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Faculty of color teaching Critical Race Theory at a PWI: An autoethnography

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Abstract

In this autoethnographic study, the authors use Critical Race Theory to examine their racialized experiences teaching a course on Critical Race Theory. Data were derived from multiple sources, including reflective interviews, journals, and course evaluations. The three authors present narratives and reflections of salient classroom experiences that relate to their roles within the classroom as facilitators, teachers, and race scholars.

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Learning about race and racism in the classroom may be difficult and uncomfortable for many students (Tatum, 1992) as well as faculty (Quaye & Harper, 2007). White students may experience feelings of guilt as they are first exposed to how they have benefited from the system of oppression, while other students might feel helpless and hopeless in the struggle for racial justice. Therefore, teaching about race and racism can be challenging, as faculty have to account for uncomfortable feelings, emotions, and reactions from students, while also being intentional about aligning course content with learning objectives. Faculty members often play the dual roles of counselor and teacher in these situations in order to help students make meaning of their personal experiences while simultaneously teaching them about theory. With skillful guidance and support, students may feel a sense of responsibility to create transformative change within the system of oppression (Kernahan & Davis, 2007).

This paper examines the experiences of three faculty of color teaching a course on race and racism in education over a three-year period. It chronicles the challenges that we faced in anticipation of the course, key moments and interactions with students in the classroom, and reflections on these experiences. It also provides a written account of our experiences as raced and gendered bodies, and the ways these complicated and contentious labels and intersections played out in the classroom environment. Through the examination of our experiences, this study will add to the literature on understanding the challenges that faculty of color face in teaching students about racism and oppression.

This analysis will use Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework to understand our learning and teaching experiences in teaching a graduate-level CRT course at a prestigious East Coast university. Given that we served as investigators within this study as well as participants, this paper serves as a collaborative autoethnography of our challenges, dilemmas, and reflections of being a multicultural teaching team working with a multicultural graduate student population in a context that is often framed as *post-racial (CITATION?)*. While much of the research regarding CRT and education focuses on the use of CRT as a lens to

explain and understand racialized educational contexts (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995), or even how to use CRT as a teaching tool within educational contexts (Stovall, 2006), more research is necessary to understand how race profoundly impacts our positionality as teachers of a course about race, the ways in which students in our courses interacted with us and each other, and our sense of the classroom climate. The goal of this paper is to reflect on our own teaching and learning as a vehicle to help other scholars and teachers be more reflective as they engage in the difficult task of facilitating courses about race.

Literature Review

There is a subset of research that utilizes CRT in understanding the education and training of teachers and other educators. Kohli (2009) used a CRT lens to illustrate how pre-service teachers of color have to navigate different iterations of racism either from the school-based adults they work with, or from the *curricular invisibility* of the experiences and perspectives of people of color in their education coursework. Kohli suggested that pre-service teachers of color have a "wealth of knowledge about race and educational inequality. It is essential that teacher preparation programs utilize this knowledge as a strength and tool in combating racism in schools," (Kohli, 2009, p.245). This study demonstrates this, similar to our experiences in the classroom.

It is also important, given that we, the teaching team members, all identify as people of color teaching at a predominately White institution (PWI), to consider the research that employs a CRT lens to understand the teaching experiences of people of color in higher education settings. In examining student—faculty relationships within the college classroom, McGowan's (2000) research illuminates that with white students and black faculty,

> There appears to be greater incidences of students challenging African-American faculty members' validity, many times aggressively noting minor flaws and stating the exception to each generalization. (p.21)

McGowan's study helps us understand that not only do African-American faculty members face unique challenges in instructing white students, but that these interactions also impact the learning of these students. African-American faculty must focus their energies more on navigating power struggles in the classroom, as opposed to the details and processes of the teaching and learning process. McGowan's study also found that the African-American faculty members in her study benefitted from explicit opportunities to share and debrief these racialized experiences with each other.

Constantine et al. (2008) in a qualitative study of counseling and counseling psychology faculty of color, found that these faculty faced numerous types of racial microaggressions in their professional lives. More specifically, these faculty recounted experiences of being rendered invisible in professional situations where they should have been recognized and acknowledged, while being hypervisible in professional situations where they were unfairly singled out. They also recounted having their expertise and credentials being challenged by fellow faculty, staff, and/or students. And, in addition to receiving inadequate mentorship and also feeling the need to be conscious in terms of how they presented (e.g clothes and speech), many female faculty of color expressed that they could not parse the extent to which the microaggressions they experienced were due to their race or the gender.

Using counterstorytelling as a method, Patton and Catching (2009) showed the racial profiling that African-American faculty faced while teaching at a PWI. The faculty in this study shed light on experiences of receiving less respect from their students compared to White faculty, having to prove their credibility to their students, and having their students interpret constructive criticism from the faculty as personal attacks, among others. All these factors often led to negative evaluations of African American faculty (Patton & Catching, 2009). Despite these challenges, Bower (2002) found faculty of color were overall satisfied with their professional experiences, though the faculty in the study also described experiences of "[i]solation, alienation, overt discrimination by peers and students" (pg. 83).

In a qualitative study on the experiences of women of color in academia, Turner (2002) interviewed 64 faculty members who self-identified as being Asian Pacific American, African American, Native American, and Latina. While Turner did not use CRT as a framework, her research findings shed light on how faculty of color have raced and gendered experiences. Turner found that participants in her study experienced both racism and sexism in the workplace. They experienced difficulty in having to prove that they were capable of doing their jobs. They described feelings of isolation, yet they were hypervisible in that they were often asked to represent "diversity" on committees. In addition, they reported that they were "more likely to have their authority challenged" than their White, male counterparts (p. 83).

