Stigma, Stereotypes, and Attributional Theory: A Successful Merger

TASHA A. RILEY
University of British Columbia

ABSTRACT: Critical race theorists assert that racism in society and schools is a factor that impedes the progress of minority students. Whiteness theorists argue that white racialized teachers and students assume entitlement to privileges within an educational system that promotes white privilege as natural and allows it to remain unchallenged. Researchers of both theories claim that until racism is recognized as real, stereotypes and biases will continue to be passed on by teachers and administrators and the educational divide will grow. While these theories provide a useful framework for the macro context of society by providing a lens to view how educational institutions have been constructed to reinforce the status quo, they fall short when examining the subtle ways discrimination seeps into daily practices. When combined, theories on stigma, stereotyping, and attribution may give policy-makers and practitioners insight into the extent to which perceptions of race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status influence teachers' expectations for students.

RESUME: Les théoriciens critiques de la race, affirment que le racisme en société et dans les écoles, représente un facteur qui ralentit le progrès des minorités estudiantines. Les théoriciens de la race blanche soutiennent que des professeurs et étudiants de couleur blanche, s'approprient le droit aux privilèges à l'intérieur même d'un système éducatif qui favorise tout naturellement des privilèges pour les blancs, sans qu'ils soient remis en question. Les chercheurs des deux théories prétendent que jusqu'à ce que le racisme soit reconnu comme un fait réel, les professeurs et administrateurs continueront de se soustraire aux questions de stéréotypes et de préjugés. Ainsi, le fossé du monde des études deviendra plus profond. Alors même que ces théories offrent un cadre utile pour le macrocontexte de la société grâce à un objectif permettant de voir la manière dont les établissements scolaires furent construits pour renforcer le statu quo, elles ne répondent plus lorsqu'elles analysent les manières subtiles avec lesquelles la discrimination s'infiltre dans les habitudes quotidiennes.

Journal of Educational Thought
Vol. 44, No. 2, 2010, 229-246.

> L'amalgame des théories sur l'opprobre, les stéréotypes et de droit d'attribution, peut donner aux responsables de l'élaboration des politiques et aux praticiens, un aperçu de l'étendue vers laquelle les perceptions de la race, de l'ethnicité, du genre et des statuts socio-économiques, influencent les attentes des enseignants pour les étudiants.

Determining the effects of teachers' expectations is no easy undertaking. Yet, teachers expectations do much to determine students' future opportunities. For example, placing students in remedial or advanced classrooms not only establishes the type of instruction they receive, it may also determine the student's likelihood of obtaining higher education. Some researchers have indicated that teachers' perceptions regarding students' academic ability might be influential years after the initial contact. Smith, Jussim, and Eccles (1999) discovered that even though self-fulfilling prophecies in terms of effect size may be relatively small, their presence over time is quite remarkable (p. 563). Other researchers have noted that the decisions teachers make regarding their students can be influenced by arbitrary factors such as a student race, ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status (Riley & Ungerleider, 2009; Chang & Sue, 2003; Hauser-Cram, Selchluk, & Stipek, 2003; Murdock, 1999; Feilker, 1999; Tapasak, 1990; Rubovitz & Maeher, 1973). The long-lasting influence of teachers beliefs combined with the potential for teachers' decisions to be affected by the aforementioned factors calls for further investigation. Conducting a proper investigation requires the appropriate tools for the job.

In this article, I suggest that combining theories of stigma and stereotyping with attribution theory will provide policy-makers and practitioners a more precise understanding of the subtlety of discrimination and the influence it may have upon student placement. I contend that while critical race theory or whiteness theory is useful for investigating social inequalities at the macro level, the combined theories of stigma, stereotyping, and attribution may be more beneficial when investigating discrimination within the micro context of the classroom. The combined theories of stigma, stereotyping, and attribution operating on the micro level may provide researchers with an adequate platform for collecting data that would pinpoint specific instances of discrimination within the classroom setting (such as teachers decision making). I recommend that rather than privileging one theory over another, educational theorists and policy- makers should

employ all theories as a way to expand their understanding of daily classroom practices. In addition, I propose that by merging theories of stigma, stereotyping, and attribution with those of whiteness and critical race, teachers and students will develop a greater self-awareness. This self-awareness comes from both the recognition of the ways in which labels, categories, and belief systems are socially constructed and of having the appropriate theoretical tools to destabilize them.

