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Cultural Identity and Education: A Critical Race Perspective

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As we begin to journey through this new 21st century, educators at every level are endeavoring to meet the challenge to be responsive to the educational needs of their students, current and future. This is especially true in relationship to the education of students of diverse backgrounds (Ladson-Billings 2001; 1999; 1994) in public educational settings. These settings are largely made up of Black and Brown students, African American and Latino/a children. Education for these students has become an important consideration in curriculum and pedagogy for colleges/universities, state boards of education, school districts, and agencies including NCATE. This is further complicated by the fact that the majority of students entering the teaching profession are White and female (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

In 2006-2007, 105,641 students earned degrees in education (National Center of Educational Statistics). Of these, 83,125 were women, 70,889 were White women, and 18,979 were White men. The leadership of education mirrors the demographics of those earning

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degrees and initial certification in education. In 2007-2008, 175,800 professionals earned Masters' degrees in education. There were 134,870 White/Caucasian degree recipients; 31,104 were White/Caucasian males and 103,766 were White/Caucasian females. Concurrently, 8,491 professionals received Doctoral degrees in education; 5,589 were White/Caucasian with 2,773 White/Caucasian males and 3,683 White/Caucasian female degree recipients. These numbers are staggering next to the increasing numbers of non-White students in America's public schools. These numbers also speak to the limited presence of African Americans as educators in public school settings. Just these numbers alone indicate a potential cultural gap between most educators and students.

As African-American educators working with White teacher/educators who teach diverse student populations, we know it is necessary for our colleagues to gain access to and create understandings of the cultural experiences of African American and Latino/a students. An understanding of these cultural experiences will, at minimum, provide a glimpse of their students' cultural identities while helping them to understand their own; "White Americans also have a cultural identity" (Robinson, 1999, p.88).

While it is clear that cultural identity and cultural experiences alter how individuals view their world (Berry, 2005), this discussion will focus on the ways in which these factors impact teaching praxis. Why is cultural identity and cultural experience important in the teaching practice of African American teacher/educators who will serve diverse student populations (primarily African American students) in school settings? How might the cultural identities and cultural experiences of the African American teacher/educator affect their (future) (African American) students? How might the cultural identity and cultural experience of the teacher/educator affect the students? How might knowledge of their students' cultural identity and cultural experience influence the praxis of the teacher/educator? In what ways does critical race theory (CRT)/critical race feminism (CRF) connect with issues of cultural identity and cultural experience? And why is it important to understand these connections in the context of teaching?

In this article, we will first discuss cultural identity and cultural experience. In this discussion, we will articulate our meanings for cultural identity, cultural experience(s), and cultural gap in the context of this work. Following this will be a discussion on CRT/CRF. Then we will address two questions: (1) In what ways does CRT/CRF connect with issues of cultural identity and cultural experience and (2) in what ways have such connections served the praxis of two African American educators?

Cultural Identity and Cultural Experience

Cultural experience, for the purpose of this work, is defined as events (singularly or collectively engaged) specific to a group of individuals with shared beliefs, values, traditions, customs, practices, and language. Individuals possess a cultural identity, significant way(s) in which a person is defined or defines one self

as connected to culture (customary beliefs, traditions, practices, values and language). Experiences occur within the context of a variety of socio-cultural venues and have the significant potential of shaping one's identities. Our past and present experiences as African American teacher/educators in a suburban school system, at a historically Black university (Berry 2002a) and at a predominantly White, traditional four-year university (Berry, 2009) have continuously shaped our present experiences in a predominantly White institution. As a result, this has re-affirmed our belief that identity is not a static, but rather a socio-dynamic, racialized, and historical construct. Robinson (1999) places identity as "multiple, textured, and converging" (p. 98) pointing out that "race ... alone does not constitute all of one's attitudes, experiences, and cognitions related to the self" (p. 98); however, race can be a dominant identity most influential in our experiences (Robinson 1999). As such, it can inform new experiences.

Robinson (1999) defines identity as "both visible and invisible domains of the self that influence self-construction. They include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and physical and intellectual ability" (p. 85). Taylor (1999) defines cultural identity "as one's understanding of the multilayered, interdependent, and nonsynchronous interaction of social status, language, race, ethnicity, values, and behaviors that permeate and influence nearly all aspects of our lives" (p. 232). All of these factors influence the way we see the world and inform our experiences.

For African Americans, our experiences and identities have served as part of a binary construct in a dichotomous relationship to those identified as White. As "involuntary immigrants" (Castenell & Pinar 1993, p.4), our experiences and identities have taken place solely in socio-cultural venues constructed and dominated by White people, even in those venues solely visibly occupied by African Americans. As African American educators teaching in predominantly White institutions, our race became our dominant identity. But instead of resisting this singularity placed upon us, we have utilized it in performing pedagogy. Race is the dominant factor in the focus of the curriculum we use. Race is the dominant factor regarding the decisions about how we present curriculum (Berry, 2002b). Our genders, ethnicities, sexual orientations are secondary; regardless of class, gender, nationality, language or sexual orientation, race has often surfaced as a dominant factor toward influencing our experiences.¹

For White Americans, experiences and identities have served as the model for all "other" Americans. And although "White Americans also have a racial identity ... it is rare that a White person has an experience that causes them to assess their attitudes about being a racial being" (Robinson 1999, p. 88). It is rare that White Americans have and/or take the opportunity to "address the ways in which their culture influenced their beliefs and actions toward others" (Taylor 1999, p. 242).