The research cited above focuses on how central race and racism is to the learning and teaching process. This research is able to illuminate the challenges of teaching undergraduates as a faculty of color, in curriculum, classroom interactions, and personal microagressions. This body of literature provides a useful grounding for understanding the overt and insidious ways racism can be present in the classroom, played against the backdrop of a "postracial" era, in which CRT poses that the nature of race and racism as somewhat obfuscated, downplayed, or ignored. However, within this landscape, very little attention has been given to the challenges and opportunities associated with teaching a graduate-level CRT course, especially one focused on race and racism. For students at the graduate level, there may be an assumption that these conversations about race and racism have already occurred in previous years of schooling, or that maturity of age and experience would change the classroom dynamics. However, there is little research in this area to challenge these perceptions.

Theoretical Framework

CRT "recognizes that racism is a pervasive and permanent part of American society…challenges dominant claims of objectivity, neutrality, colorblindness, and merit…[and] insists on the recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color in analyzing law and society," (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006, pg. 4). CRT helps illuminate how racism operates in a

context where overtly racist practices and ideologies are no longer deemed acceptable by society at- large. Bonilla-Silva (2003) posits that the current iteration of racism takes the form of colorblind racism where racism is acted out more covertly, through notions of abstract liberalism and the naturalization of *racial* behaviors. CRT is an important framework for us to use as it foregrounds the role of race and racism in contexts where pervasive and overt forms of structural and interpersonal racism are not sanctioned by society. The campus and classroom spaces at this prestigious East Coast University are a great example of such a setting. Much like the academy at-large, this university has a history where the faculty and student body was once dominated by White men, though presently the student body and faculty are much more representative of the society in which it resides.

CRT urges researchers to look beyond the mere extent of the diversity of the faculty, but to also examine deep-seated ideologies, stereotypes, and constructions associated with race to better illuminate how seemingly mundane or behaviors and dispositions can produce deeply inequitable outcomes on the basis of race. Furthermore, CRT urges researchers to recognize and tap into the expertise (through the form of highly racialized lived experiences of individuals) as a means to better understand the processes and products of racism (Solórzano, 1998). In this regard, CRT will help illuminate the ways racism is covertly operating in the mundane, everyday life of a class at East Coast University, by leveraging the expertise of the faculty of color who teach the course.CRT has been used as a theoretical lens to analyze racialized educational contexts and outcomes in both the K-12 and postsecondary educational contexts. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) were among the earliest scholars to apply CRT as a crucial tool to explain racialized educational disparities in the U.S. Ladson-Billings and Tate posit that seemingly *common sense* educational discourses (e.g. framing urban students of color as *at-risk*) and practices (e.g. non-culturally responsive teaching) that obscure or ignore the roles of race make racialized educational disparities difficult to resolve. It also facilitates misguided solutions that often reproduce inequities.

Other researchers have looked at more specific educational circumstances through which they have employed CRT as an analytical lens. Lopez (2002) utilized CRT to show the ways a New York City high school implemented school-wide discipline policies that adversely and disproportionately impacted male Latino students. Stovall (2006) demonstrated how incorporating tenets of CRT, such as, foregrounding the racial realities of his students, leveraging the lived experiences of his students as valid texts, and engaging the interdisciplinary work of the study of race in his teaching of high school students to increase their functional and critical literacies. In the realm of higher education, Harper and Hurtado (2007) researched how students experience campus racial climate on college and university campuses, while Solórzano (1998) utilized CRT to expose the racial and gendered microaggressions that Chicana/o graduate students faced in their institutions.

To explore our experiences as faculty of color teaching a course on race and racism in education, we employ CRT as a theoretical framework, drawing upon much of the research presented in the literature review. Solórzano (1998) defined five tenets of CRT in education that guide our research and emerging analysis: (1) The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (2) The challenge to the dominant ideology, (3) commitment to social justice, (4) centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) a transdisciplinary perspective. Tied closely to the tenet of intersectionality, we also draw upon a differential racialization analysis as an important frame for examining our experiences. Differential racialization is the understanding that “each race has its own origins and ever-evolving history” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012, p. 9). Media portrayals and stereotypes shift and change throughout time as well, and contribute to the varied racialization (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012), For example, during WWII, Japanese Americans were seen as an enemy threat, and the media represented them as such, whereas today, Asian Americans are stereotyped as the “model minority,” immune to racism and upwardly mobile. Understanding differential racialization gives context for the differentiated responses each member of the teaching team received from the students in our course.

CRT allowed us as researchers to acknowledge that race is a normal and endemic in society, and that our own perspectives as racialized actors are real and legitimate forms of knowledge. As instructors for the course, we relied on CRT as our framework in order to question and challenge the ways people of color are discussed and portrayed in the classroom. The tenets provide a lens for understanding and reflecting on our roles as faculty and researchers of color.

Methods, Data Sources, and Data Analysis

The purpose of this study is to understand the challenges that three faculty of color faced while teaching graduate students about CRT over a three-year period. Much can be learned from the experiences of faculty of color who navigate through racialized and gendered encounters in the classroom (Harris & González, 2012). They can share their narratives about the challenges they faced and how they responded to these obstacles. This study is guided by the following research question: What challenges do faculty of color encounter in teaching students about race and racism?

Data presented in this paper were derived from various sources, including reflective interviews, journals, and course evaluations and assessments. We chose autoethnography as the methodological approach for this study as it is aligned with the experiential knowledge tenet of CRT. CRT underscores the importance of people of color in producing knowledge and sharing their experiences through storytelling, testimonies, and narratives (Solórzano, 1998). In particular, Parker (1998) argued that qualitative research be conducted using the experiential knowledge tenet of CRT to better understand race and education.

