Identifying Dominant Group Communication Strategies: A Phenomenological Study

Robert J. Razzante


To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2018.1472116

Published online: 25 Jun 2018.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data
Identifying Dominant Group Communication Strategies: A Phenomenological Study

Robert J. Razzante

Through this study I attempt to extend cocultural theory toward a dominant group theory. I offer an exploratory account of the many ways dominant group members have responded to the concerns of cocultural group members. That is, dominant group members tend to engage in strategies that produce four themes: (a) using dominant group membership for reinforcement of privilege, (b) coming to a dominant group awareness, (c) using dominant group membership for support of cocultural groups, and (d) using dominant group membership for disrupting practices of oppression. When taken together, cocultural theory and a dominant group theory afford researchers, teachers, and practitioners another tool to explore intersectional communication.

Keywords: Cocultural Theory; Privilege; Power; Pedagogy

Introduction

Communication is the means through which identity is created, shared, altered, and re-created. A social constructionist ontology embraces a complex understanding of the role of communication, culture, and power in developing social/cultural identities (Fassett &
This study works to extend cocultural theory (Orbe, 1998) toward a dominant group theory by addressing how dominant group strategies are created and maintained in interactions with cocultural group members. Although cocultural theory seeks to explicate the intentions of cocultural group members when interacting with dominant groups, this study attempts to understand the other side of the intercultural encounter. In other words, I attempt to understand the communicative behaviors of dominant group members when interacting with cocultural group members. The findings in this study suggest a complex understanding of dominant groups and their communicative behaviors in response to the concerns of cocultural group members.

**Literature Review**

Foucault (1977) examines two primary conceptualizations of power: power as disciplinary and power as productive. Disciplinary power occurs when a source of power determines the behavior of an individual. Productive power occurs when one assumes an agency to determine how they interact within oppressive structures. Within the context of communication, Allen (2014) offers advice to historically privileged groups who wish to use their power in productive manners rather than disciplinary ways. Similarly, DeTurk (2011) examines ways individuals can enact agency as a cocultural ally. More specifically, her work seeks to examine “how members of dominant social groups use their social and cultural capital to confront discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudice” (p. 585). Both Allen and DeTurk share strategies dominant group members can use when interacting from their positions of privilege.

De Certeau (1988) theorizes everyday practices for those who hold positions of power and for those who hold positions of historical marginalization. More particularly, de Certeau maintains that those who hold positions of power use certain *strategies* as a means to reinforce their privilege. In contrast, those that hold historically marginalized positions use *tactics* as a means to work within the hierarchical structures that oppress them. Within the context of communication, scholars have studied the strategies Whites use to reinforce an ideology of whiteness (Moon, 1999; Nakayama and Krizek, 1995). Other communication scholars have examined the ways historically marginalized groups use tactics when working within hierarchical structures that privilege some while oppressing others (Orbe & Roberts, 2012). Cocultural theory (Orbe, 1998) is one particular theory that explores tactical communication.

Cocultural theory examines the ways in which cocultural group members interact when communicating with dominant group members (Orbe, 1998). More specifically, cocultural groups communicate in ways to achieve one of three preferred outcomes (*assimilation, accommodation, or separation*) through one of three different communication approaches (*nonassertive, assertive, or aggressive*). A cocultural group member’s communication orientation consists of the myriad ways one might choose a communication approach to achieve a particular preferred outcome (e.g., *nonassertive assimilation, assertive accommodation, and aggressive separation*). Ultimately, one’s field of experience (*abilities, situational context, and perceived cost and reward*) determines which communication approach to employ to achieve a particular preferred outcome.
Cocultural theory has been used as a theoretical framework in various contexts (Orbe & Roberts, 2012). For example, communication scholars have used cocultural theory to study the communication practices of LGBTQ members (Anderson & Giovanini, 2009; Dixon, 2009), African Americans (Hopson & Orbe, 2007; Parker, 2002, 2003), and people with disabilities (Cohen & Avanzino, 2010; Worley & Cornett-DeVito, 2007). With the aforementioned studies, scholarship lacks in the understanding of ways dominant group members interact when working from a position of power and privilege. Therefore, this phenomenological study (see Eberle, 2015; Lanigan, 1988) seeks to investigate the following research question: In what ways do dominant group members respond to the concerns of cocultural group members?

