Abstract

Current research in teacher education has turned a gaze toward recruiting students of color into teacher preparation programs. Yet teacher education programs fail to deconstruct the intersectional racial grammar of teacher education to provide meaningful learning experiences for preservice teachers of color, who often endeavor to teach in the very underserved communities of color that educator preparation programs fetishize. Moreover, there is a need to position the recruitment of preservice teachers of color alongside research on first-generation college students, who also tend to be students of color from economically underserved communities. Drawing from critical race theory in education as a conceptual framework, we use an intersectional narrative methodology to foreground how four first-generation women preservice teachers of color—U.S. Black and Latina—navigate the racial grammar of teacher education. Similar to prior studies, findings indicate that racial incongruence underscores preservice teachers’ of color experiences in teacher education.
education programs. Furthermore, students’ experiences speak to how race, class, and gender function together to form a grammar of teacher education that creates barriers of entry for educators of color. In light of our findings, we call for greater attention to discourses of Black and Latinx educator recruitment that consider gender, race, and class within contexts of first-generation college attendees.

Introduction

White women represent a majority of the teacher educator and preservice teacher workforce (Haddix, 2017; Milner, 2012; Milner & Howard, 2013), which has resulted in two interrelated approaches toward addressing racial diversity in teacher education. First, teacher education programs endeavor teacher preparation curriculum to prepare mainly White preservice teachers to teach ethnoracially and linguistically “diverse” students (Dillard, 2019). Yet overall, teacher education curriculum continues to transmit and normalize Whiteness while fetishizing communities of color as Other (Matias, 2016; Matias & Grosland, 2016; Sleeter, 2017). Second, teacher education discourses relevant to racial diversity have shifted toward diversifying the teacher workforce through the preservice educator preparation pipeline (Brown, 2014, 2018; Dillard, 2019; Haddix, 2017). Preservice teachers of color (PSTOC), especially Black and Latinx students, are seen as crucial to this diversification and often serve as the (lone) voice for communities of color in predominantly White teacher education settings (Brown, 2014; Gist, 2017; Haddix, 2017; Santoro, 2015; Sleeter, 2017).

This approach to addressing teacher education’s covenant with Whiteness (Dillard, 2019) fails to deconstruct the racial grammar of teacher education and provide meaningful learning experiences for PSTOC, who frequently endeavor to teach in the same communities of color that educator preparation programs fetishize. Bonilla-Silva (2012, 2015) argued that racial grammar can best be understood as shaping and maintaining dominance in both visible and invisible forms. We argue that the curriculum of teacher education, along with misguided and halfhearted efforts to diversify the preservice preparation pipeline, contributes to a racial grammar or structure of teacher education (Milner & Howard, 2013). We also posit that the racial grammar of teacher education (see Table 1) operates in tandem with broader structures that impact preservice teachers’ experiences, such as field-based participation, certification exams, and programmatic organization (Akiba, Cockrell, Simmons, Han, & Agarwal, 2010; Petchauer, 2012; Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein, & Mayfield, 2012; Sleeter, 2001, 2017). In doing so, we suggest that teacher education (a) functions as a social, political, and economic system that maintains and perpetuates the [oppressive] status quo and (b) systemically and actively reproduces racism along racial, gendered, and class-based lines. It is a racial apparatus that has historically omitted PSTOC, especially Black teachers post–Brown v. Board (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings, 2004), and continues to redirect blame for the paucity of PSTOC on Black and Latinx students’ lack of interest in
the teaching profession. The racial grammar of teacher education ignores the racial, gendered, and class-based structural barriers that often prohibit PSTOC from entering the profession through teacher preparation programs (Milner & Howard, 2013; Milner, Pearman, & McGee, 2013; Sleeter, 2017). The racial grammar of teacher education also omits and actively disregards the dehumanizing and oppressive experiences that might inhibit PSTOC from completing an educator preparation program with their full humanity intact (Endo, 2015; Haddix, 2012; Irizarry, 2011; Kohli, 2009; Meachem, 2000; Wilkins & Lall, 2011).

There is a need to understand teacher education as a fundamentally racist apparatus of a broader educational system that primarily serves and advances (upper-) middle-class White interests. However, there is a need to examine teacher education alongside and as part of its exclusionary dwelling—the university. In this study, we further nuanced the concept of racial grammar and drew from critical race theory (CRT) in education with a focus on intersectionality and counterstorytelling to deepen our understanding of structural racism in teacher education through the perspectives of four first-generation women preservice teachers who self-identify as Black or Latina. Through CRT counterstorytelling (Cook & Dixson, 2013; Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), we sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do first-generation Black and Latina preservice teachers make sense of and navigate the raced, gendered, and class-based racial grammar of teacher education?

2. In what ways is the racial grammar of teacher education incongruent with first-generation Black and Latina preservice teachers’ lived experiences, experiential knowledge, and future teaching goals?

As Haddix (2017) noted, a critique of racial diversity in teacher education “can only happen when teacher education programs leverage the voices and experiences of current teachers of color and students of color” (p. 147). However, as we further detail in the literature review, the “racialized, sexualized, and classed” (Jones, Duncan, Johnson, & Dillard, 2017, p. 74) voices and ontologies of women educators of color are often othered in teacher education (Bower-Phipps, Homa, Albaladejo, Johnson, & Chin-Calubaquib, 2013). We layer the canon of literature relevant to PSTOC in teacher education programs by drawing attention to how these experiences play out for students who are first-generation low-income college students. We also add to the nascent yet growing body of research that underscores how being first-generation low-income might factor into the experiences and ultimate retention of PSTOC. Thus we hope that these counternarratives provide an avenue for further research for examining structural racism in teacher education in tandem with PSTOC’s status as first-generation college students.

