

“Mommy is being Brown bad?”: Critical Race Parenting in a “Post-Race” Era

by

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Abstract

This article looks at the counter-pedagogical processes that may disrupt how children learn about race by positing a pedagogical process called Critical Race Parenting. By drawing upon counterstories of parenting I posit how Critical Race Parenting (CRP) becomes an educational praxis that can engage both parent and child in a mutual process of teaching and learning about race, especially ones that debunk dominant messages about race. And, in doing so, both parents and children have a deeper commitment to racial realism that does not allow for colorblind rhetoric to reign supreme.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, Pedagogy, Parenting

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Introduction: Internalizing Racism and Critical Race Parenting

Using Black and white dolls, the infamous Clark and Clark (1939) study provided interesting findings about how one understands race in the U.S. Of recent, these findings were repeatedly confirmed in the reproduction of the same study. Of notable replication was a 17-year old Bronx teenager who replicated the study in 2006 and yielded the same results (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWyI77Yh1Gg>). Findings, for one, revealed that children learn to internalize dominant messages of race by age three. This is shown when children selected Black dolls as the “bad” ones and white dolls as the “good” ones. Such a finding debunks the oft trope that children are too young to learn about race and therefore should not be taught about race. Secondly, it suggests there was a psychoanalytic aspect of race that needed to be deconstructed. Cheng (2006) argues that when Black children identify the Black dolls as the “bad” ones then later identify themselves with the Black doll they are engaging in a psychological process of self-degradation due to hegemonic whiteness. Plainly, the children learned to believe that being Black is bad and, by virtue of being Black themselves, are then bad too. Fanon (1967) coins this psychosocialization as an inferiority complex that also happens in Black men who are forced under a hegemonic system of white colonial racism. This

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psychosocial process is important in that it alludes to the fact that such internalizations are learnt through a process of socialization and then applied to own sense of self. However, what was not discussed in the doll study is how to prevent children from internalizing negative rhetoric, ideologies, behaviors, and emotions about race. Although one may argue that they are but mere children, my concern as a racially just educator, is what happens to these children, now grown, when they have never had the opportunity to un-learn and re-learn their understandings of race? Notwithstanding the effects of essentially learning the emotionalities and behaviors that uphold racist ideologies, I redirect the attention to education and how it can be a vital source in re-educating these racialized emotionalities and racial misunderstandings. That is, since Freire (2000) argues that education can be a liberatory praxis that can transform oppressive social structures, it then behooves me to look at how educators can use educative tools, like pedagogy and praxis, to begin to deconstruct race, beginning with our own children so that they do not grow up recycling or internalizing dominant messages of race, similar to that of the doll study.

This article looks at the counter-pedagogical processes that may disrupt how children learn about race by positing a pedagogical process called Critical Race Parenting (CRP). For the purposes of this article *CRP is defined as an educational praxis that can engage both parent and child in a mutual process of teaching and learning about race, especially ones that debunk dominant messages about race.* I will do this by methodologically drawing upon critical race theory's methodological approach called counterstories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). This methodological approach is discussed more in depth below. This article revisits my counterstories of parenting and, in doing

so, both parents and children have a deeper commitment to racial realism that does not get allow for colorblind rhetoric to reign supreme. The counterstories will be written so that both children and adults can understand them. In doing so they can be used as teaching tools for other children and parents. The analysis will be written clearly for parents to use, however, the embedded scholarly citations and theoretical framing provides the academy a deeper understanding of the academic contributions of critical race parenting. They should be understood *in toto*.

Although the term parenting is included, I do not assume that such parenting processes only happen between parent and child. Instead, I apply the concept of parenting in a larger sense. That is, just as mothering (Beaubouf-Lafontant, 2005) is seen as a pedagogical way to engage classroom teaching, I too define parenting as a pedagogical way to engage teaching and learning about race. Therefore, one need not be a biological, legal or foster parent to understand the dynamics between adult and child in the process of teaching and learning about race.

Framing Racialized Emotionality in Education

Theorizing where racialized emotions stem from is essential to understand because when educators engage in antiracist teaching practices more often than not strong emotions surface about. Some of these emotions may hinder the dialogue on race or cause students to relish in emotional resistance (see white resistance and hysteria in Rodriguez, 2009). To understand better understand racialized emotions I draw from several scholarly works. First, Thandeka's (1999) concern over how white children are socialized into whiteness by their white parents and white communities and how that impacts their adult attitudes on race is just example of how the socialization and learning

processes of children are relevant to adult behaviors. In fact, Thandeka claims that if white children are taught to be white, which includes feigning colorblindness despite the fact that white children do indeed bear witness to race, it then produces within them a sense of white ethnic shame because they are, as she suggests, “living a lie” (p. 34). This becomes a grave matter to education because when these “shamed” individuals enroll into teacher education programs and claim to do so in order to “give back” to students of color in urban schools, they do so with their “white lie” left intact. Since almost 90% of the U.S. teaching force is white, the process of their own racialized emotionalities are relevant and necessary if they are to eventually claim to be antiracist teachers (see Matias, 2013).

Second, as Ahmed (2013) argues, racialized emotions are expressions set within the confines of structural racism. For example, she draws from Fanon’s (1967) famous line, “Look a Negro” to unveil the emotional interplay between the white child who speaks the phrase out of fear and the Black man who is socialized as someone to be feared. This feeling of fear, as Ahmed points out, is nonetheless an enactment of anti-Black racism under a system of white supremacy, for how can one fear a man walking down a street if there were no racial presumptions and stereotypes to contextualize that fear? Therefore, to better understand how we can engage in antiracist practices we, as antiracist educators and professors, must first deconstruct where these racialize emotionalities stem and manifest.

