawaiian.

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everyday, verbal and non-verbal assaults upon People of Color[4] (Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2020).

While understudied in western academic circles, songs, poems, and fiction stories are powerful literary tools to transmit beliefs about race and ethnicity to children and youth (Justice, 2018). In homes and schools, these seemingly neutral educational materials can manipulate social values, especially when paired with explicit messages from family members, peers, and media culture (Kido Lopez, 2020). For example, nursery rhymes like "Little Miss Muffet" and "Jack and Jill" contain gendered discourse that children may retain as they mature. Similarly, patriotic tunes like Schoolhouse Rock's "Elbow Room" and "The Great American Melting Pot" can indoctrinate youth into revisionist histories that silence Indigenous Peoples. In the case of multicultural songs like "Mr. Sun Cho Lee," layering ethnic-based stereotypes and racialized messaging within lyrics that overtly embrace group differences (e.g., language and accents, food preferences, cultural practices) legitimizes covert forms of intragroup and intergroup prejudice.

Although Hawai'i scholars have disrupted acritical and ahistorical multicultural discourses in advertisements and films that cater to visitors and seek to bolster the settler state's capitalist tourist industry (Aikau & Vicuña Gonzalez, 2019; Trask, 2004), less attention has been given to those that circulate in schools via curriculum and pedagogy. This is concerning, especially because research by non-Hawai'i academics continue to downplay the everyday nature of race-based conflicts experienced by Students of Color (Does et al., 2023), despite numerous reports of witnessing and experiencing racial microaggressions by local children and youth (Caparoso & Collins, 2015, Viernes, 2014). Such assertions fail to recognize schools as microcosms of societies in which racism and ethnic-based discrimination are pervasive (Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2020). Moreover, they perpetuate settler colonial narratives that insist Hawai'i is free of race/ethnicity-based oppression, rendering everyday instances of racism in local schools and communities invisible (Makaiau & Freese, 2013).

This article thus builds upon previous critiques of multiculturalism in Hawai'i (ho'omanawanui, 2008; Labrador, 2022; Moniz, 2008) and studies on classrooms as mediating sites where local children and youth align themselves with dominant ideas about race and ethnicity (Furukawa, 2010; Lamb, 2015). While its overarching purpose is to theorize how discourse, identity, and ideology intersect to reinforce and reproduce racial hierarchies, it also aims to conceptualize long-term consequences of ethnic-racial socialization in acritical multicultural perspectives for Students of Color. Consequently, this paper uses a CRT in education lens oriented toward racism and power to analyze three literary texts from a larger data corpus for an ongoing critical race content analysis of Hawai'i-focused literature inspired by Pérez Huber et al.'s (2023) database of over 300 literary depictions of People of Color. Though this larger project aims to catalog pedagogical materials for educators serving multicultural student populations, this current paper's focus is illuminating the existence of racialized messages that reflect broader intragroup and intergroup relations for the unsuspecting eye. To this end, the following two research questions guide this paper: What racialized messages are circulated in Hawai'i-focused multicultural literature? What are potential long-term outcomes of engaging with racialized, multicultural messages on an everyday basis for Students of Color?

First, a CRT in education framework is introduced and applied to review literature on Hawai'i's model multicultural society myth, ethnic-racial socialization, and the intersections of discourse, identity, and ideology. Then, the concurrent study's methodology and key information on this article's three core texts are explicated before presenting emerging findings. Through its critical examination of stereotypical tropes and myths of Asian American and Pacific Islander Peoples, this article advances research on racial microaggressions and provides an innovative theorization of how Students of Color come to internalize these layered forms of racism and "tease da otha' race."

4 People of Color refer to non-white individuals and groups. This term did not originate in Hawai'i and is not commonly referenced in everyday talk among locals. It is used in this paper to establish parallels in the social positioning of racial/ethnic minorities compared to whites in the U.S. and Hawai'i. Person/People of Color, Student/s of Color, Communities of Color, and Character/s of Color are intentionally capitalized to challenge linguistic forms of oppression (Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2020).

Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory in Education

Soon after calls for culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy spread across the U.S. in response to wide achievement gaps between Students of Color and white students, CRT in education emerged as a lens to critique educational inequities as a product of systemic and institutionalized racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Rather than simply treating a symptom of academic disparities — namely, the lack of meaning in western schools for Students of Color — CRT in education identifies and attacks the root cause of the disease itself. It (a) foregrounds the pervasive nature of racism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism in the reproduction of systemic social and educational inequities, (b) recognizes the role that U.S. law plays in justifying and maintaining these inequities, and (c) challenges inaccurate claims of political neutrality, race-evasiveness, and meritocracy within schools. As a result, CRT in education is an appropriate framework to critique multicultural literature because it not only disrupts revisionist framings and deficit narratives about People of Color but also questions who benefits from their continued circulation and who is harmed by it. In other words, CRT in education supports conceptual analyses that articulate the far-reaching implications of racism in the U.S. at individual, institutional, and systemic dimensions.