Review of Literature

A growing and current body of research has turned a gaze toward teacher education programs’ desire to recruit students of color (Brown, 2014, 2018). Concur-
rently, educational researchers of color have forced that gaze inward, encouraging the teacher education field to consider deep-rooted structural changes to more adequately address the learning needs and professional goals of those students (Brown, 2014; Dillard, 2019; Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011; Milner et al., 2013). Rogers-Ard et al. (2012) detailed how economic exclusion, standardized testing, and racially biased definitions of teacher quality functioned as structural barriers into teacher education. As suggested in their title, “Racial Diversity Sounds Nice; System Transformation? Not So Much” (Rogers-Ard et al., 2012), teacher education as a field is only interested in communicating diversity through visuals such as pamphlets but is unconcerned with what PSTOC both contribute to and experience in teacher preparation programs. Further attention to this matter is warranted given that preservice teachers of color often experience tokenization, dismissal of their perspectives, racialized tropes, and overall silencing (Bower-Phipps et al., 2013; Endo, 2015; Gist, 2017; Irizarry, 2011; Kohli, 2009; Meachem, 2000).

Haddix (2012) conducted a yearlong ethnographic and sociolinguistic study of Black preservice teachers across multiple domains of teacher education: practicum experiences, university-level instruction, and social settings. Findings from Haddix’s (2012) study illustrated that Black preservice teachers are required to be deliberate about how they position themselves and engage with majority White preservice peers and faculty as a mechanism for self-preservation. Similarly, Amos’s (2016) examination of PSTOC’s experiences also highlighted how the racial grammar of teacher education programs makes PSTOC fearful of retaliation and ostracism because the demographic structure alone allows White preservice teachers to impose upon students of color.

For bilingual Latinx preservice teachers, experiences with linguistic discrimination and epistemic and psychic violence are also commonplace, with these attacks often rooted in racialized notions of language and citizenship (Ek, Sanchez, & Quijada Carecer, 2013; Herrera, Morales, Holmes, & Terry, 2012; Irizarry, 2011; A. R. Morales & Shroyer, 2016; Sarmiento-Arribalzaga & Murillo, 2010; Yazan, 2017). Irizarry (2011) drew from CRT and LatCrit to underscore how Latinx preservice students experienced systematic silencing in three ways: through curriculum and pedagogy of teacher education, in social spaces, and as a result of school policies. Gomez, Rodriguez, and Agosto’s (2008) examination of Latina preservice teachers’ life histories concluded that teacher education programs must be more attentive to the intersection of language, culture, class, and race and, in doing so, be more intentional about diversifying teacher educator faculty. The suggestions offered from this research would help to deconstruct the structural barriers that require Latina preservice teachers to channel agency in response to hardships they face in teacher preparation programs (A. R. Morales & Shroyer, 2016).

As we detailed in the introduction, teacher education programs operate under an assumption of Whiteness, particularly with regard to curriculum, which fails to account for the broad range of experiences our students of color already retain
There is an assumed homogeneity in classrooms, such as monolinguality, middle- to upper-class income, or continuing-generation status. There is also an underlying assumption that all students have little to no personal experience with or exposure to issues of diversity in regard to race, class, and other oppressed identities (Brown, 2014; Sleeter, 2001, 2017). There is an assumed homogeneity in classrooms, such as monolinguality, middle- to upper-class income, or continuing-generation status. There is also an underlying assumption that all students have little to no personal experience with or exposure to issues of diversity in regard to race, class, and other oppressed identities (Brown, 2014; Sleeter, 2001). Cheruvu, Souto-Manning, Lenc, and Chin-Calabaquib (2015) conducted a CRT narrative study with four early-childhood preservice teachers of color that spoke to intellectually and socially alienating effects of White normativity (Bonilla-Silva, 2012, 2015) in teacher education programs. Furthermore, course materials habitually neglect epistemologies from communities of color, and consequently, PSTOC find that their perspectives and identities are seldom represented in the curricular materials that are chosen (Bower-Phipps et al., 2013; Mensah & Jackson, 2018).

While the literature is robust in examining the experiences of PSTOC, we know very little about its intersection with first-generation, low-income students (Sarcedo, Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2015). However, researchers have pointed to similar experiences among PSTOC that speak to the literature on first-generation students from low-income backgrounds (Brown, 2014; Kim, Morales, Earl, & Avalos, 2016; Longwell-Grice, Adsitt, Mullins, & Serrata, 2016). As documented with PSTOC, the overall racial grammar of higher education can take shape in a number of ways, particularly for those first-generation students of color who are historically underserved (E. E. Morales, 2012; Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014; Katrevich & Aruguete, 2017; Sanacore & Palumbo, 2016). For example, first-generation college students of color are often met with instructors who are resistant to supporting them in the ways they need. Negative faculty responses include viewing first-generation students of color through a deficit lens or indicating that these students should simply not yet be in college (Kim et al., 2016; Schademan & Thompson, 2015). Conversely, instructors who have spent time developing competency in their relational pedagogies do better in providing more appropriate instruction for first-generation low-income students of color (Irlbeck et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2016; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Schademan & Thompson, 2015).