Attribution Theory: What it is and How it Works in the Classroom

Attribution theory, articulated by Weiner (1984), offers an explanation as to why an unexpected event may have occurred (Janes, 1996). In attribution theory, causes for a specific event may be seen as external (an event created by something/someone outside the individual affected by the event) or internal (an event created by something inherent to the individual), stable (consistent over time) or unstable (changes over time), controllable (something that the affected individual can manipulate or change) or uncontrollable (something that the individual has little ability to manipulate or change), by the one who makes the attribution . The attributes an individual uses to explain the outcome of an event will often reflect the personal attitudes that an individual holds (Weiner, 1984).

The following example illustrates the way attribution theory might unravel in the classroom. Imagine that a perceived model student inexplicably acts out in class. Since the student is not known for disruption, the teacher may try to determine the reason for the behaviour by considering whether the actions were triggered by an outside event or if the reaction signified something more intrinsic to the student (locus of control). The teacher may then consider whether the student has always been disruptive or if the incident is unusual (causal stability). Finally, the teacher may question whether other teachers believe the student is capable of controlling behavior or not (controllability). Later the teacher discovers that the student reactions were triggered by her parents recent separation. Over time, the student reverts to her usual well-behaved self. Her behavior is thus labeled as external (caused by an outside event), unstable (does not last for a long period of time), and controllable (the student when asked, could control her actions).

These same measures can also demonstrate how a teacher might determine the cause of a student's success or failure in the classroom. In this case, the causal attributions are that of a student's perceived ability and/or effort While both the attributions – ability and effort – are believed to be internal in causality, ability is regarded as stable and uncontrollable since it is perceived as fixed, whereas effort is seen as unstable and controllable since it may vary and is under the control of the student (Janes, 1996; Wallace, 1996; Weiner, 1985). A teacher who attributes a student's *success* in the classroom to ability (something that is internal and stable) may increase his or her expectancy for that student's success and therefore be more likely to encourage the student's persistence in achieving goals. Likewise, students who attribute their success to stable factors such as ability may feel confident in their ability to succeed and are more likely to participate within the classroom. However if a student's success is attributed to an unstable factor like effort or good fortune, a teacher may have lowered expectations for that student since high effort implies low ability. The student may suffer from lack of confidence regardless of her success if she believes her chance of success requires very hard work or luck.

Alternatively, a teacher who attributes a student's *failure* to ability may develop lower expectations for that student and may even appear to give up on the student since her failure has been determined as fixed (Tollefson & Chen, 1988; Juvonen, 1988). Students who identify their failure as intrinsic may also be overwhelmed by feelings of shame, frustration, and hopelessness and thus pull further away from the classroom (Tollefson & Chen, 1988; Juvonen, 1988). However, if that student's failure is attributed to unstable and external factors such as illness, a teacher may continue to have high expectations for that student and the student's confidence about the likelihood of later success should remain (Janes, 1996). A teacher who perceives a student failure as rooted in a lack of effort, something internal and unstable, may be more likely to become angry with the student for not trying hard enough.

Stigma, Stereotyping: What They are and How They Might Work With Attribution Theory

In the preceding section, I provided definitions of attribution theory and indicated ways in which this might unfold in a classroom. Now I argue that the combined theories of stigma, stereotyping, and attribution can

be used by policy-makers as a theoretical tool to demonstrate the ways in which incidents of discrimination might occur in the classroom.

In his seminal work, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity*, Erving Goffman (1963) describes stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (p. 3). Stigmatization is thus created by both the initial recognition of differences based upon the individual's distinct characteristics and then by the subsequent devaluation of that individual (Dovidio, Major, & Crocker, 2000). Once an individual has been stigmatized, the individual is often treated as "less human" and may be subjected to various levels of discrimination which may impede upon that individual's life chances (Goffman, 1963). More recent definitions of stigma have included the contextual nature of the stigmatization process. In these definitions, stigma is described as a social construction "determined by the broader cultural context (involving stereotypes, values, and ideologies), the meaning of the situation for participants, and the features of the situation that influence this meaning" (Dovidio et al., 2000, p. 3). Such definitions elaborate on how notions of what was once perceived as either unusual or normal may alter or shift over time. Goffman identifies three stigmatizing conditions which include the physical (physical deformities); individual character (addiction, mental disability, and lower occupational status); and tribal identities (race, sex, religion, and nation). Although my argument could potentially encompass all three categories, for the purpose of this paper I will focus on *tribal identities*, specifically on variables of race, nation, and gender.