Methods

The data collection process was designed with two separate, yet simultaneous phases. The first phase of data collection used a convenience sample of undergraduate students at a large public university in the Southwest United States. Of the 55 students in both classes, 26 gave consent to use their responses for the study. The students were enrolled in two separate sections of a small group communication course where most students’ majors fell outside of communication (e.g., business, business communication, and engineering). Altogether, there were 15 men and 11 women, 6 of whom were international students. The racial and ethnic sample of students mirrored that of the larger university population: 51% White, 22% Hispanic/Latino, 6% Asian, and 3% Black/African American. The second and simultaneous pool for data collection included semistructured interviews with a snowball sample of 7 individuals recruited from my personal network; none were students from the aforementioned classes. As a result, the interviewees differed in both geographic location (Midwest and Southwest) and age (18–54 years old).

Challenge exists when collecting data from two sets of participants. To maintain consistency, every participant experienced the same data collection workshop (see below). Students in both classes experienced the same workshop procedure. The other two workshops took place in the homes of two separate participants (one in the Midwest and one in the Southwest). After each workshop I conducted an in-person, audio-recorded, interview with each participant. The final data set consisted of 33 participants who shared a total of 59 stories of critical incidents/stories. A more detailed description of the workshop follows as a means to further explicate the data collection process and to offer a pedagogical practice that helps people identify the ways in which they identify as dominant group members.

Data Collection Procedure

In a recent article investigating the ways in which White people “learn how to become White,” Moon (2016) articulates the challenges of getting White students to talk about their whiteness. She described how students first needed a class activity to help them
understand their own racialization. Similarly, I faced challenges in getting participants to notice their dominant group memberships. To meet these challenges, I designed and conducted an activity for students and interviewees that would prime them to think of the ways in which they identify as dominant group members. The workshop entailed three main components: brainstorming social identities, identifying avowed and ascribed social identities, and discussing the historical privilege(s) attached to certain social identities. What follows is a detailed account of the activity provided for both the students and the interviewees. The detailed account serves as a means to articulate the activity as a pedagogical and research tool. Instructors can use this method to encourage students to further complicate their own self-identifications as dominant group members.

**Brainstorming social identities**

Before telling students and interviewees what constituted a social identity, they were encouraged to develop their own understanding of social identities in an organic manner. That is, they were instructed to brainstorm different social identities and to write their thoughts on the white board. Throughout this process there was a "no stopping rule" where participants could add an idea whenever one came to them. In addition, no one could "stop" or question another student’s ideas until the very end.

**Avowed and ascribed social identities**

When brainstorming was complete, participants were instructed to reflect on the list and to ask questions on any identities they found confusing or intriguing. After clarifying any terms, participants were then asked to consider their avowed and ascribed identities (Collier, 1998). That is, avowed identities are self-perceived social identities, whereas ascribed identities are social identities “others” place on an individual. To facilitate this portion of the activity, participants were first asked to draw two triangles. The first triangle attempted to visualize which avowal social identities are most salient to the individual (most salient in top third, least salient in bottom third). The second triangle attempted to visualize which ascribed social identities were most salient for others (most salient at the top, least salient at the bottom). After generating social identities and determining which identities are self-affirmed or “other”-ascribed, the participants then explored the role power plays within communication and identification.

**Social identification and historical privilege**

To prime participants to think about their own privilege, participants were first asked to determine which social identities hold historical privilege. Among the students and interviewees, the most common historically privileged identities included physical ability, educational level, and age. Certain participants maintained more historically privileged identities (White, middle- to upper-class, cisgender male, etc.) whereas other participants maintained more historically marginalized identities (person of
color, lower-class, female). For the sake of this project, I only wanted participants to focus on the ways in which they identified as a salient member of a historically privileged group.