More specifically, we used a collaborative authoethnographical approach to examine how we collectively reflected on our challenges teaching about race and racism in a graduate course on CRT (Chang, 2008). In addition, we believe that collaborative autoethnography is aligned with the CRT tenet that highlights the knowledge that communities of color possess in making meaning of their own experiences. Chang (2008) suggested that autoethnography is a

useful method for researchers and practitioners in multicultural settings as it uses accessible language, helps those involved engage in reflective exercise to better understand themselves and their context, and it may facilitate cross-cultural collaboration. In addition, scholars of color have found it helpful to use autoethnography as a method for understanding their racialized and gendered experiences as students and faculty within the academy (Chavez, 2012; Espino, Munoz, & Kiyama, 2010; Miller, 2008; Reddick & Saenz, 2012).

We found it useful to use autoethnography to explore our own intersectional identities. Because CRT centers the discussion on race and racism and emphasizes the importance of intersectionality in the experiences of individuals of color, this particular tenet was appropriate in our analysis of our experiences as faculty of color. Similarly, we felt that the concept of differential racialization applied to our experiences in the classroom setting; students placed different meanings and expectations of us based on our gender and racial identities. We, the research and teaching team, consisted of:

- Daren, a Black male faculty member;
- Kim, an Asian American female faculty member; and
- Adrienne, a Cherokee female doctoral teaching fellow.

We all participated in three prior iterations of the course as faculty, teaching fellows, and as a former student. We all engaged in the reflective interviews and journaling about personal experiences, teaching experiences, and challenges within the classroom. Examples of reflective questions include: What was one of the first experiences you had that made you realize that race mattered/matters in your education or education in general? Describe your most useful classroom educational experience around learning/talking about race. Describe your most painful classroom educational experience around learning/talking about race. Members of the research team wrote reflective journals about teachable memorable moments in the classroom during each of the three course iterations.

All of the reflective interview data were transcribed and uploaded to a shared folder. Journal entries and course evaluations and assessments were also uploaded to the shared folder. Chang (2008) suggested ten different strategies for analyzing and interpreting autoethnography data. These include: "(1) search for recurring topics, themes, and patterns; (2) look for cultural themes; (3) identify exceptional occurrences; (4) analyze inclusion and omission; (5) connect the present with the past; (6) analyze relationships between self and others; (7) compare yourself with other people's cases; (8) contextualize broadly; (9) compare with social science constructs and ideas; and (10) frame with theories" (p. 131). The research team analyzed the data based on these strategies to present the findings.

Creswell (2013) and Patton (2002) suggested that triangulation, using different data sources and methods, may make a study more rigorous. Within this study, we used both methodological triangulation and investigator triangulation. Methodological triangulation refers to the multiple sources of data that were collected. For example, we triangulated our own reflections of classroom dynamics with the students' evaluations of the course to strengthen our analysis. Course evaluations underscored the significance of how race and gender contributed to students' perceptions of us. One example shows how students critiqued specific members of the teaching team for keeping track of deadlines based on gender. Another example shows how a faculty member was believed not to be as knowledgeable about racism because of her race. Investigator triangulation refers to the multiple (three) perspectives we had as a research team. Each of us reflected individually and collectively about the students' classroom experiences. Our individual analysis of classroom situations was confirmed by the other two researchers who were witnesses, observers, and participants in these classroom situations. The discussions that we had about our perspectives of classroom experiences helped strengthen the analysis in that we were able to build on each other's assessments of raced and gendered classroom situations. We also ensured dependability and confirmability by keeping research study materials in a central and secure location, so that we could create an audit file (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The

audit file helped ensure that information is accurate and that an external auditor could trace back to how the study was conducted.

Findings

In analyzing the data on how we taught students about race and racism, we present the findings for each of the three research team members under three subheadings: (1) differential racialization and anticipation of classroom dynamics; (2) salient classroom experiences; and (3) reflections on classroom experiences. Each of us navigated the unique race/gender intersectional constructions applied to us by virtue of our self-determined and ascribed racial-gendered identities. Within our research team, both genders were presented as well as three different races. Each of our raced and gendered bodies played a role in our daily interactions with others in society and we also anticipated that the same would be true for our interactions in the classroom. These unique racial/gendered constructions, interactions with students, and ways we made sense of our experiences speak back to the concept of differential racialization. The unique and evolving histories and contemporary contexts of our respective racial communities in the US has led to distinct stereotypes, pre-conceptions, and/or an oppressive "common sense" about who each of us are or aren't as faculty members, much less as people who have relevant experience to talk about race or racism. We also reflected both individually and collectively on the three years of the course, identifying specific instances and moments in the classroom that stood out as representative of some of the challenges and complications involved in teaching CRT. In the following section, each of us identifies one story in particular that represents a specific challenge or opportunity. Each of us reflected on the opportunities and challenges associated with teaching a course on CRT at a predominantly White institution. Our reflections pertained to how we viewed our positionality and what each of us could or should have done in response to the aforementioned classroom incidents. We also focused on our racial and intersectional identities as teaching staff and how these identities conferred relative amounts of authority as faculty members and/or race scholars. Again, due to issues of

differential racialization, the quality of authority that was conferred upon us turned out to be as distinctly unique as each of our racial/gendered constructions.

