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# Transgressive-racialization: a collective refusal of racial governance

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This analysis introduces transgressive-racialization as a praxis for resisting race's structural imposition in U.S. schools. Drawing on Kantian notions of apperception, Althusser's theory of interpellation, and Omi and Winant's racial formation theory, transgressive-racialization is conceptualized as a collective refusal that unsettles the racial ontologies schools often re/produce. Extending this framework, I further develop the concepts of counterapperception and counterinterpellation to describe possibilities of internally and externally negotiating racialized logics as both imposed and inhabited. The analysis integrates insights from Trans Scholars of Color to ground transgressive-racialization in politics that refuse race's legibility and governability. Educational institutions are positioned not as neutral transmitters of knowledge but as racializing state apparatuses in which students encounter, contest, and occasionally reconfigure the ideological scripts that define them. Transgressive-racialization emerges as a pedagogical praxis of ontological resistance. This interdisciplinary intervention contributes to ongoing conversations in race scholarship, education, and trans studies by offering educators a vocabulary for reimagining racial subjectivity beyond determinism and toward a refusal of racial governance.

## KEYWORDS

counterapperception, counterinterpellation, education, racialization, refusal of racial governance, transgressive-racialization

## Introduction

From the nation's inception, state-sanctioned institutions have utilized race to militate social, political, and economic structures that have undergone various iterations of domination throughout the United States' (US) history. As a corollary, race permeates every facet of our structural lives, as is apparent from the enduring legacies of slavery and segregated housing to the blatant racial disparities within wealth distribution and the mass-incarceration system. Race's enduring pervasiveness exemplifies how the US maintains a vested interest in re/producing race as a tool for governance. We exist in a racialized society that demarcates people through ethnoracial identities<sup>1</sup> to organize citizens and distribute resources. This system seeks to ensure race remains central in people's lives through the social institutions that uphold and reinforce racialized systemic inequities. Bell (1992) forewarns that the US will continue to

1 I utilize "ethnoracial identity" to describe how even ethnicities are treated as a race. Therefore, ethnoracial identity best encapsulates how structures racialize people based on either/both their ethnicity and their race. For example, the United States categorizes latinidad as an ethnicity, but many people, like me, have experienced racialization in how social structures racialize us through our latinidad despite Latine being structurally labeled as an ethnicity.

contend with the permanence of race by asserting that society should acknowledge racism as an act of defiance and not as an act of submission (p. 10). This analysis builds upon these collective acts of defiance in aims of reconfiguring race's permanence.

As social institutions, schools have the most prevalent reach on U.S. society and aid the state in shaping ethnoracial identities for structural purposes. Schools not only serve as knowledge-producing institutions but also function as people-processing spaces that contribute to students' racialization [see [Leonardo \(2005\)](#)]. By racializing the learning environment, schools teach students the rules of race-making necessary to navigating the racialized nation. [Omi and Winant \(2015\)](#) describe *race-making* as the process of "othering" (p. 105). I expand this definition to describe how social structures, like schools, "make race" to construct a person into a governed, racialized subject. Simultaneously, communities challenge and negotiate the race-making process by redefining the conditions by which they live their racialized lives. Schools serve as critical sites where students learn how the state operationalizes race as an organizing principle ([Leonardo, 2010](#)) but also how to confront racialization's contradictions as they make sense of their ethnoracial identities. As such, schools are one of the nation's most prolific race-making institutions.

This analysis delves into how a social construct, such as race, can have social, psychological, and material consequences. By exploring how race bolsters and interacts with various interconnected systems of social division, I seek to expose racialization's malleable properties to advocate for *transgressive-racialization* as a transgressive act that leverages racialization's fluidity to subvert its structural influence. Drawing from Trans Scholars of Color, I argue that transgressive-racialization is not a liberal project of identity exchange but a practice that unsettles the U.S. racial order. Understanding transgressive-racialization harbors critical implications for education because schools function as institutions that re/produce, enforce, and discipline racialized meanings. Through curriculum, disciplinary policies, social interactions, and institutional norms, racialized students learn how the state mobilizes race to organize society while simultaneously grappling with the dissonance between imposed racial logics and their lived experiences. In this context, transgressive-racialization becomes a praxis to reimagine pedagogies that resist ontological fixity by challenging structures that uphold race as a regulatory force.

My argument first distinguishes transgressive-racialization from misconceptions of identity-crossing through groundings that refuse racial governance inspired by Black trans\* feminist thought and critiques from Trans Scholars of Color. Next, I employ an interdisciplinary approach to explore the manifest intricacies in the racialization process that render us racialized beings. This approach is necessary because racialization cannot be understood through a singular disciplinary lens. Racialization functions ideologically, psychologically, linguistically, and through gendered dynamics across dimensions and institutions. Guided by various intellectual fields, I demonstrate how drawing from diverse ontological insights enables us to better grasp racialization's everyday operation to meaningfully resist its structuring power. I apply Kantian logics, Althusserian theories, and educational frameworks to facilitate a multi-layered analysis of how race ideologically functions and how transgressive-racialization then unfolds as a counter-ontological disobedience. Finally, I provide educational examples of how race leverages other identity axes to reproduce itself, and how transgressive-racialization

is applicable as a disruption within these contexts. Deconstructing the racialization process provides the foundation for transgressive-racialization to re-forge a fugitive path toward the disarticulation of a racial regime. In this way, transgressive-racialization draws from the refusal politics of Black trans\* feminists' collective acts of illegibility and ungovernability.

## Transgressive-racialization and the refusal of racial governance

To disrupt how the US manipulates social structures to racialize citizens, we must understand racialization's functioning mechanisms to advocate for transgressive-racialization<sup>2</sup>—a term I offer to promote a movement that rejects structural, racial impositions as an extension of the refusal politics long theorized by Black trans\* and Trans of Color scholars. This praxis is a refusal of racial governance to live otherwise [see also [Hartman \(2024\)](#)]. To live as a transgressive-racial subject is to inhabit a form of fugitive existence by disrupting the racialized structure that captures and governs racialized subjects through ontological fixity. Transgressive-racialization rejects biological determinism, ascribed social scripts, and racial intelligibility. To be racialized is to become intelligible by the state, enabling its governance upon the subject through surveillance, categorization, and control. I mobilize the "trans" prefix to be in conversation with Black and trans\* traditions of ungovernability. Transgressive-racialization challenges the grammar of racialization by calling into question how people internalize and externalize race under systems of power. Being a transgressive-racial subject bolsters existing pathways to be ungoverned and empowers the ontological fugitive.