Stereotype or the process of stereotyping is the generalization about what a particular individual/group is or does without accounting for the individual differences within that group (Reyna, 2000). While a stigma is by definition negative, some stereotypes may be positive in that they may treat members of a group positively (Jussim, Palumbo, Chatman, Madon, & Smith, 2000, p. 376). Such stereotypes are often believed to be better than others because of the emphasis on the positive, such as in the statement; all Asians are good at math. What is not recognized is that such assumptions are unhelpful if a person feels they do not fit the designated label. Stereotypes can also be used to rationalize individual acts by stereotyped group members through offering explanations as to why someone did well (or not well) at something.

Individuals with collective or stigmas such as race or ethnicity may be more likely to be stereotyped since it is often assumed that certain characteristics exist among people sharing the same stigma (Biernat &

Dovidio, 2000). Educational psychologist, Christine Reyna (2000), provides a model to illustrate how various attributes of such collective groups and individuals may be stereotyped. Using her examples as a guide, I illustrate the various ways in which these examples may influence teachers' decision-making regarding their student's academic future.

Reyna discusses how some ethnic minorities may be perceived as being inherently lazy Since laziness is an undesirable but controllable trait, the perceiver may feel that the stereotyped individual *chooses* to be lazy and thus the perceiver may become angry (Reyna, 2000). If the perceiver becomes angry or upset they may be more likely to respond to the stereotyped individual with reluctance or disdain. For example in the classroom the stereotyped individual might be a student while the teacher is the perceiver. Imagine a teacher asks a student she perceives as lazy a question regarding the previous night's homework. If that student needs more time to reflect upon the question and does not respond immediately, the teacher may be less inclined to wait for an answer and more likely to move on to someone else. The teacher may even punish that student for not paying attention. Research has demonstrated that students with perceived behavioral problems are more likely to be placed in remedial classrooms (Oakes, 1995), thus a student who is consistently perceived as lazy may be more likely to be placed in a lower ability classroom regardless of their ability.

A collective group or individual may also be stereotyped as low-intelligence. An example of this is the notion that all girls are bad at math. This stereotype evokes the notion that a girl's poor test performance is the result of inherent (and thus uncontrollable) ability. Attributions such as this are particularly damaging to a student's motivation and self-image. A girl who believes her poor performance is due to a lack of effort rather than inherent ability may feel more convinced of her potential for success than the girl who believes her poor performance reflects her innate inability. The girl who feels her poor performance is innate may feel incompetent and more likely to withdraw from math completely to avoid facing negative feelings (Reyna, 2000; Tollefson & Chen, 1988; Weiner, 1985). Further, a teacher who truly believes that a student is incapable of success due to an inherent lack of ability may be less likely to recommend that student for future opportunities relevant to a particular subject. Such scenarios may help to explain the current under-representation of female students in hard sciences.

A stigmatized group may also be identified as in control of positive outcomes. An example of positive stereotyping of a collective group is the stereotype that all Asians are good at math. While this may appear to be positive, teachers who hold such perceptions may be more likely to steer Asian students towards careers in hard sciences or mathematics regardless of the students actual needs or desires. Furthermore, those in the targeted group who do not fulfill the positive stereotype may believe they are in some way inadequate or unworthy if they do not meet such expectations. Another example of positive stereotyping is the labeling of Asian people as model minorities (Reyna, 2000). While such a label might appear unproblematic and even beneficial, Chang and Sue (2003) observe that the positive stereotypes held by some teachers regarding their Asian students good behavior and work ethic actually prevent teachers from identifying and treating behavioral disorders such as problems related to anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal (p. 240). In this case, students who might benefit from a teacher's extra attention may be ignored.