CRT in education is applied throughout this article to deconstruct majoritarian assertions that misconstrue hegemony for objective truth. As a theory built by the stories of those forced into the bottom of society's well, CRT in education acknowledges there are multiple realities and truths in existence (Bell, 1992). In effect, this article privileges perspectives from Students of Color and critical voices that view knowledge as situated and contextual. Furthermore, experiential wisdom is considered especially valuable to understand lived realities with racial/ethnic and gendered subordination (Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2020). This CRT tenet is referenced in the method section to explicate how the author's positionality influenced the selection of three Hawai'i-focused texts for this article's central analysis.

Racial Microaggressions and Internalized Racism

This article advances CRT research on racial microaggressions and internalized racism by presenting contemporary experiences of the two phenomena among Asian American and Pacific Islander students. In previous inquiries by CRT scholars, racial microaggressions have been described as offensive mechanisms that stun victims with their disregard for human dignity and their validation of white superiority (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2020; Pierce, 1980). According to Watson (2019), racial microaggressions are "(1) verbal and non-verbal assaults directed toward People of Color, often carried out in subtle, automatic or unconscious forms, (2) layered assaults, based on a Person of Color's race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname, and (3) cumulative assaults that take a psychological and physiological toll on People of Color" (p. 17). These definitions are significant because they compare racial microaggressions to attacks on a Person of Color's humanity and elucidate their physical and mental consequences. Additionally, CRT gives People of Color the power to perceive and name the everyday racism they experience; perpetrators do not determine what a microaggression is or when it is committed.

One outcome of experiencing racial microaggressions across the lifespan is internalized racism, defined as a conscious and unconscious acceptance of racial hierarchies that benefit whites and punish People of Color (Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2020). Considered to be "racism's most insidious consequence," this phenomenon leads People of Color "to internalize the messages of inferiority they receive about their group, and to develop animosity toward others of the same race or ethnicity, or toward other oppressed racial or ethnic groups" (David et al., 2019, pp. 1057, 1060). As a verbal and non-verbal form of racism, racial microaggressions can transmit negative attitudes of self and others, eventually leading to internalized racism as well as intragroup and intergroup conflict. For example, frequent engagement with nativist rhetoric has been linked to low perceptions of newer immigrants and high support for anti-immigrant policies among Asian Americans (Pyke & Dang, 2003). Kohli (2014) found that Teachers of Color can enact internalized racism in their classrooms by mistreating the names of Students of Color and holding disproportionately low academic and career expectations of racial/ethnic minoritized youth in comparison to their white peers.

Similarly, extant research on Hawai‘i’s educational context explored this relationship between racial microaggressions and internalized racism from a CRT lens. Borrero et al.’s (2012) study on “othering” behaviors in local schools revealed that stereotypes about Native Hawaiian students’ intellectual ability influenced students’ low perceptions of themselves and their Native Hawaiian classmates when they underperformed on exams. Viernes’ (2014) exploration of Filipino student experiences in Hawai‘i’s K–12 schools discovered that vicarious interactions with racial microaggressions communicated racist beliefs and psychologically affected how students felt about their ethnic identity. Everyday comments about accents created a divide between “normal” Filipinos and “buk-buks,” who were subject to microaggressions about their immigrant status and heritage languages (p. 70). Consequently, Filipino students who did not have a notable accent acted negatively toward Filipino students and teachers who did, believing themselves to be superior based on a perceived proximity to dominant western culture. This article expands upon these two studies by conceptualizing how ethnic stereotypes of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders communicated in literature reinforce racial hierarchies and contribute to the formation of internalized racism among Students of Color.

Culture, Race, and Racism under Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education

A CRT framework in education recognizes multiculturalism and multicultural education largely ignore issues and questions on the intersections of culture, race, and racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). At a societal level, multiculturalism refers to an identity conscious ideology that values group membership and respect for group differences (Wilton et al., 2019). Multicultural education, then, is an approach that combines culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse curricula and pedagogies to promote an inclusive and pluralistic learning environment and provide “windows into other cultures different from one’s own” (Casto, 2020, p. 25). Under multiculturalism, race is perceived as a static indicator of group differences instead of a fluid social construct that signifies unequal power and authority for certain people across time and space (Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2020). Multiculturalism frames racism as a lack of respect for a person’s or group’s racial identity. It is perceived as a product of intergroup contact and shifting demographics and naively dismissed as a social phenomenon that can be easily eradicated through an appreciation for cultural differences and empathy.