School and its primary components/activities—curriculum, teaching, and learning—is a major socio-cultural venue from which our experiences and identities are

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(re)invented, racialized, and remembered (Oakes & Lipton, 2007). That shouldn't be surprising considering that many of us were required to attend school for 12 years of our lives, 180 days each year for approximately six hours each day. For all Americans in school, there is a certain way to be, a certain way to act and react, a certain way to live. However, for African Americans these ways of being and living in this place and space often, if not always, do not coincide with the ways African American students live within their cultural communities. Given what is known about the history of schooling, its connections to notions of assimilation, and the current demographics of the teaching force (Oakes & Lipton, 2007), these students may be experiencing the symptoms of a cultural gap. For the purpose of this work, a *cultural gap* is defined as theoretical, conceptual, and practical disconnects and spaces between the culture (values, traditions, customs, beliefs, etc.) of the learners and the communities from which they come and the educational institutions and the proponents thereof. So, for many of those hours, days, and years, African American students experiencing the cultural gap may be suffering an identity crisis. Our classroom praxis provides opportunities for teacher/educators to investigate ways in which they were able to come to begin to know their students' cultural communities. Teachers whose future teaching practices are affected by their coming to know the cultural identities and experiences of their students may, in turn, have students who are less likely and less often experiencing identity crisis (Ayers, 2001).

Within our cultural communities, African Americans are keenly aware of our contributions to this country. It was the backs, arms, and hands of our ancestors that built this country (Robinson, 2000). Emerging scholarship, oral histories shared at family and community gatherings, informal scholar dialogues, and formal meetings and conferences have enriched our cultural identities (Ladson-Billings, 2001); as such, we create experiences that are invaluable to who we are, our identities.

In this day of increasing numbers of White, mostly female, teachers in public schools, educators must find it imperative to link these experiences to students' school lives in order to strengthen and honor the cultural identities developed, formulated, and affirmed in the cultural communities of their students (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In order to do this, all teacher/educators must come to understand who they are within the socio-cultural venue of school. Maintaining a eurocentric character of school not only denies role models to non-White students but also denies self-understanding to White teachers (Pinar, et. al. 2000). We argue that to teach without knowing your students limits how much you truly know about yourself as teacher and, thus, limits how well you can teach your students (Irvine, 2003). Having the multiple, complex perspectives and experiences of your students as a central part of the classroom curriculum may have the affect of challenging and enhancing what you know and how you know it. Knowing your students means knowing their stories.

And, indeed, there are multiple stories, especially in school stories, for our identities create such multiples. All students/teachers have multiple and intersecting identities in their school stories (Berry, 2009). African American students, indeed,

have multiple stories not only because we exist within multiple and intersecting identities but also because at least one of these identities carries with it the historical burden of oppression. As educators, we are obligated to create spaces where we can gain access to and stand “in the presence of others’ lived experiences” (Garrod, et. al. 1999, p. xvii).

Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Feminism

Critical Race Theory

We subscribe to and advocate CRT and CRF. CRT has been identified as a movement of “a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 2).

The beliefs, practices, and institutions that necessitated the inception of CRT precede the creation of the United States of America. They are imbedded in the foundations of the Constitution that define the federal relationships that permeate various aspect of daily life (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Appropriately, the origins of CRT lie within the legal tradition that interprets the space that exists between principle and practice for the citizenry of the nation. The concept of “citizen” has had the same floating characterization as “race” throughout the short and turbulent history of the United States. The CRT perspective lay hidden in scholarship until the latter portion of the twentieth century, when voices began to emerge with evidence that the token advances of civil rights legislation did not attack the foundations of racism in the United States. In the mid-1970s Derek Bell and Alan Freeman emerge as ushers of this uniquely critical approach to legal and therefore social impact of race within the contexts of everyday experience (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Jennings & Lynn, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Building upon foundations from critical legal studies (CLS), these perspectives held that the token integration advanced by the Civil Rights Movement cemented the racialist foundations of the effects of history on People of Color on an international scale. As more scholars of diverse backgrounds, nationalities, and interests furnished more research, a movement was created that gained momentum over the subsequent decades.

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When considering CRT and the potential utility that it can serve to inform educational research, it is essential to build upon a definition of what it is and how this framework can serve the atonement of our nation and world at large. The primary tenets of CRT are based upon the legal foundations from which the paradigm is spawned. Seeking to expose and address the inequalities that plague the current social and economic spheres, it addresses the ways that disadvantaged people suffer from the legacy of historical practices (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Jennings &

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Lynn, 2005). The literature in educational research related to this specific framework had gained tremendous momentum in recent decades due to the growing plight of disenfranchised students in America's schools. Investigation is carried out through analysis of people and the institutions that display the effects of these trends in a contemporary context.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) assert that race juxtaposed with economic status (property ownership) have worked to define the reality for the benefactors and victims of these racialist paradigms. Larger access to resources, in this case schooling resources, provides the ability to define and perpetuate the ideals that maintain the social order. Research (Berry, 2005; Castenell & Pinar, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Oakes & Lipton, 2007) clearly indicates the ways on which such property ownership and its connections to schooling resources normalize race and racism in the social order. CRT offers voices and perspectives to provide avenues by which the testimony of previously marginalized groups can describe the impact that "race" as a construct has had on their life experience (Delgado, 2000), including schooling. The narratives, stories, and actions of the survivors intertwine to provide a clear account of the past that includes the triumphs and offenses that comprise the "American voice" hidden within the institutions, norms, and biases that have been established by the ruling class. CRT attributes the formation of that class to the ideology of race and the role in play as a factor in socioeconomic contexts.