Intersections in the literature on PSTOC and first-generation low-income students are also evident beyond the classroom, whereby students of color often lack faculty mentorship, particularly in comparison to their White peers (Endo, 2015; Kim et al., 2016; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Given the paucity of faculty of color, there are few if any faculty members in whom PSTOC can confide or, in some cases, simply to acknowledge their humanity (Haddix, 2010, 2012; Kim et al., 2016). As Bower-Phipps et al. (2013) underscored in their personal narratives as PSTOC, incongruence with dominant-culture faculty can lead to a growing sense of academic solitude. In addition to a disconnect with the curriculum and faculty, students of color often find themselves to be “the only ones” within their programs (Endo, 2015; Haddix, 2012; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016), making for an isolated experience. Given the lack of student and faculty racial diversity in teacher
education, PSTOC may question their place within their programs and whether it is a space where their presence is desired, let alone validated.

**Conceptual Framework:**
**Racial Grammar and Critical Race Theory**

We have argued and used literature to explicate how the racial grammar of teacher education functions as a form of oppression for Black and Latina preservice teachers. This body of literature, largely produced by Black and Latina educational researchers, makes a fundamental contribution to the concept of racial grammar and thus corresponds with the overall framing of our study. As the literature has made clear, racial grammar is about naming the reproduction of White dominance that suggests a common logic or order (Bonilla-Silva, 2012, 2015). Racial grammar implies a sense of White normativity that, “like a smog, affects us all in an invisible way” (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, pp. 80, 81). Moreover, racial grammar allows educators to apprehend the structure of race in its transactions, acquisitions, and communicative exchanges. Yet, racial grammar is also challenged (Bonilla-Silva, 2012), and the literature is illustrative of how researchers as well as educators of color speak back to the racial grammar of teacher education. Similarly, we employ racial grammar as a means to both challenge White dominance and refute the “epistemology of ignorance” (Mills, 2007) common to educational research that positions White preservice teachers—as well as the overall White universal structure of teacher education—as innocent reproducers of racism.

Bonilla-Silva (2015) suggested racial grammar as a new direction for CRT and theorizations of race in general. Hence, to further frame our study, we drew from CRT in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), with specific analytic and methodological attention given to the intersectionality and counterstorytelling tenets. CRT emerged from the legal field as a critical theory of race in the 1970s and 1980s. Its theoretical and pragmatic origins challenged liberal color-blind ideology touted by critical legal studies and the slow progress of racial reform (Bell, 1980, 1987; Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado, 1989). In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate brokered CRT into education with their seminal article “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education.” Although CRT was initially met with skepticism by educational researchers (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2013), it has now become the most visible analytic theory for analyses of race and racism in education (Leonardo, 2013). While this may seem progressive, the over- and misuse of CRT in educational research threatens the criticality of the theory as it continues to stray further from its legal underpinnings (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Leonardo, 2014). We did not engage CRT as a default theorization as is often the case in educational research (Ladson-Billings, 2013). To the contrary, we acknowledged this tension within CRT research to ensure that
our study was grounded in CRT’s tenets, which name the malignancy of racism that reproduces material and social abjection.

First, CRT posits that racism is normal, not aberrant, and is a permanent feature of society (Bell, 1992a, 1992b). Furthering this tenet through the idea of racial realism, Bell (1992b) suggested that we—people of color—accept this status and alter our tactical approaches toward addressing racism. A racial realism approach to teacher education encourages educational researchers to seek out “policy positions and campaigns that are less likely to worsen conditions for those we are trying to help and remind those in power that there are imaginative, unabashed risk-takers who refuse to be trammeled upon” (Bell, 1992b, pp. 377–378). Second, we draw from the interest convergence tenet of CRT (Bell, 1980, 1987), which suggests that advances for people of color are only realized when those advances converge with White self-interests. Research in teacher education situates the interest convergence principle as significant in examining curricular and instructional practices, the recruitment of PSTOC, and the White-dominated field of teacher education itself (Milner, 2008; Milner et al., 2013). We take the “unpopular position” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 22) that racially incongruent structures pose barriers for first-generation PSTOC and will not be mediated through superficial recruitment strategies or ill-conceptualized remedies.

The third tenet of CRT offers race as a social construct (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Omi & Winant, 2014). Yet, CRT nuances our approach to race as an idea by suggesting that researchers do not simply deal with race through discourse (Delgado, 2003, 2011). However, the use of CRT in teacher education research requires that we deal with the material and tangible manifestations of racism that emerge from this objective reality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Dumas, 2013; Leonardo, 2013). In fact, we revisit the arguments advanced in the introduction to suggest that teacher education has dealt with race and racial remedies as ideology. Efforts merely to readjust the curriculum or recruit a few more preservice teachers and teacher educators of color are intended to disrupt our thinking about race. Thus it is no surprise that most analyses of race in education deal with changing White educators’ minds about communities of color. While this line of inquiry is worthwhile, it only leads to futile policies that do not fundamentally alter the conditions of preservice teachers of color, teacher educators of color, or students of color who continue to be underserved in our nation’s schools. Very rarely do analyses of race in teacher education—or at any level of education, for that matter—deal with the material impacts of race (Darder & Torres, 2004; Leonardo, 2013). Therefore intersectionality, the fourth tenet of CRT, takes center stage in our analysis of Black and Latina preservice teachers’ counterstories.