Lastly, we reflected on how the classroom incidents focused on the extent to which we should facilitate difficult discussions, as opposed to directing them. We engaged in continuing reflection on our pedagogical practices with regard to our roles in helping students navigate difficult conversations or potentially divisive comments from students. We each espouse pedagogical styles that may be relatively more or less effective in terms of what is necessary for any classes where difficult conversations are likely, much less a course on CRT where we would like to have some fidelity to its core tenets. One of the core tenets of CRT that is particularly pertinent to issues of helping students navigate difficult conversations about race is the tenet related to the centrality of experiential knowledge. In this regard, CRT values and honors the knowledge we all come to acquire and construct via our racialized lived experiences. While we might have different levels of privilege and power based on our multiple identities, we all have expertise to draw upon in thinking about and analyzing issues of race and racism. This expanded notion of expertise lends itself to a relatively *horizontal* and shared sense of authority with regard to navigating conversations about race. Ironically, this *horizontal* sense of authority is often at odds with a more traditional classroom structure where there is a hierarchical or vertical sense of authority. In this vertical model, the faculty holds more authority in driving and framing conversations than the students. The extent to which students come expecting a vertical structure and encounter a horizontal structure can lead to teaching and learning dilemmas for faculty and students alike.

Kim's Story

Differential racialization and anticipation of classroom dynamics. The teaching team anticipated that some of their prior classroom teaching experiences might also manifest itself as they took on the roles of higher education faculty, especially in a course about CRT. They recognized that while students self-selected to take a course on race and racism, the CRT

classroom was still a microcosm of American society, a place where racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression thrive. However, they also believed their experiences might also be different based on the classroom composition consisting of a self-selected and diverse group of students who wished to learn about race and racism.

Kim identifies as a Southeast Asian American woman who comes from a low-income background. She was the first in her immediate family to graduate from high school and the first member on both sides of her family to earn a master's and doctoral degree. Kim reflected that people perceive her as young, inexperienced, and passive based on her self-determined and ascribed identity as an Asian woman,

> One of the things I've noticed is people think they can tell me what's on their minds when I first meet them. That coupled with stereotypes of Asian American women being passive and subservient don't really help things. Because of my size, stature, and how I look, many people always tend to treat me in the same way. It isn't just once, but it's a pattern that I've gotten used to seeing/experiencing over the years.

Kim had prior teaching experiences both in the traditional classroom and in an online setting. She observed that students thought she was young and inexperienced. In addition, when Kim approached issues of race, she was cognizant that students might not acknowledge her as a "race expert." Because of the ways in which Asian Americans are represented as the model minority, there is confusion about whether they are people of color. Hence, Asian Americans might not be seen as a group that experiences or has knowledge about oppression. While these identities may play a role in how Kim interacted with students as an oppressed being, she also recognized that a power dynamic existed within the classroom as she took on an instructor role. Therefore, some students might not have freely expressed how they perceived her. In addition, students may have also been impressed or intimidated by her academic credentials, so they might not have questioned her authority.

Salient classroom experiences – "Day one, year two". Kim relayed a specific instance from the second year of the course, one that seemed to set the tone for the entire semester. On the first day of class, Kim and Adrienne (her first time as the teaching fellow for the course), undertook the task of asking the students to create small groups that would serve as their midterm presentation and final paper groups for the semester. Kim suggested to the students that they organize into groups with other students who shared similar academic and research interests. We, as the teaching team, had decided prior to the first class that students would organize into these groups on the first day of class, so that they could get to know each other and create a sense of community and collaboration from the beginning. As Kim told the class what the groups would be used for throughout the semester, the students instantly began to avoid the directive. In Kim's words, "they resisted, pushed back, and questioned me/us." Adrienne was unsure how to respond to the situation, and said she "had this moment of panic—should I intervene?" She also noted that she felt the students were "really downright rude in protesting the process." She ended up volunteering to create a survey where students could list their interests in research and practice and their times and availability for the semester. A process that Kim reflected, meant "more work for Adrienne," and Adrienne agreed, saying that it took "hours and hours" to compile the final groups, especially when some students only listed a single one-hour time slot per week that they were available to meet outside of class, which made her "resentful and question their commitment to the course and these issues." The entire incident was underscored by the fact that Daren was unable to make the first day of class, meaning that the direction and tone-setting for the semester were coming from Kim and Adrienne alone. Both wondered if things would have gone differently if Daren, as a Black male, would have been in the room that day, particularly as students might perceive Daren to be an authority figure based on looks alone. Kim "understood how important the first class is in setting the tone for the semester," and reflected back about how that first day may have set the tone for a challenging semester of teaching CRT.

Reflections on classroom experiences.

Facilitation vs. direction in a class about race. Kim reflected on the first day of the second year of the course, where she gave students the authority to form their own groups. She encouraged students to pick groups based on the academic interests they discussed in their introductions. As Kim stated, "I tried to make the class structure flexible to go against hierarchical classroom structures. What I realized was that they wanted me to tell them what was and what things should be, which is not aligned with CRT." The students in the course were quite resistant to Kim and Adrienne's instructions to form their own groups. We were somewhat caught off guard by the students' seeming rejection of the authority we had conferred on them. As stated in Kim's quotation, the students' desire for us to take on that authority ran counter to our pedagogical beliefs and values we were attempting to scaffold.

Racialized and intersectional teaching identity. Our respective reflections also made it clear that we could not separate our positionality as the teachers in the course from our racialized and intersectional identities. While the research indicates that teachers of color have to deal with this issue regardless of the content of the coursework they teach, we found these dynamics particularly ironic in a CRT course because of the ways the course dynamics helped reify some of the problematic racial and gendered constructs that CRT helps us interrogate. In reflecting on the resistance she faced from the class when she asked them to form their own groups, Kim felt like her racialized and gendered identities could not be separated from her experience of feeling disenfranchised by her students.