Theoretical Framing Critical Race Parenting: CRT, Womanism, & Racial Realism

Developing new antiracist pedagogical approaches should not be delivered without a thorough understanding of that which theoretically frames it. Since the field of education is replete with Band-Aid-like teaching strategies that never fully address the underlying problems that give rise to educational dilemmas such as the racial achievement gap or the overrepresentation of Black and Brown boys in special education and/or disciplinary actions, it then behooves the article to provide a formidable theoretical grounding. Doing so, grounds the pedagogy more deeply within the context of education and the complexity of race instead of offering mere teaching tips.

Although I agree with Leonardo (2013) that the study of race must take multidimensional approaches to best understand complex dynamics of race, for the purposes of this paper, I draw mainly from critical race theory (CRT), namely the employment of critical race pedagogy, understanding of racial realism, and debunking majoritarian stories. Drawing on CRT's intersectional tradition, I also undergird the entire analysis with Womanism. These theories, frameworks, and theories of pedagogy will undergird my entire analysis of the counterstories below and, thus, I spend particular length in explicating how I define the theories and how they apply to my conceptualization of critical race parenting. I drew from these specific theories because they acknowledge the following: 1) the existence of race, racism, and white supremacy as an issue that needs educational attention, 2) the complex manifestations of whiteness as a hegemonic force and 3) the maternal, although unlike Walker (1983), I apply the maternal in a larger sense, claiming that fathers and men can, at times, also exhibit maternalism.

Critical Race Theory

CRT has long been described as a theory that although stemmed from legal studies, provides a more complete analysis of race in education (Taylor, Ladson-Billings, and Gillborn (2009). Taylor et al (2009) describes CRT as the following:

a long tradition of resistance to the unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and gendered lines in America, and across the globe, with the support and legitimacy of the legal system which makes possible the perpetuation of the established power relationships of society (p. 1).

Fortuitous is this definition in that it clearly identifies the intersectional dynamics of race, class, and gender while relating it to an overarching power structure. Though seemingly grandiose, these social dynamics that are imbued with power are nonetheless present in the daily lives of people, and felt mainly by people of color. That is, the dynamics of one's identities are an interpellation between the individual identification processes and the social dynamics that identifies them. This can be seen in CRT's conceptualization of the counterstory because, as Solórzano & Yosso (2002) describe, counterstories are "a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (p. 32). Therefore, stories from marginalized identities are *both* intimate, individual experiences *and* social experiences by virtue of the individual's relation to larger social dynamics of race.

Additionally, Ladson-Billings (2009) argues that CRT is "an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction" (p. 19). Meaning, just as CRT provides a framework for acknowledging the intersectional dynamics of race it also has within it the possibility to un-learn dominant messages about race while re-learning racially just ways of living. This is vital in my conceptualization of critical race parenting because although parenting is often seen as processes of individual family units, CRT allows us to re-conceptualize the family unit as

interpellation of individual processes and social processes. That is, as families parent their children they do so with values, traditions, and norms. However, these values, traditions, and norms are, much like racialized emotions above, set within the confines of power structures that influences and shape them in their everyday cultural practices. Plainly, just as Lareau (2000) argues that parenting behaviors are influenced by class, the same can be said for race.

Critical Race Pedagogy

CRT sets the foundation for critical race pedagogy, which is vital in the conceptualization of critical race parenting. Lynn (1999) argues that critical race pedagogy “has the potential to unify existing critical explications of educational phenomena in education and to provide more theoretical grounding and direction for educators who are concerned with issues of racial, ethnic, and gender inequality in the U.S. educational system” (p. 622). However, for the purposes of this paper the education phenomena of youth not only happens in formal K-12 U.S. schools with formal classroom educators. Instead, I acknowledge, like Hughes and Chen (1997), “parents’ racial socialization practices with their children are shaped in part by their racial socialization experiences in their own families of origin” (p. 211). Meaning, socialization practices that teach children about race, otherwise identified as critical pedagogy of race, are also passed down by families inasmuch as they are passed down from teachers, society, and mainstream media. If parents are the first teachers of their children then should not they consider pedagogical ways of teaching their children about race while also learning from them?

Racial Realism

Beyond critical race pedagogy, the notion of racial realism in CRT is also a useful theorization to employ for this study. For example, Bell (1992) uses a parable about a white female character named, Erika, who is a part of a fictitious group called White Citizens for Black Survival. The group has a two pronged commitment 1) racial realism and 2) sheltering and protecting “black people in the event of a black holocaust” (p. 93). Erika’s explanation of racial realism to Professor Bell included four themes.

First, the historical point, that there has been no linear progress in civil rights. American racial history has demonstrated both steady subordination of blacks in one way or another and, if examined closely, a pattern of cyclical progress and cyclical regression.

The second theme is economic. In our battles with racism, we need less discussion of ethics and more discussion of economics--much more. Ideals must not be allowed to obscure the black’s real position in the socioeconomic realm, which happens to be the real indicator of power in this country.

Third, we believe in fulfillment--some might call it salvation--through struggle. We reject any philosophy that insists on measuring life’s success on the achievement of specific goals overlooking the process of living. More affirmatively and as a matter of faith, we believe that, despite the lack of linear progress, there is satisfaction in the struggle itself.

Fourth, and finally, are the few imperatives implicit in racial realism. One is that those who presently battle oppression must consider looking at racism in this realistic way, however unfamiliar and defeatist it may sound; otherwise, black people are bound to repeat with their children what their grandparents suffered (p. 98-99).