In this section I have demonstrated how combined theories of stigma, stereotyping, and attribution may be useful as a theoretical tool to help demonstrate and identify the subtle ways in which teachers' decisions may be negatively influenced by arbitrary factors such as a student's race, ethnicity, gender, or social-economic status. However, one might speculate whether such tools would still be useful if it was determined teachers decisions regarding students were *not* influenced by these arbitrary factors and were based solely upon the student's academic achievement. Might then combined theories of stereotypes and attribution be rendered useless or would they still provide educators with a constructive method of determining the existence of social inequalities within education? I contend that even if empirical studies determined that teachers perceptions were *not* influenced by factors such as race, gender, ability, or ethnicity, theories on stereotypes combined with attribution theory still offer valuable insight into the subtle ways various forms of discrimination may operate in the classroom. For example, failure on academic tests may also be invoked in stigmatized groups in certain situations where behavior can confirm that the group lacks a valued ability (Aronson et al., 1998, p. 30). Stigmatized groups must consistently deal with reminders and triggers of particular stereotypes and thus may have developed a heightened awareness of the group stigma. Research has shown that if a group is made aware of their stigmatized status before participation in a test in

a subject where their group is deemed incapable, they will not do as well as they would have had it not been mentioned at all (Reyna, 2000; Salinas & Aronson, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). This is referred to as stereotype threat.

In addition, a targeted group may feel a certain sense of group loyalty which may also make the direct target feel more responsible for representing the group and thus be more keenly and chronically apprehensive about representing their group in situations where the group stereotype is relevant (Aronson et al., 1998, p. 41). This means that stigmatized students may be more apprehensive about entering particular subject areas if they feel that they might let down their group This behavior may help explain why some stigmatized groups choose to disengage from school as a self-protective tactic rather than be continuously abused by the negative feelings triggered by stereotype threat.

A Wider Perspective: Tracking for School or Tracking for Society?

I have explained why theories of stigma, stereotyping, and attribution theory combined help determine how teachers' decisions might be discriminatory and have also discussed how they may explain more subtle forms of discrimination in the classroom. One might argue that while these theories may be useful for examining the way discrimination occurs between individual subjects, they are not useful for explaining how social inequalities are developed or reinforced by educational institutions. I argue that theories of stigma and stereotyping when combined with theories of attribution provide a framework for determining how larger social inequalities may be reinforced by educational policies over time.

The practice of tracking (also called ability grouping or streaming) refers to the process of students being placed into ability groups. Advocates for tracking argue that by putting students with similar capacities together, teachers have the opportunity to tailor their lessons to maximize learning and achievement for those students (Jussim, Palumbo, Chatman, Madon & Smith, 2000, p. 406). Other researchers (Broussard & Joseph, 1998; Oakes, 1995; Sirotnik, 1994) have argued that assessment practices that support tracking may actually be more harmful than beneficial as students in remedial classes show fewer gains over time than similarly situated students in higher track classes.

They claim that there is currently little movement between tracks and note that students wrongly placed into lower tracked classes have more difficulty advancing to higher ability classrooms. Some researchers (Dei, Karumanchery & Karumanchery-Link, 2004; Oakes, 1985; Rist, 1970) claim that tracking further exacerbates social inequalities, the results of which can widen the achievement gap between white, middle class students and those from minority and lower socio-economic backgrounds.

In the preceding section, I gave examples of how teachers perceptions that *all girls are bad at math* or *all Asians are good at math* may steer those students towards particular subjects. In addition, teachers with perceptions that students of a particular minority group are inherently lazy or less academically inclined may steer such students to remedial classrooms. In theory, if enough teachers hold the same perceptual biases towards students of a particular race, class, or gender, they may be responsible for perpetuating social inequalities.

Critical Race Theory and Whiteness Theory: In Need of New Associates?

If researchers combine theories of stigma and stereotyping with attribution theory, they may better understand how educational policies can perpetuate larger inequalities throughout society. Skeptics might argue that the combination of such theories is actually redundant since critical race theory and whiteness theory already offer practitioners and policy-makers useful tools to understand the overt and subtle ways racism and discrimination are perpetuated by educational institutions. Yet while critical race theory and whiteness theory aid our understanding of the systemic nature of racism and discrimination, the situational nature of stereotyping and attribution theories combined may be more useful for those who wish to locate the *specific* areas in which instances of discrimination might manifest. This may be more ideal for policy-makers and practitioners looking to gather empirical evidence to reinforce such claims and inform future policy decisions.