> I feel like maybe that didn't work so well with my own racialized identity of being Asian American and how students perceive me as a woman, an Asian American woman, and the stereotypes that come with it as being passive and subservient. I guess when I taught more like how I am, I think they felt threatened.

Echoing Turner's (2002) findings that female faculty of color faced intersecting marginalities on the bases of race and gender, Kim describes how she felt that the symbolic structures that are

often associated with Asian American woman were an intervening factor in how our students perceived and responded to her instruction. As she describes, because Kim did not acquiesce to her students' desires to be put into groups, she attributed students' resistance as a function of Kim not fitting the passive and subservient stereotypes associated with Asian women.

Racial and intersectional identities confer authority. Depending on their ascribed racialized identities, members of the teaching team talked about ways that their identities may have helped or not helped students confer authority on issues of race and racism. Kim, in her reflection, is concerned that they see Daren, through his ascribed Black male identity, as the authority in matters of understanding and teaching about racism. This stands in contrast to her ascribed racialized identity, where she is framed a model minority and lacking expertise or perspective in experiencing issues of race and racism. This, according to Kim, puts students in a place where they interacted with her differently for different reasons than they do with Daren. Kim states,

> Some students don't think that I experience oppression because I'm Asian American and Asian Americans are the "model minority," and in a way it's like white-washing us and our experiences, which I think when I was a master's student at [institution], there was a White male student who asked the question "Are Asian Americans people of color?" because he was really confused… I also noticed that students will invite Daren, but not necessarily me, to do workshops and stuff.

Here, Kim described a devaluing of her authority based on her experiential knowledge about being racialized and navigating racism. Daren was often approached by students to guest lecture on race and racism, whereas Kim was contacted by students about administrative questions, such as assignment deadlines.

Adrienne's Story

Differential racialization and anticipation of classroom dynamics. Adrienne's racial identity became salient for her during her senior year in high school. Because she grew up in

predominantly White communities and was phenotypically White, all of her White friends assumed that she was like them. While Adrienne had always identified as being Native and spent time with family and other Indians in Oklahoma, her friends were not aware of her race. It was not until the college application process that conversations about affirmative action surfaced and students of color, including herself, were targeted by other students about getting an unfair advantage. Peers, teachers, and her guidance counselor questioned Adrienne about her identity and she always had to defend her identity as Native and enrolled as a Cherokee.

Adrienne discussed her journey coming to terms with her White privilege, and the intersections it has with her Native identity. She wondered how students would perceive her within the CRT classroom and how interactions with students in class might surface based on how she carried herself, the language she used, and the comments she made. Would students perceive her as White even though she self-identified as Native? Would they see her as an authority figure on race because she is phenotypically White? This dynamic along with her role as a teaching fellow for the course also had an impact on the relationship Adrienne had with students. She anticipated that students might not view her as an authority because of her job title, even though she was a member of the teaching team.

Salient classroom experiences – "The gloves". Each year of the course, Adrienne guest lectured about Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) and her doctoral research. It was an opportunity for Adrienne to gain teaching experience and share the work she is passionate about, but also for the students to see the ways CRT and its offshoots can be applied as a theoretical framework for research. Additionally, Adrienne employed examples from *real life* to challenge the students to put the theory into practice, looking at the cases of Indian mascots (such as the Washington Redsk*ns and the Cleveland Indians), and fraternity *Indian* theme parties (such as a recent incident at Harvard University, named *conquistabros and Navajos*). Much of her presentation focuses on the power of images and stereotypes in the continued marginalization of Native peoples. During the second year of the course, she lectured for nearly

an entire three-hour class period, working in discussion activities and showing YouTube clips to illustrate her points. The next week, at the end of the class, one of the Black, male students walked up to Adrienne to ask a question. She looked down at his hands, and was taken aback to see that he was "wearing black mittens with the Redsk*ns logo in the middle." She responded in a *jokey* way, pointing out, "nice gloves, dude." She was surprised when he "didn't look embarrassed, just looked down and said, 'you know, I thought about these after your presentation. But I'm from DC, and I've been a lifelong fan of the team. So for me it's not about the logo, it's the team, you know? I don't even think of it that way.'" Adrienne *backed off* and did not continue to push back about his dismissal of her ideas, though it continued to bother her. Throughout the rest of the semester, he continued to wear the gloves and other forms of Redsk*ns gear as well. Adrienne felt the incident showed a lack of respect for her position as a member of the teaching team, as well as an engrained disrespect for Native peoples and issues, even from other people of color. In addition, it made us, the teaching team, question how we could better reach students and encourage them to be more reflexive about their roles in perpetuating the very systems we were critiquing in the classroom.

Reflections on classroom experiences.

Facilitation vs. direction in a class about race. Adrienne, who was the teaching fellow at the time of the incident that Kim recounted about the first day of the second year of the class, had a similar set of concerns that Kim did, that was compounded by the fact that she was not the teacher of record in the course. As she stated:

> So I had this moment of panic—should I intervene? As a student, I have dealt with the (at times entitled) attitudes of the masters students, and they are used to a lot of handholding and scaffolding in everything. I also didn't want to undermine Kim and the plan we had discussed before class for forming the groups, because I was aware how that would look to the students as well…

Adrienne, in her role of teaching fellow, had the somewhat unique position of sympathizing with the frustrations of students trying to navigate the pedagogical features of the course in its earliest days in the semester, while also being part of the process that determined these pedagogical features. Furthermore, she did not want to *undermine* Kim's authority as the teacher of record in front of their students.