This analysis would be remiss to not fully engage with critical scholars in trans studies, whose insights are informative to transgressive-racialization. [Snorton's \(2017\)](#) scholarly contributions ground this analysis by establishing that Blackness and transness are historically co-produced through technologies of fungibility, captivity, and biopolitical violence. Their work emphasizes how gender, when applied to Black people, has functioned outside of normative frameworks. Snorton asserts, "Captive flesh figures a critical genealogy for modern transness, as chattel persons gave rise to an understanding of gender as mutable and as an amendable form of being" (p. 57). The history of Black enslavement, particularly the condition of the enslaved Black body, significantly instructs how race and gender are flexible and socially constructed despite the state's efforts to depict them as rigid. Snorton's insights emphasize how the state has constructed identity axes, such as race, language, and gender, as technologies of control but also gives light to how marginalized peoples have leveraged these social constructs as sites of contestation. Thus, modern transness diverts from traditional frameworks of trans studies, relating to medical and personal transition [see [Schilt and Lagos \(2017\)](#)], to highlight how enslaved peoples experienced gender's plasticity under violent domination. In doing so, Snorton shifts transness to also being a racialized, historical process. [Bey \(2022\)](#) further applies Black trans\* feminist frameworks to describe how

2 The hyphen serves to illustrate the intentional disruption to racialization as a violent act (see [Leonardo, 2005](#)).

transness is the “quotidian act of becoming through openings and refusals” (p. 84). Transness enables us to see gender and race as forms of captivity with transness providing openings for the possible selves that refuse the state’s governance.

Race itself will always exist in our collective memory. Aspiring to fully extinguish race ignores the deep enduring impact race has imprinted on society. Refusing racial governance is a praxis that restructures race as descriptive and not determinate. Transgressive-racialization, therefore, becomes a form of diasporic refusal that enables society to escape into a future where race is not an organizing principle. This approach does not dismiss the state’s detrimental efforts to govern racialized subjects nor erase the racialized historicity embedded in our everyday interactions. To build a world that refuses race entails proactive efforts to destabilize racialization as a determining force and rejects the assumption that society can ever exist as a state that has “outgrown” race—it cannot. However, to take a step toward a refusal of racial governance (i.e., a world that normalizes the disruption of race) requires counter-hegemonic efforts that denaturalize race as essential to how state systems function. This movement is a refusal that discusses race as something else.

Transgressive-racialization would not condone Rachel Dolezal, former president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who presented herself as a Black woman despite being born to white parents (Haag, 2018). Transgressive-racialization does not signify “to change race,” as transracialization might imply. To do so would impoverish the objectives of transgressive-racialization. Many might deem Dolezal’s deceptive actions as a form of “race passing;” however, passing is best defined as “an attempt to move from the cultural margin to the center, from the perspective of the dominant race, passing is deception, an attempt to claim status and privilege falsely” (Ginsberg, 1996, p. 8). In the U.S. context, passing historically refers to nonwhite individuals presenting themselves as white to evade oppression and enhance access to social, economic, and legal privileges. Dolezal’s actions appropriated and exploited blackness to secure herself a more advantageous position within the Black community. Passing does not align with transgressive-racialization because it functions within racial logics. When a person participates in race passing, they are subverting race as fixed but ultimately rely on the very racial boundaries transgressive-racialization aims to refute. Unlike passing, which still portends racial intelligibility, transgressive-racialization refuses a racializing grammar.

Within the public imaginary, Dolezal’s “transracialization” haunts the transgressive-racial subject by conflating refusal with her discourse of deception and appropriation. Consequently, this term can evoke pain and skepticism, particularly for Black and trans communities who have long endured the commodification of blackness and transness. This critique is valid and must be acknowledged. I apply transgressive-racialization to illuminate the terrain already mapped by Black and trans scholars by sitting with the instability of language that will not resolve the tension fueled by transracial politics, but this tension is a productive struggle. Transgressive-racialization is offered in dialogue with, not in substitution for, Trans of Color critique. I do not offer sanitized alternatives but engage with an uncomfortable analytic that exists in the tensions of racial legibility. Transgressive-racialization exists as the extension of an argument already established by Black trans feminists and Trans Scholars of Color [Bey, 2022; Snorton, 2017; Tourmaline (formally known as Gossett et al., 2017)], who have long theorized and lived illegibility and ungovernability.

Engaging in transgressive-racial practices recognizes that oppressive systems cultivate disproportionate possibilities to refuse. The state racializes, and we enact our racialization differently across spaces; and therefore, illegibility does not transpire at a universal rate.

The multiracial movement is an example of how different groups can disproportionately refuse. However, the multiracial identity movement does not achieve the goals of transgressive-racialization because it ultimately reproduces race by legitimizing racial boundaries and logics. Spencer (2011) captures the essence of this point best, “The crucial reality [is] that the ideology of the American Multiracial Identity Movement does absolutely nothing to challenge or subvert this age-old racial equation” (p. 6). As a counterpoint, Zack (1993) clarifies that the construction of the mixed-race identity signifies the incoherence of racial categories by demonstrating how this movement has contributed to destabilizing race as fixed. Multiracial identities are not positions of privilege or evasion. Being multiracial is an imposed identity within the paradox of hypervisibility and erasure. Modi (2023) astutely asserts that mixed-race individuals can wield this imposed identity as an instrument of misrecognition within dominant racial orders. Nevertheless, the aim of racial recognition still reaffirms racial taxonomies because the mixed-race identity continues to operate within the grammar of racial classification. Mixed-race subjects might engage in the terrain of misrecognition by not fully belonging to one race or the other, but the desire for racial recognition remains present. From a transgressive-racialization perspective, the mixed-race movement reinforces racial ideology by accepting the call to be racially named rather than refusing racial legibility. Song (2014) further explores the paradox of mixed-race peoples in how they undermine the concept of people neatly fitting into categories but ultimately concludes that “an assertion of mixedness cannot help but reify this notion of racial difference” (p. 89). The mixed-race identity ultimately seeks to be read. Transgressive-racialization refuses to be racially read at all.

Transgressive-racialization is strongly aligned with transversal politics. Transversality, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) foundationally establish, manifests through relational movement across structured systems to disrupt and induce new subjectivities. They explain how transversality materializes “between things [and] does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again...a transversal movement sweeps one and the other away (p. 25). For Deleuze and Guattari, transversality destabilizes by moving across systems, such as a multiracial coalition that connects through their heterogenous racialized identities. Transgressive-racialization builds upon and departs from transversality by disrupting the psychic frames of apperception and interpellation (to be elaborated below) that enforce racial coherence.