**Intersectionality**

It is increasingly imperative that educational researchers treat teacher education as complicit in the larger political economy that cements White material gain
The Racial Grammar of Teacher Education

while ensuring that communities of color remain at the “bottom of the well” (Bell, 1992a). CRT encourages researchers to see teacher education as a White normative system that concedes nothing materially even when advances are made to consider racial equity. Intersectionality provides a sublens within CRT for understanding how an analysis of race, class, and gender together (not exclusive of nationality and language) implicates teacher education as a multifunctional racist apparatus. We use intersectionality in two ways. First, we use structural intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), which points to teacher education as a structure that is built and determined to ensure that White women educators at all levels continue to reap the unearned advantages—both ideological and material—of being White. Meanwhile, women of color, in our case Black and Latinx first-generation preservice teachers from economically underserved backgrounds, encounter structural barriers that make their experiences as future educators qualitatively distinct (Crenshaw, 1991) from the experiences of White women preservice teachers. The teacher education field is heavily gendered, but those experiences vary based on race and class. The convergence of these three constructs within a system of domination forces educational researchers to ask fundamentally different questions about teacher education that supersede discourses of racial representation.

Second, and relatedly, we know that the centrality of racism is important, but intersectionality also acknowledges that “racism is not the only culprit in a particular crime” (A. Harris & Leonardo, 2018, p. 16). Race is the primary unit of our analysis, but we recognize that racism, classism, and sexism both shape and impact outcomes for women of color, especially Black women (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Therefore our use of intersectionality serves as a critique of raced, classed, and gendered power structures that operate in unison. While foundational CRT research on intersectionality spoke largely to political and legal contexts, we argue that those same structural barriers exist within teacher education. Though some might argue for the centrality of class (e.g., Darder & Torres, 2004), race remains central because it accounts for the differences between White women and women of color who are first-generation students from low-income backgrounds (Sarcedo et al., 2015). Centralizing class might offer a true Marxist analysis but would fail to explicate how “raciology is so deep in the ideological hearts of many Whites, including the working class and poor, that they would rather die as White than live as free people” (Leonardo, 2013, p. 73). Hence our focus sheds light on how gender along with “race and class in education are intertwined partners. They create a tango that negatively impacts college students who belong to racially and economically minoritized groups” (Sarcedo et al., 2015, p. 2).

Methodology

The fifth tenet, storytelling and counterstorytelling, posits that the experiential knowledge and lived experiences of people of color are valid and speak both to and
against structural racism (Delgado, 1989). To methodologically guide this study, we drew from CRT narrative intersectionality (Berry & Cook, 2019) to underscore the experiences of Black and Latina preservice teachers who were also first-generation low-income college students. Berry and Cook (2019) have offered the following principles for conceptualizing narrative intersectionality as methodology: It (a) “focuses on multiple inequalities embedded in identities and intersecting forms of oppression,” (b) “avoids hierarchies of oppression,” (c) “articulates experiences of at least one of the three forms of intersectionality,” (d) “centers the voice(s) of the multiply burdened,” and (e) “uses counter-storytelling to provide alternative realities to debunk the master narrative” (p. 93). When told through various narrative forms, counterstories allow for the construction of social realities (Bell, 1987, 1992a; Delgado, 1989). Counternarratives from communities of color speak against majoritarian stories, or those “bundles of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant race bring to discussions of race” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). Counterstorytelling allows researchers to methodologically construct principled arguments that illustrate broader political or social concerns regarding matters of race and racial injustice (Cook & Dixson, 2013; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Through narrative intersectional counterstorytelling, CRT guides our methodological framing in terms of whose stories and voices are prioritized in teacher education research about race and how those stories are situated to counter majoritarian narratives of racial progress in the field. We recognize that the literature is robust in documenting the experiences of preservice teachers of color. However, we wanted to layer this canon of research with the perspective of first-generation college-going women while also understanding that there is a need to build on extant research in teacher education to work toward policy change (Sleeter, 2014).

Data Collection and Analysis: Invited to Listen

As teacher educators, we reached out to students of color enrolled in a teacher preparation program at our former and current institutions. Four preservice teachers invited us into their lives through individual semistructured interviews. They were at various points in their teacher education programs when we spoke with them. All four identified as women of color from economically underserved backgrounds. Although we indicated our interest in speaking with preservice teachers of color who were also first-generation college students, one student, Jessica, was adamant about sharing her experiences navigating a teacher preparation program despite her being the second person in her family to attend college. To honor Jessica’s story, we included her narrative as part of this article. We incorporated elicitation techniques and a review of student artifacts to understand students’ experiences more holistically (Bhattacharya, 2017). The interviews lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours, and all four collaborators engaged in the first round of interviews, while,
owing to scheduling concerns, two took part in the follow-up sessions. We created semistructured interview questions that were guided by the desire to explore students’ intersectional experiences with the inherent racial grammar of teacher education programs—structures that value coursework, pedagogical styles, and experiences that repress and reject epistemologies from communities of color.

The first storytelling sessions focused primarily on knowing more about the teacher candidates’ self-identities, backgrounds, and reasons for entering the teaching profession. The teacher candidates also discussed their experiences within their respective programs, ranging from perspectives on curriculum to interactions with faculty and peers and field experiences. Session 2 was a deep dive into their various identities, how these identities impacted their retention in the program, and the support they believed they received as students with those identities. Owing to the semistructured nature of our interviews, identity and support naturally emerged as significant topics in the first interviews.