Whiteness theorists such as Thompson (2004) define whiteness as the unmarked condition against which racial difference is measured (p. 32). These theorists argue that the educational system preserves, promotes, and protects white superiority in the classroom in subtle and not so subtle ways. They suggest that while many whites promote the idea of racial equality through notions of colour blindness, white

students often assume entitlement to various privileges within the educational system. These assumptions are generated by an educational system that promotes white privilege by disguising it as natural thus allowing it to remain unchallenged (Schick & St. Denis, 2005; Thompson, 2004; Schick, 2000a, 200b). Critical race theorists (Dei, Karumanchery & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004; May, 1999; Moodley, 1999; Nieto, 1999) assert that racism in the wider society and in schools impedes the progress of minority students. They argue that overt and covert hierarchies within the school system privilege some groups while silencing others creating an unequal distribution of opportunities and differential outcomes for students (Moodley, 1999; Dei, 1996; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993). Critical race theorists argue that until racism is recognized as real, stereotypes and biases will continue to be passed on by teachers and administrators favoring some groups at the expense of others allowing the current educational divide to grow (Garcia, 2001).

While both of these theories provide a framework for addressing the big questions such as why some groups are stigmatized and others are not by making visible the social construction and the power differential inherent in difference, both theories provide little insight into how stereotyping and discrimination might play out in a situational context. Critical race theory and whiteness theory provide a useful framework for the *macro context* of society as they offer insight into how race works within the hegemonic culture. They provide a lens to view how various forms of oppression have intersected over time while also providing insight into how institutions have been constructed and upheld to reinforce the status quo. By exposing such structures, critical race theory and whiteness theory are useful in that they provide one with the tools to challenge or subvert existing hegemonic practices. They also demonstrate how such structures may shape and influence an individual's own belief systems through the creation of labels and categories instigated by and relative to various social, political, and historical ideologies.

These theories fall short however when examining the more subtle ways various forms of oppression or discrimination seep into our daily practices. While critical race and whiteness theories may help explain who gets stigmatized and why, they are not as useful for illustrating the interplay of stereotyping in the classroom between individuals. This is where the combined theories of stereotyping and attribution may be more useful. Researchers using these theories will be better able to consider the *micro context* of the classroom, as these theories address the

various interactions and exchanges between individual subjects. Thus, these theories, when partnered with existing critical race theories and theories of whiteness may better enable policy-makers and practitioners to consider *both* the ways in which discrimination and other forms of oppression are developed in the macro context of society *and* the ways various forms of discrimination may be passed on or reinforced at micro level through daily practice.

However, all of these theories (including theories of stereotypes and attribution) are limited in that they are theories without context and often have little empirical data to verify their claims allowing skeptics to disregard such arguments as rhetoric. While some critical race theorists argue that the call for standards of evidence suggests that racism can only be proven sufficiently when validated by the same privileged groups that have allowed these injustices to exist (Gillborn, 2006; Dei, Karumanchery & Karumanchery-Luik, 2003), I suggest that if there is a possibility to obtain data that would help strengthen claims of racism and discrimination we should not abstain from using it out of principle, especially if the results might mean the earlier demise of discriminatory policies. Educational researchers are often dependent upon data to both legitimize their existing policies and to validate the provision of government funding to instigate new programs. If studies are able to indicate more specific areas where instances of discrimination are occurring (such as tracking), more effort might be made to alleviate the problem and more funds may be provided for better alternatives. As Morton Weinfeld (1996) states, if everything is harassment, racism, and genocide, then nothing is harassment, racism, or genocide (p. 122). Teachers may be more adept to changing attitudes or perceptions regarding their students if evidence points towards biased decision-making. Without such data, claims of discrimination and racism may appear rhetorical in nature and easier for some to dismiss. Fisher and Echols demonstrated in their 1992 study of the Vancouver School Board that, while there was sufficient support for the underlying principles of antiracist and multicultural education, when it was to be put into practice teachers were not as accommodating. One reason for this lack of enthusiasm stemmed from the inadequate provision of empirical evidence to convince teachers of the need for innovation (Moodley, 1999, pp. 147-148). Farkas (2003) states that while it may be difficult to provide empirical proof of discrimination within the school system, it is not impossible and one should not rule out the possibility of attempting to directly study teacher attitudes by collecting survey

data, conducting social psychological field experiments (e.g., during pre-service and in-service teacher training), or even by directly observing in classrooms (p. 1135). Empirical research may provide further credibility for existing theories of whiteness and critical race theory, making it more difficult for skeptics to deny the existence of discrimination and racism in the classroom and more likely for others to demand a call for action. In addition, such research may help to identify problem areas specific to teachers' decision-making, enabling policy-makers to see precisely where changes need to be made.