Lastly, feminist and decolonial scholars, like Lugones (1987) and Sandoval (2013), have reworked transversality as a praxis of disidentification. Specifically, Lugones explores the possibility of world traveling as a way of entering different meaning systems that construct and reconstruct worlds (p. 16). Although transversal traditions inform transgressive-racialization, the transgressive-racial subject does not cross into new worlds to transform them; they exit the demand to be seen and known within the terms of racial legibility. Like Wu Tsang (Bailey, 2016), who intentionally withholds racial identifiers, transgressive-racialization is a disarticulation of the state’s demand for legibility. Transgressive-racialization is not simply transversal but also a refusal to be seen, named, or governed through race. The

transgressive-racial subject does not pass between identities but removes themselves from the epistemic and ontological forms of racialized intelligibility that the racial state needs to operate.

## Existing frameworks of racialization

To understand how transgressive-racialization disrupts race as a structuring logic, we must first understand race's functionality and historicity. According to Omi and Winant (2015), racialization extends "racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group" (p. 111). Racializing someone, or something, involves imposing symbolic meanings based on phenotypical and cultural markers. Omi and Winant describe this process as a "combination of centripetal and centrifugal forces" (p. 44) in which we are immersed (this analysis will later explore such forces). Lewis (2003a) elaborates how racialization involves assigning the body to specified, and imaginary, racial categories that people adduce to identify themselves and others based on symbols, attributes, qualities, and other constructed meanings (p. 287). Racial categories are identifiers that determine how opportunities and resources are distributed along racial lines. In a corporal sense, racialization entails extending racial meanings to the body and mind. Despite proffering a foundational understanding of racialization, these insights fail to provide a substantial explanation as to why race has become the force by which we perceive our world. What more is happening to make race the *raison d'être* of our structural existence?

Across time, the US has re/made race through racial projects, which "link significations or representations of race with social structural manifestations of racial hierarchy or dominance" (Winant, 2001, p. 100). Omi and Winant (2015) define this system of racial projects as racial formation, "The sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived, transformed, and destroyed" (p. 109). Through racial formation, U.S. society and its social structures have continuously re/made ethnoracial identities by racializing people with symbolic meanings that structurally organize them into an ethnoracial hierarchy. The racial formation process is not solely a top-down force but also bottom-up. Racial formation, which has ineluctable effects on people's lives, is not stagnant but evolves over time. Throughout history, groups have consistently challenged the state's racialized impositions and the ways race materializes in the social order. Zepeda-Millán and Wallace (2013) illustrate how Latine participants in the 2006 immigration rights protests developed a heightened sense of their latinidad because the social movement served as the collective construction and affirmation of their Latine identity. Racial formation can be a unifying and divisive force. But race, as an instrument of the state, fundamentally possesses a divisive function.

Omi and Winant proclaim that race is a master category because it is the "fundamental concept that has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure, and culture of the United States" (p. 106). As a master category, race is a signifier that remains salient throughout all social interactions, influencing how social structures frame our collective and individual psyches. In other words, race is never not in play. Many might claim that other oppressive structural identities, such as gender, are equally integral to a person's subjugation, which Omi and Winant (2015) would not deny. Systems that function on axes of inequality work in tandem with each

other as part of the racialization process. This analysis specifically explores how race leverages language and gender to racialize subjects.

## Race as malleable

Roediger's (2006) work exemplifies racialization's adaptability in the US through the nation's immigration history. Such historical precedents have caused racial identities to expand or contract, based on the nation's structural needs. For instance, he explains how U.S. citizens from Western Europe, who served as part of the white dominant class, initially relegated Slavs and Italians to a nonwhite status to exploit their labor. Political reformers eventually embraced these groups into the white identity when rendering them white facilitated political gain for the dominant group (pp. 74–75). Roediger argues that, prior to achieving whiteness, certain immigrant communities underwent a form of "inbetweenness," wherein previously considered "nonblack" immigrants held a mid-tiered status in between white and Black communities (p. 32). *Inbetweenness* preserved nonblack-but-potentially-white immigrants' cultural heritage while distinguishing them from African Americans to secure a more advantageous status, evincing that racialization is not stagnant but a recursive process that adapts.

The structural forces that racialize people are powerful, but they ultimately are not determinant. C. Kim (1999) cautions against notions of ethnoracial hierarchies as potentially narrowing how we understand racialization, which, according to C. Kim, is relational and "continuously contested and negotiated within and among racial groups" (p. 197). Molina et al. (2019) further explain that racial categories do not form in isolation but are relational projects of white supremacy through which racial categories are "coproduced and co-constitutive, and always dependent on constructions of gender, sexuality, labor, and citizenship" (p. 3). Race exists as a relational framework to other structural identities, an ontology that merges with other structural identities to construct racialized subjectivities. Transgressive-racialization seeks to break this link of co-production between race and other identity axes.

This analysis recognizes that some groups, like Black Americans, have less latitude to contest their racialization. After all, a case could be made that U.S. institutions are built on anti-blackness (Dumas and Ross, 2016). Yet, Black identities are also continuously negotiated and redefined (Harper and Nichols, 2008; Celious and Oyserman, 2001). Womack and Dingle (2010) studied Black Americans who challenged structural definitions that were specifically associated with historical and cultural markers. Their conclusions illuminate how there is a new class of Black Americans who identify beyond historical definitions of blackness and instead reimagine their Black identity through their personal interests, viewpoints, and lifestyles. The study's participants rejected how social structures aim to constrict definitions of blackness. Their negative ontology, establishing who they are by rejecting who they are not, exemplifies a group's semi-agentic efforts to bend the confines of their structural impositions. Womack and Dingle's findings reflect Black community members who can contest Black structural definitions because their socioeconomic privileges shielded them from racialization's full effects. Thus, the ability to redefine one's Blackness is not a privilege most can leverage. Since race is unfixed, racial groups can rework structural definitions all while seeking to escape racialization's structural effects.



These examples substantiate the core premise of transgressive-racialization by demonstrating that racialized subjects are not always legible by the state and have agency in challenging racializing structures. As demonstrated, people can transgress their racialization by reconfiguring or disarticulating racializing scripts. Transgressive-racialization foregrounds this disruption as an ontological challenge that exposes race's instability and advances the possibility of becoming illegible within the dominant racial order. In this sense, transgressive-racialization counters structures that rely on the state's recognition and conformity to racial hierarchies. Its ontological disobedience exemplifies race's contingent and constructed nature. This fugitive relation to race unsettles the state's ability to govern through racialized relations, advancing how transgressive-racialization seeks to refuse racial governance.