It is important I included the entire length of the quotation because racial realism is often misunderstood as defeatist ideology. This quotation shows, at length, the historic and present day racial realities that people of color, specifically Black people, live under. And under these racial conditions Black people, moreover people of color, will continue to recycle the oppressive state of race even amongst their own families if they so refuse to recognize the reality of race. This complexity of race--both described as progress and regression--that surrounds people of color begets the complexity of teaching about that racialized experience to children. That is, how can parents teach about the reality of race and racism to their children if those same parents deny racial realism by

adopting false notion of racial progress? This is the quandary racial realism so sets for the context of critical race parenting.

Womanism

Adhering to CRT's notion of intersectional and transdisciplinary approaches, I also draw from Womanism, with its roots in Black feminism. Walker (1983) poetically merges the creative world with that of the maternal world claiming that "And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read" (p. 240). Meaning, although we, as scholars, writers, and educators, often separate our professions from our families, claiming that they are of separate worlds useless in the articulation of each, they are, in fact, ways in which we can better articulate both. Walker's chapter, "A Writer Because Of, Not In Spite Of, Her Children" describes how Buchi Emecheta dedicated her book, *Second Class Citizen*, to her children and how their "sweet background noises" inspired the fruition of her book. As such, this plausibility of coalescing the maternal and the professional "causes a rethinking of traditional Western ideas about how art is produced" (Walker, 1983, p. 69). In the case of education, educators can rethink the possibility that their cultural practices within their parenting styles can inform the way they teach, especially with regards to race. In fact, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005) applies Womanism in the field of teaching because it adheres to the philosophies of humanly care. In the study, all six African American teachers, credited their approach to caring teaching to their mothers or grandmothers and not that of their teacher education programs. Beauboeuf-Lafontant writes, "When focused on the profession of teaching, Womanism suggests that the power

of the women as teachers may be rooted in their awareness of following in the footsteps of foremothers” (p. 443). Therefore, Womanism has deep implications for how we, as educators, understand how we teach and how we learn. And since parents are the first educators to their children it thus behooves me to employ it here.

Counterstorytelling as Method

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) describe how counterstorytelling is critical race methodology in that it debunks majoritarian stories that are “generate[d] from a legacy of racial privilege” (p. 28) and “distorts and silences the experiences of people of color” (p. 29). Indeed, counterstorytelling “can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform” (p. 32). As such, I strategically employ counterstorytelling to debunk racial norms that presume that either parents of color do not care for their children’s education or are often stereotyped as “bad” parents. In fact, Chapman & Bhopal (2013) argue “Common-sense understandings of school practices have historically painted parents of color as inattentive and non-participatory actors in public school settings. These understandings are based on white middle-class forms of school participation in which ‘good parents’ are seen as people who serve the needs of the school and harmoniously work with educators to provide what teachers and administrators request from them” (p. 563). As such, counterstories become a great way to debunk majoritarian or “common sense” ideologies that presume parents of color do not care for their children.

Gillborn (2010) corroborates this claiming that counterstories, itself, “throw new light on old assumptions” (p. 254). However, Gillborn also notes that “among the advantages of this format is that it sometimes makes critical scholarship accessible to

readers who might not otherwise work through the dry, often boring, tone of traditional academic writing” (p. 254). Since not all parents have access to the language and ideas of the academy I opted to use counterstories to make the pedagogical dynamics inside critical race parenting more accessible to all parents.

Critical Race Parenting in Action

Below are five counterstories drawn from my experiences of raising twins in a proclaimed “post-racial”, post-Obama era while earning tenure at a research university. At the time, I was a single parent. For transparency, I am also a tenure-lined motherscholar of color who researches racism and whiteness in education and continually tries to find ways to pedagogically teach and learn about race. I use the term motherscholar in the same vein as Leonardo’s (2012) coalesced term, raceclass “whose goal is to privilege neither framework and, instead, offers an intersectional, integrated...perspective” (p. 438). Likened to Leonardo, motherscholar, better frames the duality of my identity so articulated in many parent and academic literature (see Evans & Grant, 2009) while also identifying myself as a motherscholar of color to include the dynamics of race and womanhood (see Berry & Mizelle, 2006; Gutierrez y Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012). Each counterstory will be followed by an analysis that draws from the theoretical underpinnings of critical race theory, critical race pedagogy, and racial realism while recognizing that the maternal in Womanism is ever-present in parenting.

Counterstory 1

One afternoon my 7 year old twins (Mateo and Maria) came home from school squealing about Black History Month. Mateo discussed at length that he was excited to do a biography on Jackie Robinson. “Mommy, he was the first African American baseball player,” his eyes wide with bewilderment. He went on to explain what Jackie Robinson has done and how much barriers he broke

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down. Sensing he was understanding the symptom of the problem and not the problem itself, I casually asked, "So why is he the first African American? Did other African Americans not want to play baseball?" Mateo turned to me and gave me a crazy look. "Duh, Mommy, it's because of racism and white supremacy. Whites with whiteness did not like Blacks and didn't want Blacks to play with them." Relieved he was able to articulate the reason behind why "the firsts" are always "the firsts" I turned to Maria to ask her whether or not they talked about racism and white supremacy in class. Maria replied, "A little. You know, Mommy, we can't talk about that to them [her white teachers]." Pushing further, I asked why they could not speak to their teacher, who is a white female, about racism and white supremacy during Black History Month or for that matter, ever. Maria coaxed me to sit down as if she were the mother in this conversation. Then she relayed a story about a young African American boy at her school who called his white teacher a racist. Appalled by the label, the teacher kicked the boy out of class and then sent the boy to the principal. Maria let out a big sigh, looked down, and shook her head. There was a pause. Neither twin spoke. I looked back and forth at each one of them with a look that resembled "and?" Not handling the suspense any longer I blurted, "Well, what happened to the boy?" Like Mateo earlier, Maria looked at me like I was an idiot and patronizingly said, "What do you expect, Mommy? He got in trouble with the principal."