In the United States and much of the post-mercantilist world, race and ethnicity continues to be the primary indicators of social standing and access to resources (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker & Lynn, 2002). African Americans and other ethnic minorities continue to display significant long-term psychological effects as a result of a need to forge cultural identity that indicates true hegemonic cohesion into mainstream society. CRT has held in the legal system that the very foundations of the policies, trends, practices, and statistics have been contaminated by racial tones and inconsistencies. This perspective becomes critical when these toxins are presented as unbiased and impartial (Parker & Lynn, 2002). The institutions that arose from the contaminated seeds of separatism have grown into the ideological maelstroms, with perspectives of all types competing for the opportunity to proliferate a compartment or facet of learning. The educational system is no exception to this infection of disenfranchisement and serves as a basin of activity related to these historical trends.

Critical Race Feminism

CRT has several basic principles, three of which are most appropriate for this discussion regarding CRF. The first principle asserts that racism is ordinary and normal in American society. Rather than accept the societal and political marginalization placed upon People of Color as identified in CRT, CRF places women of color in the center, rather than the margins, of the discussion, debate, contemplation, reflection, theorizing, research, and praxis of the lived experience as we co-exist in the dominant culture. As an outgrowth of CLS and CRT, it suits the sensibilities

of those who acknowledge, address, and accept Black male experiences as different (CRT) as well as womanhood experiences as different (CFT). CRT and CRF adherents like ourselves utilize narrative or storytelling as counterstories to the master narrative, the dominant discourse. However, unlike CRT adherents, CRF is multidisciplinary as it draws from “writings of women and men who are not legal scholars” (Wing, 1997, p. 5) as evidenced in the social and political writings of Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 1998), bell hooks (1990) and Joy James (1999).

CRF is supportive of and concerned with theory and practice. Adherents of the CRF movement believe abstract theorizing must be supported with actual concerns of the community. Advocates of CRF support a discourse of resistance that centers the voices of Black and Brown students in educational settings.

CRF suits our sensibilities as it addresses all of our intersecting beings: African American, teacher educator, researcher, scholar, spouse, sibling, friend, and more. By permitting ourselves to engage in the ideology of CRF, we can be more free to bring all of who we are into the classroom. By doing so, we can disregard the monolithic discourse of the universal Black wo/man and acknowledge the multi-dimensionality of our personhood.

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But why is CRF important for African American teacher/educators? First, CRF encourages us to acknowledge and accept of our multi-dimensionality as African Americans who are teacher/educators, among other things. As such, we must understand that we bring our whole self(s) and all connected experiences, into the classroom. What we all do gets filtered through these experiences. CRF also acknowledges the importance of storytelling. Educators’ stories, including their stories of school, are important to know in the context of their development as teachers because these stories, these experiences, may influence what they learn and how they learn it as well as what they choose to teach and how they choose to teach as emerging teachers. Making their stories important to the teaching and learning experience also centers, rather than marginalizes, their personhood. CRF advocates for such centering. Through the lenses of CRF, there is the ability to ‘see’ complexities. By viewing the world through such lenses, the complexities of “others” can be “seen” more clearly.

Critical race feminists understand that one’s racial/ethnic appearance does not dictate a singular story about who they are. CRF is a multidisciplinary theory that addresses the intersections of race and gender while acknowledging the multiplicative and multi-dimensionality of being and praxis for women of Color. While advocates of CRF are concerned with theory, praxis is central to this theory; theory and praxis must be a collaboration. CRF theorists strive to center those who are considered socially and politically marginalized in the dominant culture; those whose cultural identities are often placed as other become centralized in time, space, and place. Additionally, adherents of CRF support storytelling or counterstory as a means of understanding multiple positionalities of individuals or groups of individuals,

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particularly those stories of socially and politically marginalized persons living at the intersections of identities. As much as this theory applies to one of us as an African-American female teacher educator and researcher, this also applies to White students. As storytelling is an important part of the first author's work and a key component of hooks' engaged pedagogy, it was decided to centralize the counterstory in the teaching and learning lives of teacher-students as a model for de-marginalizing the lives of their students.

Counterstory

Counterstory, as described by Delgado (2000), is created by the outgroup, the members of the socially marginalized group, aimed to subvert the reality of the dominant group. For socially marginalized groups, this reality centers on a host of presuppositions, commonly held wisdoms, and shared understandings by the dominant group about the outgroup. These presuppositions, wisdoms, and understandings are what Romeo and Stewart (1999) refer to as the master narrative, stories of shared reality that subsume differences and contradictions and narrowly define people and their identities by supporting ideas constructed by the dominant group. These "stories we were taught and teach ourselves about who does what and why" (p. xiv). The essence of an oppressed people will always be found in their narrative voices, and these serve as the inspiration for identity and self-awareness that will share until people forget. Critical race theory and critical race feminism seek to record and affirm the experiences of the past.

Connections: Praxis and Process

Stories and counterstories that represent our identities and experiences are, truly, memoirs (recalled and revealed memories) of our praxis. For the purpose of this work, our praxis lives through bell hooks' notion of engaged pedagogy.

Autobiography/Memoir

Autobiography has served as a tool for knowledge construction within a host of theoretical frameworks within education to include, but not limited to, CRT, CRF, feminist theory, post-colonial issues, and post-structuralist theory. Storytelling forms such as biography, autobiography, life stories, personal narratives, and memoirs are abundant in educational research.

Autobiography, life histories, life narratives, and personal narratives have been used in educational research in a variety of topics (Griffiths, 1995). It has been useful in the examination of teaching practice (Anderson, 1988; Ayers, 2001a; Britzman, 1991; Delpit, 1995; Foster 1997; Gay 2000; Henry, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Miller, 1990; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000), teacher education programs (Knowles & Holt-Reynolds, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000) and students' educational experiences (Anderson, 1988; Cooper, 1989; Garrod, Ward, Robinson, & Kilkenny, 1999; Nieto, 2000). Many of these and other studies have focused on the students' educational experiences in concert with their cultural identity

and experiences. The construction and revealment of a personal story includes a myriad of experiences that are influential in the (re)development/shaping of one's identity.