## Racialization's centrifugal and centripetal forces

Thus far, I have explored how groups adapt race to serve their structural needs. In doing so, dominant groups subjugate marginalized communities by systematically disadvantaging them through their ethnoracial identities. In response, racialized groups have mobilized to resist and destabilize how dominant groups deploy race as an instrument of marginalization and social control. Their resistance showcases how groups have already engaged in movements of transgressive-racialization. However, to destabilize racialization, we must first understand the mechanisms through which race operates. There is limited discussion on what the process of racial formation fully entails. Below, I expand established theorizations of racialization to examine how people become racialized subjects with examples in schooling contexts.

We are racialized beings who, on a daily basis, encounter structural centrifugal and centripetal forces as part of the racialization process. Racialization is the apperception (centrifugal forces) and interpellation (centripetal forces) of imaginary racial meanings that construct individuals as racialized subjects. Apperception, in the case of racialization, refers to the process by which individuals make sense of their world through racialized and intra-psychological schemas, such as internal and often unconscious filtering of their social reality that reflects dominant ideologies. Interpellation, complementing apperception, serves as an external and centripetal force that calls individuals into internalizing racialization through their interpsychological interactions with institutions, discourse, and everyday socialization.

Racialization is not merely the extension and ascription of imagined racial meanings as Omi and Winant purport. Rather, racialization consists of the apperception and interpellation of racialized meanings that are internalized and externally imposed to shape how individuals inhabit and perform their racialized subjectivities. Understanding the process of interpellation and apperception first requires a deeper engagement with ideology as a structuring force that shapes subject formation. Through ideology, the subject externally calls to racial legibility and internally recognizes the self as racialized. Ideology naturalizes race as an ontological truth by sustaining the recursive process in which the subject is hailed and comes to self-identify within a constructed and regulatory mode of governance.

## Racial ideology's evasive effects

To better comprehend our racial subjectivity, we need to examine how ideology distorts our ability to identify racialization's centrifugal and centripetal effects. Fields (1990) intellectual contributions may shed light on how the nation's collective consciousness (re)creates ideology to make sense of our social reality. She defines ideology:

*The descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence, through which people make rough sense of the social reality that they live and create from day to day. It is a language of consciousness that suits the particular way in which people deal with their fellows... [The] interpretation in thought of social relations through which they constantly create and re-create their collective being. (p. 110).*

Ideology eludes our structural understanding because we fail to recognize ideology through its material manifestation, further obscuring its pervasiveness. Building upon Althusser's (2003) theory of ideology, Leonardo (2005) explicates Althusser's ideology as functioning like the unconscious. According to Althusser's view, Leonardo describes ideology as possessing a practical dimension, wherein people employ ideology to construct a worldview that informs their actions, ultimately manifesting in material consequences. As an ideology, race has a material existence. For instance, in schools, racial ideology perpetuates disproportionate disciplinary measures that lead to material ramifications for students' career prospects and continued educational attainment (Hooks and Miskovic, 2011; Irby, 2014). Yet, without a materialist lens, ideology remains unexamined, distorting how we perceive our structural existence.

By construing how we perceive our daily realities, ideology functions like a filter transposed upon our lives. Despite ideology's material consequences, Fields (1990) explains that ideology paradoxically exemplifies how the reality we perceive is not reflective of our objective truths, which is typical for Marxist understandings of ideology. As Leonardo (2005) asserts, the US has an exceptionally unique strand of ideology that defines the nation's collective consciousness—racial ideology. Collectively and individually, he argues that we make and remake race as an ideology in *apparent perpetuity*, not unlike the unconscious. Through racial ideology, European Americans resolved the hypocrisy between liberty and slavery (Fields, 1990). Racial ideology rationalizes how the narrative of equal protection for all signifies, in practice, fewer human rights for others. Most of all, racial ideology creates a fallacious logic that informs and naturalizes the social relations of domination and subjugation to serve the dominant group's interests (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Giddens, 1983). Racial ideology is not logical and exists even through irrational contradictions. A transgressive-racialization approach leverages these contradictions to destabilize how racial ideology normalizes racialized ascriptions.

Ideology explains why People of Color also have a racial investment. Patillo's (2003) ethnography on how African Americans contest representations of blackness found that participants' efforts to uplift blackness were built upon the post-civil rights movement to establish and preserve Black presence beyond marginalized spaces. For many People of Color in their study, race is not simply a social construct imposed upon them by dominant groups but a source of identity, community, survival, and opposition in an oppressive system. This being the case, racial investments by People of Color are an

ideological response to a system that has historically sought to erase and marginalize their existence. [J. Kim \(1999\)](#) exemplifies this racial investment through the formation of the “Asian American” identity. They explain how Asian-presenting peoples created “Asian American” in solidarity with the Civil Rights movement and as a strategic response to dominant narratives that casted them as perpetual foreigners. Ideologically, race becomes both a force of oppression and resistance.

## Racialization’s centrifugal forces

Racialization is a European invention and derives from the European paradigm of thought. Europeans and their descendants have significantly contributed to how race, as a social construct, has emerged as one of the most influential social organons. Immanuel Kant, a key figure in 18-century European intellectual development, propagated influential philosophies about human difference and social cognition. His ideas are informative in explaining how race functions because his works significantly shaped the racializing systems that the US inherited and continues to uphold when re/producing race. Kant’s framework enables us to identify racialization’s centrifugal forces of the mind.

[Kant \(1781\)](#) introduced *apperception* to explain how our self-consciousness organizes our social world. Through apperception, we synthesize how we conceive our world in three exponents: (1) how we perceive ourselves in relation to our objective world; (2) how we organize these perceptions; and (3) how we cohere these perceptions into a unifying whole. Individuals, as subjects, accept, contend, negotiate, and resist structural forces; however, every interaction informs how they understand racial meanings. Apperception differs from perception, with perception being the immediate sensory experience and apperception being the accumulated synthesis of sensory experiences that create a coherent sense of self and meaning. The social structures, in which we exist, exert unrelenting and enigmatic forces that influence our cognitive processes and inform our ideologies. Our apperception fuses an interplay between perception, cognition, and personal history that imbues our individual psyches. In a racialized society, race’s social and cultural constructs shape our apperception to endow our external world with subjective significances that create racially apperceived realities. An individual’s apperception is unique to them and represents the effects of structural centrifugal forces on a person’s mental frameworks. Like rose-colored glasses that saturate our vision, our apperception serves as an internal, psychological, and centrifugal force that informs how we racially view our existence.