The proceeding activity encouraged participants to think about their social identifications in more complex ways. Afterward, I prompted both students and interviewees with the following question as a means to collect data:

Think of the ways you identify as a dominant group member. This may be in terms of age, sex, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. In what ways do you identify as a dominant group member? As a dominant group member, what is your response to the concerns raised by different cocultural groups (people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ+ persons, etc.)? In other words, what have you done in response to their concerns? Please share two to three stories.

Data Analysis

The data for this study were 59 critical incidents where participants described their communicative strategies when interacting with cocultural group members. Students’ written-responses ranged from 230 to 700 words and interviewee responses lasted 3–17 minutes. Each participant shared roughly two incidents. Once collected, these data were analyzed through a phenomenological analysis. Philosophically, phenomenology is the study of one’s subjective consciousness (Eberle, 2015), or one’s experience as lived. However, as a method of analysis, phenomenology requires researchers to bracket their subjective experiences. Through bracketing, phenomenologists attempt to suspend any natural attitude that may flaw their interpretation of the data.

Bracketing becomes an essential step in phenomenological research. In other words, the researcher must be aware of his or her own biases when entering the data and be willing to set assumptions aside to read the data for what they are. As a dominant group member myself, it becomes important that I recognize my biases and intellectual blind spots when performing data analysis. Rather than ascribing preexisting labels and terms, I let in vivo codes emerge. I then engaged in abduction as a means to move between emerging codes and existing theoretical explanations (Tracy, 2013). This process of data analysis can be further explored through Lanigan’s (1988) explanation.

Phenomenology is an inductive research approach that enables the emergence of grounded theory. With a phenomenological orientation, I use Lanigan’s (1988) three stages of analysis: description, reduction, and interpretation. The first stage of analysis calls for a description of the subjective consciousness. That is, I created one document with all participants’ responses verbatim. After reading through the data multiple times, I then moved into the second stage of analysis, reduction. Through familiarizing myself with the data, I began reducing the content to essential themes. For themes to emerge organically, I attempted to bracket my natural attitudes as much as possible. More specifically, I used inductive research procedures to create codes/themes that reflected the essence of the original data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The third and final stage calls for interpretation. Within the interpretation stage I simultaneously enacted two practices: I reduced the themes once again to further capture
the essence of the data, and I related similar themes that address the research question. The interpretation stage allowed me to then make more conceptual connections between themes. I excavated four main themes and eight subthemes.

Findings: Identifying Dominant Group Strategies

Muted group theory offers insight into the nature of marginalized groups exclusion from the workplace through dominant group members’ use of language (Ardener, 1978; Ardener, 1975; Kramarae, 1981). Standpoint theory offers a lens to understand the nature of one’s social positionality as it refers to one’s access to privilege or marginalization (Smith, 1987). Orbe’s (1998) original work attempted to extend muted group theory and standpoint theory toward a cocultural theory and posit a nomenclature of different cocultural practices. Through this study, I begin extending cocultural theory toward a dominant group theory by complicating the meaning of dominant group strategies. I present the findings in as a typology to explore emergent themes (Tracy, 2013). Through a phenomenological analysis, the following four main themes of dominant group communication emerged: (a) using dominant group membership for reinforcement of privilege, (b) coming to a dominant group awareness, (c) using dominant group membership for support of cocultural groups, and (d) using dominant group membership for disrupting practices of oppression (see Appendix A). These four main themes are further explicated through eight subthemes.

Dominant Group Membership as Reinforcement

This first main theme contains two subthemes: reinforcing the dominant group’s privilege and engaging in power-blindness. Reinforcing the dominant group’s privilege took form in three primary ways: focusing on reverse prejudice/discrimination, using dominant group membership to one’s own advantage, and aggressively reinforcing dominant group privilege. Engaging in power-blindness took form in one of two ways: avoiding power, privilege, and oppression, and downplaying difference. The following offers an example of each subtheme to demonstrate how dominant group members use their positions of privilege to reinforce their power.