While critical race theory and whiteness theory offer a foundation for discussing discrimination in the broader context of the educational institution and society itself, theories on stigma and stereotyping combined with attribution theory are better equipped to examine the more subtle instance of discrimination within a classroom and will be better equipped to determine whether teachers' decisions are discriminatory. The ability to identify where instances of discrimination occur at the micro level may make it easier for policy-makers to obtain empirical data to help substantiate claims of discrimination in the classroom. While it may be difficult to provide empirical proof of inherent racism or discrimination within the educational system as a whole, it may be feasible to quantify where particular instances of discrimination occur. One of those areas may be through the study of teachers' perceptions and the attributions they make regarding stigmatized and non-stigmatized students. The micro data driven theory of stereotypes and attribution can help inform and provide data for the macro level theories of whiteness and critical race theory, making all theories stronger.

Stigma, Stereotype, and Attribution Theory: A Problem and a Solution?

Some might argue that while combined theories on stereotypes and attribution may be useful for policy-makers and practitioners to determine whether or not teachers' decisions are discriminatory, they do not offer concrete solutions for the individuals involved. Or to put more simply, *what is the use of finding the problem if you can't come up with a solution?* My response is that an individuals' awareness of the combined theories of stereotypes and attribution is in itself a solution because these combined theories enable individuals (both the perceiver and the perceived) to investigate their own daily interactions.

Second, critical race theory and theories on whiteness have taught us that discrimination in our institutions takes both overt and covert forms, meaning that not all forms of discrimination are easily revealed or have intention (Gillborn, 2006). If we agree, as critical race and whiteness theorists have claimed, that hegemonic ideals are interwoven into each pocket of society, it is reasonable to assume that even teachers with the best of intentions may be at fault. Although a teacher might not *intend* to make discriminatory decisions based on their students ascribed characteristics, it does not make the teacher automatically incapable of biased decisions. Gillborn (2006) wisely suggests that our approaches regarding instances of discrimination in the classroom need to move away from endless debates about *intent* by insisting upon a focus on the *outcomes* of actions and processes (p. 8). I argue that an awareness of how combined theories of stereotyping and attribution operate is crucial for teachers as this understanding empowers teachers to consider *precisely on what basis* the decisions regarding their students are made and whether it is appropriate. In addition, teachers aware of the existence of stereotype threat may be more likely to pay attention to the language they use around students and the attributions they place on students successes or failures. Teachers familiar with theories on stereotyping and attribution may also be more aware of how students attribute their own successes and failures and thus, may be more likely to step in if they notice a student on a downward spiral.

Similarly, students familiar with theories of attribution and stereotyping may reflect upon both how they perceive themselves in different environments and how they feel they are perceived, which may be empowering. In addition, this awareness may better enable students to challenge negative perceptions of themselves and the decisions made regarding their own lives. It must be kept in mind however that the inherent power structures existing within educational institutions and society may make it difficult for students to speak out, suggesting that while students should have a voice in the construction of educational policies affecting their lives, they should not be held accountable for decisions made by educational administrators and teachers regarding their future.

Teachers and students familiar with the combined theories of stereotyping and attribution will, (a) be equipped with tools to investigate their daily interactions and practices which may make the task of challenging hegemonic policies appear less daunting, (b) be cognizant of the way discrimination manifests in the classroom and, (c)

be empowered as individuals with the ability to recognize and challenge stereotypical perceptions (within themselves or others).

Conclusion

I am *not* arguing that critical race theory or whiteness theory should be abandoned nor do I argue that that the combined theories of stereotyping and attributions are better than such theories. What I do argue is that the *combined* theories of stereotyping and attribution would be able to extend existing critical race theory and whiteness theory by enabling a deeper analysis of discrimination on a micro level allowing one to address more specific questions on issues like *whether or not teachers decisions are discriminatory.* Ideally, all of these theories would be integrated into one way of knowing and understanding the more subtle nuances of discrimination that take place in both our daily practices and the underpinnings of society as a whole. Second, I do *not* suggest that theories are only useful if they can be quantified. In fact, I would argue that theory is valuable precisely for its ability to go beyond what one can see or measure.