Notions of whiteness, privilege, and dominance are absent under multiculturalism and multicultural education in the U.S. to protect the myth of the country as a land of equal opportunity for all. Although U.S. schools are becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, the teaching force is predominantly white, resulting in an uneven distribution of power over who determines how and what students are taught (Kohli, 2014). Moreover, unless educators intentionally engage in critical professional development trainings, most teachers who implement multicultural education reduce complex racial/ethnic identities to trivial elements like foods and resist teaching radical texts on politics, diversity, and power (Casto, 2020; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Thus, Students of Color continue to be exposed to revisionist histories from multicultural literature, defined as literature containing messages of local, national, and global unity, respect, and tolerance; an affirmation and integration of multiple cultural perspectives; and an emphasis on cultural distinctions. While these texts celebrate diversity, they often methodically erase factual lived experiences of marginalized groups from history (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2021). Or, as this article argues with the case of Hawai‘i-focused multicultural literature, they ensure racial microaggressions are misread as normal, everyday practices, so that society turns a blind eye to symptoms of internalized racism and negative ethnic-racial socialization.

Hawai‘i‘s Model Multicultural Society Myth and Local Identity

As one of the most diverse contexts in the U.S. education system, Hawai‘i is an ideal social landscape to explore the racialized experiences and consequences of multicultural education for Students of Color. While the contiguous United States and Hawai‘i are both described as melting pots, Hawai‘i’s geographic isolation and its large multiracial population have contributed to its myth as a model multicultural society (Okamura, 2010). Due to the influx of immigrant workers during the 19th and 20th centuries, local Students of Color have

ancestors from Japan, China, Korea, Okinawa, the Philippines, Vietnam, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. Today, about one quarter of the state's population self-identifies as multiracial (Darrah-Okike, 2020). For this reason, Hawai'i's schools are lauded as social spaces where multiple cultures and home languages unite. However, critical studies have confronted this belief with evidence of race- and ethnicity-based oppression.

Like most U.S. schools, the majority of Hawai'i's schools prioritize teaching and learning in English. Non-white cultural values and practices are either superficially added to make a predominantly white, Euro-American-centric curriculum marginally more relevant to the lives of Students of Color or ignored completely. In fact, less than 50 years ago, vernacular education for Native Hawaiian students was banned from Hawai'i's schools, creating a linguistic hierarchy that positions English above all other languages (Kana'iaupuni et al., 2021). Today, that hierarchy is reinforced not only through English's preeminence in curricula, pedagogies, and assessments but via everyday talk and interaction. Studies on intergroup relations in Hawai'i revealed that Students of Color with notable accents are subject to racially-charged jokes and stereotyping from peers (Caparoso & Collins, 2015). Furthermore, Salazar (2014) found dehumanizing rhetoric about Hawaiian language and culture as primitive and subordinate in cartoons published in Hawai'i newspapers.

One outcome of Hawai'i's model multicultural society myth is the construction and subsequent negotiation of a local identity. According to Labrador (2022), "localness" is a recognizable social category used to describe non-white groups whose ancestors immigrated during the Plantation Era and intermixed as well as residents who are born, raised, and socialized in the islands. A CRT in education framework views this identity with skepticism. Though it creates a shared sense of belonging and community, local identity introduces a race/ethnic-based hierarchy in classrooms between those who are perceived as local and those who are not (i.e., recent immigrants like Micronesians and Vietnamese youth) (Lamb, 2015). Additionally, localness removes Native Hawaiians' Indigeneity and bestows it upon Euro-American and Asian settlers (Moniz, 2008).

Hawai'i's model multicultural society myth persists because it benefits white supremacy and settler colonialism in the islands. Multicultural literature authored by settlers reinforce the myth by tracing Hawai'i's origins to the influx of white and Asian immigrants, intentionally erasing centuries of pre-contact Indigenous civilization from the islands' historical record. If Native Hawaiian characters are mentioned in multicultural stories, they are depicted as trusting and friendly toward foreigners, boosting a colonial agenda that glosses over the horrors of genocide, the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, and historical trauma caused by settlers (Moniz, 2008). As ho'omanawanui (2008) contends in their comparison of Indigenous and settler representations of land in Hawai'i-focused literature, Dean Howell's children's book The Story of Chinaman's Hat takes this acritical, ahistorical stance by positioning Chinese and Japanese immigrants as humble recipients of the Native status from generous Hawaiians. This article expands on ho'omanawanui's work by analyzing other Hawai'i-focused multicultural texts from local writers to examine written discourse for evidence of racial microaggressions and long-term consequences of negative ethnic-racial socialization for Students of Color.

Discourse, Identity, and Ideology

According to Gee (2014), discourse is both language-in-use and a way of thinking that enacts a "socially recognizable identity" (p. 46). This article specifically focuses on discourses from songs, poems, and stories that construct a local identity and reflect a multicultural ideology. From a CRT perspective in education, analyzing the intersection among discourse, identity, and ideology requires contextualizing layered sociopolitical meanings and attending to the subaltern's voice. Under this lens, the spoken is just as important to consider as the unspoken, especially if certain identities and ideologies benefit from missing viewpoints.

