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Theodorea Berry
San Jose State University, theodorea.berry@ucf.edu

Michelle Jay

Marvin Lynn
The University of Illinois at Chicago

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Introduction: Thoughts and Ideas on the Intersectionality of Identity

**By Theodorea Regina Berry,
Michelle Jay, & Marvin Lynn**

A Critical Race Narrative of Intersectionality

One of the elements that appear in critical race theory and its subsequent theoretical outgrowths is the element of counterstory or counterstorytelling. Counterstory, as described by Delgado (1999), 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.

This introduction will begin with a counterstory, a critical race narrative of intersectionality, as a means of illustrating one way of understanding the complexities potentially held by those who possess such multidimensional and intersecting identities as race, gender, social

Theodorea Regina Berry is an independent scholar; Michelle Jay is a professor in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and Marvin Lynn is an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. They served as co-guest editors for this issue of the Journal of Educational Foundations.

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class, religion, nationality, and language. The ways in which critical race theory and its outgrowths have, thus far, addressed some of these issues will continue this discussion. Finally, this introduction will provide a glimpse of what is to come in this special issue.

The Counterstory

Two years ago, I traveled to Italy to visit a friend and colleague who, after retiring, decided to become a permanent resident of this country. Our plan was to visit the two universities in her town and one in Rome to discuss the ways in which teacher education programs prepare their candidates to educate their increasing minority student populations. We would, subsequently, travel to Germany to have similar discussions with teacher educators in Frankfurt and Heidelberg. Having lived in Germany for six and a half years during the 1990s, I felt as if I were going home again. Imagine my excitement to have the opportunity to combine three of the things that intrigue me most: issues of race, teacher education, and traveling through Europe. I boarded the plane in mid-March, taking all of my identities and experiences with me.

When I arrived at Rome's Leonardo da Vinci (formerly known as Fiumicino) airport, I was stopped first at passport control. After standing in line for approximately five minutes, I reached the window of a passport officer. I passed my passport through an open slot in the window and the officer picked up my passport, opened it, and greeted me solemnly (in English) without looking up. "Buongiorno," I replied, using the little Italian I knew. He looked up at me and smiled, then looked at my passport photo. "Hello, and welcome to Rome," he said with a smile. After asking me the required questions, he wanted to know if I was staying in Rome.

"Yes, for a few days, then I'm traveling to Perugia and Germany."

"Really? Are you here for business or pleasure?"

"Both."

"I see you have a phone. May I call you? I would like to have dinner with you, if you like."

"I'm meeting a friend at Termini (Rome's main train station). I will be traveling with her while in the continent."

"I will bring a friend for her. Okay?"

"Okay."

I wrote down my cell phone for him and provided instructions for dialing.

"I will await your call. Have a good day."

"Thank you. I will call," he said with a smile.

As I passed through the baggage claim area (possessing only carry-on luggage), I recalled the affinity Italian men have for women of color, especially women with brown complexions. I was momentarily amused and flattered as I continued through the airport toward the train station platform.

When I reached the escalator that provides direct access to the train station,

I stopped to re-adjust the way I was holding my bags to accommodate safe passage up the escalator. Just as I was to step on to the escalator, an Italian man approached me from behind, speaking in Italian and motioning for me to hand him my bags. Immediately, the Philly girl arrived on the scene and looked at him as if he were crazy. After observing the appearance of sincerity upon his face, I decided to allow him to hold my bags. He asked me, in Italian, if I spoke Italian. “Un poco (a little),” I replied. When we reached the top of the escalator, he turned to me and asked, “uno caffè?” I tried to explain to him that someone was waiting for me at Termini but he didn’t appear to understand a word I said. “Okay,” I complied. We walked into a small coffee shop located directly across from the ticket office where he ordered two cappuccinos. When I finished my drink, I picked up my bags. “Grazie, Signore.” I walked to the ticket window and asked the female ticket agent if she spoke English. “Yes,” she replied. “One ticket for Termini, please,” I requested. Just as I requested my ticket, I saw a hand appear between me and the ticket window, sliding a 20 Euro bill through the window. When I turned to see who was standing behind me, I saw the man from the coffee shop, smiling. These gestures of courtesy and kindness would happen several times during my two and a half week stay in Europe.

Later, that evening, my friend and I joined the passport officer, Angelo, and two of his friends for dinner at a traditional Italian restaurant. Their greetings were warm and friendly. I felt a sense of connection when we, collective, marked ourselves with the sign of the cross when we began our dinner prayer. I was intrigued by their knowledge of global issues such as politics and the environment.