Reinforcing the dominant group’s privilege

Participants would often use their dominant group privilege as a means to refocus prejudice and discrimination toward themselves. For example, when asked about his reactions to the concerns of cocultural group members, one participant thought of a time when he experienced prejudice. More specifically, the participant stated, “I interned for the John McCain campaign and had different coculture people fire back at me...get the door slammed in my face, cussed out, even almost got ran over.” By not addressing the concerns of the cocultural group members and by addressing his own concerns, this dominant group member reinforced a system of power, privilege, and oppression.
Other dominant group members were more explicit with their reinforcement of privilege. One participant (self-identified as White) shared how she associated herself with Black culture:

First, it only takes a glance to see that I am clearly White. Thankfully, I personally haven’t ever been in a conflict with a black person. However, in high school I seemed to fit in more with black girls than White; I had countless black friends!…
In fact, one of my best friends in high school was black.

This participant, although framing her interpersonal relationship as a mutual, takes part in myopic thinking through overgeneralizing Black culture. Through associating herself with Black culture, this participant gained popularity with her peers.

Finally, one participant (self-identified as heterosexual) explicitly shared his story of aggressively reinforcing his privilege through joking about homosexuality: “when my sister told me she was a lesbian… I responded with ‘Oh thank God, for a minute there I was beginning to wonder if you didn’t realize you were gay.’” This participant demonstrated how dominant group members may ultimately reinforce their privilege through the use of aggressive language.

**Power-blindness**
Dominant group members often noted their lack of a need to identify their dominant group membership. For example, an 18-year-old male stated, “I’ve never really given it [cocultural concerns] much thought because I have never had to.” This same participant later shared how he addressed the concerns of cocultural group members: “I just shy away from that because I personally think that it will always be there, and it will be hard to avoid.” Through avoiding power, privilege, and oppression, this participant actively reinforces their position of power.

Even when participants did identify difference, there seemed to be a trend of downplaying difference for commonalities. For example, one participant stated:

I had a large mix of friends ranging from African American to Hispanic to Asian, and I could learn at a young age that they were no different than me, other than their skin color. I have seen many who think they are oppressed and usually, I just shy away from that because I personally think that it will always be there, and it will be hard to avoid.

Although explicitly acknowledging the systemic concerns of cocultural groups, this participant downplayed racial and ethnic difference to treat his friends as his equals. In failing to address the systemic concerns of his African American, Hispanic, and Asian friends, this participant reinforced their dominant group privilege through power-blindness.

**Coming to a Dominant Group Awareness**
The subthemes that constitute this second theme include three tiers of privilege awareness, and self-compassion. The three tiers of awareness manifested in three primary ways: lack of awareness, self-reflexivity, and systemic awareness. Self-compassion took
form in one of two ways: practicing self-patience and practicing humility. I provide an example of each subtheme to demonstrate how dominant group members articulate three different tiers of awareness.

**Three tiers of awareness**

The first tier of awareness is where participants demonstrated a time when they were oblivious to their dominant group membership and/or privilege. For example, one participant reflected on his dominant group membership (as a White male) in his homeschooling experience: “I have never really thought much about how that has defined me as a human being…I was relatively unaware of the fact that members of cocultural groups were marginalized.” This participant later noted how he only came to understand his lack of awareness through his exposure to a “non-White” student when transferring into a public school.

Other participants described how they became aware of their dominant group membership upon self-reflexivity:

One day I snapped and said, "You’re so gay.” He was very offended and decided to tell the front office about what had transpired…Being a 14-year-old boy I was confused why I was in trouble…I realize now using gay is offensive to some and I do my best to not use it in my everyday vocabulary.

This participant demonstrated a common progression of first understanding one’s dominant group membership and then understanding the potential implications of abusive language. He first acknowledged his lack of awareness, but through experiencing cognitive dissonance, he came to understand why “you’re so gay” is considered homophobic language.

Finally, one participant reflected on his awareness of systemic concerns cocultural members might experience:

This year, my lead-op, who is the lead for our department, he’s like my go to guy. He doesn’t have a college degree, but he’s the most qualified inspector in the plant… the whole team will go to him for advice, but because he doesn’t have a degree, he can’t be the supervisor of the department.

