

2012

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## Recommended Citation

Cappiccie, Amy; Chadha, Janice; Lin, Muh Bi; and Snyder, Frank, "Using Critical Race Theory to Analyze How Disney Constructs Diversity: A Construct for the Baccalaureate Human Behavior in the Social Environment Curriculum" (2012). *Faculty Publications - School of Social Work*. Paper 9.  
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# Using Critical Race Theory to Analyze How Disney Constructs Diversity: A Construct for the Baccalaureate Human Behavior in the Social Environment Curriculum

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*Utilizing the basic tenets of critical race theory, the authors draw upon the expertise of multicultural scholars to raise consciousness and facilitate BSW classroom dialogue about microaggressions perpetrated in Disney animations. Microaggressions pervade our media partly because they typically operate outside the threshold of the dominant culture's conscious awareness. Our main consciousness-raising method is to expose social work students to microaggressions depicted in Disney animations and then use the classroom as a counterspace to process the experience. We note that utilizing critical race theory to become conscious of microaggressions within Disney animations is the first step toward eradicating them.*

*KEYWORDS* critical race theory, Disney, baccalaureate curriculum, human behavior

In the 1970s, critical race theory was developed by legal scholars of color who were concerned about racial oppression in society (Calmore, 1992; Delgado, 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002). The formation of this

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theory was an attempt to refocus society on race relations during a time that progress had stagnated. Both critical sociology and postmodernism undergirded the formation of critical race theory by focusing on the topics of ethnicity, prejudice, and structural inequity (Miller & Garran, 2008).

Critical race theory has several basic themes that inform its perspective, pedagogy, and research methods (McDowell & Jeris, 2004; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). First, a central theme is its overall commitment to social justice and to ending all forms of subordination on the basis of identities such as race, religion, ethnicity, and ability. Second, race and racism are at the core of the theory, but these constructs also are viewed at their intersection with other forms of oppression such as by sexual orientation, class, or gender. Third, critical race theory acknowledges the importance of the experiential knowledge of persons of color in understanding and teaching its relation to racial subordination. Finally, the theory encourages an interdisciplinary perspective as an invitation for all educators to join the dialogue.

Two key concepts of note are the racial contract and deconstruction/reconstruction (Miller & Garran, 2008). In the United States, the racial contract started with colonization deciding who would be deemed superior. With the advent of colonization, White privilege found its way into the DNA of United States history with the idea that those seeking the New World were more important than those already living on the land. Deconstruction, and ultimately reconstruction, are key for breaking down this paradigm. It requires the seeker to appreciate the dynamics that lead to prejudice, to understand privilege, to examine covert racism, and to be willing to change their thoughts and actions (Miller & Garran, 2008).

Solorzano (1997), who enters the conversation from an education perspective, challenges educators (both those of color and those from a White privilege background) to examine their “pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda” through the lens of critical race theory (p. 7). This paper seeks to explore how the themes pervading critical race theory can be used effectively to specifically awaken social work educators to the need to enhance student consciousness about the various forms of insult that are directed toward minority and multicultural groups. Classroom activities will be presented to assist such educators to challenge students, at increasing levels of intensity throughout a BSW course of study in human behavior in the social environment (HBSE).

## TEACHING CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND RACISM

Students are presented basic information during lectures on critical race theory and the racism spectrum. The definition, main tenets, and key terms of critical race theory are provided via a PowerPoint presentation in the