Extant research on Hawai'i-focused multicultural literature have already identified patterns in whose speech, whose identities, and whose ideologies are privileged. Moniz (2008) pointed out the absence of Indigenous characters in multicultural literature and the lack of Indigenous perspectives in multicultural

education approaches implemented in Hawai‘i’s schools. ho‘omanawanui (2008) named the exaggerated use of Hawai‘i Pidgin English to distinguish between local and non-local characters. While this honors the multiethnic and multiracial population of the islands, characters who speak Pidgin are often subject to degrading comments from white or wealthy characters for speaking a low-class version of English. Labrador (2022) exposed writers’ frequent use of “Mock Filipino,” a combination of linguistic accents and Pidgin, as a racialized move to other Filipino immigrants and prevent them from being accepted as locals. This article contributes to this research by examining discourse that communicates racialized attitudes, beliefs, and values under a guise of multicultural exceptionalism — that is, a majoritarian stance that racialized discourse is acceptable and embraced in a context where locals’ ethnic/racial origins are deeply intermixed.

Ethnic-Racial Socialization

Ethnic-racial socialization refers to a transmission and internalization of explicit (i.e., overt, direct) and implicit (i.e., covert, indirect, subtle, layered) verbal and non-verbal “messages, practices, and beliefs surrounding ethnicity/race” (Williams & Banerjee, 2021, p. 1038). Although empirical studies on children’s ethnic-racial socialization are often inquiries about explicit messages from parents as primary socializing agents (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020), recent research uplifts the ability for literature to socialize students indirectly into dominant ideologies (Smalls Glover et al., 2022). In their analysis of 19 picture books on multiracial Asian American identity, Wee et al. (2021) argued that the combination of written text and images presents varied understandings of racial identity development, subsequently communicating diverging socializing messages on how to enact a multiracial Asian American identity. Nguyen’s (2022) study on kindergarten students’ engagement with anti-bias picture books revealed children’s internalization of anti-Black and anti-immigrant attitudes through moments of the teacher’s silence in response to discriminatory discourse by children in the classroom.

This article conceptualizes ethnic-racial socialization as intergenerational, lifelong learning that shapes identities and influences intragroup and intergroup attitudes and interactions. Indeed, socializing messages are constantly circulating, and children do not cease learning or acting upon these indoctrinating lessons on race and ethnicity once they mature. According to Leath and Mims (2023), the consequences of being socialized by racist messages during adolescence is embodied, felt, and experienced well into young adulthood. As they argued, frequent and sustained exposure to anti-Black, misogynistic images of Black womanhood resulted in negatives views of self and a low sense of control over their personal narratives. A CRT in education lens names such images as racial microaggressions and the subsequent ingroup perceptions as manifestations of internalized racism (Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2020). To this end, internalized racism is operationalized as a long-term outcome of negative ethnic-racial socialization by indirect messaging communicated by acritical multicultural literature.

Method

To challenge the fallacy of neutral research and race-evasive ideologies published in Euro-American-centric studies on multiculturalism in Hawai‘i, this article used a CRT methodological approach grounded in experiential knowledge and resistance to deficit perspectives of People of Color (Pérez Huber et al., 2023, Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2020). First, the author reviewed critical research on Hawai‘i-focused literature and identified three themes that distinguish a text as multicultural: (a) describes Hawai‘i as diverse, egalitarian, harmonious, united, peaceful, tolerant; (b) idealizes it as a racial utopia, a coexisting melting pot, a multiracial paradise, the “aloha” state; and/or (c) emphasizes group differences within Hawai‘i’s populace (Day, 2017; Okamura, 1998, 2010; Trask, 2004). As an Indigenous, multiracial woman raised in a predominantly Native Hawaiian community on the island of O‘ahu, the author reflected on her exposure to multicultural rhetoric throughout her childhood and adolescence to compare the validity of these themes to the lived experiences of her and her peers. Once confirmed, the three themes became criteria for selection into a data corpus for this article’s concurrent study, which began in January 2021 and remains ongoing as of publication.

The author intentionally selected three widely circulated Hawai‘i-focused multicultural texts from this growing corpus for a closer examination in this article. The song, short story, and poem maintain a popular status in Hawai‘i’s schools and local communities, serving as appropriate examples of literature that may currently be included in multicultural curricula. While this point is an analytic assumption, it is informed by the author’s experiences as a student and a secondary educator in Hawai‘i. For example, the author first came into contact with “Mr. Sun Cho Lee” when she was in an elementary English class that focused on Hawai‘i history. Moreover, when the author was an English teacher, she was assigned a multicultural curriculum, and, like many local teachers, she prioritized culturally responsive Hawai‘i-focused multicultural texts instead of those that cater primarily to the continental U.S. population (Makaiau & Freese, 2013). As a result, this selection reflects the author’s personal engagement with multicultural messaging from childhood to adulthood in the twenty-first century.