In our work, the term memoir will be used in lieu of autobiography. Preference for the use of this term is based on two components that precede the telling of one's story: recall and revealment.

Recall, for the purpose of this study, in relationship to memoir focuses on what the writer remembers as well as how well the writer remembers. In memoir, revealment asserts intentional or unintentional selection of what is recorded or told. Memoir, therefore, is what the writer chooses to tell based upon memory.

But, as Ayers (2001b) cautions, memory is a motherfucker. What we recall is purely in context. Memories are not isolated segments that can be pulled out from the emotional, historical, racialized, gendered, spiritual time and space in which they occur. To be able to place all of these factors onto a page and have each and every reader feel the intended impact and receive the intended message would be the mere creation of a miracle. Kelly (1997) provides a cautionary note regarding memoir:

... unproblematic or romantic notions of the power of story and/or the educationally redemptive powers of auto/biography—even where applauded by those whose agendas might appear more radical—must be approached cautiously, for notions are never innocent ... The caveat holds: to tell one story is to silence others; to present one version of self is to withhold other versions of self. (p. 50-51)

Kelly (1997) provides special attention to the use of such memoirs in education by “members of socially marginalized groups” (p. 51). Memoir has provided a means by which such groups can expose and/or reveal social and political oppression from a historical perspective. However, by placing in view a particular self in a prominent position, the writer not only silences another version of self but also potentially essentializes one's identity. As stated earlier, an individual's identity is multiple, intersecting, and socio-dynamic and, as Kelly (1997) clearly recognizes, this creates multiple stories.

Engaged Pedagogy

bell hooks (1994) speaks eloquently about the process of teaching students “in a manner that respects and cares for” (p. 13) their souls as opposed to “a rote, assembly-line approach” (p. 13). In her interpretive approach to hooks' work on engaged pedagogy, Florence (1998) views this respect and caring as a tool toward inclusivity and caring as an acknowledgement and appreciation of difference. Only in this way can “educators ... give students the education they desire and deserve ...” (hooks as cited in Florence 1998, p. 88).

Life experiences, when permitted into the classroom and given voice, can call to task the established or official knowledge (Apple 2000) generated and perpetuated in education. This voice, which hooks speaks of frequently (1984, 1989, 1990,

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1994), has the potential to move professors/teachers from a 'safe' place of lecture and invited response to a place of resistance (Florence, 1998) thereby challenging the "implications of equating white middle/upper class male experience and cultural histories to a national cultural heritage"(Florence, 1998, p. 96).

As a contrast to the 'safe' place of lecture and invited response, hooks (1994) moves to a place of resistance as she espouses an engaged pedagogy: "a progressive, holistic education ... more demanding than critical or feminist pedagogy" (p. 15). hooks advocates an education that goes beyond the classroom (Florence, 1998) and relates to them as whole human beings. Beyer (as cited in Florence, 1998) suggests that this may mean including elements of popular culture in the classroom experience. This facilitates classroom discussion that allows students to interject many facets of their complex lived experiences into the curriculum. From this position, students and professors/teachers can free themselves into an engaged pedagogy that is holistic and progressive incorporating passion, dialogue and interaction.

There are those who disagree. There are those who question and challenge the use of dialogue and interaction in the classroom experience. Ellsworth's (1989) work, which is a critique of critical pedagogy, addresses a need for something more demanding than critical ... pedagogy. In *Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy*, Ellsworth (1989) identifies the need for teachers/teacher-educators to "criticize and transform her or his own understanding in response to the understandings of students" (p. 300). Ellsworth contends that by moving critical pedagogy to lived experiences placed into current reality, teachers and teacher-educators can begin to deconstruct the perceived empowerment gained from such a classroom experience. In this way "students would be empowered by social identities that affirmed their race, class and gender positions ..." (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 300). She seems to suggest that focusing on the understandings of students through their lived experiences detracts from the political singularity of critical pedagogy. In other words, the teacher/teacher-educator is no longer the sole provider of empowerment. The content/material of what is learned becomes affirmed by the students' experiences. Such valuation "redistribute[s] power to students" (p. 306), delineates "the socially constructed and legitimated authority that teachers/professors hold over students" (p. 306) and understands that students' lived experiences provide dimensions of knowledge into the classroom that the teacher/professor could not know "better" than the student. However, "to assert multiple perspectives ... is not to draw away from the distinctive realities and oppressions of any particular group" (p. 323). Creating a space for multiple perspectives is in no way designed to oversimplify or homogenize any one's experiences regarding oppression and conflict in the classroom. Rather, it may facilitate the valuation of multiple ways to experience. hooks' (1994) engaged pedagogy allows for students' lived experiences to facilitate their understandings, thereby creating an understanding for teacher/teacher-educator. Ellsworth and hooks appear to agree on these points.

A key tool in hooks' engaged pedagogy that facilitates this experience is dia-

logue. This is where hooks and Ellsworth distinctly depart from one another. hooks' engaged pedagogy incorporates passions, dialogue and interaction through the entrance of lived experiences. Ellsworth has identified dialogue "as a fundamental imperative of critical pedagogy" (p. 314) with rules that include the assumptions that all members have equal opportunity to speak, "all members respect members' rights to speak and feel safe to speak ..." (p. 314). However, among other problems, she feels that critical pedagogy does not alleviate the historical power of the teacher/professor and thereby can limit the freedom of speech in the classroom setting. hooks does not address this dilemma in her engaged pedagogy in this way. Ellsworth refers to this as a problem of "the students' and professor's asymmetrical positions of difference and privilege" (p. 315). In hooks' engaged pedagogy, there is a failure to address these asymmetrical positions and the issues of difference and privilege (or lack thereof) that accompany them. As a result, what also does not get specifically addressed in hooks' engaged pedagogy is how privilege and difference may silence such dialogue.