Later in the interview, this participant noted how he created a symbiotic work relationship with his lead-op who lacks a college degree. Ultimately, this participant may not have gotten to a symbiotic work relationship without having understood the systemic barriers in place that limit his colleague’s occupational opportunities.

**Self-compassion**

In addition to raising their own awareness, participants also spoke about demonstrating compassion toward themselves during their coming to awareness process. One participant (self-identified as a White male) noted how he needed to practice patience to understand the concerns of cocultural group members:

Being a dominant group member opens the door to be criticized…it is important to see the point of view that the cocultural group members are coming from, because
they are treated unfairly because of their social identities, so seeing where the cocultural members are coming from is crucial to creating a fair and equal group where we can all work together.

From a willingness to understand cocultural members’ concerns, this dominant group member was better able to deal with any criticism he might experience for being of the dominant group.

In addition to practicing patience toward oneself, participants also noted how experiencing “otherness” allowed for humility. For example, one participant noted how her own cocultural memberships allowed her to appreciate her positionality as a dominant group member in terms of nationality when hosting dinners for refugee families. She explained how, “it’s often important to humble oneself and take light of the advantages one can have over others depending on the situation. Realizing these disparities is the first step towards equalization.” In this participant’s case, she used her “advantage over others” to extend food to displaced families rather than use her advantage in disciplinary ways.

Using Dominant Group Membership for Support

The subthemes that constitute this third theme include fostering interpersonal relationships and providing resources. Fostering interpersonal relationships took form in one of three ways: putting self in contact with otherness, networking with cocultural groups, and affirming cocultural groups. Providing resources took form in two primary ways: offering mental/emotional support and offering material resources. I provide an example of each subtheme to demonstrate how dominant group members use their positions of privilege to support cocultural group members.

Fostering interpersonal relationships

Participants often reflected on times when they developed interpersonal relationships with cocultural group members. A first step toward fostering an interpersonal relationship with cocultural members was to put oneself in contact with the “otherness” of cocultural groups. For example, one participant (self-identified as a U.S. citizen) reflected on the development of her friendship with Korean and Japanese international students: “As we spend more and more time together, we knew each other better. I have found mutual characteristics and interests besides the culture difference.” Through this example, this participant demonstrated how she embraced difference for more authentic relationships.

Other participants described times when they networked with cocultural group members. For example, one participant (self-identified as able-bodied) reflected on her experience of networking with students with disabilities: “I had to help them or talk to their aids throughout the class. I continued to know them and talk with them throughout my four years of high school.” Through networking with her peers, and the aids of her peers, this student demonstrated a willingness to offer support for the rest of her high school career.
Finally, participants fostered relationships with cocultural groups through empowerment. For example, one participant reflected on a time when he used his interpersonal relationship with his cousin (who has autism) to foster a macro-level consciousness of cocultural concerns:

Before going there I had preconceived ideas of children with disabilities and I too was marginalizing them just like so many people have done, but after my first few visits I realized I was wrong for marginalizing these kids, for all the kids were capable of doing so much than I ever thought and all the kids were so incredibly smart…Although historically I am still the dominant group member I try not to marginalize the cocultural members and I want to think of these kids of being capable of anything.

This participant demonstrated how interpersonal relationships can lead to more awareness if the dominant group member is willing to practice self-reflexivity. The next section shares times when dominant group members use their privilege to address more meso-level concerns of cocultural group members.

Providing resources
Dominant group members provided support in one of two ways: through emotional support and through material support. One participant reflected on a time when she provided emotional support to underresourced high school students. She shared a story of when she visited her high school to show students that they can pursue a college degree too. She further noted:

I let them know my story, about scholarships, financial aid, and all the resources out there that make it able for us to pursue high education…I think it was important to let them know how they can do it too.

Through her example of being a college-educated woman, this participant encouraged underresourced students to pursue higher education.

Participants also shared times when they provided material support for cocultural groups. For example, one participant reflected on how his family provided dinner for 150 families experiencing homelessness: “My family has an annual tradition to host a homeless shelter feeding during the holidays.” Through providing material support, this dominant group member addressed the concerns of food insecurity.