Analysis

Bell's (1992) notion of racial realism undergirds this entire pedagogical moment. Although it is clear that the mother engages in teaching by using pedagogical inquiries to dig deeper into her children's understanding of race, racism, and white supremacy by asking "So why is he the first African American?" she also learns the extent of her children's racial reality. That is, on the one hand, the mother is engaging in critical race parenting in that she acknowledges racial realism, heralding of a few "firsts" cannot equate to racial equity inasmuch as Bell describes a few moments of racial progress is always coupled with moments of racial digressions. As a teacher, she seeks to bestow this realism to her children by implementing Socratic questioning.

On the other hand, however, embedded in the children's response is a racial realism of their own. Mateo clearly describes the impacts of white supremacy and how because of it whites "did not like Blacks and didn't want Blacks to play with them." Here, the mother presses further in her Socratic questioning to understand whether or not such issues were being discussed in class, knowing full well the racial reality of education is that more often than not racism is not discussed in classrooms (see

Sleeter, 2004). After being confirmed of this racial reality of education, Maria teaches her mother another fact of racial realism. Instead of explaining the dynamics outright, Maria opted to employ counter storytelling to explain how race and racism operate inside K-12 schools for urban students of color, even if that urban student of color is the child of a critical race scholar.

Maria's story about the Black boy being sent to the principal's office was an attempt to teach her mother that although the family can adhere to the ideals of racial justice and defy whiteness, they cannot do so when white supremacy surveils and has the power to enact brutalities onto people of color in the world beyond the family home. When the mother inquired what happened to the boy, Maria was flippant by saying "What do you expect, Mommy? He got in trouble and was suspended." Maria's disturbed reaction to her mother's inquiry reveals the complex dynamics of co-constructing racial realities. That is, the mother has taught Maria much about racial realism yet when confronted with a pedagogical moment whereby the children employs critical race parenting to the parent, the mother had to learn that she too has much to learn about racial realism in the lives of children of color. In this pedagogical moment the power dynamics of teaching and learning shifts and thus a more liberatory praxis ensues; one where parent and child both participate equaling in understanding how racial realism impacts their lives.

Counterstory 2

By the age of 4 the twins were exposed to a variety of vocabulary to describe race. They often attended my lectures around the nation and behind strokes on the Ipad still heard my commentaries on racism, whiteness, and emotionality. One day I was stressed out and knowing that the twins were ready for lunch I pulled over to a local McDonald's. It was not the most ideal restaurant but it was a place to feed two hungry 4 years olds. I went up to the counter to order 2 Happy Meals. Being that I have girl and boy twins the clerk immediately put a "boy" toy in one box and a "girl" toy in another. I brought the tray of Happy

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Meals to where the twins were playing in the indoor playground. When the twins arrived to the table they immediately sat down, looked over their boxes, and began taking out the toys. Mateo rolled the Hot Wheels car around a bit before taking a bite of chicken nuggets. It was then I saw my daughter, Maria, take out her Barbie doll and throw it in the trash, plastic wrapped and all. “What are you doing, Maria? Why’d you throw away your doll?” Maria took her time to sit back down. She then took a deep breath and began explaining. “Mama, you know I watch the Barbie cartoon.” I nodded to affirm her. “Well, in those shows they always make the dark-skinned girl be the bad guy. I don’t like that. So I don’t want this doll.” With that, she nonchalantly turned to her chicken nuggets and finished up.

Analysis

In this counterstory Maria employs critical race pedagogy by describing 1) the extent by which she understands the endemic nature of race, 2) how such understanding impacts her self-reflection, and 3) how she chooses to operate under an existing power structure of race. However, unlike critical race pedagogy, this learning and teaching did not happen in the K-12 classroom. Instead, Maria engages in critical race parenting at McDonalds when teaching her mother the decisions she has made for the doll while also displaying her internal learning of race and racism through the resistive responses and action she takes. By doing so she out rightly debunks dominant messages about race. She does this by first letting her mother know that Barbie shows often depict darker-skinned characters as “bad guys.” In doing so, she is reflexive enough to understand that this seemingly innocent depiction of darker-skinned individuals in a cartoon was indeed an extension of a larger racial context in her racial reality. This is particularly true when acknowledging that Maria identifies herself as a person of color and knows that all of her cousins and god brothers are of mixed raced identities who phenotypically cannot claim to be white (e.g., Filipino-Korean, Filipino-Salvadoran, Filipino-Colombian, Korean-Black-White, etc.). Therefore, like the doll study, Maria clearly identifies with darker-skinned individuals, the same individuals that the Barbie shows were often depicting as “bad guys.” In her self reflexivity she must have applied her understanding of race and racism to that of her own identity, and thus rejected

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common applications of characterizing dark-skinned characters as bad. Knowing that this is a power structure for which she has no control over the production of such cartoons, she opts to exercise her power by throwing away the doll.