However, hooks (1994) does approach this issue differently. Engaged pedagogy warrants the vulnerability of the teacher/professor via revealment of personal lived experiences in connection with the subject. In fact, hooks insist that initial revealment come from the teacher/professor, facilitating movement from that safe place to a place of resistance. In this view of engaged pedagogy, it may be assumed that such revealment of by the teacher/professor is a comfortable position from which to operate in the traditional space of the classroom. This may be true for hooks; however, hooks does not address issues of comfort or ease for others attempting to move into this position. Critical pedagogy, as presented by Ellsworth (1989), presents dialogue as an entrance to multiple perspectives. But critical pedagogy places the responsibility on the students to gain the empowerment as it is assumed that it is freely provided by the teacher. It also places the point of vulnerability on the student as a means of effective dialogue, thus, accentuating the problem as presented by Ellsworth, regarding difference and privilege. In other words, if the student doesn't reveal their oppression, the dialogue, if any, isn't effective. By contrast, hooks' engaged pedagogy insists the teacher/professor initiate and continue to participate in such revealment as a means of effective dialogue. And although there is no guarantee that the teacher/professor acknowledges and relinquishes any privilege, teacher/professor vulnerability via revealment has the potential to shift the power relationship. This has the potential to have a positive effect on how the asymmetrical positions of difference and privilege play out in the classroom. The possibility of change in the power relationship between teacher/professor and student(s) via teacher/professor revealment has the potential to change the way teacher education is conceptualized. In this view of engaged pedagogy, the teacher/professor must be critically thought-full about shifts in power and privilege via vulnerability within the classroom curriculum.

Method: (Counter) Story and Process

Initiation of this work commenced with the authors' development of their educational memoirs, stories of their schooling experiences. Each author independently constructed their memoir as a free write, journaling exercise to give context to the subsequent data collection. The authors were mindful of the challenges of recall and revealment embedded in the construction of memoir. As such, each author read the other's memoir for clarity. Questions were posed to address apparent absences in revealment. The memoirs were then condensed for the purpose of this work.

After the memoirs were condensed, each of the authors collected observational data from their individual classroom environments. As such, the Institutional Review Board deemed their data collection process exempt. The primary author's data collection took place at a small, four-year doctoral granting institution in the southeast region of the United States. The secondary author's data collection took place in a medium sized middle school located in a minority community of a large metropolitan area in the southeast region of the United States. Each author maintained observational field notes of their classroom teaching experiences for a period of 12 weeks. The purpose of the field notes was for both autobiographical/memoir data as well as our engaged pedagogical praxis. Additionally, each author conducted memoing within the field notes. These memos served as writing prompts for the weekly reflective journal entries each author maintained. The purpose of the reflective journal was to provide additional data that would focus on the engaged pedagogical praxis. The significance of the focus on engaged pedagogy is directly related to the significance of teaching based on who students are (cultural identity).

To connect our pedagogical praxis with our identities (culturally and professionally), and our students' cultural identities, we analyzed our data using Wolcott's (1994) notion of turn to theory. The authors connected the data to tenets/attributes of critical race theory and critical race feminism.

Matthew

His Story

Matthew spent his early years in a large Midwestern city living with his mother, an educator. Before he was 10 years old, she decided they would relocate to a large city in the southeast region of the United States. While he excelled in academics and sports, socially he was an outsider. He didn't understand the racial norms and dynamics of the region. His academic prowess made him a misfit among his racial peers. His skin color made him an outcast among his academic peers.

As a product of an educator, he found himself continuously questioning the deficit perspectives held in the curriculum about People of Color, particularly in his area of interest: History. As a result, instead of adhering to the prescribed reading assignments given in many of his classes throughout his schooling years, he investi-

gated literature with an Afro-centric focus. Teachers labeled him as “troublesome,” often encouraging him to focus on his athletic prowess.

Even as an undergraduate student at one of the state’s largest universities, he found limited opportunities to access curriculum that focused on the contributions and histories of African American peoples. His frustration regarding the invisible nature of such information increased as he continued through his undergraduate studies. However, as his frustration mounted, his determination to teach young People of Color more about their own histories increased.

His Teaching, in Critical Race Color

One vital aspect of CRT is the importance of storytelling as a part of the teaching, learning and documentation process (Delgado, 2000). It places experiences in context of the sociocultural elements that intrigue, captivate, and inform people. There was a group of sophomores in an inner city school in the southern United States that benefited from the techniques and questions raised by CRT strategies. The school setting was 98% African American, with the last two percentiles being occupied by Latino students. At the onset of the year the students were informed that their class load would consist of “World Literature” and “World History” courses that would satisfy their legislated requirements toward graduation. Both of these courses were presented through a European focus limiting the inclusion of work from the tropical and sub-Saharan world. It was the inspiration of cultural relevance that proved to trump the satisfaction of standard driven completion in the history class that the author taught.