classroom (see Appendix A). After discussing the theoretical underpinnings, the instructor begins a discussion of the racism spectrum via overt-to-covert forms of racism (Sue, 2010a). Overt racism is defined as intentional forms of insult toward another individual or group of people. Students are provided examples of overt racism, such as the Klu Klux Klan's burning crosses on an individual's lawn or a person's addressing a racial epithet to someone of color. It is explained that people do not typically see themselves as discriminatory, but their actions and words show prejudicial attitudes towards out-groups. An example might be the statement "I'm not racist but. . . ." (Here you can insert a variety of comments.) One example is a parent's not wanting a son or daughter to date a person of a different race. Such parents do not see themselves as racist but, someone outside of this circumstance, can easily note that the such parents do note difference or otherness. On the other end of the spectrum is covert racism. Microaggressions are a type of covert racism (Pierce, Corew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978). The term *microaggression* was first noted in 1970s literature, which focused on subtle negative comments and actions toward African Americans (Pierce et al., 1978). More recently, the literature applies the term beyond race. Marginalized groups also include minorities by dint of gender, disability/ability, class, and sexual orientation (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). A definition of the term *microaggression* is "the brief and common place daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue, 2010a, p. 5). It is important to stress to students that many times violators are unaware that they are doing or saying things that are considered hurtful. Examples might include talking about a peach crayon as "flesh-colored," looking at Black students in the classroom when providing an example of that particular race, or using unintentional racist language such as "brown-noser." The authors like this last example as many people use this term regularly to mean a person who is trying to find favor with the person in charge. What many people do not realize is that this term was first used by field slaves as a derogatory term for house slaves who were considered to not work as hard and to constantly find favor with their masters.

### Teaching about Pervasive Forms of Racism

After gaining knowledge of the basics of critical race theory and the racism spectrum, students of HBSE are asked to read Tatum's (2003) *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria* (see Appendix A). This book addresses the routinely experienced difficulties by people of color living in a predominately White environment. Students of HBSE are required to write a Tatum Reaction Paper in which they address four questions posed by the instructor (see Appendix B). These questions are aimed at helping

the student to explore further the core concepts in the book as well as to raise their consciousness.

Next, students are required to read McIntosh's (1989) article entitled "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." The specific examples of White privilege then are discussed in the classroom setting. Students are challenged to think beyond their current belief system to address personal and societal injustices. If instructors feel that the students are struggling with the topic, they may ask for a supplementary homework assignment commonly referred to as an "Ism Log." This is a log kept for a specified amount of time to explore various injustices they are able to note in their environment. These may include sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, ageism, and the like.

### Disney and Pervasive Forms of Racism

The author's main consciousness-raising method is to expose students to the principal tenets of critical race theory by having them analyze the microaggressions that are depicted in Disney animations and then use the classroom as a counter-space to process their observations (Solorzano et al., 2000). The goal is to use critical race theory to help students increase their awareness about the many ways in which the media, as an influential social institution, make use of microaggressions to routinely oppress multicultural and minority groups.

#### RATIONALE FOR FOCUS ON WALT DISNEY PRODUCTIONS

In the collective consciousness, Disney has long been viewed as promoting a culture of childhood innocence, protected space, and wholesome family fun. However, Disney also has a history of conflating children's entertainment with children's education and, if its teaching purposes are to be taken seriously, it becomes apparent that Disney holds an enormous stake in the cultural capital of the nation—our children (Giroux, 2010). Hence, the Disney culture that envelops children serves to educate them about the larger world as well as suggest the roles that are open or closed to them (Henke & Umble, 1999).

Disney's first full-length feature animations, beginning with *Snow White* in 1937, were based upon European fairytales that he Americanized. They reflected mainstream majority values such as the Protestant work ethic and his personal prejudices. Disney often slid indirect social slurs (as well as racial and ethnic slights) into scenes that were so fast-paced the audience had little time to notice them. *The Lion King*, *Mulan*, and *Pocahontas* serve as case studies wherein we, as social work educators, can explore these issues with our students using critical race theory to help guide our discussion.

CASE EXAMPLE: *THE LION KING*

In keeping with the major tenets of critical race theory, we utilize *The Lion King* to challenge dominant ideologies such as the United States' being a race neutral meritocracy. The authors define ideology here as "a system of beliefs that groups of people share and believe are inherently true and acceptable" (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p. 8). We define oppositional readings as a process whereby we actively question the dominant ideologies in a cultural text (Benshoff & Griffin). An oppositional analysis of *The Lion King* offers opportunities to explore themes that support racial dynamics such as hierarchy, domination, and oppression.