The mother, observing all this, did not contest Maria's decision, for she knew all too well that this decision came from a deeper understanding of her daughter's own experience with race and racism and how it impacts her. If this mother choose to not engage in critical race parenting whereby she describes the daily racial realism she experiences and how it impacts her to her own children, Maria would not have been able to apply a similar racial analysis to her own life. In fact, the mother often mocks that she once picked up her five year old twins from school and when Maria, asked how was her day, the mother described she had a bad case of battle fatigue, a concept she often discussed with her children. Upon hearing this Maria then asked, "Was your colleagues exerting whiteness today?" Maria had assumed that her mother was experiencing racial battle fatigue instead of gender battle fatigue. Before the mother could answer, Maria furthers her explanation of whiteness by saying, "You know they don't mean to." This story is just another example of how the mother constantly enacts critical race parenting in the daily speech of her child rearing and by doing so, her children were able to extrapolate the key ideas, vocabulary, and concepts to apply to their understanding of their own racial realities.

Additionally, if the mother choose to deny Maria's racial reality by challenging Maria's decision to throw away the doll or by downplaying the importance of characterizing dark-skinned cartoon characters as bad, Maria might not have been able to exercise her power of resistance, which provides Maria a sense of agency (see Solórzano

& Bernal, 2001). Instead, like Thandeka (1999) argues, children would have to submit ipso facto to the power of colorblindness and that, in and of itself, gives rise to the sense of shame one so experiences with race. Particularly, for children of color, like the doll study suggests, they will adopt a denigrated view of themselves. Therefore the dynamics of critical race parenting not only must include a constant discussion of the racial realism the parent experiences, it must also include the racial realism the child experiences. This is of grave importance because if such praxis is to be transformative then both the teacher and learner must switch roles every now and then to co-construct racial understanding while also allowing each other a right to express resistance in the way they see fit to survive and cope with racism.

Counterstory 3

During a volunteer day at my twins' pre-kindergarten classroom, I was helping the teacher cut paper for a class project when a little Latino boy snuck up next to me and asked, "Can you read Chinese?" I smiled but before I could respond the teacher's aide, a white female, jumped out of nowhere and into the conversation. Physically distraught she screamed, "Manny, apologize now! Apologize to Mateo and Maria's mom!" She then looked at me and pleaded, "I'm so sorry. So sorry." She was visibly so distraught that disjointed movement made her scrunchy fall off from her hair. The twins, who were right next to me, overheard the conversation. They were laughing at the misidentification of Chinese. "Manny, say sorry right now" shrieked the teacher's aide. Upon this emotional display Manny looked confused, shocked, and ashamed, yet he also looked as if he was unsure as to why his teacher's aide was acting in such a way. He just stood there almost terrified for doing something he didn't understand why was it wrong. My twins went over to Manny and explained that were Filipino, not Chinese. I then chimed in, "You don't have to say sorry, Manny. Although I wish I could read Chinese, I cannot. You must have saw my face and thought I was Chinese by the way I looked, right?" I calmly asked him. Manny nodded his head and looked at the ground almost ashamed. He was fiddling with his feet, kicking the air. "It's OK, Manny. I get mistaken for Chinese or Mexican all the time, but I'm not. I'm Filipina. I understand and read in English and Spanish." Upon this clarification, the twins giggled and both said, "Ya, see Filipino." Maria grabbed Manny's hand and pulled him towards the floor where they began playing with blocks. All three of them laughed while building a tower and discussing ways to position the blocks. Life resumed for them. However, the aide was stunned. She stood there for a while trying to soak in what had happened. In her expression she looked relieved, bewildered, and highly confused. I, on the other hand, smiled at her and continued cutting my paper. Life resumed for me.

Analysis

In this counterstory the impacts of critical race parenting between parent and child and that of child and parent went outside that sphere of the family members and into the

outside world. Yet, despite its move beyond the confines of the family, it still had a pedagogical praxis of learning and teaching about race. When Manny asked the mother whether or not she could speak Chinese she did not react with white emotionalities. Matias (2013) explains that White emotionalities are racialized emotions that stem from a deep racialization process that often recycle hegemonic whiteness and they can inhabit both whites and people of color in the socialization under a white supremacist society. For example, Matias describes a white female teacher, Hayley, who expresses guilt, shame, sadness, and denial when talking about race and racism; all of which often characterize the common emotionalities displayed within hegemonic whiteness in teacher education.

Applied to this counterstory, instead of jumping into white emotions like shame, guilt, denial, or anger, similar to that of the white teacher aide, the mother acknowledged Manny's racial reality, which still had misunderstandings of Asian Americans as a homogenized group. The fact that the twins laughed at the situation shows a common experiences in the misconception of their racial identities; a misconception that nonetheless influence how they experience their racial reality. In fact, Mateo, whose skin is darker and eyes are wider, is often racially mistaken for Latino whereas his sister is a *chinita* (Tagalog and Spanish for Asian-looking because of more almond shaped eyes) and is often racially mistaken for Chinese. Therefore, their laughter to Manny's misunderstanding of their mother's ethnic identity as a Filipina revealed a shared understanding about racial phenotypes and how racial assumptions and stereotypes can mislabel one's identity.

On a deeper critical race pedagogical level the twins, like critical race pedagogues, understood the endemic nature of race and racism and its constant need to racially categorize people based upon these phenotypes. In fact, beyond mere misidentification these racial phenotypes have had historical consequences. The notion of *passing* bequeathed much more privilege than those who could not. In African American folklore this is characterized as the “brown bag and ruler test” whereby if someone’s skin is lighter than a brown bag and her or his hair is straighter than a ruler, then they would be more likely to pass as white and by being able to pass for white, would have greater access to white privilege. The same can be said for Latino culture in the fact that the nomenclature of *guera* (light skinned, eyes, or hair that can pass for white) is a marker that grants greater access. Therefore racial phenotypes impact socialization in grave ways.