To analyze their narratives, we deductively coded statements related to race, class, and gender to be consistent with our intersectional CRT framework. Then we conducted another layer of coding indicating when students discussed first-generation student status, motivations for entering the profession, and experiences navigating teacher preparation structures. We then attached these codes to the racial grammar of teacher education we identified in Table 1. Patterns that were especially illuminated throughout the coding process were feelings of isolation, silencing, a lack of representation, barriers to entry, and program retention. Finally, with the codes and patterns clearly identified, we reconstructed the narratives as individual short stories rather than presenting them as deconstructed themes (Bhattacharya, 2017). The decision to represent the data in this form is consistent with counterstorytelling and narrative intersectionality, which call for authenticity, representation, and multidimensionality of voice (Berry & Cook, 2019; Cook & Dixson, 2013).

**What the Intersectional Narratives Told Us**

**Eggs, Rice, and Vienna Sausage**

Molly was a fourth-year Latina student from a diverse urban city in the Southeast in an early-childhood education program with an emphasis in special education. She shared that she was always drawn to education but was particularly looking forward to the impact she can make as a role model for other Latinx children. Countering the myth that students of color are not interested in education, Molly noted,

> One of my professional goals is to return [home] and be a strong minority teacher in my own community to help students that come mostly from other countries . . . and just teach them and give them that same empowered feeling that I’ve been feeling now.

Throughout Molly’s K–12 experiences, her teachers were predominantly Latinx,
### Table 1
The Racial Structure and Grammar of Teacher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial structure</th>
<th>Racial grammar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and student demographics</td>
<td>Teacher education is normalized as a White profession at both the teacher education and preservice teacher levels. Faculty and students of color are projected as anomalies and therefore warrant unconventional or innovative recruitment strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework</td>
<td>The curriculum of teacher education at all levels is geared toward a majority White demographic. Therefore courses relevant to issues of “diversity” cater to White innocence that “pushes” White educators to consider the lived experiences of people of color. Consequently, very rarely is teacher education curriculum constructed upon the learning needs and perspectives of people of color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field-based experiences</td>
<td>Clinical and field-based experiences often derive from university–school partnerships built by a largely White faculty demographic. Preservice teachers are often thrust into a field-based experience with little to no sociohistorical or sociocultural context regarding the school/community. Therefore these experiences can be largely dictated by their interactions with mentor teachers, who also play a role in preservice teacher evaluations, leaving preservice teachers of color vulnerable to school-based deficit discourses of the students and their communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort model</td>
<td>Preservice teachers of color often take their coursework within a cohort model. While this might foster community, little thought is given to the psychic violence that preservice teachers of color often endure in teacher preparation programs, as they constitute a small fraction of the demographic makeup. The violent experiences and silencing are repeated across classes and semesters because of the cohort model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
<td>Passing rates on state teacher certification exams are prioritized in teacher education coursework. Certification exams often require separate tests based on subject area and can prove costly. Furthermore, preservice teachers of color who reject majoritarian narratives of education are forced to pass a high-stakes exam influenced by White-washed state standards that repress epistemologies from communities of color.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Racial Grammar of Teacher Education

which made her even more cognizant of the overwhelming Whiteness in teacher education. Upon arriving to college and enrolling in a teacher preparation program, she noticed a far less diverse demographic among the students and the faculty in comparison to her upbringing. She found that a gendered, White, middle-class normative experience dominated her classroom structure at the university level, and as a result, Molly yearned for advocates in whom she could confide. In addition, Molly was also attuned to the racial grammar and its intersection with matters of class. When discussing her class upbringing in relation to the teacher education program, she noted,

I don’t live in a cardboard box or anything, but I also don’t have that financial flexibility. So, I was just telling my best friend yesterday, I have $40 in my bank account right now after paying for books. And right now I’m doing [program-required] tutoring and I have to drive out to Pines Elementary, which is a 25-minute drive and you know, the total commute is 50 minutes a day of being in the car, driving to and from. And I go three times a week and it eats my gas. So, I’ve put gas weekly, that is why my funds are so low. So, I really do think about how I spend my money and it affects what I do. Like I remember last week I just ate eggs and rice for the week, and Vienna sausage, and it’s just because my parents are putting money in my account today since I can’t work because the program is really demanding. If I were to speak completely, honestly, that’s a very big factor, it has been a big factor in my time here.

Molly felt forced to make the choice between working an external part-time job or using that time to study for classes. Fortunately, with a bit of parental financial support, she had the ability to make that choice, but she also expressed having to plan for these expenses several years in advance:

And luckily, I have a car! I told my parents 2 years ago, I’m like, the program is going to have us going out to practicums and schools all around the city. So, I know I need a car because I can’t get everywhere by bus. So luckily my parents were able to give me that, but you know, I still have to think about the cost of gas.

Reflecting on costs associated with program requirements, she mentioned that a former peer was unable to make such accommodations because of her family’s socioeconomic status. This student had several conversations with program faculty to try to remedy the concern, but ultimately, the policies of the program superseded the individual’s needs; that student was forced to leave the program because she did not have the transportation necessary to complete her field experience requirements. Financial constraints were not new for Molly, however. Even prior to applying to the university, her family’s socioeconomic status and her first-generation college student status were almost prohibitive factors in her matriculation. Molly discussed her mother’s financial concerns with her attending college away from home:

It was actually quite a bit of a struggle I would say, because my mom was really worried about finances and I remember me applying to the university and she was like, “Why are you going to apply? It’s not like we’re going to be able to afford to send you there.” . . . So I kind of struggled with my mom from November until
Priscilla Bell & Christopher L. Busey

when I got accepted. I remember February 13 of 2015, I was like, “I got in, Mom,” and she’s like, “Well, I don’t know what you’re gonna do with that.”