*The Lion King* is set in Africa and, early in the film, the circle-of-life theme is introduced as a motif for a natural order of balanced equilibrium in which each animal fulfills a function useful to the others. For example, it is explained to the lion cub Simba by his father Mufasa that the lion species is fed by the antelope but, when the lion dies, its body returns to the soil to nourish the grass, which in turn feeds the antelope. As it turns out, however, this social order is not really an egalitarian cultural circle of life as the film's theme song would proclaim, but rather it is structured as a hierarchy with the patriarch Mufasa ruling at the top of the food chain as king. Gutierrez (2000) observes that the film's opening scene depicts animals of divergent species traveling vast distances to pay homage to the newborn Simba, their future ruler. This scene conveys their acceptance of their subjugated place within a social hierarchy as they genuflect to the king and his heir. Artz (2002) notes that in this scene, Disney is relying on the viewer's fondness for royalty and for noble beasts to create a fictional world of nature where animals of prey pay homage to their predators rather than fleeing from them. One film's aim is to "naturalize" the ideology of a social hierarchy by making it seem as if this is how animals behave in real life (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009). Gutierrez sees this scene as but one piece of evidence that a key ideology behind *The Lion King* is not to promote diversity but to control it.

This theme is further expanded upon when another clip from the film is shown. Here the viewer learns about the region that lies outside of the area "where the light touches" and that Mufasa rules. This is the desolate dark area, the elephant graveyard—a sort of death zone where the social outcasts lurk. Gooding-Williams (1995) intuits this dark space as an allegory of the decaying inner-city populated by the American citizenry who are labeled an underclass. The residents of this underclass world are the scavenger hyenas, and they are characterized with urban African American and Latino accents (Tatum, 2003); in this manner, their multicultural status is linked with the darkness and depravity of the social environment they inhabit. We note that it has been observed that Disney's animal stars typically anthropomorphize the fiction of some human trait, and cultural familiarity with the human stereotype facilitates the receptivity to Disney's values (Artz, 2004). For

example, Scar, the brother of Mufasa, rules this underclass world, and he is given many gay stereotypical character traits; hence, his villainous acts within the story plot are conflated with the image of homosexuality (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009). In this manner, the viewer is presented with two worlds ruled by two very different kings who bear juxtaposed social identities: The aristocratic, heroic, heterosexual king presides over a lush and orderly kingdom, while the villainous gay king rules a decaying and antisocial wasteland largely inhabited by an African American and Latino citizenry.

As the plot unfolds, it becomes apparent that Scar and the hyenas are well aware of their marginal status and are disconcerted about being pushed to the bottom of the social ladder. With Scar as their designated leader, the hyenas “endeavor to become legitimate and enfranchised citizens who are no longer relegated to the periphery of the polity” (Gooding-Williams, 1995, p. 376). However, once Scar and the hyenas succeed in taking over Mufasa’s kingdom, complete social malaise ensues. The once bright and colorful kingdom soon becomes as decayed and disorderly as the hyena’s land—the elephant graveyard. Because this portion of the film raises many issues for discussion, we ask the class to consider the question: What ideology is this plot attempting to convey? We close discussion by mentioning that one oppositional analysis of this plot is that Disney is implying that gays, as well as inner-city persons of color, are so pathological that if they are not carefully contained, their dysfunction will quickly infect the rest of the polity, destroying the hegemonic circle of life. Interpreted through the lens of such an oppositional reading, Disney’s circle-of-life theme simply becomes a metaphor for justifying a prototype of White privilege.

It has been suggested that one way parents and educators can expose children to a more realistic view of African culture is to use *The Lion King* as a stepping stone to genuine African stories—such as the epic tale of *Sundiata, Lion King of Mali* (Paterno, 1994). Ironically, in fact, the Disney animation is adapted from this story (Artz, 2004; Paterno, 1994).