Using Dominant Group Membership for Disruption

The subthemes that constitute this final theme include disrupting predispositions and using dominant group privilege as a tactic. Disrupting predispositions took form in two primary ways: educating others and challenging prejudice. Using dominant group privilege as a tactic took form in one of three ways: resisting prejudice/discrimination, mobilizing resources, and advocating on behalf of cocultural groups. I provide an example of each subtheme to demonstrate how dominant group members use their positions of privilege to disrupt micro- and macro-strategies of oppression.
Disrupting predispositions
Dominant group members described moments when they used their privilege to challenge predispositions of other dominant group members. For example, one participant (self-identified as White) reflected on a time when she challenged a colleague’s color blindness:

“...So, when he walked away I said, boy, I could use him on our committee for diversity. And the volunteer said oh, for you know, representing gays and lesbians, and I said no, for representing African Americans, clearly he was black, and she said, ‘oh I don’t see black and White, I just see a person,’ but she said she clearly thought he was gay. I told her that we can’t prejudge who a person is and to recognize that he was black because he has his own culture, and validate that.”

In addition to challenging her colleague’s color blindness, this participant also disrupted her colleague’s predispositions of what constitutes a gay performance of sexuality.

Dominant group members also turned toward educating other dominant group members. For example, one participant reflected on a time when she taught her friends about different nationalities and ethnicities through her own personal travel: “...When it comes to interacting with people who aren’t familiar with these two different ethnicities, I get to show individuals where these countries are because they have absolutely no clue.” Through personal exposure, this dominant group member was able to willingly educate her peers about cultures different from their own.

Using Dominant Group Privilege as a Tactic
Dominant group members used their dominant group membership as tactics in three primary ways: resisting prejudice/discrimination, mobilizing resources, and advocating. One participant reflected on a time when he consciously challenged prejudice at work:

“...There had been an incident at work where my coworker was talking very disrespectfully about homosexuals and I decided to stand up and confront him, while doing so my boss and other coworkers were listening to what I had to say and I feel like they got to hear it from a straight person so it was not bias.

By resisting prejudice as a straight male, this participant was able to set an example for other straight males when confronting homophobia. His disapproval of prejudice in front of his coworkers may have implications for resisting discriminatory practices in the workplace as well.

Another participant (self-identified as a cisgender, straight male) reflected on a time when he, along with many others, mobilized themselves to march in solidarity: “Last summer, I participated in the pride parade in Chicago, Illinois although I am straight and a male I wanted to show my support for the LBGT community.” This cisgender, straight male mobilized himself as a resource of solidarity for members of the LGBTQ community along with many others who marched in support.

Finally, some participants advocated on behalf of cocultural group members. For example, one participant shared a time when he not only challenged the prejudice of a colleague but also advocated on behalf of his clients who have mental disabilities:
I worked with one waitress in a restaurant, very independent, fierce, strong willed individual who kept using the word retarded all the time. I called her out on it early on and asked her about it and she asked me, do you think they know what it means, they meaning my group of individuals with disabilities in the restaurant. I said, absolutely. They know it’s a derogatory term. They may have a cognitive disability, but that doesn’t mean they don’t have emotions and feelings.

Although his clients may not been present, this participant spoke on their behalf and in their defense. These dominant group strategies remain at the micro- and meso-level but may be precursors for more macro-level tactical strategies.

Conclusions and Implications

This study aimed to better understand the variety of ways in which dominant group members communicate with cocultural group members when working from a position of power. The study incorporated De Certeau’s (1988) articulation of the difference between tactics and strategies and Foucault’s (1977) understanding of productive power. The study then incorporated Allen (2014) and DeTurk’s (2011) work as a way to complicate the variety of communicative behaviors dominant group members might enact (i.e., thinking under the influences and allyship). With these theoretical underpinnings, this study aimed to theorize the variety of dominant group strategies employed by dominant group members.