The irony of this particular setting involves the popular context of the time based on a media frenzy that had heightened the historical interests of these African American students in a low income area. The film *300* hit the movies during the summer before and many young men were enthused by the epic narrative approach to the history of the Greek warriors of old. Young descendants of the Youruba, Fulani, Mandingo, and Wolof peoples of Africa were yelling “Sparta” at the top of their voices. This example from popular media was reinforced by the state-mandated curriculum that included objectives on Greek military, art, politics, and academia; African culture was only referenced through vocabulary alone. In literature class these students were required to study the spiritual views of the early Greeks through their mythology and epic tradition that was presented as the origin of all higher human intellectual activity. No reference was provided for African folklore outside of a few stories that were collected from ex-slaves.

As a teacher of African descent in a world studies class where the demographic matched that of the instructor, there was a decision that had to be made as to how these trends would impact the lessons that would be taught for the semester. Enthusiasm for a culture that was not their own has diminished the students’ regard for their own African cultural base. Because the class met during lunchtime, an extra 30 minutes had been built into the schedule for that period for advisement and reading. The executive decision was made by the instructor to read aloud an

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oral rendition of the epic life of Chaka Zulu, the renowned warrior chief who stifled British imperialism in southeastern Africa during the latter eighteenth century. After providing a general abstract of the text, the class democratically consented to the use of their time to listen to this story which was written as an African epic by the Dutch writer Thomas Mofolo.

The story told of the geography of the land and the lifestyle of the people of Bokone. The story captured the students' attention immediately due to the immature act that led to Chaka's conception and life of ridicule as the child of a single mother. Students were able to understand the rage and pain of growing up and dreaming of ways to achieve more in order to manifest their noble destinies. There was amazement in the witches and sense of community that governed social behavior. In the African oral tradition this book was able to connect with African American youth that had not seen or heard of these traditions. The class engaged in discussions before and after each reading in which they asked questions and shared opinions that breathed life back into this story. Students were excited about reading to the class each day; the dramatic parts were acted out by the instructor. As the story unfolds and Chaka meets his downfall, the students begin to write a plan for their future that avoids the fate of this fallen warrior. The young ladies in the class relating to Nandi (Chaka's mother) making a critical mistake began to contemplate the options they foresaw in their own progression into womanhood.

While these connections were being made with bonus time, the formal unit pertaining to Sparta and Greek included sources that shared the counter story that disagreed with the sensationalized image portrayed in films like *300*. The ability to place both European and African culture within geographical contexts was an additional product of the collaborative discussions that the students engaged in. In fact, students even began to prefer discussing these topics based on counter story rather than the prescribed curriculum. The motivation and engagement that those students experienced in the world history class was an accomplishment that demonstrates the implications that CRT has for education. The identification and redefinition of these concepts is a primary tenet of this framework. This redefinition can only be done with an original concept of self. This is the requisite for the creation identity based on concepts learned through connections obtained through relevant and meaningful examples that celebrate ethnic traditions.

Theodorea

Her (Multi-Dimensional) Educational Story

Daughter of a Bajan man and a mixed heritage woman (African, Irish, Cherokee) who self-identified as Black, Theodorea's home life rarely centered on race but often centered on culture (values, traditions, customs, beliefs, language/dialect). While her mother was an educator, both parents placed a high value on education. Yet, Theodorea struggled to discern the social and cultural norms of schooling,

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particularly along racial lines. This excerpt from *The Problem of Being Me* (2002) illustrates the difficulties she experienced:

As I reflect upon my K-12 schooling, it is apparent that I experienced difficulties with peer relationships in environments that were predominantly African American. I believe my parents were aware of my difficulties with these kinds of social interactions, and that served as a major rationale for placing me in integrated school settings. By the time I reached high school, I myself had come to believe that culturally and racially integrated school settings were, overall, better educational environments than homogeneous school settings.

In retrospect, I realize that my limited ability to view the world through the lenses on my African American culture was a serious drawback. I was academically and socially disconnected from the greater part of my identity. I never questioned why the sole African American authors to whom I was exposed were Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes. I never questioned why African American history was discussed only during Black History Month. My social interactions in homogeneous African American settings caused me psychological discomfort. I didn't want to be around all of them, as if they were alien from me. Clearly, the messages my well-intended parents transmitted regarding education and racial integration had been received. They had been attempting to encourage me to befriend people regardless of race and/or socioeconomic status, and I did learn the skills necessary to socialize in the dominant culture. But they failed to provide me with the social capital I needed to interact with homogeneous groups of African American children. I just wasn't comfortable being me among my racial peers.

Her entrance into a historically Black university in the southeastern region of the United States was the affirmation she needed to know, with certainty, that there were many ways to be Black. Her professional life would lead her through many opportunities, rewards, and challenges including her experiences in her doctoral studies (Berry, 2004) that addressed the significance of her multi-dimensional identity. This excerpt from *Why Are These White Women Trying to Run My Life?* (2004) provides a glimpse of the complexities of her experiences:

As a graduate student in a private institution in the U.S. Midwest, I was pleasantly surprised about the number of female scholars in my desired field of study... But as I moved through this program, I discovered that these White women (who articulated that they believed they always meant for the good) wanted me to be like them, and emulation was not my goal. After all, I am a free woman. I have chosen my identity, and I alone will chose to alter it to suit my needs. I recognized my adulthood that is my critical race feminism. Thus, I was resistant to their direction because I discovered that it accepted only the woman of me. I resisted their direction because I discovered I was being asked to choose my womanhood over my Blackness... Their seemingly well-intended direction was not willing to fully accept the intersections of race and gender and all of the multi-dimensionality that lay therein.

As a college professor teaching, researching, and producing scholarship from a CRF perspective, questions continue to arise from students and colleagues about who she is in relationship to her work.