The overarching study from which this article emerged applies critical race content analysis to examine multicultural literature. Pérez Huber et al. (2023) argue that critical race content analysis is a CRT framework that “seeks to reveal how power operates in the practice of literacy” by “considering the representations of oppressed social locations, power, structure, and agency” in narratives for children and youth (p. 2448). Consequently, to address this article’s first research question on racialized messages in Hawai‘i-focused multicultural literature, the author coded the three texts for characteristics assigned by race and roles that People of Color play in the overarching story. Additionally, the author investigated the writers’ backgrounds to contextualize the racialized realities represented by the discourses and experiences of Characters of Color from a historical, political, and social perspective (Zettervall, 2012). Two discourse analytic tools — stance and intertextuality — were utilized to explore the second research question and theorize long-term outcomes of engaging with racialized messaging for Students of Color. Stance refers to a position that subjects take to align themselves with or oppose other subjects via overt communication (Walton & Jaffe, 2011). Intertextuality occurs when statements and utterances display “links with previous as well as synchronic texts” (Furukawa, 2010, p. 260). This allowed the author to make connections across examples of multicultural literature and to locate dominant ideologies operating in racialized messaging. Next, background information on three Hawai‘i-focused multicultural texts are provided before presenting and discussing emerging findings.

Background Information on Hawai‘i-Focused Multicultural Texts

The three texts analyzed in this paper are “Mr. Sun Cho Lee” by Eaton Magoon Jr., the short story “I Wanna Marry a Haole[5] so I Can Have a Haole Last Name” by Lois-Ann Yamanaka, and the poem “Lessons from Hawai‘i” by Kathy Jetñil-Kiiiner. Each text contains Pidgin and references to local identity and Hawai‘i’s diverse ethnic/racial population. However, the narratives diverge in their point of view and their endorsement of or opposition to Hawai‘i’s model multicultural society myth, allowing for a comparison of how ideologies are viewed and internalized by different people.

“Mr. Sun Cho Lee”

Although many locals attribute the lyrics of “Mr. Sun Cho Lee” to Native Hawaiian musicians Keola and Kapono Beamer because of their popular 1975 rendition of the song, it was originally written by Magoon Jr., a songwriter and businessman born and raised on O‘ahu. Educated at Punahou School, a predominantly white, upper-class private school, he occupied a privileged position in Hawai‘i society through his socioeconomic status and his identity as a white and Chinese man. This elevated rank is evident through the lyrics of “Mr. Sun Cho Lee,” which describe encounters with six characters of different ethnic, gendered backgrounds from the perspective of a presumably local, male narrator. Each verse introduces a character, names an item or skill in their possession, assigns a racial, gendered identity to them, and concludes with a

5 While all non-Indigenous Peoples to Hawai‘i may be described as a haole, or foreigner, to the islands, the term is typically used in reference to Caucasian foreigners.

lament about their unwillingness to share the possession with the narrator and a remark about the character being mean and old. As noted in the introduction, the song ends with the narrator's amazement that racialized groups can tease one another and live together in Hawai'i.

With its racialized and gendered stereotypes, "Mr. Sun Cho Lee" is an example of an acritical multicultural text. The title character Mr. Sun Cho Lee is described as a Chinese man with an abundant supply of lychee, referencing the influx of Chinese farm workers to Hawai'i during Hawai'i's plantation era. The haole character Mr. Conrad Jones enjoys a wealthy lifestyle symbolized through his ownership of multiple swimming pools, paralleling the dominant status of white Americans in Hawai'i following the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom (Trask, 2004). Similarly, Mr. Kazuo Tanaka, a Japanese man, is identified as a well-to-do character through his electronic equipment. This, too, is indicative of a reality in which Japanese immigrants have amassed wealth and power to rival white settlers (Okamura, 2010). On the other hand, the last three characters possess less privilege. Mr. Maximo Concepcion is a Filipino man with fighting chickens, commenting on an illegal social practice used to earn money among low-income communities. Miss Momi Lomilomi, a local Hawaiian cocktail waitress, is said to have "plenty experience," alluding to a sexual commodification of her body (The Beamer Brothers, 1975, stanza 5). Lastly, Mr. Kamakawiwo'ole, a Hawaiian man, is said to take his anger out on the narrator for having "not too much of nothing," thus positioning Native Hawaiians at the bottom of Hawai'i's racial and socioeconomic hierarchy.

"I Wanna Marry a Haole so I can Have a Haole Last Name"

Yamanaka's short story "I Wanna Marry a Haole so I Can Have a Haole Last Name" comes from her 1996 children's novel Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers. A partially semi-autographical collection of vignettes, the book follows Lovey Nariyoshi, a low-income, Japanese girl as she comes of age in Hilo, Hawai'i during the 1970s. Many of Lovey's experiences mirror Yamanaka's personal story of being born on the island of Moloka'i to two Japanese American parents and raised in Pahala, a small, rural plantation town on the island of Hawai'i. Yamanaka's works have been extensively reviewed and critiqued by local and Indigenous scholars because of their popularity in Hawai'i, especially among those who communicate primarily in Hawai'i Pidgin and those who share a connection to early plantation life. Though novels like Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers are beloved stories that capture cultural, economic, and social struggle for low-income Students of Color in Hawai'i, Native Hawaiian scholars like ho'omanawanui (2008) caution readers to avoid labeling Yamanaka's narratives as an accurate portrayal of Indigenous history or the impact of settler colonialism for Native Hawaiians. For this reason, without proper contextualization, "I Wanna Marry a Haole so I Can Have a Haole Last Name" can be an acritical multicultural text. However, for the purposes of this article, Yamanaka's story is viewed as testimony of the long-term outcomes of socialization into white supremacist beliefs and rhetoric for local Students of Color.