During our pasta course, Angelo noticed that I had not talked about my profession. My friend immediately chimes in and provides Angelo with a vitae-like synopsis of my professional career. Angelo and his friends appeared sincerely impressed. Insightfully, Angelo asked, “What is the thing you want to do most in your profession?”

“I want to teach all of my students that our identities and experiences bring value to our work as scholars and educators,” I replied.

“This is good, but all professors do this, no?” Angelo responded.

“Unfortunately, no,” There was a deafening silence at the table as the men looked at me with amazement.

Discussion

As illustrated in this narrative, White European men do not possess traditional ideals of beauty normally maintained by American men. Something about dark skin truly seems to appeal to their notions about beauty. An educated African American woman with the desire and ability to travel to another part of the world is much more intriguing to them than the local Italian woman with blue eyes. It can be easily acknowledged that brown skin and dark hair are features that draw these European men toward women of the African Diaspora. Equally, one can acknowledge the weight of such flattery and attention on the ego and superego. However, such initial

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experiences of this trip can cause one to wonder if these men possessed erotic and, simultaneously, color-lesened notions of race. Women of the African Diaspora raised in a country where race is a central part of its social system may find it difficult to have someone admire the beauty of their skin color without accepting all of the historical and social challenges embedded therein. It's like the White girl who wants the darkest tan possible while maintaining her position on the pedestal.

What these men easily omitted from their consciousness European teacher educators found a necessity to consider when preparing candidates for teaching. Teacher education programs in both Italy and Germany address community relations, culturally responsive parental involvement programs, colonialism, language and cultural linguistics, and immigration issues. Issues of equity and equality are thoroughly embedded into curriculum, pedagogy, and learning. Consideration is given to all aspects of the students' lives simultaneously. Nothing is asked to be checked at the door. Unlike the ways in which White European men view women of color, education in Italy and Germany is understood within the multiple and intersecting issues of identity.

Education in the United States continues to struggle with such issues of equity and equality in connection with race. And, much like White European men, U.S. education barely acknowledges the intersections of race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and language. Scholars like Ladson-Billings (1999), Lynn and Jennings (2005), and Dixson and Rouseau (2006) have made tremendous inroads in the field on these issues.

Critical race theory in education research has called for an in-depth examination of the processes, structures, practices, and policies that create and promote persistent racist and classist inequalities in schooling and education. Such work has made clear the microcosmic nature of schools to U.S. society. The teaching and learning experiences of educators and students of color in the United States have moved much closer to the center from the margins through the appearances of such important scholarship.

While this work is significant, it has become increasingly important to address the educational inequalities and disparities for those whose identities place them in a double or tertiary bind with intersecting identities of race, class, gender and/or sexuality. This requires a multiplicative intersectional analysis that examines the ways in which race, gender, class, sexuality and other axes of marginalization cohere to create a unique set of experiences, understandings, practices and constructs that help to better define the conditions of folks at the intersections (Wing, 1997). Identities are not only multiple and intersecting but also gendered, racial, historical and social constructs (Berry, 2006). We are not only the sum of our parts but also the sum of our experiences. To understand multiplicity and intersectionality of identity means to view the world through multiple and intersecting lenses. In short, nothing is simple.

This special issue is designed to provide multiple critical race conceptual analyses of the educational processes, strategies, structures, and policies for those

whose identities and experiences exist at such intersections. Critical race education scholars with backgrounds in Lat-Crit Theory, Critical Race Pedagogy, Critical Race Feminism, and other genres of Critical Race Theory have submitted articles that define and explain their research and the ways in which it illuminates the links between race, class, gender, and/or sexuality within the context of education. Montoya (2006) asserts the importance of critical legal scholars' influence in middle and high schools toward the benefit of its students. If such is the case, it could be surmised that it is significantly more important for education scholars who espouse critical race theory and its antecedents to bear such influence. "We must hold open the doors of educational opportunity, but then we must transform the classroom experience. I believe we can help create race-conscious and culture-specific curricula and pedagogy that can help keep students of color in school, engage their families in education and public policy debates, and improve their chances of navigating through the system" (Montoya, 2006, p. 1309). I support Montoya's assertion. It is now, however, important for legal and educational scholars to address disparities that impact upon those who bear multiplicative identities. Can someone endure discrimination based on race and gender? Race and sexual orientation? Race and language? Of course. But, should they? Of course not.