In a society built upon racialized logics, the apperceiving subject is already racialized through historically shaped, state-sanctioned perceptions of self and others. Transgressive-racialization intervenes this process by subverting the psychic incorporation of racialized scripts. Apperception renders our world legible and rational. Transgressive-racialization unmakes race as part of this legibility and rationality by exposing how our racialized consciousness is unnatural and a product of a racial ideological governing. In alignment with [Sandoval’s \(2013\)](#) *oppositional consciousness* as “the practitioner’s ability to read the current situation of power and self-consciously choosing and adopting the ideological stand best suited to push against” (p. 59). To this end, *counterapperception* becomes part of the

transgressive-racialization movement that develops an oppositional consciousness. Counterapperception, for the transgressive-racial subject, is the deliberate restructuring of one’s racialized consciousness in opposition to the internalized scripts that racial ideology imposes. The transgressive-racial subject counters logics that apperceive race as having rational power. Understanding how racial ideology structures our apperception requires us to also examine the external forces that rationalize race. If structural forces possess a systematic consistency that enable centrifugal forces to influence our apperception, then centripetal forces complementarily function to shape our interpellation. They function as twin engines that fuel racial ideology.

## Racialization’s centripetal forces

[Althusser \(1971\)](#) describes interpellation as the subject’s ideological transformation in which the individual identifies, or internalizes, their position in society based on dominant ideologies. He explains that we become interpellated subjects through Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), such as schools, which serve as institutions for social control. ISAs interpellate individuals to subsume imparted knowledge for the purpose that they internalize societal roles. [Backer \(2018\)](#) more plainly describes interpellation as the “everyday practice that exerts a force in the overall balance of social forces” (p. 2). Through interpellation, individuals accept structural definitions of race that contribute to the U.S. ethnoracial hierarchy and act on behalf of race as an ideology. As individuals navigate this racialized structure, they constantly engage with ISAs that strive to interpellate them into racialized subjects and racialize the spaces in which they exist. ISAs adapt to sustain themselves; and thus, the ways in which ISAs interpellate racialized subjects evolves and is ever-changing.

[Leonardo \(2005\)](#) describes schools as a racial state apparatus (RSA), distinct from Althusser’s own use of RSA, or repressive state apparatus, whereby “the school is a material institution where race takes place, where racial identity is bureaucratized and modernized, where people are hailed as racialized subjects of the state” (p. 409). As an RSA, schools interpellate students into racialized subjects by positioning them as intelligible through the state’s racialized logics. Transgressive-racialization, however, rejects the notion that subjects only come into being through state legibility. The transgressive-racial subject does not escape interpellation but invalidates race as an interpellative force. Transgressive-racialization is not a failed interpellation but a mode of fugitivity from institutions’ attempts to racially subjugate, serving as a form of counterinterpellation.

[Lecercle \(2006\)](#) defines *counterinterpellation* as the negotiation of interpellated forces whereby a person rejects structural narratives, values, and hierarchies to reconstruct how they define their subjective position. A counterinterpellative negotiation of structural definitions requires encountering the interpellative force in order to debilitate its efficacy. Through counterinterpellation, individuals can reclaim their identities but not without a cost. Counterinterpellation, according to [Backer \(2018\)](#), has “ideological and political ramifications” (p. 10), for interpellative forces are constantly endeavoring to preserve their ideological dominance. A counterinterpellative negotiation seeks to “shift the balance of forces away from the ruling class’s control” (p. 11). In rejecting one’s racialization as a counterinterpellative act, the individual must understand how race functions to counterinterpellate race’s interpellative effects. Simply stated, to counterinterpellate, the

transgressive-racial subject must learn how the structure imposes race upon them, then resist and reshape structural identities to subvert the racializing forces that seek to govern them. Counterinterpellation does not entirely evade the dynamics of interpellation. Rather, counterinterpellation provides space for alternative narratives, or identity formations, to emerge and remain operative within the broader framework of the interpellative process, i.e., does not escape interpellation but evades racialized interpellation. Individuals who resist racial narratives are still subject to the pervasive influence of societal structures and norms. Bunch (2013) refers to counterinterpellation as a form of unbecoming. They identify the unbecoming subject as an agent of social change (p. 48); and thus, a counterinterpellative act does not liberate the person toward a more individual sovereignty but aims to undermine race as an interpellative force.

Figure 1 illustrates the systematic and recursive process of racial subject formation through the dual operations of interpellation and apperception. The outer arrows represent interpellation's external forces, such as social, institutional, and ideological structures that "hail" individuals into racialized legibility. These outer forces persistently position the subject into systemic recognition through externalized ascriptions. The inner arrows signify apperception, as the internal process through which the subject understands themselves. Through apperception, the subject internalizes stereotypes, self-surveils along prescribed and self-ascribed definitions, and employs strategies of resistance and negotiation. This diagram visualizes how racialization is the incessant interplay of external and internal forces that the subject encounters daily. Racialization, through apperception and interpellation, is like the air we breathe; it surrounds us constantly to shape us and our environment. We externalize and internalize race with each exhalation and inhalation.

Figure 2 depicts how transgressive-racialization serves as counterinterpellative and counterapperceptive acts. The external multidirectional arrow represents counterinterpellation as a disruption to the external forces by forging a rupture to the normative systems that hail the subject into a fixed identity. Similarly, the internal

multidirectional arrow portrays counterapperception as interrupting the internalization process. Rather than forming a stable self-image, the subject exits into a new path of withdrawal as they bend away from the recursive loop that metabolizes state-sanctioned subjectivity. These forces no longer fully shape the subject. This ontological disobedience opens space as an exit from legibility—a shape that we can no longer articulate. The incomplete shape is central to this visualization, for it demonstrates how the subject is no longer enclosed and no longer fully governed. Their refusal of containment unmakes ontological boundaries. Stated earlier, counterinterpellative and counterapperceptive acts do not escape interpellation and apperception all together. As demonstrated by the recursive arrows prominent in Figure 1, dominant forces will persistently try to quell disruptive acts by absorbing them back into the dominant, structural formation.