In this short story, Lovey reflects on her racialized preference for romantic partners. She asserts, "Japanee girls all want haole last names like Smith or Cole," while local boys "like haole girls with strawberry-blond hair ... from places like Kenosha, Wisconsin" (Yamanaka, 1996, p. 20). Through messaging about actresses and film and television characters, Lovey associates blond hair with good, and Black hair with evil. Furthermore, she communicates her belief in the superiority of whiteness, saying it is "better to be haole" (p. 28) and "live in a house with Dixie cup dispensers, bunk beds with ruffled sheets ... and eat potatoes and biscuits" (p. 29). In effect, Lovey is ashamed of her Japanese identity, her home community, her own name. She is embarrassed of being told that she talks "funny" and "inarticulately" because she speaks Hawai'i Pidgin (p. 27). The story concludes with Lovey wishing to "be a haole. A Japanee with a haole last name" (p. 29).

"Lessons from Hawai'i"

Published in 2011 by Jetñil-Kijiner, a Marshallese poet and journalist, "Lessons from Hawai'i" is an example of a critical multicultural text that uncovers and names the racism that Micronesian immigrants frequently experience. Jetñil-Kijiner has received wide acclaim for openly challenging U.S. imperialism,

nuclear testing, and the forced migration of Pacific Islanders through poetry. While she is not Indigenous to Hawai‘i, Jetñil-Kijiner is Indigenous to her ancestral homeland. Additionally, since she was raised and socialized in the islands, Jetñil-Kijiner fits this article's operationalization of a Hawai‘i local even though Marshallese are excluded from majoritarian definitions and enactments of local identity.

In this poem, a young Micronesian narrator deconstructs subtle, layered meanings underpinning racialized discourse about their people through a review of interpersonal conversations and newspaper headlines. The 108-line poem is divided into seven stanzas that represent seven lessons the narrator has learned from living as an immigrant in Hawai‘i. The first lesson recounts an interaction with a classmate who receives tutoring services from the narrator and tells them, "You know, you're actually / kinda smart / for a Micronesian (Jetñil-Kijiner, 2011, lines 2–4). The second compares the reduction of nations and countries across the Pacific to "MICRO(nesian)" (line 12) with how small they felt when a nail technician said, "You know you don't look / Micronesian. / You're much prettier!" (lines 24–26). Lesson three continues with this unspoken message on beauty standards, describing the type of Micronesian women who are considered "ugly" because of their gold teeth, greased hair, and brown skin (line 31). Lesson four presents the narrator's belief that everyone in Hawai‘i "hates / Micronesians" (lines 52–53) because their language and cultural practices are different. Lesson five restates relevant newspaper headlines, including "No aloha for Micronesians in Hawai‘i" (line 71), "Micronesians fill homeless shelters," (line. 73) and oppressive rhetoric from local residents like "We shoulda just nuked their islands when we had the chance!" (line 74). The sixth lesson lists actions that Micronesians experience on a regular basis, including belittling, blank faces, and closed doors. In the seventh and final lesson, the narrator realizes that through these everyday anti-Micronesian discourse, that's how they learned to hate themselves.

Emerging Findings

A critical race content analysis of Hawai‘i-focused multicultural literature discovered evidence of racial microaggressions circulating in everyday discourse and manifestations of internalized racism among young Characters of Color. Racialized messages layered within the three texts dehumanize and other Hawai‘i's non-white population, reinforcing a racial hierarchy that intersects with other hierarchies according to gender, class, sexuality, and immigrant status. In some instances, characters voiced overt racial microaggressions, as exemplified in direct comments to Japanese and Marshallese characters about speaking "inarticulately" (Yamanaka, 1996, p. 28) or being "ugly" (Jetñil-Kijiner, 2011, line 31). Of the three texts, "Lessons from Hawai‘i" contains the greatest number of racialized messages that directly assault a non-white character. These cutting remarks about Micronesian people's intelligence, physical features, cultural practices, and experiences with forced migration not only deny them of their inherent right to dignity but also inflict major psychological injury upon the narrator's self-worth.