Racialized and intersectional teaching identity. Because of her phenotypic features that are often associated with Whiteness, Adrienne felt she had to make strides to visibly assert her Native American identity, lest folks misinterpret her stances or misidentify her community's histories and legacies. As she put it,

> I felt (internally) with the way I view myself (Native) vs. the way the students perceive me (White), and how that effects the way I carry myself in class, or the comments I'm willing to make, or the language I use. I think I am constantly navigating what it means to (as clichéd as it sounds) be a person of color in a white person's body. While still understanding that my Native identity is rooted in a political identity (i.e., citizenship) rather than a purely racial one—but society has racialized it.

Adrienne's reflection on the ways she felt the need to make her racialized identity visible had a tangible impact on her classroom experience as a teaching fellow. She described how an African American student felt too comfortable wearing gloves with racist imagery and terms on it. Adrienne says, "Reflecting back, I was really taken aback that he could feel so comfortable completely dismissing the three hours I had spent talking about how marginalized Native communities are, and how hurtful the images can be." So even after presenting on Native communities and the challenges they face, Adrienne felt this student did not seem very concerned with the statement he was making. She wonders how much more or less comfortable this student would have been with his choice had Adrienne presented more phenotypically Native. Adrienne also wondered how her ascribed racialized identity might impact the sense of authority she was/is conferred when teaching about issues of race and racism.

Racial and intersectional identities confer authority. Adrienne felt the need to find ways to outwardly present her Native identity as some may ascribe a White racial identity to her on the basis of her phenotypic characteristics. Much like the implications of her encounter with the student who wore the racist gloves, Adrienne was concerned with how her ascribed White racial identity might impact the way students conferred authority upon her as someone who could speak to issues of race and racism from the perspective of a person of color. Adrienne states,

> The whole personal identity piece in the teaching process is something that I'm really interested in, and have been thinking a lot about the ways I chose to strategically highlight my *Nativeness* in the classroom, from introducing myself in Cherokee, to wearing my beaded earrings, to choosing Native musicians to play in class, or even my feathers on my laptop—they're all things I do without thinking, because that's who I am, but I wonder if I was more subtly strategic about displaying those outward signs of identity to give myself *credibility* in teaching a class about race.

Here Adrienne responded directly to this notion of "'credibility' in teaching a class about race" and the ways that she presents as Native might impact this level of *credibility* in teaching about issues of race from the perspectives of people of color.

Daren's Story

Differential racialization and anticipation of classroom dynamics. Daren also thought about how his ascribed racialized identity might impact the ways his students see him as an authority on experiencing and teaching about issues of race and racism. In his case, Daren struggled with balancing how his racialized identity might simultaneously confer and deny him authority as a faculty member and as an expert on race. As Daren expressed,

> …I recognized that whether I liked it or not, I could very likely be conferred *authority* by my positionality as a Black male lead instructor teaching about race that would make being solely a *facilitator* impossible. Not to mention the fact that I've often had to struggle

> with students NOT necessarily conferring the *authority* associated with my positionality as a lead instructor because of the racialized assumptions and perceptions that some students have about me by virtue of being a Black man.

Daren lived in Venezuela when he was three until the age of ten. When he returned to the states and enrolled in the fifth grade, he was placed in lower level courses. Even though he excelled in school, it became a pattern that teachers assumed that he would not be able to perform academically. He stated,

> They ended up making assumptions about what I could do rather than just testing me and figuring it out. They ended up putting me in either the middle to low reading and math group. I think it took my mom or my dad or somebody to come in and rectify them basically… I think it was the first time I realized that the assumption that came with my race in terms of academic or intellectual capabilities.

Similar to Adrienne, Daren also had experiences in which others questioned his college acceptances. He recounted how his guidance counselor assisted him in creating a list of prospective colleges in which to apply. The list showed how the guidance counselor had low expectations of him. When his mom saw the list, she was furious. She took an active role in helping him during the college admissions process. On the last day of school, Daren informed his guidance counselor that he was attending Yale and she expressed shock after she had discouraged him from applying, believing it was a joke.

As a faculty member at a predominantly White institution who teaches in predominantly White and female classrooms, Daren discussed how students experience shock when meeting him on the first day of class. His students often assume he is one of them rather than a faculty member. In his interactions teaching students about race issues in required teacher education courses, he experiences resistance and hostility. He stated that students might misinterpret what he says and they will feel uncomfortable and threatened when they focus on a topic that they do not feel *safe* discussing. However, when a White colleague or guest speaker conveys

similar messages as Daren, students acknowledge and listen to what his White colleagues say. He stated,

> I've had experiences where I've said things in the context of race and education and it just wasn't received. It wasn't heard or it was misinterpreted in a way that made people uncomfortable or, I don't know, even hostile sometimes. And then I've had guest speakers come in who are white women or something like that, and then they say basically the same thing or something similar, and then the message is received.

Salient classroom experiences –"Why are you laughing?". Daren reflected about an incident that occurred during the first year of the course, when the class was a *module*--a half course offered for 7 weeks of the semester. The course was new at the institution, and Daren and Kim (who was technically the Teaching Fellow the first year) were pushing through introductory CRT quickly for the first full class session of the semester, while also still building community and setting norms for classroom discussion. Daren was thoughtful about how the tone he set as a faculty of color, "for what knowledge, stances, or dispositions are valued in the classroom space can be (dis)empowering for students of color," and how his "positionality as a person of color can set the tone for how folks of color and White folks can/should engage in inquiry around/interrogation of issues of race."

Given the context about setting the tone, he reflected on a particular experience that first year:

> We were having a conversation about the nature of racism in the US. We as a class were beginning to explore the ways in which racism has and hasn't changed between the *pre-Civil Rights era* and today's *colorblind racism* era. In the course of our conversation, one of the students in the class, who happened to be Black, asked what it would look like if the university we were at had segregated bathrooms in this current era.