What I do argue is that quantitative evidence might strengthen existing theoretical claims. This data is particularly useful when developing or arguing for or against a particular policy. Since data is more easily obtained on the micro level (through the observation of daily practices), theories of stereotyping and attribution may provide a more useful framework than those that are all-encompassing. By combining theories of stigma and stereotyping with attribution theory, policy-makers, practitioners, and students may be better equipped to examine the more subtle instances of discrimination within a classroom and will be better equipped to determine whether teachers decisions are discriminatory. I contend that while the application of such theories may be best applied to individual situations within the classroom, they also can provide a more complex understanding of existing social inequalities on a larger scale.

Finally, although critical race theory or whiteness theory may be useful for investigating social inequalities at the macro level, combining theories of stigma, stereotyping, and attribution may be more beneficial for investigating daily practices. I contend that the combined theories of stigma, stereotyping, and attribution that operate on the micro level enables researchers to collect empirical data that would help legitimize and reinforce claims made by all aforementioned theories. If this is done and policy-makers have access to the data, we may be able to eradicate

discriminatory educational policies, provide increased government funding for programs that do work, provide active support for anti-racist programs within the community, and, most importantly, develop an educational system that provides equal opportunities for all students. Finally, I suggest that the combination of theories of stigma, stereotyping, and attribution are not only useful as a tool to investigate and understand the process by which various forms of discrimination in the classroom occur, but also will empower individuals to recognize and challenge stereotypical perceptions either within themselves or those around them.

REFERENCES

Aronson, J., Lustina, M., Good, C., Keough, K., Steele, C., & Brown, J. (1998). When white men can't do math: Necessary and sufficient factors in stereotype threat. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 35*, 29-46.

Biernat, M. & Dovidio, J. (2000). Stigma and stereotypes. In T.F. Heatherton, R. Kleck, M.R. Hebl, & J.G. Hull (Eds.), *The social psychology of stigma* (pp. 88-125). New York: The Guilford Press.

Broussard, C.A. & Joseph, A.L. (1998). Tracking: A form of educational neglect? *Social Work in Education, 20*(2), 110-120.

Chang, D.F. & Sue, S. (2003). The effects of race and problem type on teachers' assessments of student behavior. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 71*(2), 235-242.

Crosby, M. & Kremer, R. (2001). Racism, aboriginal students and school. *The aboriginal education branch of the British Columbia Ministry of Education position Paper*, 1-20. Victoria, BC: British Columbia Ministry of Education.

Dei, G.J.S. (1996). *Anti-racism education: Theory and practice.* Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing.

Dei, G.J.S., Karumanchery, L.L., & Karumanchery-Luik, N. (2004). *Playing the race card: Exposing white power and privilege.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Dovidio, J.F., Major, B., & Crocker, J. (2000). Stigma: Introduction and overview. In T.F. Heatherton, M.H.R. Kleck, & J.G. Hull (Eds.), *The social psychology of stigma* (pp. 1-28). New York: The Gillford Press.

Farkas, G. (2003). Racial disparities and discrimination in education: What we know, how do we know it, and what do we need to know? *Teachers College Record, 105*(6), 1119-1146.

Fielker, A. & Webster, A. (1999). Teacher predictions of young children's literacy success or failure. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice, 6*(3), 341-356.

Fisher, D. & Echols, F. (1992). Evaluation report on the Vancouver school board's race relations policy. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver School Board.

Garcia, R.L. (2001) Countering classroom discrimination. *Theory Into Practice, XXIII*(2), 104-109.

Gillborn, D. (2006). Critical race theory and education: Racism and anti-racism in educational theory and praxis. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 27*(1), 11-32.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Hauser-Cram, P., Selchuk, R. S., & Stipek, D. (2003).When teachers' and parents' values differ: Teachers' ratings of academic competence in children from low income families. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 95*(4), 813-820.

Janes, C. (1996). An examination of the relationship between teacher expectations, attribution theory and student achievement. Retrieved November 22, 2004 from http://www.mun.ca/educ/faculty/mwatch/fall96/examinat.htm

Jussim, L., Palumbo, P., Chatman, C., Madon, S., & Smith, A. (2000). Stigma and self-fulfilling prophecies. In T.F. Heatherton, R. Kleck, M.R. Hebl, & J.G. Hull (Eds.), *The social psychology of stigma* (pp. 374-416). New York: The Guilford Press.

Juvonen, J. (1988). Outcome and attributional disagreements between students and their teachers. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 80*(3), 469-480.

May, S. (1999). Critical multiculturalism and cultural difference: Avoiding essentialism. In S. May (Ed.), *Critical multiculturalism: Rethinking multicultural and antiracist education* (pp. 11-41). London, UK: Falmer Press.