While class was significant in how Molly navigated through the racial grammar of the program, her identity as a first-generation woman student of color also forced her to navigate through other program structures. In both interviews, Molly discussed operating in majority White spaces and the few resources she had in the forms of supervisors, teachers, and peers of color who had facilitated and encouraged her retention in the program. She spoke of a situation that emerged with one of her White peers and how Nia, a Black woman supervisor, was able to help her navigate the complexities of the conflict:

Then, you know, after I had the conversation with her [Nia], it’s what pushed me to go ahead and talk to the director of our program along with my other classmates and that situation terrified me. But I was like, I know I need to do this because it’ll help me in the future. So, you know, I have Nia to thank for that because she pushed me to be able to go into it and I don’t know if her also being a minority or not affected that, but I felt very comfortable talking to her.

The situation with her White peer impacted Molly’s field-based work, her coursework, and her emotional and mental well-being, as she worried about the impression she would leave with faculty and administrators. Molly believed that her various identities were woven into the dynamics of the conflict, and she expressed her desire for more support from faculty of color:

The individual I was having this conflict with was just completely White and I know there are stereotypes of Hispanic people being lazy or sometimes that we take jobs and so I don’t know, I don’t know. But overall, it’s just that they think [we] can be not as up to par. And to this day, even when I talk to her, I feel a little on eggshells. I feel like you [referring to peers] think we’re not on the same level and we are. You know, I’ve been through this program just as she is. So I remember going into that meeting with that in the back of my mind, thinking, okay, I feel like I’m going up against someone who probably thinks they’re better than me and they are not. You know, we’re learning the same things and becoming adequate educators. And, yeah, because [of] the representation that the program is majority White and maybe if [the] director of the program were someone of color or if other classmates in there had been, you know, people of color, I might’ve been like, okay, I have more on my side. Or I have people that can kind of know what it’s like, but I’m just in a pool of White, and none of the people involved in the situation were my other Hispanic classmates. So, I was just like, I’m alone.

Molly was ultimately able to navigate the program to completion but left it personally scarred.

You’re Going to Give Me a Four out of Five
Because I Was Born With Curly Hair?

Jessica was a fourth-year Puerto Rican student studying early-childhood educa-
Similar to Molly, Jessica was drawn to the teaching profession because of early exposure to Latina teachers and her belief in the importance of education. After a brief stint as a business major, she transitioned to the College of Education, where she self-identified as a floater among her peers. While she believes her biethnic identity allows her to move seamlessly between her peers of color and her White peers, particular race-class markers differentiated her experiences from the White woman, middle-class, continuing-generation dominant group. Though her mother attended the University of Puerto Rico, Jessica and her family acknowledged how different and complex navigating higher education in the contiguous United States was, and thus she has had parallel experiences to her first-generation peers. Additionally, on several occasions, she referenced various financial constraints that contradicted the normative middle-class culture of her program and the larger college of education. The experience that most impacted her, however, was one of explicit racism.

Jessica and her peers were required to participate in field-based education by engaging in work with a mentor teacher at a local school. Jessica had this to share about a recent experience with her mentor teacher, an older White woman, regarding the professionalism of her hair:

One time I got checked off that I was like four out of five in my professional attire, in grooming and stuff. And I was kind of upset because I was like, okay . . . I’m . . . my hair gets a little bit frizzy sometimes and I was a little bit upset about that and I didn’t think anybody else got a four out of five.

As I (second author) sat across the table from Jessica, I was awed by her thick, visible curls and wondered how anyone could see her beautifully full hair in a negative light. I clarified by asking whether others in her program had hair of her texture or style, to which she responded,

One other girl in my class. But it’s like, it’s blonde. And so, I do think about that. Um, I think I’m the only person with curly hair in my class. And that also made me a little upset because . . . I’ve been using no product in my hair as a statement of like . . . this is my hair and I want to treat it kindly. . . . And so, I wash it with clean materials and then I dry it with a towel and I’m like, this is my hair and I don’t want to put heat or hairspray to it. And sometimes that’s what was required for me to look professional. And that irks me. I’m like, you’re going to give me a four out of five because I was born with [curly] hair?

She mentioned the impact of this experience several times throughout the course of our conversation, oscillating back and forth between whether she was in the wrong or whether the standards for professionalism were faulty. In the end, she stated that she was “too embarrassed to actually ask other people” but has since decided she would continue to approach her work with her natural look, encouraging her future students also to bring their authentic selves to her future classroom:

In my classroom, I would love for students to [know] that every student is wel-
Though the program seems to encourage a prescriptive outcome from the students it is shaping, not all teacher candidates can be molded, nor should they be.