Her (Critically Race Feminist) Teaching Positionality

As a Black woman in a room with mostly White people at a predominantly White, traditional four-year university, I was aware that my ideas, my knowledge, and my very being would be questioned. This is the complicatedness of living with multiple socially marginalized identities. From the first teaching day with these teacher-students, I would be engaged in a balancing act of multiple identities, careful not to lean too far on one side as teacher or on the other side as an African American woman while avoiding schizophrenia; I was living a balanced schizophrenia. I knew I had to tell my stories while listening to their stories while questioning the story (Delgado, 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). I had to be careful not to play into stereotypical representations of womanhood (hooks, 2001; Freidan, 2001) or Blackness (hooks, 1990), fearing the normalization of racism and sexism living in my classroom. I knew I had to live up to the challenge of being good (Armstrong, 1997). Just like Collins (1990) Black Lady Overachiever, I wanted to be all of who I am while giving all that I had toward the benefit of my teacher-students. To connect my life and my life's work to the lived experiences of the students, I used educational memoir as a catalyst for hooks' notion of engaged pedagogy.

Her Life's Work, In Color: Working with White Female Pre-service Teachers

The first assignment was an educational memoir. "What School Was Like For Me" was designed to provide a launching pad to help the pre-service teaching learn how to connect the lives of their (future) students to the content of a social studies curriculum. It was also designed to provide me with insights about the educational lives of the pre-service teachers. These student/teachers were to recall and reveal their experiences of schooling and I would connect these experiences to the curriculum of the social studies methods course. Prior to the due date of the assignment, I shared "one version of my story" with these students (Berry, 2002b). In *The Problem of Being Me*, I told the story of my multiple identity crises as an African American girl in the multicultural school system of Philadelphia. While this story revealed all of the highs and lows related to my experiences in school, both academically and socially, the students became fixated upon the portion of the story about my second grade teacher, Mrs. O.

While I thought this portion of the story would reveal and re-affirm the necessity for parental involvement and the continued development of the love of reading for young learners, these student/teachers focused on what they believed to be the unfair decisions of a White teacher on a Black student. Race was the central focus of the discussion that followed the reading of this story. Students took sides with some arguing that my mother, the educator, had no right to dictate to the teacher what I should be allowed to read while in school; others argued that the teacher would have allowed me to read anything I wanted if I were White. None of the information regarding the rest of the story seemed to interest the students; my years

in middle school in academically talented classes and my high school years as an emerging musician and activist never entered the conversation.

And then it happened. “Dr. Berry? Do you think most White teachers stereotype Black students? And do Black teachers stereotype White students?” The room fell silent. It was as if everyone were holding their breath, awaiting my response. Immediately, I realized that regardless of my multiple identities and multiple experiences, I was still the Black teacher. It didn’t matter what I did. I was living the engaged pedagogy. I made myself vulnerable. I shared my story, first. I invited dialogue, discussion, and conversation without censorship. I held a terminal degree, had published peer-reviewed journal articles, presented papers, and conducted intense research. I travelled to foreign lands, even living in a foreign country for several years. And yet, it still all boiled down to the fact that I was the Black teacher.

I moved from the front of the classroom to the center of the room. “Yes, and yes,” I responded.

One of the most significant things I learned through these students’ memoirs was that, for many of these student/teachers, I was the first African American person they had as a teacher. While some expressed curiosity and excitement to have this “first” experience, others expressed concern. This realization shed new light on what occurred in the classroom during our discussion about my story. Many of these students had homogenized, monolithic schooling experiences. Their shared experience with me would require more interactions, more dialogue, more discussions, more conversations, more engaged pedagogy.

Re-viewing Our Work through CRT/CRF

Wolcott’s (1994) turn to theory employs researchers to re-view data collected through theoretical lenses. In this case, the authors will address the ways in which CRT and CRF are connected to their work with students. This analysis will focus on three primary areas: (1) normalness and ordinariness of race and racism; (2) storytelling and counterstory; (3) multi-dimensionality.

Normalness and Ordinariness of Race and Racism

In the work illustrated in this article, race plays a significant role for both the educators and the students. For both educators, race played like a familiar theme song of a popular serial television program. You may not know the words, but when you hear the tune you can name the program/show. Race and racism in the context of schooling and education had become familiar to both educators during their own educational experiences. Both educators encountered this phenomenon from teachers and peers. The lessons they learned from these encounters influenced the ways in which they viewed themselves and the world around them. Most significantly, these encounters influenced the ways they chose to engage in teaching, as professionals.

Theodora fully embraces all of the identities she possesses and the multiple ways of being Black—a lesson she learned through her K-16 schooling experi-

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ences. However, as she attempted to teach her students, race became the central way she was identified by her students. It didn't seem to matter that her own story of schooling was fraught with complicatedness and her inability to assimilate with her racial peers. Yet, these experiences are what led her toward embracing critical race feminism as a way of understanding herself and her work.

Matthew's K-20 educational experiences not only embraces notions of multi-dimensionality and but centered the ways in which race and racism permeated through his educational curriculum. His experiences catapulted his desire to center the Black experience through his delivery of the state-mandated curriculum. In doing so, he also honored the cultural identities and popular cultural experiences of his students.

Both educators recognized the challenges they faced through their own schooling experiences and endeavored to propel their intellectual capacity as well as their pedagogical praxis to a space that marginalizes race and racism.

Storytelling and Counterstory

To reveal cultural identity and cultural experiences, CRT/CRF embrace storytelling and counter-storytelling in ways that honors the assumed dominant self as well as multi-dimensionality and intersectionality of self.

Presenting the data in the form of story allows the authors/researchers to honor the African and Caribbean traditions of storytelling as a means to transmitting important messages. Additionally, for both authors/researchers, these stories present counter stories of the teaching and learning experiences in traditional learning environments.