Sundiata lived in the thirteenth century and was the son of the king of Mali. It was prophesized by the king’s seer (or “griot”) that Sundiata was destined for greatness even though he was born with multiple physical disabilities. Sundiata was forced to live in exile as a child but, when he reached manhood, he returned to Mali and liberated the kingdom from the conqueror who had usurped his father’s throne. Under Sundiata’s leadership, Mali entered a golden age wherein its culture flourished as it became the center of education, commerce, and law for the entire West African Sudan. This story is available in its epic form (Niane, 1965) as well as in numerous picture book formats. We provide these books as counterpoint and teaching resources, noting that picture books play an important role in providing children with visual images that offer information about the relative status of their identities by virtue of race, gender, class, and so on (Spitz, 1999; Yeoman, 1999).



#### CASE EXAMPLE: *MULAN*

We introduce this film by providing students with a brief historical overview. *Mulan* originated as a classical Chinese ballad entitled “*Mulan shi* or ‘Mulan Poem’” (Lan, 2003, p. 231). Viewed from a Chinese cultural perspective, *Mulan shi* foreshadows the importance of filial obligation and loyalty to one’s parents (Mo & Shen, 2000). The poem tells the story of a daughter, *Mulan*, who impersonates a man so that she can take her aged father’s place in the army. After heroically serving in the military for 10 years, *Mulan* returns home from the war and resumes her identity as a woman. The poem ends with *Mulan* teasing her comrades about their inability to detect her true gender during the long years she served beside them (Zhong, 1994).

We mention to students that, like the *Lion King*, *Mulan* has been stripped of much of its cultural authenticity (Chan, 2002). Li (2000) notes that “*Mulan Poem*” is an authentic Chinese legend; yet when viewed from a Chinese “insiders’ perspective,” the Disney rendition of the story reveals a dismal lack of historical, linguistic, and artistic authenticity (Mo & Shen, 2000). For example, at the beginning of the film, *Mulan* gazes at her reflection in a pond while she sings the song “Reflection.” The song serves as a device for *Mulan* to convey a message to the audience that part of her motivation for going to war is so that she “can be true to herself” by seeking individuality that she yearns. From a Chinese viewpoint, however, *Mulan*’s motivations are not about “finding herself” but rather are reflective of Confucian philosophy about filial loyalty and parental duty—a philosophy that pervaded Chinese culture at the historical period when the poem was written. From a Confucian perspective, *Mulan*’s motivation to take her aging father’s place in the military reflects a dutiful child’s obligation to her parent.

We encourage students to reflect upon the ways in which Disney attempts to Americanize the animation. Both Dong (2006) and Ma (2000) observe that *Mulan* is constructed to appeal to the American youth culture and celebrate the values of an individualized American “self.” Dauphin (1998) adds that even the musical scores in *Mulan* are culturally inauthentic; they make use of a conventional full scale of 12 notes rather than the pentatonic scales. Furthermore, the songs—while appealing to an American audience—have little authentic Chinese flavor since sparse use is made of Chinese musical instruments.

Mo and Shen (2000, p. 138) noted that *Mulan* is filled with “racially-coded social slurs which are used to mock Chinese culture.” Therefore, we ask students to watch for and notice these scenes. For example, the film provides *Mulan* with two sidekicks who serve a comedic function “by defiantly altering historical reality, mixing up past with present and East with West” (Mo & Shen, p. 138). One of the sidekicks is named Mushu. It is offensive to



many cultural insiders that his name comes from a Chinese menu (Young, 1998). Toward the end of the film, the ancestors are celebrating Mulan's many accomplishments when Mushu exclaims "Call for egg rolls!" Making such a joke underscores the pervasive racial stereotyping in the film. The other sidekick is a "lucky" cricket name Cri-Kee. Mulan takes him with her when she visits the matchmaker to ensure a fortunate outcome, but Disney filmmakers should know that crickets are not a symbol of luck in China (Mo & Shen, 2000).

As we discuss the microaggressions operating within *Mulan*, we continually seek to brainstorm strategies for addressing the issues raised during our classroom analysis. Problems from the movie can be addressed, in part, by exposing children to other picture book versions of the Mulan legend that are more authentic. Li's (2000) scholarship offers other Chinese heroines who are more accurately and unstereotypically depicted in children's literature. She also offers guidelines with specific criteria that will help parents and educators in evaluating the cultural accuracy of Chinese folklore presented in children's picture books.