Like stated above, the teaching and learning about race moved beyond the family and into the outside world. When the mother acknowledges Manny’s racial misconception and calmly redirects to the misconception, she teaches Manny, the observing twins, *and* the white teacher aide three things. One, there need not be any shame in recognizing racial difference. Hence, the displays of anxiety by the teacher aide do not serve as the only model for how one must emotionally react to race. Two, that racial assumptions are just that, assumptions, and can often make, as the saying goes, an ass out of you and me. Therefore, it is probably best not to subscribe to them. Additionally, all members got to see how the interplay of racial identity (Asian American) interplays with ethnic identity (Filipina). Three, once the white emotionalities are pushed aside people can actually learn a thing or four about race. And finally,

everyone learned that not all Asian-looking individuals are Chinese and that the homogenization of Asian Americans is as erroneous as assuming all Latinos are Mexican.

Counterstory 4

It was a district wide teacher in service day, which translates to parents that children have no school and must quickly decide on care-giving options. Being that I was a single mom, I had no other choice than to bring my 7 year old twins to campus while I taught my noon college course and hosted office hours. The twins were familiar with the situation and I have often talked to them how they needed to behave in the office building. This particular day the twins were not having it. They had sat quietly throughout a 2 hour college course so by the time we reached office hours they were off the chain. While I was busy talking to college students my twins took turns running down the hallway, laughing loudly throughout the building, disturbing not only faculty offices but also an on-going faculty meeting in one room. Once done with office hours, the twins and I held hands and quickly went to the elevator to head back to the car. During the elevator ride I said, "Your behavior today was unacceptable in terms of whiteness and patriarchy. Why do you think that is?" In the elevator were two white females, presumably staff or faculty, judging by their suits and middle-aged appearance. Maria shamefully replied, "Because patriarchy looks badly on women who bring their kids to work but nicely when men do it." Mateo then added, "Patriarchy makes people think that when men do it they are good dads but when women who do it they're moms who can't control their kids and are not professional." Mateo purposely used the term not professional because he and his sister both attended a talk I once gave about motherscholars entitled, "What do you mean I'm not professional?!: A Motherscholars Navigation Through Academic Racism and Sexism." Out of the corner of my eye I saw the white women smiling as if feeling assured and impressed. I then intersected gender with race by asking, "And what about women who are of color? How does whiteness play a role?" To this, the women stopped smiling. "Well if women of color did it they are seen like that queen thing while white women aren't seen that way," replied Maria. Knowing that she was referring to a previous conversation about race and gender, I replied, "Welfare queen?" Maria and Mateo both nodded. To clarify I explained, "A welfare queen is a racial stereotype that labels mothers of color badly. It assumes that mothers of color, particularly Black mothers, take the government's money without working and that they do not care for their children. This stereotype is not given to white women even when they are the ones who most partake in the welfare program." To this the twins looked like they realized something. I continued, "When people of color, mothers and children, act in ways that are different from white cultural norms, people can use this stereotype to treat us badly." The eyes of the two white women next to us were wide open. "Look" I continued, "it's ok to be kids. It's ok to laugh and run around. But as people of color we need to always be cognizant of how race and gender works because if we don't, we might not know exactly why we are being treated badly and be able to assert ourselves." The twins squeezed my hands and I lifted both arms up to kiss each hand. "It's bigger than us, huh, Mama," said Maria. "Absolutely, *anak* (a Tagalog term of endearment for my child). Because whiteness works to recycle racist stereotypes of people of color we need to be absolutely aware of how it'll be used against us." We exited the elevator on the ground floor and walked towards the faculty parking lot while the two women slowly walked behind us.

Analysis

CRT's intersectional approaches to race, gender, and class provide a more complex framework to deconstruct this counterstory. For one, clearly the mother was applying a multilayered approach to discussing race, gender, and class into the dialogue so that the

twins could see how dynamics change when accounting for all three. She does this when she first asks why might the twins' behavior be perceived as unacceptable in terms of race, specifically whiteness, and gender, specifically, patriarchy? By positing it as a question the twins had to recall their knowledge of how race and gender operate in society while also thinking about the overarching structures that influence how race and gender operate in society. Both twins began with identifying the dynamics of sexism in a patriarchal society. That is, Maria was clear to understand that when men bring their kids to work they are looked upon "nicely" whereas women who do it are looked upon "badly." Mateo corroborates and extends this argument by claiming that women who do this are categorized as unprofessional. This was a choice word for a 7 year old boy. In fact, he said so precisely because he was aware of how it is used in motherscholarship. By doing so, he links what he has learned about women in the academy from his mother's talks to deconstructing how their behavior might reflect on their mother based on gender stereotypes.

However, the discussion does not stop there. The mother then probes by asking the twins to apply their understanding of whiteness and race into their said gendered analysis. At this point the Maria tries to recall her understanding of a racial and gendered stereotype of the Welfare Queen, claiming that if "women of color did it they are seen like that queen thing while white women aren't seen that way." In this sense, Maria clearly understands that although women experience similar gendered dynamics under an overarching system of patriarchy, their experiences will further divert when adding racial stereotypes under an overarching system of white supremacy. The notion of class is

embedded in the Welfare Queen stereotype by virtue of assuming the poverty of mothers of color.

Although, many motherscholars have been in this same predicament of bringing their children to work, especially if they are single motherscholars, more often than not men are praised for their efforts in “babysitting” their own children whereas mothers are not. As Evans & Grant (2009) argue “academic life is predominantly a man’s world” (p. xix) and as such “mothers in the academy stand at a significant disadvantage” (p. xix). This understanding is well understood by the twins, but like Lugo-Lugo’s (2012) asserting that as a Latina faculty member she is also doused with racial stereotypes of being a prostitute, a servant, and a customer-service representative, the twins understood that their own mother could not escape similar racial stereotypes.