Over time, collectively sustained counterinterpellative and counterapperceptive acts will cultivate a subjectivity that is no longer fully enclosed by dominant and racializing forces. Unlike Figure 1, in which the subject is contained by recursive operations of interpellation and apperception, Figure 3 visualizes the loosening and dispersal of these mechanisms. Dominant forces, as portrayed by the recursive arrows, remain present as remnants of the racial regime will always exist. A world that refuses racial governance does not exist "after" race because past structures possess a haunting underlife ever seeking to re-entrap the subject. For example, the U.S. has abolished slavery, but its racialized hierarchies perdure. In Figure 3, the subject remains centered but no longer completely governed. Whereas Figure 2 represents the ripple effects that social movements have enacted to shift paradigms, Figure 1 exhibits how dominant forces ultimately re-absorb failed counterinterpellative and counterapperceptive acts. This results in a return to a re-configured Figure 1 that continues to function on axes of domination. Figure 3, thus, gestures toward a world that refuses race in which racialization loses organizational power, even as dominant systems seek to re-integrate racialized structures. Progress functions like pendulum swinging from Figure 1 to Figure 2; and therefore, Figure 3 is the horizon we seek when we refuse and disrupt. By refusing racial governance, the fugitive subject thrives in the wake of destabilization.

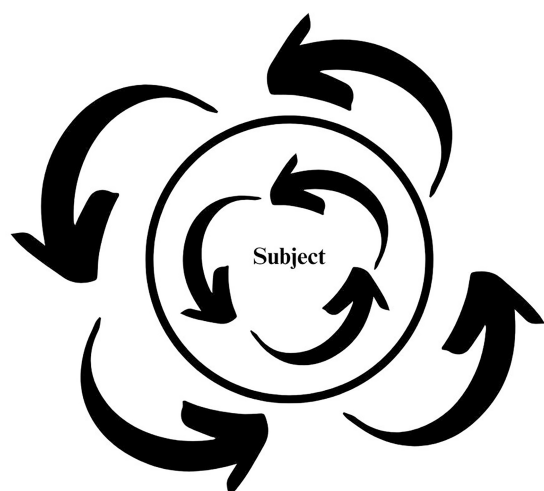
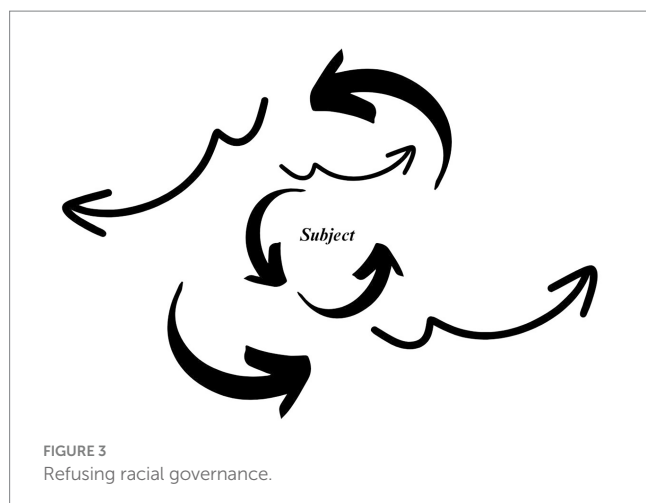


FIGURE 1  
The racialized subject formed through interpellative (centripetal) and apperceptive (centrifugal) forces.



FIGURE 2  
Pathways of subjective refusal: transgressive-racialization as counterinterpellative and counterapperceptive disruption.



By engaging in counterinterpellative and counterappreceptive acts, like transgressive-racialization, individuals and communities can actively strive to subvert racialization. Transgressive-racialization forges a path for alternative interpellative and apperceptive forces that foster the emergence of a more transformative ideology in which subjects can find a different sense of self. Stanley's (2021) archival work on the state's violence toward trans/queer peoples describes their experiences as a refusal politics by which being trans is a rejection to be governed or legible by the state. They describe being ungovernable as both a "trace" and "map" for liberation (p. 123). Their framing of ungovernability offers a powerful insight into transgressive-racialization as an ungovernable relation to race. Transgressive-racialization, as a counterinterpellative and counterappreceptive act, refuses the state's demand for legibility and containment; transgressive-racialization is a form fugitivity out of racial governance. No other institution better sustains the racialization process than schools.

## Racialization and transgressive-racialization through structural identity axes

When children enter the school building, they do not simply learn the rules of race but additionally undergo the racializing process. Lewis (2003b) explains that "schools play a role in the production of race as a social category both through implicit and explicit lessons and through school practices (p. 188). Leonardo and Grubb (2018) specifically identify the school curriculum as contributing to the racial order through fact selections by which students learn race's significance in their lives, equating curriculum-making to race-making (p. 16). Schools' everyday social interactions aim to create fixed racial boundaries that reproduce racialization through internal and external ascriptions (Lewis, 2003a), or as Omi and Winant would identify as centrifugal and centripetal forces. According to Lewis, the racial-ascription process aids individuals in ascertaining to which racial category a person might belong. Lewis describes external ascriptions as to how others racialize an individual; inversely, internal ascriptions relate to how a person racializes themselves. Both internal (apperception's centrifugal forces) and external (interpellation's centripetal forces) ascription processes contribute to a person's racial formation. Jenkins (2014) further alludes to how the racial-ascription

process is not a science but a reference system by which individuals employ unconscious and automatic processes that identify racial markers in order to inform how we racialize others and ourselves.

In schools, racialization happens in every instance from the macro structure to an individual's everyday interactions. Racialized indicators such as language, culture, skin color, name, and socioeconomic status constantly mediate the racialization process. Yet, within these racial dynamics, students engage in transgressive-racial acts when they refuse and negotiate the racial scripts that schools impose. To demonstrate the conditions that involve racialization's centrifugal and centripetal forces, I will focus on how racialization, as a relational ontology, leverages other identities, such as language and gender, to reproduce itself and how racialized subjects can engage in transgressive-racialization to subvert how social structures racialize them.

## Racialization and transgressive-racialization through language

Language is racialized and racializes. In the US, language has undergone a raciolinguistic enregisterment: the process by which "race and language are rendered mutually perceivable...this raciolinguistic perspective directs attention to the ways that race is socially constructed through language but also to the ways that language is socially constructed through race" (Rosa, 2019, p. 7). The racialization process employs race and language as mutually constitutive. This process entails linguistic practices and features that society racializes by linking them to already-existing racial categories. Through raciolinguistic enregisterment, language constructs differences that reflect racial ideologies. Fanon's (1952) poignant observation recognizes the relationship between race and language when stating, "The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be all the whiter as he gains mastery of the cultural tool that language is" (p. 38). He identifies language's ability to function as a powerful tool that can distance or increase proximity to the dominant class. Raciolinguistic enregisterment explains how language practices shape a person's racial experiences. Anzaldúa (1987) best portrays the intra-dependence of linguistic and racial identities when describing how a person's "ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—[they are their] language" (p. 59). The ways in which individuals speak and the language they use are intertwined with their structural identity.