**Just Because We’re Both Black Doesn’t Mean We Can Relate**

Ayana was a Black woman in the elementary teacher preparation program and originally from a small town outside of a major city in the Southeast. As a lower income, first-generation Black woman, she expressed several programmatic barriers she faced throughout the span of our time together. Ayana pinpointed various financial constraints the program imposed that may be acceptable for higher income students yet create significant hurdles for students who do not fall within a similar economic bracket. At the same time, she believed there was a lack of diverse faculty representation to adequately address course content that discusses experiences of marginalized students, particularly around areas of economic inequality, thus furthering the misinformation being propagated:

> It just keeps coming down to financial which is weird but I feel like there’s more White students [and] they’re able to do more . . . so they’re able to like to have this program set up the way it is because the program is expensive already and then plus the teacher tests that you have to take in between each semester is extremely high, they’re $150/$200 and that’s if you passed the first time you do it and it’s like . . . I remember sitting in colloquium and they’re telling me you have to take this test, you have to take this test, you have to take this test and I’m just like well where’s the money? Like how can you just assume that I’m able to do that without any help? But because it’s a majority White and history shows that they’re just economically better off [in this program], I feel like they just assume that this is gonna happen—like you can throw any like amount of tests or programs that I need and like we can just get it at any moment.

In conjunction with the exorbitant costs for lower income students Ayana expressed, there are also constraints on students’ ability to work outside the program to compensate for these expenses:

> The only thing that has been really challenging is the fact that I feel like it’s not flexible enough. Like I have to work and pay bills and they literally make your schedule . . . so it’s hard to like actually work and then go full-time to be a student. . . . I had to quit my full-time job where I was certified for and getting paid a lot more than this [part-time job I have now] and it’s like okay well . . . and then I see like the other students in there and they’re like catered and going on vacations
and because everything is paid for and I’m like this is just not realistic. . . . That has been the most challenging part of the program.

Beyond this, Ayana acknowledged that there were very few people to whom she could turn as peers and as mentors. Of a cohort of approximately 80, she identified 4 other Black students. Given the intersectional nature of her and other students’ of color identities, even though she was able to relate to some of her Black peers, differing background experiences still contributed to feelings of isolation in the program:

I do remember talking with one of the Black men in the program about how we’re struggling . . . because we’re so broke in this program . . . and then we shared how he had both of his parents and his mom was a teacher so like I can’t relate to him on that because I [come from a single-parent household]. It was interesting, the financial dynamics of everything, where you come from really matters because I feel like I’m . . . for lack of better words, from the ’hood, and I’m the only person [in my cohort] from that part of any type of city. So I can’t say that we’re extremely relatable just because we’re like Black and minority.

And these feelings were exacerbated when she felt faculty were also deficient in their experiences, particularly as they related to lower income students:

I feel like a lot of people talk about how it’s like to be in low SES [socioeconomic status] or what low SES schools are like without ever stepping foot in a low-SES school. And I feel like the professor never, well I know she didn’t ‘cause she was never a teacher, but she taught a lot about low SES income and the children in it, and she never stepped foot in a low-SES school so I didn’t like that.

Beyond this, she described her “shock” and dismay at faculty and administrators’ labeling of a particular school site students were to visit. She recalled them having painted an extremely negative picture filled with coded language to describe the low-income school:

People really thought this was the most terrible school and I’m like this, I guess, yes, it’s lower SES but I really wouldn’t put it as like a [poor] school at all. . . . I feel like it missed the whole point. . . . They pretty much stereotyped [the school].

Aside from the various instances of racial and economic profiling, Ayana expressed several times that being the only Black-identified female in most of her classes was exhausting, as her peers were oftentimes “oblivious to the struggles that other people have.” The few Black students enrolled in the program were often not in classes together due to the alternating cohort model. As a result of this, she regularly chose to remain silent in her courses on issues of race, gender oppression, and economic inequality unless she felt that what was being shared by her White, higher income peers “was just completely wrong.” She discussed instances of blatant racism and sexism within the cohort that took place via social media platforms and carried over into coursework. Resultantly, Ayanna desired to be as far removed from her second cohort as quickly as possible. The only solace she felt was the few times she had faculty of color or a few White professors who were willing to share authentic
experiences of previous biases they had and how systemic racism shaped those preconceived notions. Those experiences were few and far between for Ayana, however, and she continued to persevere through the program without the same support she believed others had.

**No, I Don’t Speak Spanish—Do You Speak German?**

Sofia was a third-year elementary education major who identified as Latina. She hoped to move into educational counseling after a few years as a classroom teacher. During our time spent together, she spoke directly to the need for the representation of more diverse experiences among her peers, her faculty, and her course content. She also spoke at length to the importance of shared identities and how they were integral to a student’s sense of comfort in the classroom. One of the most salient concerns for her, however, was the stereotyping and tropes with which she was faced on a constant basis, but particularly during her field experiences:

I’m always ready when I meet the teachers on the first day of practicum. . . . They’re always like, “Hi. Do you speak Spanish?” And I’m always like, I feel like I’m letting them down because I don’t. I look like I do, but I can’t. So that’s always . . . I brace myself every semester for that. It’s kind of mixed emotions because I knew if I did speak Spanish I’d be even more of an asset in the classroom. It helps students and their families, which is great, but I also feel like they’re assuming that I have an ability just because my name is Martinez or is a certain name and then maybe that I look Hispanic. I want to ask them sometimes, to be a sass, like, oh, you have a German name. Do you speak German? Do you speak German? No? Why [not]? So next time someone says that I’m going to come back with that response. But yeah, it’s mixed feelings.

Sofia noted a bit later on in the session that the teachers in the field also did not ask her White counterparts if they spoke Spanish or any other language. She was also aware that normative assumptions were made about them regarding monolinguality because that tends to be the norm in teacher education programs: White, (upper-) middle-class, monolingual women. Though there was the initial discomfort each time she confronted a similar situation, she remained optimistic about the profession as well as her eventual contribution to it; she stated that because there are not many Latinx or African American teachers, she will be able to fill a void as “students would really benefit from diversity . . . even just seeing a teacher that looks like them might help.” She also expressed that the diversity of her socioeconomic background as well as her first-generation student status could be assets when working with students who share similar identities:

I understand that struggle, I can empathize maybe more than [a] higher income individual . . . so like now, currently, I really appreciate and understand my place in education, and I know that my perspectives are needed and they’re very valuable.