McCarthy, C. & Crichklow, W. (1993). *'Race', identity and representation in education.* New York: Routledge Press.

Moodley, K. (1999). Critical multiculturalism and antiracist education. In *Antiracist education through political literacy: The case of Canada* (pp. 138-152). London, UK: Falmer Press.

Murdock, T. (1999). The social context of risk: Status and motivational predictors of alienation in middle school. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 91*(1), 62-75.

Nieto, S. (1999). Critical multicultural education and students' perspectives. In S. May (Ed.), *Critical multiculturalism: Rethinking multicultural and antiracist education* (pp. 191-215). London, UK: Falmer Press.

Oakes, J. (1995). Two cities' tracking and within-school segregation. *Teachers College Record, 96*(4), 681-690.

Pickering, M. (2001). *Stereotyping: The politics of representation.* New York: Palgrave.

Reyna, C. (2000). Lazy, dumb, or industrious: When stereotypes convey attribution information in the classroom. *Educational Psychology Review, 12*(1), 85-110.

Riley, T. & Ungerleider, C. (2009). Pre-service teachers discriminatory judgments. *Alberta Journal of Education, 54*(4).

Rist, R.C. (1970). Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. *Harvard Educational Review, 40*, 411-451.

Rubovits, P.C. & Maehr, M.L. (1973). Pygmalion black and white. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 25*(2), 210-218.

Salinas, M.F. & Aronson, J. (1997). Stereotype threat: Is low performance the price of self-esteem? *Unpublished manuscript.*

Schick, C. (2000a). By virtue of being white: Resistance in anti-racist pedagogy. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 3*(1), 299-309.

Schick, C. (2000b). By virtue of being white: Resistance in anti-racist pedagogy. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 3*(1), 83-102.

Schick, C. & St. Denis, V. (2005). Troubling national discourses in anti-racist curricular planning. *Canadian Journal of Education, 28*(3), 295-317.

Sirotnik, K.A. (1994). Equal access to quality in public schooling: Issues in the assessment of equity and excellence. In J.I. Goodland & P. Keating (Eds.), *Access to knowledge: The continuing agenda for our nation's schools* (pp. 159-185). New York: College Entrance Examination Board.

Smith, A.E., Jussim, L., & Eccles, J. (1999). Do self-fulfilling prophecies accumulate, dissipate, or remain stable over time? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77*(3), 548-565.

Steele, C.M. & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*(5), 797-811.

Tapasak, R.C. (1990). Differences in expectancy-attribution patterns of cognitive components in male and female math performance. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 15*, 284-298.

Thompson, R.C. (2004). Gentlemanly orthodoxy: Critical race feminism, whiteness theory and the APA manual. *Educational Theory, 54*(1), 27-46.

Tollefson, N. & Chen, J. (1988). Consequences of teachers' attributions for student failure. *Teaching and Teaching Education, 4*(3), 259-265.

Ungerleider, C.S. (2003). *Failing our kids: How we are ruining our public schools.* Toronto: McClelland & Steward Ltd.

Wallace, S. (1996). Pre-service teachers' changing attributions for elementary students' success of failure in science. Retrieved April 7, 2005, from http://www.ed.psu.edu/CI/journals/96pap42.htm

Weiner, B. (1984). Principles for a theory of student motivation and their application within an attributional framework. In R. Ames & C. Ames (Eds.), *Student motivation* (pp. 15-38). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation. *Psychology Review, 92*, 548-573.
Weinfeld, M. (1996). Social identity in the 1990s. In Littleton, J. (Ed.), *Clash of identities* (pp. 106-112). Scarborough, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Tasha A. Riley teaches part time at the University of British Columbia and is the HIV/AIDS Education Programs Coordinator for AIDS Vancouver. Previously, she has been a youth educator and curriculum advisor for The Women's Legal Education Action Fund's "No means No" and "Work Place Rights" program. Her prior work experience in Korea, the Middle East, and Botswana have meant that she is grounded in the messy world of practice from which she derives her research interests in anti-racist and critical multiculturalism in education. She has published articles in the *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* and *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal.*

Author's Address:
AIDS Vancouver
HIV Prevention and Education Program
1107 Seymour Street
Vancouver, BC
CANADA V6B 5S8
EMAIL: tashar@aidsvancouver.org