In a schooling context, Rosa's (2019) ethnographic account found that many students in a Chicago public school experienced the phenomenon of "looking like a language, sounding like a race" (p. 2) when their educational environment racialized them through language. He describes how society perceives language as racially embodied (looking like a language) and race as linguistically intelligible (sounding like a race). The US's history of othering non-English languages employs Spanish as a powerful social construct that shapes and racializes identities. Rosa found that students experienced raciolinguistic enregisterment when speaking Spanish because of the language's inextricable link to being Latine. When students spoke Spanish, they were not only engaging in a linguistic activity but also performing a racial identity that leveraged racial markers that externally ascribed (centripetally forced) students to the Latine identity. As structural narratives associate Spanish with Latine



identities, Rosa found that speaking Spanish contributed to students' racialization.

In contrast, Latine students who did not speak Spanish, or lacked native-like proficiency, felt that they were not Latine enough (Martínez and Nuñez, 2023; Sanchez et al., 2012). In these cases, the absence of Spanish fluency did not diminish racialization but reinforced structural narratives of latinidad by juxtaposing perceived deficiency to imposed structural narratives, serving as a consistent reminder of what "being Latine" means. This type of interpellation enables social structures to racialize students who feel "not Latine enough" by forcing them into an inflexible category and labeling them as deficient for not adhering to what structural narratives proclaim they should be. A Latine student's limited Spanish proficiency, therefore, becomes deeply intertwined with a deficit narrative that reinforces their externally and internally ascribed racialization. In this example, the school acts as an ISA that interpellates Latine students by positioning them as linguistically deficient. Interpellation, the process in which subjects are hailed into their subjective position by dominant ideologies, serves as a "calling out" of students for failing to uphold their ascribed structural identity; interpellation racializes them through a deficit frame and potentially positions them to apperceive this deficiency.

*Disrupting Language Racialization.* Despite structural attempts to racialize a person through language, this aspect of racialization is not fixed. Alim (2016) expounds on a person's ability to operationalize language as a transracial mechanism. He applies transracialization as the ability to apply raciolinguistic performances to make and remake race (p. 48) through accents, body language, code-switching, and verbal expressions, which serve as resistant reactions to translate oneself beyond racial boundaries (p. 36). Alim's (2016) scholarly contributions significantly inspire how I apply transgressive-racialization.

For Alim, the prefix "trans" is paramount because the term invites us to understand transgressive-racialization as a means to *transgress* structural impositions and *transcend* beyond racial boundaries (Alim's italics). Alim's work informs how becoming a transgressive-racial subject enables us to disrupt race as a counterinterpellative and counterapperceptive act. A person's linguistic transracialization subverts and destabilizes the idea of race (p. 47). His scholarship informs how transgressive-racialization is more than coding and decoding race across racial formations but also a means to resist and withdraw from such codifications. For Alim, transracialization is about "doing race and undoing race in an effort to develop a subversive transracial politics" (p. 48). Given the powerful effects of structural racialization, Alim recognizes the limits of transracialization, thereby providing a platform for transgressive-racialization to emerge as an effective praxis of refusal. Nonetheless, understanding language's ability for transgressive-racialization equips groups to collectively (re)shape racial definitions that counter structural influences on racial boundaries. Alim's model underscores how speaking serves as a counterapperceptive and counterinterpellative tool that advances the goals of transgressive-racialization.

## Racialization and transgressive-racialization through gender

Butler (1990) describes gender as a "corporeal style" (p. 139) that is determined by society's gendered script. According to Butler, gender

is "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance" (p. 25). Gender is not something one is but something one does. A person does not exist as their gender; rather, they perform their gender. Butler's (1990, 1997) theory of gender performativity addresses how gender performance occurs when meaningful effects shape gender identities. They explain how gender is an act, or a performance, and that social expectations and pressures construct a person's gendered identity. Over time, performativity becomes unconscious, whereas performance is a daily (and sometimes conscious) act. Similar to how someone is racialized through social structures, so can structures gender them. Racialized gender, therefore, provides a critical analysis of gender and race's converging effects through socialization practices that influence one's ethnoracial identity (Few, 2007). I define *racialized gender* as the mutual constitution of gender and race, whereby gendered expectations are fundamentally shaped by an individual's racialization.

Different from Crenshaw's (1991) intersectional framework, which would view race and gender as intersecting institutional failures, one's racialized gender engages with identity axes as a mutually constitutive identity rather than two distinct identities that intersect. Identities have an intra-active relationship because identity axes, like race and gender, do not merely cross paths but act upon each other and merge to create a unique structural identity. For example, someone is not simply male and Latine, they are a Latine male. This perspective identifies the compounding effects of being a Latine male which differs from the amplified impact of being a Latine trans male. Maleness is structurally different for Latinos than for Latine trans males. Analyzing these identities through their intra-active relationship (because they actively build upon each other) best reflects how structures racialize subjects through gender. This process is especially visible in how femininity and masculinity are constructed and made legible in schools, where students' gendered and racialized performances become technologies for state regulation.

*Disrupting Gendered Racialization.* In educational contexts, students' racialized and gendered performances alternatively serve as central practices within the transgressive-racialization movement. Youdell's (2006) observations of regulating students' bodily presentations illuminate how students are made intelligible through their racial and gendered performances. Their analysis underscores how performance alternatively functions as an act of contestation and reconstitution. Youdell found that students' discursive performances, such as the clothes they wear, their bodily gestures, and behavior, challenged structural narratives of racialized femininities and masculinities. More specifically, they found how students' performances enabled them to "reconstitute themselves *again differently*" (p. 16, Youdell's italics). This reconstitution, while occurring within racialization's constraints, implicates the epistemic and embodied disruption that transgressive-racialization names: a refusal to be fixed within racializing logics.

Extending this analysis, Cervantes-Soon (2016) also found how young Latinas subverted dominant racialized and gendered scripts that schools imposed upon them by reconstituting themselves differently. These young women rejected ascriptions of being "unfeminine" and re-narrated themselves into *mujeres truchas*, women who 'will not take it anymore' (p. 1216). In alignment with the transgressive-racialization movement, the *mujeres truchas* engaged in a racialized, gendered, and linguistic politics of refusal by

reconstituting their subjectivities. They were no longer Latina but the illegible *mujer trucha*. In this context, they rejected “Latina” due to how the state associates this structural identity with hypersexualization and intellectual deficiency. [Bey \(2022\)](#), however, would describe this rejection of gendered structural narratives as an attempt “to vitiate gender *through* itself, un-doing itself by way of an unyielding, radically opening ungending” (p. 69, *Bey’s italics*). Thus, a reframing of Cervantes-Soon’s findings (and Youdell’s) would identify these young women as ungending themselves through the dissolution of ontological fixation. When *Women of Color* reject structural impositions, they are simultaneously dismantling gendered and racialized definitions by creating new ways of being.