Her question "provoked mild laughter in response." To Daren, "It definitely didn't seem to be a "laughing at" response, where folks were ridiculing the student and her question…But to be fair,

it wasn't clear (as a whole) how one could characterize the nature of the laughter." The student, as well, was unclear about the nature of the laughter, and followed up with, "Wait, what are you all laughing about?" This question sent the classroom into complete silence. Daren continued,

> Whatever people's individual or collective rationales were, we had a Black student who's question opened up the possibility that we were not taking her words or ideas seriously. This possibility is much to consider regardless of what class one is in, much less a class about race. This was further complicated by the fact that among those laughing was yours truly.

He chose to address the discomfort head-on in the classroom, and "speak truthfully" and "explain my laughter." He "laughed at the notion of the school currently having segregated bathrooms as my way of dealing with my discomfort and sadness around the history that shaped this hypothetical example, as well as the current ways that racism occurs at this school."

Reflections on classroom experiences.

Facilitation vs. direction in a class about race. Daren navigated the issue of comfortably laughing at one of his students comments.

> I wanted to create a community of learners (myself, Kim, and the students) who regarded themselves as co-constructors of knowledge, where my role would be facilitator of inquiry. On the other hand, I recognized that whether I liked it or not, I could very likely be conferred *authority* by my positionality as a Black male lead instructor teaching about race that would make being solely a *facilitator* impossible.

Building on the centrality of the experiential knowledge tenet of CRT, Daren would have liked to have laughed and been afforded the same level of scrutiny or critique that other students in the class were under. But recognizing his positionality as the teacher of record in the course, he quickly realized that his students may be looking to him as an authority in a more vertical

authority structure. Daren questioned whether he could be held to a different level of accountability by his students, and if they might be employing the hierarchical authority structure.

In each of the aforementioned cases, the teaching team would have liked to play the role of facilitators instead of directors in helping students navigate difficult conversations around race. Once again, this pedagogical preference was informed by a critical tenet of CRT in which all students are conceived of as having expertise being racialized. In each of these cases, we each deeply questioned whether being a facilitator would be the most useful role for us and our students in this regard. This question of being a facilitator was also hard to divorce from our racialized identities. As Daren stated in the quotation above he "could very likely be conferred 'authority' by his positionality as a Black male lead instructor teaching about race".

Racialized and intersectional teaching identity. When Daren reflected on the ways his interpersonal communication style and emotional coping mechanisms might be misinterpreted or framed incorrectly, he talked about how his racial identity may have informed this process.

> I tend to utilize sarcasm, comedy, and satire to deal with my feelings of discomfort. And this strategy has been useful for me as a way to process my emotions. But as useful as it has been for me, I need to be mindful of how others might (mis)interpret my responses in this regard... What messages might I send (verbal or non-verbal) to my students that go unclarified? How does my positionality as a Black male teacher who teaches about race, and my responses (or lack thereof) to mundane and/or conspicuously provocative comments, impact the ways my students (mis)interpret the ways I need *them* to critically challenge the course texts, the teaching team, or each other?

After having laughed to deal with his own feelings of discomfort that arose upon reflecting on his student's comment, Daren suddenly felt the spotlight on himself as the student asked the members of the class community why they were laughing. This spotlight brought his racial and gendered identity to the forefront of his consciousness, as a fellow Black student was now

asking a racially diverse class community why they were laughing. Daren, like Adrienne stated previously, wondered what messages, with regard to validating this student's experiential knowledge, he was sending to this Black student and the rest of the students in the class by participating in the laughter.

Racial and intersectional identities confer authority. Earlier, Daren and the other members of the teaching team struggled with the challenges and opportunities associated with taking a facilitator role versus a director role in facilitating difficult conversations. Like Ladson-Billings (1996), Daren felt his racialized identity may complicate his desire to be a facilitator because of his fears that his positionality as Black male may cast him as the authority on issues of race and racism, and perhaps silence students' thoughtful and reflective critiques of the course material, the faculty, or each other. These concerns were complicated by the fact that as a younger Black male, Daren feels he is often put in the position of trying to establish a sense of authority that is often conferred to graduate level faculty, which may not be initially granted him by his students who cannot overcome their stereotypes of Black intellectual inferiority.

Teaching Evaluations - Racial and Intersectional Identities Confer Authority

Kim and Daren's concerns about authority (or lack thereof) as "experts" on issues of race were somewhat confirmed by the feedback they received via course evaluations. Based on the CRT concept of differential racialization, students perceived Kim and Daren's knowledge base about race issues differently. In one teaching course evaluation, a student's comments confirm Kim's suspicions that she was not seen as someone who understood issues relating to race and racism.

> Kim was most effective when she spoke to the whole class about her teaching and research interest and background. When we were able to hear her story and where she was coming from, we were more suited to use her as a resource.

Another student echoed this sentiment, stating, "…it [was] hard for me to read her. When she shared her work or anything with the class, it was clear how much deep insight she had to offer

and how many resources she had." In these course evaluations, the students described how Kim was not seen as someone knowledgeable about race throughout the semester. The students only learned that Kim possessed knowledge when she presented on her research on racism and shared her own personal experiences. Only then was she seen as someone who had legitimate knowledge about the topic, whereas students might automatically assume that Daren was an expert based on his phenotype.