Acts of Love, Crimes of Passion

Many educators, PK-20, will state that they believe all students can learn. They will talk about equality in schools, social justice, meeting the needs of all students, respect for diversity, etc. They will say that they care about students. Often, prospective teacher education candidates are heard to say that they want to become teachers because they love children. Likewise, colleagues in the field say that they are passionate about what they do. It brings to mind the words of an old R&B song: "if loving you is wrong, I don't want to be right." But, if what Montoya says is true, education has opened the door but has yet to transform itself. National and state laws and policies have legislated equal opportunity and access to free public education. But, it has not been able to legislate compassion. In short, educational practice and policy has yet to love our children.

The articles in this special issue are works that not only demonstrate acts of love but also crimes of passion committed against/by educators who say they love their students. The issue opens with "Other People's Daughters: Critical Race Feminism and Black Girls' Education," in which Venus E. Evans-Winters and Jennifer Esposito purport that critical race feminism is currently the most useful lens for, "studying, analyzing, critiquing, and celebrating the experiences of African American female students." They argue that the short-sightedness of feminist epistemologies that are primarily concerned with the education of White girls and women, and raced-based epistemologies that are often occupied by the educational barriers experienced by Black boys, necessitates more scholarship that specifically addresses the educational experiences and school processes for African American girls. Drawing on the work

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of critical race scholars in both education and legal studies, the authors map out a case for why critical race feminism, which avoids gender and racial essentialism and calls attention to women of color's multiple, intersecting identities, and thus multiple consciousness, is a particular useful framework for speaking to and representing the experiences of Black girls in educational settings.

Next, Cassandra L. McKay explores the value of critical race praxis in the context adult education. In "Community Education and Critical Race Praxis: The Power of Voice," she explores how blending critical race theory and critical pedagogy created a powerful platform that allowed her research participants, African American community elders, to reclaim their lived experiences in the name of self and community empowerment. McKay opens her piece with an imagined coffee shop conversation between prominent critical scholars, living and deceased, regarding the role of CRT and critical pedagogy in liberatory praxis. This dialogue provides the ideological foundation for contextualizing McKay's efforts to position African American community education as a space for adults to "counter the master narrative," "recover silenced consciousness," and affirm their identities.

In "Examining Education for Latinas/os: A CRT/LatCrit Approach," Erica R. Davila and Ann Aviles de Bradley offer a detailed, yet succinct review of literature on the educational experiences of Latinas/os in the United States. Drawing on CRT and LatCrit as analytical tools, they highlight a number of barriers that have limited Latina/o students' access to quality educational experiences including ethnicity, language, legal status and culture. Their review provides the backdrop for an exploration of the sociopolitical context of educational policy as it pertains to Latina/Latino educational experience in Chicago Public Schools, the third largest school district in the U.S. The authors bring a CRT lens to their examination of four particular areas of education including early childhood education, assessment, bilingual education, and school dropout, attempting to shed light on the ways in which structural inequalities are present in each. The authors end by highlight the importance of community-based organizations who have, and continue to actively challenged the negative educational policies and practices aimed at Latina/o students.

María C. Malagón's "All the Losers Go There: Challenging the Deficit Educational Discourse of Chicano Racialized Masculinity in a Continuation High School" gives voice to the very experiences explicated by Davila and Aviles de Bradley. Drawing on oral history interviews and participatory observations, Malagón examines the educational life trajectories of 11 Chicano male youth enrolled at a continuation high school, and explores how their experiences illuminate the ways in which schools work against the opportunities that facilitate the educational attainment of Chicano male youth. Malagón utilization of a Chicana feminist epistemological framework and a critical race methodology help to frame our understanding of the relationship between the gendered, classed and racialized constructions of Chicano males and their positioning within educational institutions. Malagón argues that bringing these unique epistemological and methodological frameworks together assists her in reclaiming the narratives of her participants as a critical reading-one

that connects their educational life history to historically oppressive structures that have constricted their educational outcomes.

Next, we encounter the intersection of racism and nativism manifested in the lived experience of 10 undocumented Chicana college students. The *testimonios* of their education trajectories, re-presented in Lindsay Pérez Huber's "Using Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Racist Nativism To Explore Intersectionality in the Educational Experiences of Undocumented Chicana College Students," reveal how the complex interactions between race, immigration status, class and gender gave rise to a detrimental educational context in which the racist beliefs of their teachers were tied to "constructions of undocumented immigrants who were perceived as a threat to the well-being of the U.S. and its *native* citizens." Huber demonstrates how using LatCrit and racist nativist frameworks, as well as a critical race grounded theory method, allows us to better appreciate the complexity in understanding educational experiences that occur at the "intersections of oppression."

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