#### CASE EXAMPLE: *POCAHONTAS*

As the Disney Company prepared to release their animated version of *Pocahontas* in 1995, Disney publicists contended that "in every aspect of the storytelling, the filmmakers tried to treat Pocahontas with the respect she deserved and present a balanced and informed view of the Native American culture" (*Pocahontas*, 1995, p. 34). The Disney Company sought to immerse its film crew in Pocahontas' Algonquin culture after conducting extensive historical research about the period during which she lived. Some information Disney learned during this fact-finding mission was used, some was not and, in other cases, information was fabricated. For example, one such questionable area is the way in which Pocahontas herself is visually constructed.

Before viewing the film, we ask students to complete an assignment that provides a list of questions about Pocahontas, such as what was Pocahontas' age when she met John Smith and what did she look like? Multiple online sources are provided to make this historical exploration easy. When it is completed, we discuss differences between the Disney image of Pocahontas and her historical depictions. We note, as Edgerton & Jackson (1996) have observed, that in his attempt to design Pocahontas,

Keane, in turn, drew on four successive women for inspiration, beginning with paintings of Pocahontas herself; then Native American consultant Shirley "Little Dove" Custalow McGowan; then 21-year-old Filipino model Dyna Taylor; and finally, white supermodel Christy Turlington . . .

After studio animators spent months sketching her, their Pocahontas emerged as a multicultural pastiche. They started with Native American faces but eventually gravitated to the more familiar and Anglicized looks of the statuesque Turlington. (p. 95)

Compared to White Disney heroines, Pocahontas is portrayed as sexier, more sensual, and exotic. Pocahontas wears an over-the-shoulder costume that is only loosely consistent with sixteenth-century Algonquian attire (Strong, 1996). Much bare skin is revealed by the way Pocahontas' short dress is designed, and it is fashioned with a slit that draws even more viewer focus to her physical body. In reality, Native American women of the period wore long dresses with removable sleeves (Golden, 1998). Pocahontas' hair is a focal point, and it is frequently shown blowing in the wind. Pocahontas' special relationship with the wind allows Disney to draw upon the Eurocentric stereotype of the "Noble Savage"—a once-great but now conquered culture that was integrally connected to the earth and could commune with nature (Pewewardy, 1996/1997). Indeed, to the dismay and anger of many, the term *savage* is used throughout the film to refer to Native Americans. Anthropologist Strong (1996) explains why this term is so offensive:

For many Native Americans and other colonized people, "savage" is a potent and degrading epithet, comparable in its effect to the word "nigger." I cannot imagine the later epithet repeated so often, and set to music in a G-rated film and its soundtrack. (p. 418)

It is the wind and another object of nature—Grandmother Willow—that urge Pocahontas to listen to her heart. This means that she should follow her individual destiny, which lies just around the bend in the river; as it turns out, this destiny is to meet and fall in love with Captain John Smith. Historical records recount that Pocahontas was approximately 10 to 12 years old when she met John Smith, who was then in his late twenties (Golden, 1998). Disney depicts an older, voluptuous Pocahontas presumably so their romance can be developed. Yet, there is little historical evidence that Pocahontas and John Smith ever had such a relationship (Pewewardy, 1996/1997).

We note that in Disney's animation, Pocahontas defies her father's orders and sneaks away to meet Smith. Yet Pewewardy (1996/1997) comments: "This most likely would not have happened during the time period in the movie, as it was a cultural norm for all tribal members to adhere to any strict directive from a parent" (p. 22). However, by foreshadowing Pocahontas' growing independence throughout the film, Disney fits her into the mold of its other coming-of-age stories so that she will appeal

to American children who are aspiring to become adolescents. Pocahontas also resists her father's wishes that she marry heroic Kokum to embrace a Western perspective on individual destiny—intuiting that her true path lies, not with Kokum but somewhere just beyond the river bend. This alteration provides Disney with the opportunity to introduce another popular but offensive connection framing Pocahontas as an “Indian Princess.” This stereotype is typically expressed by a maidenly Native American's being “deeply committed to some white man” (Pewewardy, p. 21).