Cocultural theory (Orbe, 1998) provides a framework to understand the tactics historically marginalized groups use when interacting with dominant group members. This study employed an exploratory lens as a means to mirror Orbe’s (1998) original work to understand the other side of the intercultural interaction (i.e., dominant group strategies). Furthermore, this study contributes to the extension of cocultural theory by complicating the assumption that all dominant group members seek to maintain the status quo with every communicative behavior. As such, this study proposes four main themes that arise through the phenomenological analysis: (a) using dominant group membership for reinforcement of privilege, (b) coming to a dominant group awareness, (c) using dominant group membership for support of cocultural groups, and (d) using dominant group membership for disrupting practices of oppression.

There are inherent limitations to this study that are important to consider. First, some dominant group members may have a myopic view of what constitutes power and privilege. As a result, when asked to practice self-reflexivity, there may have been a lack in critical understanding of the role power plays in intercultural interactions. A second limitation manifests in the unidimensional understanding of dominant and cocultural group membership(s). That is, participants were forced to focus on their dominant group membership(s) that may have been less salient than their cocultural group membership(s). This limitation was addressed through the pre-workshop activity, but it still may not have resonated with some participants. Finally, this study risks the potential for recentering dominant group members. Rather than recentering dominant group strategies as the focus, one may better understand intercultural interactions when considering both cocultural tactics and dominant group strategies.
As a pedagogical tool, this study offers a new model of identity and privilege. For example, cocultural theory posits that everyone can or will identify as a cocultural group member. Likewise, working from a similar premise, everyone can or will identify as a dominant group member in one way or another. What this study fails to explore, is the intersectional nature of power and oppression. That is, how might someone maintain both cocultural identities and dominant group identities simultaneously. This question lies beyond the scope of this study, but it remains a central component to intercultural communication. As such, in terms of pedagogy, instructors can use both cocultural theory and dominant group theorizing as a means to better understand the complexity of culture, communication, and power.

Future research may consider the nature of sojourners who enter and leave social hierarchies in the United States. That is, how might international students, specifically, come to understand the nature of their simultaneous privilege-marginalization as coconstituted by their interactions within the United States? Finally, futures studies may continue to address Jackson’s (1999) call for studies that focus on dominant group strategies other than “denial” studies (p. 52). Rather than solely focusing on the ways in which dominant group members use privilege in disciplinary ways, our audiences may need more exposure to ways they can deal with their privilege in productive ways (Allen, 2014; Foucault, 1977). Such studies may further encourage more complex understandings of communication, culture, and power.

Notes

1. I identify as a dominant group member in terms of race, gender, class, ability, class, religion, education level, age, and immigrant status.
2. Husserl (1970) defines natural attitudes as the taken for granted assumptions we have about phenomena of experience. As such, a phenomenological approach allows for the abductive process between emerging codes and preexisting literature.

References


Appendix A. Dominant Group Strategies: Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1: Using dominant group membership for reinforcement of privilege

(1) Reinforcing the dominant group’s privilege
   a. Focusing on reverse prejudice/discrimination,
   b. Using dominant group membership to one’s own advantage, and
   c. Aggressively reinforcing dominant group privilege

(2) Engaging in power-blindness
   a. Avoiding power, privilege, and oppression, and
   b. Downplaying difference

Theme 2: Coming to a dominant group awareness

(1) Three tiers of privilege
   a. Lack of awareness,
   b. Self-reflexivity, and
   c. Systemic awareness

(2) Self-compassion
   a. Practicing self-patience, and
   b. Practicing humility

Theme 3: Using dominant group membership for support of cocultural groups

(1) Fostering interpersonal relationships
   a. Putting self in contact with otherness,
   b. Networking with cocultural groups, and
   c. Affirming cocultural groups

(2) Providing resources
   a. Offering mental/emotional support, and
   b. Offering material resources

Theme 4: Using dominant group membership for disrupting practices of oppression

(1) Disrupting predispositions
   a. Educating others, and
   b. Challenging prejudice

(2) Using dominant group privilege as a tactic
   a. Resisting prejudice/discrimination,
   b. Mobilizing resources, and
   c. Advocating on behalf of cocultural groups