Both race and gender played a role in how students perceived the teaching team. While Daren and Kim were co-instructors for the course and Adrienne was the teaching fellow, they approached the teaching and learning process collaboratively. However, students conferred authority over Daren and viewed him as the *authority figure* within the classroom and Kim and Adrienne were seen as support persons. One student stated in the course evaluation, "Daren should consider continuing to build capacity in his teaching team." While this quote demonstrates that students wanted to learn more from Kim and Adrienne, the student also believed that this class *belonged* to Daren. This ran counter to our collaborative approach in establishing our team and teaching a CRT course in which all members, including students, were responsible for it. It is clear both from our reflections as well as the course evaluations that differential racialization took place to create gendered and raced dynamics within the CRT classroom. Interestingly, the course evaluation quotes and our own perceptions of classroom dynamics demonstrate that students played an integral role in the classroom dynamics by their resistance to take more ownership of the course, while also being very willing to use their power to attach specific roles for and perceptions of each teaching team member.

Discussion

In this autoethnography, we discussed how our racial and intersectional identities were central in shaping and framing the educational experiences that led up to their teaching experiences in a CRT course. These experiences, informed by a complex and diffuse societal system of racist ideologies and practices (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Tatum, 1992; Solórzano, 1998),

led these faculty members to anticipate challenges that they would likely face as people of color teaching in an elite graduate school course on race. Our anticipation seemed warranted as we each described ways in which our racial and gendered identities were made salient in specific instances throughout the course. We each anticipated that there were ways in which racism would impact the way our students perceived us and the experiences we had as instructors. Because of differential racialization, the nature of how racism would impact was very different. More specifically, we expressed initial concerns about the amount of authority that would or would not be conferred, as faculty members and as *experts* on race and racism, by their students. While Daren and Kim talked about the ways that Daren may have been conferred too much authority (especially relative to the other two co-faculty members and the students and the various levels of expertise that they bring), Adrienne and Kim expressed that they were denied a proper sense of authority based on their raced and gendered identities. Kim navigated her ascribed racial/gendered identity as a "passive, docile, Asian woman who probably never experienced racism" as she struggled to establish authority as a faculty member and as someone who had content/life expertise about race and racism. Adrienne navigated her phenotypic White female identity as she struggled for authority on issues of race and racism, even as she went out of her way to self-identify as a Cherokee female scholar who employs TribalCrit in her research. Daren, along with the rest of the team, struggled with the ways in which his ascribed identity as "a Black male who has gendered faculty authority and raced content/life authority" challenged his desire to play more of a facilitator role in classroom situations that produce difficult discussions around race. CRT helped foreground the roles of race and racism in ways that to many, including our own students, might seem like a racially equitable space.

In this regard, this research seems consistent with the existing literature (Bower 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1996) that suggests that faculty of color face unique challenges in their roles as faculty/facilitator. Our research along with the aforementioned literature speaks to the ways that

faculty of color's ascribed racial identities impact the ways their students see their competence, expertise, and authority as facilitators and scholars. Furthermore, much like Turner's (2002) findings, we found that intersecting identities such as gender and phenotype, impacted our racialized experiences as faculty of color.

What was particularly profound is the fact that each of us experienced processes and outcomes of racism in a class where we taught our students to explicitly unpack and interrogate race, differential racialization, and racism. The fact that we experienced unique iterations of racism at the hands of our students speaks to the ways that we may need to improve our teaching, because it seems that students may be participating and reifying the racist structures and systems that we aim to teach students to deconstruct and dismantle. Furthermore, the fact that students may have participated in reproducing racism in a class where we sought to help then, at least, identify when covert forms of racism are occurring, speaks to the power of the racist structures and systems that we aim to uncover and deconstruct. It speaks to the extent to which faculty need to help themselves and their students examine how racism operates in real time in seemingly mundane classroom interactions. While each of us identify and were identified with different racial groups and the symbolic constructions that accompany them, our experiences and perceptions of those experiences were greatly impacted by specific intersectional identities. These intersectional identities further informed or re-formed the symbolic constructions of race layered on our teaching experiences and our perceptions of them.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

The findings from this study have several implications for research and practice. The first recommendation for research is to further examine how faculty of color engage in team teaching as related to interpersonal dynamics involved in the process as well as how the process can be truly collaborative. Another recommendation for future research is to examine the experiences of faculty of color using intersectionality and differential racialization lenses to examine not only race and gender, but also delve into other identities, including class, age, and sexual orientation.

This would give us a better understanding of how students perceive faculty who possess certain identities and what identities are normalized. Our last implication for research is to conduct an action research project related to race and racism within the CRT classroom to improve student learning as well as class dynamics.

Similar to the second suggestion for research, faculty of color teaching a CRT course should expose oppression within the classroom, and have candid discussions with students about these issues. One of the tenets of CRT focuses on action and practice, so it is only appropriate for faculty of color to bring these issues to light within their own classes. However, these conversations might also produce negative reactions from students, which may reflect on course evaluations. Therefore, we also recommend that administrators take the findings from this study and others on the experiences of faculty of color with oppression into account during the faculty evaluation process (e.g., tenure, promotion, and review).

Conclusion

This study adds to the literature on the racialized experiences of faculty of color (Patton & Catching, 2009) as well as faculty who experience resistance when teaching about race and racism (Tatum, 2002). It demonstrates that CRT is a useful framework to analyze the raced and gendered experiences of faculty in a classroom setting, and underscores how the theory can be applied to everyday occurrences within a *post-racial* classroom (Waterman, 2013). More specifically, even though the course consisted of a group of self-selected students and faculty who wished to work toward racial justice, the classroom space demonstrated that central tenets of CRT prevailed, that racism was prevalent within its confines, and the ways in which it manifested was different based on racial and intersectional identity membership. This speaks to the importance of the type of reflection , planning, and debriefing that needs to occur for faculty of color to successfully navigate the challenges associated with teaching in higher education, much less in a course on CRT (McGowan, 2000; Turner, 2002).

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