In the end both mother and children had a critical race parenting moment when applying their shared understanding about race, class, and gender into their own situations. In fact, the two white women on the elevator listening to the entire conversation also learned how to address such topics with their children. Their initially smiles upon hearing the twins gendered analysis confirmed how pleased they were to see such a display, however their discomfort about the application of racial analysis onto gendered analysis, modeled for them how to push through the discourse.

Counterstory 5

When the verdict of Trayvon Martin was delivered parents, especially parents of color were upset, confused, angry, and scared. It was almost unimaginable that a young 17 year old boy was stalked, beat up, and killed in his own community simply because Black men are often stereotyped as violent and suspicious and thus are subjected to racial profiling. The verdict had parents talking to their kids, particularly for parents of children of color, especially to their boys. I was no different. I asked my 6 year old twins to meet up at Mateo’s room so we can have a dialogue. “What’s up, Mama?” said Maria. “I wanted to talk to you about Trayvon Martin. Do you know who he is?” The twins looked at each other almost ashamed to respond. Finally Mateo said, “Kind of. We heard a little about it.” Surprised by their knowledge of Trayvon, I curiously asked, “Is that right? What did you hear?” The twins explained how they heard he was a black boy who got killed by a cop. Maria shook her head and said, “It makes me feel scared,

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Mama.” Trying to instill a sense of safety to them while validating her emotions I assured their safety while telling the story of Trayvon’s death. Under duress and fear, I then began to explain to Mateo that although people think he is cute now he will grow up as a man of color and in a racist society that can impact his life. I told him that if he was ever to be pulled over by police that he should move slowly and abide. I wasn’t sure if this was the greatest parenting advice but I knew if I didn’t talk to him about it one time or another I would be remiss. Of course, I believe in resisting racist structures but when it came to the lives of my own children I felt overwhelmed. The twins started to giggle over the thought that Mateo would one day be pulled over by police. “Stop it! I’m not joking here. You need to take this seriously because I don’t know if I can protect you if you don’t listen,” I screamed. I was surprised as to how forcefully it came out, as if it was a trapped beast being let out for the first time. To this, the twins froze. They sensed the seriousness and urgency of the matter and quickly became scared. Upon hearing me scream, Maria started crying while Mateo sat there emotionally frozen. I looked at each of them, scared to death that if anything should ever happen to them, I would die myself. I went on but by this time my voice was cracking. “You need to move slowly and always put your hands where they can see them. Don’t make any sudden movements. Do you hear me? None!” I realized as I said these words I was visibly shaking. I tried to clasp my hands together to hide my own fear but as I did, the twins noticed. They sensed I was scared and at this point, Mateo started crying out, “Mommy? Mommy?” I could see he felt the weight of everything on his shoulders and I, as his mother, knew all too well he was scared of whether or not he could remember how to behave so that he can stay alive. It was then I re-realized they were six years old and I rushed over to them to hug them and through my own tears they saw that I was a bit helpless as well. We just sat there hugging each other on Mateo’s bed not sure of what to say or feel. It was then that in between Mateo’s sobs he cried, “But Mommy, what if I need my inhaler?” I froze. I couldn’t respond. I just cried not knowing what advice I could give or how can I, as a parent, protect my child. My heart dropped.

Analysis

Trayvon Martin’s death has huge implications on how we, as parents, addressed race with children, especially if one has children who are darker-skinned boys. Of course, the fear of losing a child in a time where the legal system upheld the legality of racial assumptions was taxing. Out of fear, some parents, responded with “how to” guides for handling situations with cops, like this mother, but eerily, these guides paralleled the “don’t dress slutty if you do not want to be raped” ideology. Therefore, critical race pedagogy because a viable option in how to teach children about race, for understanding the dynamics of race also meant their lives. In this situation the mother responds to a larger social phenomenon about race. That is, instead of sheltering her children from the larger racial realism that plays out in larger society she opts to discuss it. Fortunately, she does because the twins express they have heard about Trayvon Martin’s case; a case that Maria later divulges makes her feel scared. If the mother was to remain silent about the

racial implications of this case, she would have denied a space for Maria to acknowledge her fears. With regards to racialized emotionalities these fear do not surface out of nowhere. Indeed, they stem from observing the racialization processes of people and how a racist society reacts to those racialized identities. Like the doll study, Maria learned that being Black was associated with badness, and that association could kill. In her thought process her feeling of fear was just another example of how children will learn about dominant discourses of race and that if we, as parents, do not discuss it, they may feel isolated in their feelings.

The twins witness their mother's fear, and quickly translate her emotions to the topic with seriousness, so much so they all sit crying. Such a display has both a cathartic and demoralizing effect. That is, on the one hand, the twins and mother have the opportunity to cry over the racial grief felt by this racial tragedy. Such a tragedy is experienced as a racial trauma and if one is ever to heal from a traumatic experience then s/he must address the trauma itself. On the other hand, the twins and the mother realize the demoralizing impact of racism. Their tears both heal and hurt knowing that racism has fatal consequences. The main communication here is emotions but these emotions, much like the common experiences above, are shared among the family. This is where critical race pedagogy is most enacted. Although the pedagogical praxis begins with the mother attempting to speak about Trayvon Martin the objective of the lesson is met most when they share the same emotions as a result of the talk.