We call attention to the fact that the founder's son Roy Disney had the following to say: “Pocahontas is a story that appealed to us because it was basically a story about people getting along together . . . which is particularly applicable to lots of places in the world today” (*Pocahontas*, 1995, p. 33). Thus, the film was portrayed by Euro-Americans as a tale of multicultural acceptance and cross-cultural understanding. We note that an oppositional reading of the Disney animation reveals that the arrival of the Europeans was a tragedy (for both Pocahontas and her people) who ultimately were conquered in their ensuing battles with the White man. In the Disney film, Smith is depicted as the only White man who expresses compassion toward Native Americans; in real life, this was not the case (Golden, 1998). He came to America, like his companions, as a part of a plan for colonial expansion to exploit the New World solely for financial gain. As a colonizer, Smith helped conquer indigenous people and then appropriated their land (Buescheer & Ono, 1996).

### Final Analyses for Students of HBSE

Students are asked to examine the ramifications of microaggressions for people of color. Blitz and Greene (2006) provide an edited text that explores the outcomes of racism. During a final lecture on this topic, students are asked to examine the most pertinent article from Blitz and Greene's book on the physical and emotional outcomes on individuals from continued exposure to covert racism over a lifetime (Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2006, as cited in Blitz & Greene, 2006). Franklin et al (2006) use the term *invisibility syndrome* to refer to the symptoms that can appear due to being consistently undervalued and ignored (p. 13). Symptoms include decreased self-esteem, enhanced anger and frustration, increased stress levels, and problems with indigestion, depression, emotional burnout, relationship difficulties, and substance use (see Appendix A).

Damasio (2000) asserts that one way to challenge microaggressions is through consciousness raising. This requires students to examine their own prejudices and to learn about the outside forces that influence them. Sue (2010b) indeed encourages such examination. Another important note is that students of color typically have higher levels of consciousness coming into the classroom due to a life experience of overt and covert discrimination

(Damasio). More typically, White students have not been socialized to be aware of the covert prejudice and discrimination inherent in our society. Both the mini-topic paper and the self-awareness paper in this class help further undergird the need for consciousness raising by both cohorts. Specifics for the expectations of these papers can be found in Appendix B.

## CONCLUSION

Critical race theory encourages an interdisciplinary perspective. This serves as an invitation for us, as educators, to join the dialogue and continually reflect upon how a variety of themes raised by critical race theory might shape the field of social work education. These themes include social justice, oppositional readings of dominant ideologies, and consideration of how our multiple social identities are a source of great strength, but also place us at risk for oppression. A final theme is the importance of those with marginalized social identities helping others to understand the dynamics and interlocking forms of oppression so that actions can help to dismantle oppression in its myriad manifestations. This paper seeks to explore how the points of view incorporated in critical race theory can be used to awaken student consciousness about the various forms of insult that are directed toward minority cultures in popular film. Our main consciousness-raising method is to expose students to the “microaggressions” that are depicted in Disney animations and then use the classroom as a safe space to process the experience. We remind students that microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al, 2007, p. 271).

The dominant ideologies of any given culture, however, are never rigid but rather, are open to change and revision through a process of hegemonic negotiation. We define hegemony as “the ongoing struggle to maintain the consent of the people to a system that governs them (and which may or may not oppress them in some ways)” (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009, p. 10). Hegemonic negotiation then refers to a process by which social groups put pressure on the dominant hegemony by challenging its ideological biases. Such a struggle over ideology is an ongoing political process that engulfs us, since we are bombarded at every moment with messages about both how the world should and could function (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009).