Following [Alim \(2016\)](#), there is a potential to characterize their racialized gender fluidity as a transgressive-racial act because they re-named themselves differently. The state cannot govern a *mujer trucha*. Students in both studies demonstrated their awareness for the fluid and adaptive nature of their racialized gender when enacting various gendered traits that crossed and escaped cultural and racial boundaries. They adapted their gender expression based on their environments, further alluding to the potential of transgressive-racialization as a counterinterpellative and counterappercceptive act. Youdell’s and Cervantes-Soon’s study in schools further provide an example of counterappercception in action through the deliberate restructuring of self-consciousness to challenge and redefine the centrifugal forces that shape perception and identity [see also [Sandoval \(2013\)](#)]. To understand this process, it is important to rearticulate that appercception refers to how individuals make meaning of their world through internalized, unconscious social and cultural schemas. Appercception is saturated with dominant ideologies that encode race, gender, and class into our cognitive landscapes. Therefore, counterappercception, much like counterinterpellation, involves actively negotiating and contesting how we accept implicit assumptions, biases, and hierarchies embedded within our appercieved realities.

The students in Youdell’s and Cervantes-Soon’s studies exemplified counterappercception by expressing femininity differently across various social spaces, revealing their rejection of how social structures want them to enact and perceive gender as fixed. Their counterappercceptive actions of consciously adapting their gender expression reflect a reconfiguration of their gendered self-perception. Their actions required a conscious acknowledgement that structural definitions are not psychologically and cognitively sedimented. Students in the studies leveraged this fluidity to shape their identities to exist differently in different spaces. By doing so, they not only challenged the structural and interpellative effects of their racialized gender identity, but they demonstrated a rejection of their appercieved realities surrounding racialized femininity. These studies emulate how people experience, and sometimes seek, ethnoracial boundary unmaking as a means to refuse their racialization.

## Transgressive-racial pedagogies

As schools are on one of the most powerful ISAs that racialize students through interpellation and appercception, they are also ripe sites for educators and students to deploy counterinterpellative and counterappercceptive strategies through transgressive-racial pedagogies. A transgressive-racial pedagogy is an educational

approach that enables students to re-configure and refuse racializing interpellative and appercceptive school norms. This pedagogical strategy aims to equip students with the ability to disrupt institutional and epistemological structures that impose race as fixed. Teachers should facilitate learning activities so that the classroom becomes a fugitive space, where students can practice engaging in identities that exist outside of state legibility. Doing so supports students’ becoming of possible selves and shifts away from affirming fixed subjectivities. Transgressive-racial pedagogies encourage refusal of racialized scripts and open space for the reimagined subject.

[Paris \(2012\)](#) provides an example of a transgressive-racial pedagogy through his use of counterscriptural economy—youth-authored identity texts that “resisted and offered [students] possible revisions for the dominant economy school and state sanctioned reading and writing” (p. 2). Learning activities that enable students to re-narrate themselves, like Paris’ counterscriptural economy, serve as refusals of being read through structural racial optics and proffers alternative ways of becoming. Paris demonstrates how educators can design learning to author non-normative modes of identity that disrupt state-sanctioned scripts. In this case, students’ re-narration challenges interpellation by rejecting the call to “hail” state-sanctioned scripts. In doing so, students can further engage in counterappercception by resisting to see themselves through the dominant gaze and seeing themselves as otherwise.

Similarly, [Sarkar \(2009\)](#) provides a case study for hip hop as a pedagogy of language mixing that defied racial-linguistic associations by strategically blending languages typically isolated from each other. In working with Black and Latine youth in Montreal, Quebec, Sarkar observed how French, English, Creole, and Hip Hop slang rendered students linguistically illegible under “proper” French and English standards. Through language mixing, students constructed new subjectivities that prioritized “becoming” rather than upholding a fixed, state-sanctioned racial and linguistic identity. Their work showcases how educators can deploy hip hop pedagogy as a fugitive practice in which students perform themselves in ways that make them illegible to the state. Sarkar’s findings identify how language mixing enabled students to contribute actively to the creation of linguistic and cultural diversity that did not align with the local, historical structure (p. 149). As a counterinterpellative act, students refused to abide by institutional linguistic norms by creating their own cultural-linguistic practices. Doing so additionally provided a space for students to create new linguistic identities only legible through their peer networks, aligning with the transgressive-racialization movement.

## Conclusion

As schools play an essential role in the racialization process, educators must intervene by engaging with transgressive-racial pedagogies that encourage students to think critically about how race is an invented social construct with a fluid nature for them to challenge. Race is more than adaptable, it is elastic. The US has historically exploited racialization to designate race as an essentializing function in our structural existence by conferring race with elastic properties. If race’s elasticity has fortified social structures, transgressive-racial actors can reappropriate its malleability to unmake racial boundaries by challenging the limitations that social structures enforce and regulate.

The transgressive-racial subject has no set racial boundaries because transgressive-racialization bounds no one. Transgressive-racialization does not seek inclusion in the state's racial categories but aims to unsettle them. The state will employ every structural power possible to counter efforts that make race obsolete, but refusing racial governance begins in the everyday interactions we have with each other.

I apply transgressive-racialization as the deliberate and conscious act of rejecting and redefining imposed extensions and ascriptions of racial meanings by exercising race's elastic nature. This project is indebted to Black and other Trans Scholars of Color whose work push us to reject how the state produces technologies of governance and legibility and whose insights demonstrate that survival results in politics of refusal. In articulating transgressive-racialization as a fugitive praxis, this refusal does not seek new subjectivities. The ultimate goal of transgressive-racialization is to render race structurally obsolete by unveiling its inherent irrationality through counterinterpellative and counterappercptive acts. The transgressive-racial subject recognizes that we are not fixed beings solely defined by structural labels. Thus, to truly propel society toward a world where race holds no structural significance, we must confront and engage with race as an unfixed property, thereby debilitating its structural centrifugal and centripetal effects. Embracing transgressive-racialization fosters the possibility of rearticulating and reconstituting race as defunct. As a movement to refuse racial governance, transgressive-racialization serves as a vital strategy for fugitive subjects to oppose and delegitimize racialization.

## Author contributions

JP: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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