Both stories counter the commonly held wisdoms of curriculum and schooling, the presuppositions about teachers and history, and assumptions about Black teachers and students. For Matthew, it had been commonly accepted in his school and as part of the state curriculum to teach about the history of Greek warfare. For Theodora, it was commonplace for teachers to dictate the abilities and capabilities of their students. Both cases illustrate the kinds of deficit thinking and ideology Delpit (1995) discusses in her scholarship. Such deficit thinking also led to presuppositions about power.

As critical race theorists, we fully understand the ways in which the master narrative repeatedly places forward those in power versus those subsumed by power. Power, oppression, and conflict are central hallmarks of CRT to be challenged in the daily lives of People of Color; it is what makes CRT/CRF critical. Additionally, it is why addressing the normalness and ordinariness of race and racism is central to this theoretical framework's use of counter-storytelling.

Stories and counterstories highlight and center the normalness and ordinariness of race and racism in U.S. education and the marginalization of African-American/Black and Latino/a students and educators (Jennings & Lynn, 2005; Lynn, 2006). In the excerpts Berry provides, counterstory is central toward illustrating the ways in which she has been marginalized as a student. Such marginalization has fuel

the ways in which she desires to educate her students at a predominantly White institution. Her use of hooks' notion of engaged pedagogy centers the students' lived experiences rather than the prescribed curriculum. Matthew's Afro-centric version of the curriculum centers the students' cultural identities with popular culture experiences to make the curriculum relevant. Both educators have constructed subversive, resistant forms of curriculum based on their individual cultural identities and experiences. In doing so, they have constructed their own counterstories of pedagogy.

Multi-Dimensionality

Earlier in this work, the authors acknowledge and articulate that one's racial/ethnic identity does not reveal a singular story. While we must acknowledge the ever-present normalness of race and racism, we must also resist the singular ways we are defined, by ourselves and by society. Derrick Bell's (1992) work on racial realism reminds us of the omni-present nature of race in the United States. Our cultural identities and cultural experiences (as African American/Black, teacher/educator, activists, scholars, etc.) inform our scholarship and our praxis. Our cultural identities and experiences inform how we recall our stories and what we choose to reveal through the curriculums we deliver. These identities and experiences influence the questions and statement we pose as memos in our reflective journals. All of who we are and the ways in which we have moved through, internalized our personal and professional spheres are interwoven and interconnected to our students through our action (pedagogy) and reflection—praxis. When the true and specific meanings of cultural identity and cultural experience are addressed, notions of CRF emerge. CRF fully supports cultural identity, as defined by Taylor (1999). CRF encourages us to acknowledge and accept of our multi-dimensionalities as individuals.

Conclusion

Race and multi-dimensionality of identity are key points in the counterstories presented in this article. For Matthew, his engaged pedagogy approach toward the counterstory of power and strength inside and outside of the Greek realm. In his effort to connect to the realities of his students' lived experience, Matthew seized the opportunity to present a counterstory that was relevant to their cultural identities. This experience also allowed Matthew to understand the multi-dimensional interests of his (mostly) African American students. While appealing to his students' interests in notions of battle and power, Matthew was also able to present a counterstory of Sparta and Greece. Through this connection, he was able to take the next logical step into a counterstory based on the same themes of interest with a focus on racial identity; instead of Sparta and Greece, the story/counterstory featured Africa and the racial commonality of the key figures in the counterstory to the students and their teacher. In this case, the focus of race as one of many identities possessed by teacher and students served as a unifying element in the engaged pedagogy.

For Theodora, the counterstory of her lived experience as a Philadelphia school

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girl was intended to feature issues of multi-dimensionality. It was her hope that the singular identity of race would be avoided in the context of this social studies teacher education classroom. Yet, for her (mostly) White pre-service teachers, race was the pre-existing and constant phenomenon that required their sole attention. In her effort to live an engaged pedagogy, to place her vulnerable and reveal her story first in the context of the curriculum, Theodorea managed to enter into a space that left her with a singular identity. In the final analysis, it was clear that there was/is much work to be done: work for Theodorea to uncover, discover ways in which to make multi-dimensionality of identity more apparent to her students, work to help her students ‘see’ the multi-dimensionality of their (future) students, and work to help all of the educators she encounters to understand the significance of multi-dimensionality of identity in the context of education.

It is not likely that, based on the current demographics of educators in public school settings, that the teaching force in U.S. public schools will become much more diverse than it is right now within the next 10 years. National Center for Educational Statistics statistics make this point clear. So, what happens next? We place the task on the shoulders on ourselves and our colleagues: teachers, teacher educators, and scholars. Many of us have engaged in a myriad of ways to help pre-service and in-service teachers, regardless of race, to connect to students toward the benefit of their education. But there is still much work to be done. In these days of high stakes testing and education mandates, there are many who do not believe that teaching and learning is a collaborative effort between teachers, students, parents, and community members. Our lives and the lives of our students play equally important roles in what is taught and what is learned. Understanding our cultural identities and cultural experiences from a CRT/CRF perspective in the context of the curriculum is one way to make the connection happen.

Note

¹ Although racial identity was placed in the forefront of this research experience, we recognize race, class, gender, nationality, regionality, language, sexual orientation, and ability as intersecting, indivisible identities of self. “. . . Race, class, and gender interact with the processes of identity development . . .” (Murrell, 1999, p. 6). At various times and points of an individual’s life, one or more of these identities are forefronted based on time, space, people, and place. As such, an individual’s life experiences and multiple identities are also connected to others’ lives.

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