While harder to identify without a CRT lens, covert microaggressions were also found in racialized messages. For example, the possessions attributed to the white character Mr. Conrad Jones and the Japanese character Mr. Kazuo Tanaka in "Mr. Sun Cho Lee" indirectly signal a high-income status, but those belonging to the Chinese, Filipino, and Native Hawaiian characters do not. This comparison speaks to an ethnicity-class intersection and stereotypes that depict Filipino and Native Hawaiian peoples as lazy, second-class citizens (Caparoso & Collins, 2015; Viernes, 2014). Moreover, Magoon Jr.'s lyrics belittle Indigenous cultural practices and familial names. Lomilomi, a ceremonial Native Hawaiian massage from the pre-contact period, is misappropriated to insult Miss Momi Lomilomi's sexuality. Similarly, although Kamakawiwo‘ole is a recognizable and respected family name in Hawai‘i because of its association with the late musicians Israel and Henry "Skippy" Kamakawiwo‘ole, it is symbolic of failure in "Mr. Sun Cho Lee." In essence, Mr. Kamakawiwo‘ole's lack of worthy possessions in the eyes of the local narrator reads as a stereotype of Native Hawaiians as underachievers.

The repetitive, intertextual nature of the racially microaggressive messages in these three texts communicate a notion that stereotyping and othering is normal among locals. Yamanaka's young character

Lovey consciously recites a pattern in the roles assigned to white, blond actresses versus Asian, black-haired actresses, leading her to internalize non-verbal messaging that People of Color are inferior and atypical to white individuals. Magoon's Jr.'s system of ascribing stereotypical names and possessions to racial/ethnic characters naturalizes the practice of subscribing to essentialized beliefs about groups over personal evaluations based on individual differences. Derogatory comments about Micronesian beauty and fashion norms in Jetñil-Kijiner's poem convey an unspoken message that girls must assimilate to the dominant culture's standards in order to belong as a local. However, even then, the overwhelming sentiment from circulating discourse by Hawai'i locals and mainstream media embodies hate and exclusion.

Long-term, cumulative impacts of engaging with racialized messaging are also explored in the literature. The local narrator's stance in "Mr. Sun Cho Lee" aligns with dominant culture's internalization of oppressive, group-based stereotypes because he articulates racial and gendered microaggressions. To the narrator, the social practice of stereotyping is not offensive; rather, it is indicative of Hawai'i's "amazing" society, reinforcing an acritical multicultural stance that bolsters the model multicultural society myth (The Beamer Brothers, 1975, stanza 7). Lovey's perception of white culture in "I Wanna Marry a Haole so I Can Have a Haole Last Name" communicates a preference for whiteness over her Japanese heritage. This reveals her conscious acceptance of negative social messaging about non-white identities and a subsequent desire to disassociate completely from who she is. In the final stanza of "Lessons from Hawai'i," the cumulative impact of racial microaggressions on the Micronesian narrator has reached its psychological and physiological toll: she has internalized the hateful socializing lessons from circulating, anti-Micronesian discourse and learned to hate herself.

Discussion

This article applied a CRT in education lens and a critical race content analytical framework to examine racialized messages and conceptualize negative ethnic-racial socialization and internalized racism as long-term outcomes of engaging with acritical multicultural beliefs. Consequently, the findings speak back to race-evasive studies of multiculturalism in Hawai'i informed by convenient samples of urban, upper-class, college-educated, predominantly white and East Asian students (Does et al., 2023). While this article presents emerging evidence from a limited corpus, the messages communicated in the three Hawai'i-focused multicultural texts represent lived realities that are largely missing or ignored by acritical research. In anticipation of scholarly critiques regarding the ability for literature to capture social phenomena accurately, this article contends that literature contains socializing messages that are "shaped by larger sociopolitical structures that exist within our world" (Pérez Huber et al., 2023, p. 2439). Thus, an acritical reader may assume the racial microaggressions and internalized racism experienced by Characters of Color are exaggerations. However, this is far from the truth.

Recent studies and testimonies confirm the credibility and reliability of many of these racialized messages. Makaiau and Freese (2013) recounted an interaction in which a Latino boy directly told his local teacher, "Ms. Amber, I wish I could be white like you," paralleling Lovey's internal desire to be a haole (p. 142). They also recorded discourse by Filipino students who admitted to being "prejudiced towards certain ethnicities" throughout their life as well as experiences by Black students who were victimized by racial slurs (p. 146). Darrah-Okike (2020) conceptualized anti-Micronesian microaggressions like those depicted in "Lessons from Hawai'i" as a "manifestation of U.S. settler colonialism and imperialism" (p. 11). The supposedly humorous characterization of Mr. Kamakawiwo'ole from "Mr. Sun Cho Lee" is an example of a settler colonial microaggression, which condones the elimination and degradation of Indigenous Peoples (Bubar et al., 2022). In effect, lived experiences and critical research support this article's assertion that Students of Color in Hawai'i are exposed to microaggressions and racist ideologies on an everyday basis.

As a result, this article implicates educators, caregivers, and community members who endorse multiculturalism or a multicultural education that sanitizes settler colonialism and race relations in Hawai'i.

