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Reconceptualizing Social Justice at the Intersections from a LatCrit Perspective

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“Our group, guided by Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), challenges a discourse about race that has traditionally been framed within the paradigm of the Black/White binary which depicts race in America as consisting primarily of Black and White racial groups.”

A LatCrit theory of education is a framework that can be used in theorizing about the ways in which education and its structures, processes and discourses affect People of Color, especially in the Latina/o community. LatCrits acknowledge that education operates in contradictory ways with its potential to oppress and marginalize co-existing with its potential to emancipate and empower. LatCrit is conceived as an anti-subordinate and anti-essentialist project that attempts to link theory with praxis, scholarship with teaching and the academy with the community. LatCrit theory is transdisciplinary and draws on many other schools of progressive scholarship. (Solorzano, 1999)

Our group, guided by Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), challenges a discourse about race that has traditionally been framed within the paradigm of the Black/White binary which depicts race in America as consisting primarily of Black and White racial groups. This paradigm suggests that only Black and White races matter for the purpose of discussing race and social policy with regard to race. This excludes other People of Color from participating in discussions about race, and enhancing race-consciousness that allows for political agency. Furthermore, this binary pits minority groups against each other to vie for the privileged position that Blacks occupy in the paradigm as the "racialized and oppressed other." Rather than perpetuate competition for space, we expand the discourse on race to allow the narratives of other People of Color to be heard.

Although started as a LatCrit group, our membership has not been limited to solely Latino/a members. We represent a multiplicity of voices that are products of infinitely varied experiences. We envision ourselves as a coalition that problematizes the myth of majority rule in the American democratic process. This union of margins focuses on building community while conscious of how loud, privileged voices often silence and oppress voices from the margins.

Attempting to understand and articulate our experiences within the margins

compelled us to theoretically conceptualize the structures of domination which impact our lives. Initially, our diverse experiences within, and in relation to, the margins led us each to employ various, distinct and reductive frameworks which privileged one or two theoretical lenses over others in the explanation of oppression. We now choose to employ an analytical framework, intersectionality, which recognizes the need to examine relations of power through multiple lenses, e.g. class, race, gender and sexuality. It is understood that this approach allows us to shift the dominant theoretical lens, or create a more elucidating lens depending on the context, without fully abandoning the power of the other lenses. This approach also has implications for how we define social justice: in order to achieve social justice, one needs to challenge and work to dismantle inequality based on all social constructs.

This session traces the formation of a Latino Critical Race Theory reading group as a site of resistance within the margins of a predominantly White institution of higher education. This group connects the various margins embodied by its members. We will discuss the intersections of race, culture, class, gender and sexuality as they inform and are informed by the experiences of students of color. By focusing on these experiences, we will discuss how the topics, which emanated from our discussions, have informed and transformed our conceptions of relations of power.

PRESENTERS:

Maria Carolina Allas is a multiracial woman from Everywhere, USA who engages in merging theory with praxis. She is a full-time student and middle school teacher. She is a first-year Master's student in the Graduate School of Education at UCLA, in the Social Sciences and Comparative Education Division, specializing in Race and Ethnic Studies. She teaches middle school English and literature in a culturally and ethnically diverse parochial school in Los Angeles. She is interested in a critical race pedagogy that empowers students as agents of transformative change.

Jolynn Asato is a fourth generation Okinawan, Japanese American born and raised in Hawaii. After teaching elementary school for five years in an ethnically diverse school in Los Angeles, she decided to enter the doctoral program in Urban Schooling at UCLA. Her research interests center around how students create identities and the contradictory role of education in this process. She is currently doing research on the effects of Proposition 227, which attempted to end bilingual education on school districts, schools and classrooms.

Alejandro Covarrubias is a doctoral student at the University of California, Los Angeles in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. He has an interest in exploring the role of Agencies of Transformational Resistance within the social-political space created by the intersection of race, class and gender structures of domination, particularly in historically impoverished Chicana/o communities. As the son of immigrant Mexican parents, he was born and raised within the intersection and is committed to transforming the power relations that maintain it.

Karen Kim is a first year graduate student in the School of Education under the division of Social Science and Comparative Education specializing in Race and Ethnic Studies.

She is a one point five generation Korean-American pursuing to teach ESL within the Latina/o community. In the future, she would like to create an ESL curriculum developed around themes concerning educational issues that affect students of color.

Anita Tijerina Revilla is Chicana and was raised by a strong, beautiful Tejana in a working-class home in San Antonio, Texas. In her academic life she has done an interdisciplinary study of the U.S. in the areas of religion, Latin American studies, African American studies, anthropology and education, bilingual and bicultural education, and race and ethnic studies. She has received degrees from Princeton University and Teacher's College. She has also worked for a nonprofit educational research organization dedicated to creating equal opportunities in education for students. Currently, she is working on a doctoral degree at UCLA in the division of Social Sciences and Comparative Education with a specialization in race and ethnic studies.

Liduína Zarate is currently in the process of discovering her voice as a Chicana living in contemporary United States society. She is a fourth generation Mexican American from Watsonville, California. She is a first year Masters student within UCLA's Graduate School of Education. She is in the Social Sciences and Comparative Education division and is specializing in Race and Ethnic Studies in Education. Once she is finished with this program, she is interested in teaching United States History at the secondary school level.