Unfortunately, racism has not disappeared from cartoons; racism simply is more subtly expressed—usually in the form of microaggressions that operate outside the threshold of conscious awareness by members of the dominant culture. Hence, we feel that the more nebulous forms of microaggression that are depicted in *The Lion King*, *Mulan*, and *Pochohantas* may

be harder for audiences to recognize. After all, Disney markets its many commodities as innocent, wholesome family fun. However, we believe that as a critical mass of individuals become empowered to read Disney texts more oppositionally, public pressure can be brought to bear on the Disney and similar companies to eliminate the array of microaggressions to which its viewers are presently being exposed.

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## APPENDIX A Human Behavior and the Social Environment Assignments

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### Preparatory assignments

- Classroom lecture material presented on topics of racism, critical race theory, and racism spectrum
- Read *Why are All the Black Children Sitting Together: And Other Conversations about Race*. (Tatum, 2003)
- Tatum reaction paper
- Read McIntosh, P. (1989). White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.
- Class lecture and discussion on White privilege

### Disney assignments

- Read unpublished paper entitled “Using Critical Race Theory to Understand How Disney Constructs Diversity”
  - Watch in class and discuss Disney clips from *Lion King*, *Mulan*, and *Pocahontas*
  - Follow-up assignments
  - Classroom lecture on affects for people of color
  - Mini-topic paper
  - Self-awareness paper
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## APPENDIX B Assignment Specifics

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Tatum Reaction Paper	Student writes a 4- to 6-page paper answering the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) What benefits might accrue from talking about racism and encouraging others to do the same? Might each of us effectively and consistently “break the silence about racism whenever we can” (Tatum, p. 93)? What fears might hinder use from doing so?</li><li>2) In what ways and to what extent is David Wellman’s definition of racism—a “system of advantages based on race”—accurate in relation to the United States? In what ways might this definition lead to an understanding of “how racism operates in America” (Tatum, p. 8), How important is that definition of racism include the elements of advantage, privilege, and power? To what degree is Tatum justified in basing the bulk of her discussion on Wellman’s definition?</li><li>3) How useful or effective in understanding racial identity development do you find William Cross’s stages of racial identity development and Tatum’s explanation of them? (Tatum, p. 54). What examples of each stage can you cite from your own experience or observations? Do you think the same five stages apply to other multicultural groups such as GLBTQ? Explain your reasoning.</li><li>4) Why might it be essential, in terms of interracial understanding, to engage children “in a critical examination of the books they read, the television they watch, the films they see, and the video games they play” (Tatum, p. 48). How might we teach children “to question whether demeaning or derogatory depictions of other people are stereotypes” (Tatum, p. 49) and how to respond to racial stereotypes and other forms of inequity?</li></ol>
Mini-topic paper	The purpose of this assignment is for students to conduct a literature review and write a 3- to 4-page mini-topic paper that focuses on a population that has experienced or is at risk for experiencing prejudice and discrimination in the United States. Suggested topics might include

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(Continued)

**APPENDIX B** (Continued)

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- 1) GLBTQ (homophobia, identify formation, forming families, social stress, and social supports)
- 2) Ethnic/racial minority groups (racism, ethnocentrism, African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans)
- 3) Women (sexism, poverty, health and mental health risk factors, battered women, women in the labor force)
- 4) The aged (ageism, mental health and the elderly, health status and needs, income assets, elder abuse)
- 5) The differently abled (ableism, societal responses to disabilities, cognitive disabilities, mental illness, physical disabilities)
- 6) Children (child maltreatment, hunger, poverty)
- 7) The impoverished (homelessness, children, women, minorities, rural populations, Appalachians)
- 8) The physically ill (HIV, AIDS, cancer)
- 9) Those who experience religious oppression (Jewish, Catholic, Muslim)

Self-awareness  
paper

The purpose of this 6- to 8-page paper is for the student to examine various issues of human behavior in the social environment as they pertain to his/her development. Students must address the following:

- 1) Draw upon the theories and literature covered in the course to describe life in terms of its stages, developmental issues, normative transitions, and coping strategies.
- 2) Describe significant factors that have impacted his or her worldview.
- 3) Describe issues relating to identify groups that have affected his or her development and worldview.

The student should consider the following topics within the three previous questions: gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability/disability, class, and race.

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