From a conceptual standpoint, the racialized messages found in the three Hawai‘i-focused multicultural texts challenge the fallacy of intragroup and intergroup harmony under Hawai‘i’s longstanding model multicultural society myth. The emphasis on group differences in material belongings in “Mr. Sun Cho Lee” and “I Wanna Marry a Haole so I Can Have a Haole Last Name” disrupts dominant platitudes of socioeconomic equality among racial/ethnic minorities. As demonstrated by Lovey’s reflections, this awareness of group differences develops at an early age, aligning with Quintana et al.’s (2004) discovery of Native Hawaiian elementary school children’s ability to recognize cultural differences among Hawaiian, white, and Black families. Therefore, caregivers and educators must be critical of the literature they introduce to children as well as the racialized messaging within their everyday discourse.

This conceptual implication is significant because it resembles findings on the U.S. continent’s multicultural society. Indeed, social stratification in the islands mirrors the racial hierarchy on the U.S. continent in its organization and history. In both contexts, white settlers naturalized a superior status over People of Color to justify their elimination of Indigenous Peoples and to generate intergroup strife among Communities of Color (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2021). Hawai‘i-focused multicultural literature can be conceptualized as a subgenre of a wider, U.S.-centric multicultural canon, which serves a national political myth steeped in rhetoric of national identity, patriotism, and democracy. To this end, this article’s recognition of stereotypical portrayals of Characters of Color in Hawai‘i-focused multicultural literature is comparable to Pérez Huber et al.’s (2023) critique of stories that reproduce deficit discourses about Latinx communities living on the U.S. continent. However, more research is needed to explore specific similarities and differences in the racialized messages communicated in Hawai‘i-focused and U.S. continent-focused multicultural literature from a CRT and critical race content analytic lens.

From a practical standpoint, this article raises important considerations and concerns regarding interpersonal interactions in classroom and home settings for Students of Color. First, it is likely that local Students of Color are both the perpetrators and victims of racial microaggressions. In “Mr. Sun Cho Lee” and “Lessons from Hawai‘i,” locals do not defend the intended targets from microaggressions. Instead, they remain silent or knowingly engage in racial teasing, allowing negative talk to accumulate and incite psychological harm. Though the literature examined in this article reinforces a racial hierarchy that positions Japanese settlers above Filipinos, Native Hawaiians, and Micronesians, Japanese students are also vulnerable to white supremacist messages that affect their self-esteem and self-regard. Second, it is likely that local and non-local educators are the perpetrators of racial microaggressions. In “Lessons from Hawai‘i,” the Micronesian narrator’s tutor is surprised by her intelligence, subtly communicating a belief in low academic expectations for Micronesian youth. While unspoken, Students of Color are adept at reading between the lines and recognizing when a teacher does not believe they will succeed (Makaiau & Freese, 2013). This, too, will take a toll on children and youth and shape their perception of themselves and others.

Conclusion

In its current mainstream practice, multicultural education is a vehicle within a larger hierarchical education system that upholds white supremacy (Sólorzano & Pérez Huber, 2020). Given the everyday, subtle, and automatic nature of racial microaggressions, critical educators must actively combat racist ideologies through their curricula and pedagogies to disrupt negative ethnic-racial socialization and prevent internalized racism from developing among Students of Color. “Mr. Sun Cho Lee,” I Wanna Marry a Haole so I Can Have a Haole Last Name,” and “Lessons from Hawai‘i” contain powerful socializing messages on race and ethnicity, making them appropriate texts for classroom lessons on multiculturalism, intergroup relations, and race and racism. With sufficient historical contextualization and scaffolded classroom discussion, a superficial reading of this literature can transform into an opportunity to deconstruct political myths and racial microaggressions layered in discourse. This point goes beyond the scope of this article and its concurrent study, but it presents a direction for future research and reminds educators of the power and responsibility they hold as influencers of children and youth.

As schools across the country become increasingly multiracial and less white (Kohli, 2014), policymakers may reference multicultural utopias to forward educational agendas while maintaining a neoliberal system that underserves Students of Color (Sólorzano & Pérez Huber, 2020). This article thus represents an important counternarrative to majoritarian beliefs that racism in diverse societies and schools like Hawai'i's is simultaneously nonexistent and acceptable. Hawai'i is certainly a special place to its Indigenous Peoples, locals, and settlers. However, the reality of the matter is that the people who made this place special — the original caretakers of the islands — are being pushed out of their ancestral homelands by wealthy buyers from the U.S. continent and beyond (Kana'iaupuni et al., 2021). Hence, the very reason for Hawai'i's exceptionalism is at risk of being lost forever. Multicultural literature that erases settler colonialism and racism's pervasiveness in Hawai'i only magnifies this threat to Indigenous livelihoods. Foregrounding race and racism in curriculum and pedagogy may very well be an important step toward eradicating Hawai'i's model multicultural society myth and empowering Students of Color to confront the oppressive reality of teasing "da otha' race."

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