Beyond this, Sofia expressed a great deal of admiration for her own K–12 teachers
who supported her during her college application process since she did not have the resources otherwise to be able to do so:

I felt like I had a lot of support growing up from teachers. Like when my parents didn’t really know much about college and stuff, my teachers were like, oh yeah, definitely go to the university. [I’m sure] you’ll get accepted. You should study this and this.

Sofia’s intersectional identity, while marginalized in numerous respects, allowed her to be an asset to her future students in a way that her colleagues might not be, and she looked forward to that opportunity.

**Moving Forward: Intersectional Racism, Teacher Education, and First-Generation College Students**

The racial grammar of teacher education, and society at large, reproduced a matrix of oppression whereby each of these identities—first-generation college students, economically underserved, and women of color—became central to how students negotiated racist and class-based structures (Collins, 1990). Furthermore, through the participants’ stories, we saw how the racial grammar of teacher education emerged at the intersection of class, race, gender, and language. Structural Whiteness created a barrier that also threatened and at times prohibited the retention of Molly, Jessica, Ayana, and Sofia in teacher education programs. Thus we borrow from Knight (2002) in suggesting that “teacher educators examine the norms in their own programs in which the intersections of race, class, and gender structures are structured by specific curricular and pedagogical practices” (p. 221).

The intersection of race, class, gender, and language oppression was evident in these women PSTOC’s narratives regarding the cohort model, curriculum, and faculty and student demographics. Ayanna and Molly especially noted the lack of faculty diversity, while all four collaborators were aware of how their peer interactions throughout the program mandated that they deal with Whiteness (Cheruvu et al., 2015; Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011). Again, for Ayanna and Molly, this racial grammar of teacher education diverged from their upbringings where their teachers and community, respectively, consisted of Black and Latinx people. Similar to findings from prior research, the racial grammar also manifested in ways that silenced Ayanna and Molly due to race, class, gender, and language (Bower-Phipps et al., 2013; Cheruvu et al., 2015; Haddix, 2010; 2017; Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2016).

We can also understand the racial grammar in relation to Irizarry’s (2011) notion of silencing in teacher education, which occurs systemically (racial structure) and socially (racial grammar). Molly was silenced and isolated due to peer conflict over a group assignment. She spoke to the fact that the program director and the student were both White, and she did not have an advocate of color within the program. Ayanna also noted the lack of faculty diversity as a structural concern,
Priscilla Bell & Christopher L. Busey

which she attributed to the problematic framing of students of color in low-income schools in which preservice teachers would be working. Like Molly, Ayanna’s experiences with White faculty and students would be exacerbated by the cohort model. Within such a structure, the racial grammar of Whiteness silenced Ayanna as a result of the racial battle fatigue she often faced from being in White-dominant spaces (Leonardo & Porter, 2010) that othered low-income communities of color.

Field experiences and certification exams are often required of preservice teachers, but little attention is given to how they can serve as structural barriers that reify race, class, gender, and language oppression. Students’ narratives reified the significance of Rogers-Ard et al.’s (2012) claim regarding clinical/field-based practicums and internships. They noted,

The possibility of working a year for free is an obvious deterrent to prospective African American and Latino candidates. Thus, in addition to tuition and difficulties balancing a full-time job while earning a credential, test fees, test study guide fees, tutoring fees, college application fees, fingerprinting fees, and other required fees become financial barriers that extend the wealth gap. (p. 455)

Molly, Anna, and Jessica spoke to the class-based racial grammar associated with costs required to successfully participate in the required experiences. They were forced to forgo jobs and make financial sacrifices that exacerbated some of the already established challenges of being first-generation, low-income students of color. Hence we can see here a clear overlap in the intersectional experiences of PSTOC and first-generation students of color.

Field experiences also had gendered and racialized components to them where the racial grammar unfolded. Jessica’s evaluation by her mentor teacher was clearly problematic. Aware of the politics of hair, Jessica chose to wear her hair naturally, for which her mentor teacher punitively assessed her for a lack of professionalism. Thus broader racialized legal and political relations are evident in teacher education’s racial grammar. Consider that a U.S. circuit court recently ruled that an employer can discriminate against an employee for natural hair and dreadlocks. This also emerged in linguistic and racialized ways for Sofia. Drawing from Rosa (2018), it was clear that Sofia’s body was racialized as a harbinger of a language other than English, despite the fact that she did not speak Spanish. These microaggressions in field experiences warrant further attention in educational research (Irizarry, 2011).

Components of teacher education, such as field-based experiences, leave students vulnerable to evaluations by mentor teachers who may harbor deficit-based discourses of the students and their communities because of their own learning, while the cohort model can serve as a place of harm and reharm due to the psychic and emotional violence that preservice teachers of color often endure throughout their education programs. Taken together with prior research (Amos, 2016; Hadix, 2012; Sarcedo et al., 2015), these intersectional counterstories offer more than enough data to illustrate that it is imperative to rethink discourses of preservice
teacher recruitment. The problem is with the racial structure and grammar of teacher education, not that students of color lack a desire to become educators.

References


The Racial Grammar of Teacher Education