The pinnacle of learning and teaching about race in this counterstory peaks when Mateo almost prophetically asks what is he to do if he needs his inhaler. His tears, along with his family's tears, demonstrate that they all acknowledge a racial reality that

recognizes that more often than not people of color are not given the benefit of the doubt. Therefore, something as mere as quickly reaching over to grab one's inhaler becomes a racialized moment, one that can mean death. The mother's inability to respond captures the complexity of how people of color experience racism. In her frozen state, she ponders, in this case, death by gun or asthmatic asphyxiation? Alas, not all critical race parenting has a happy ending, indeed, because it deals with racial realism is it about the struggle of survival. This counterstory does not provide clear answers. It does not reveal a correct way of approaching race dialogue. Nonetheless, it does recognize racial realism in its most raw of states.

Implications: What does this mean for racially just education?

Critical race theory, critical race pedagogy, and Womanism provide a beginning framework to conceptualize and understand how might critical race parenting operate. Such an operation is beneficial for educators, especially those committed to racial justice, in that they show how one can engage in the teaching and learning of race within their own homes. There has been much studies done on how to engage race in the classroom (see hooks, 1994; Tatum, 1997; Pollock, 2008) or in teacher education (Grant & Sleeter, 2006; Solórzano, 1997) but addressing race, in a critical manner, right at home needs more thorough examinations.

The counterstories above reveal how mother and children can engage, co-construct, and acknowledge racial realities through the use of critical race parenting. In applying classroom pedagogical techniques like frontloading vocabulary, the twins were able to articulate their racial realities in ways that did not adhere to dominant colorblind discourses. And, in doing so, they felt, like in the counterstory where Maria threw away

her Barbie doll, a bit empowered to make decisions based upon what they know may hurt their racialized identity. That is, unlike the doll study Maria did not internalize a sense of racial inferiority upon the negative racial depictions of dark-skinned cartoon characters. Instead, she recognized it and decided to resist it by throwing away the doll. In the case where the twins witnessed Manny ask their mother if she could read in Chinese. The shared racial reality that often racially mislabels their ethnic identities was acknowledged. Defying racial assumption to homogenize Asian Americans, the mother was able to teach not only her kids and Manny, but also the teacher aide on how to more appropriately respond to those children who bear witness to racial differences.

The mother, in turn, both taught and learned a lot about race by allowing her children to apply their own racial analyses to the situation. In her assumption that children may not know she was “schooled” so to speak by her own children. You can see this when Maria relays the story of the African American boy who got sent to the office and purposefully left out the ending of that story. She did so assuming both mother and children are fully aware of how white supremacy police behaviors. When the mother asked what happened, Maria gave a concerning look, which connotes to a shared understanding that the mother should have known the boy was suspended.

Critical race parenting has many implications. Too often, teacher educators who train K-12 teachers claim they have not had much experience with race and therefore have trouble teaching race. One aspect of teaching is that modeling pedagogy provides teachers with a great example of how to implement such pedagogy. Critical race parenting offers this modeling. However, further studies need to be done on how this can be applied.

Another implication is that when teachers do not get the chance to practice their pedagogies they are less likely to implement those pedagogies. As such, critical race parenting gives the opportunity for educators to begin practicing how to pedagogical teach and learn about race in a co-constructing manner. For, if as the doll study suggests, race is learnt by age 3, children must begin to verbalize their racial realities and thus, have the space to do so. This is not to say that all practice makes one a perfect critical race pedagogue. However, in order to reach that lofty goal, an educator must begin practicing pedagogy in his or her own lives.

Also, with regards to racialized emotions so described above, critical race parenting provides an opportunity for racially just educators to feel their own emotions about race instead of shoving them under the rug, so to speak. More often than not the teaching and learning of race will surface deeply-rooted racialized emotionalities that are often suppressed when dealing with hegemonic whiteness. By engaging in critical race parenting educators have the opportunity to identify these emotions and become familiar with how they feel. This familiarity will then not be too overwhelming when engaging them in the classroom.

Finally, the doll study revealed much about how children understand race. For white children they have internalized that they are the good dolls. This translates to a sense of righteousness, morality, and normalization. However, for Black children they have internalized that they are the bad dolls, which translates to an internalized sense of inferiority, immorality, and aberration. Notwithstanding this, critical race parenting provides one avenue on how to debunk these dominant discourses of race by teaching and learning with your children the larger dynamics and complexity that influences our lives.

Conclusion: Is being Brown bad?

When I was a child I remember coming home from kindergarten and hopping into the shower to scrub my skin with a steel wool cloth. In my foolishness, I thought that by rubbing off the outer brown layers of my skin I too would become white. However, to blame my 5 year old understanding of race is premature and incomplete. Instead, one must question as to why I felt my brown skin was not good enough. When I dig deeper as to why this came to be, I do recall how my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Watson, treated me. Unlike Joanna, Jolene, and Amanda (all blonde white girls), she never commented on how I was “sweet” or “clean.” Those adjectives were left only to the white students. Instead, I was erroneously put into English as a Second Language classes despite the fact that I spoke English at home and was often told patronizing comments about how surprised my teacher was that I was smart or assumptions of my parent’s educational attainment.

Although I never partook in any doll study I too was raised in a society where white was right and brown was bad. I do remember asking, “Mommy, is being Brown bad?” As disturbing as that may sound, what pains me more is that exact same quandary was once asked by my own children, even when their mother is a critical race scholar herself. In order to break the cycle of internalized racism and to empower my children with the racial knowledge and vocabulary that can better deconstruct, resist, and defy dominant discourse of race, I needed a pedagogy for parenting. I needed critical race parenting. And in the end, this option provided me with children who can, in all my narcissism, education, and training, teach me a thing or two about race.

Special Note:

To racially just parents and children everywhere. May you have the courage to talk and learn about race together.

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