

This is a Story About a Blue Line: Race and Bodies Colliding in the Hallway

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Abstract

This paper explores how women teachers remember stories about gender, race, and bodies, with attention to one memory about a white woman teacher and male student colliding in the hallway. Utilizing collective memory work (CMW) methods (Davies & Gannon, 2006; Haug, 1987, 1999), nine secondary English teachers and one teacher educator (all women) wrote memories, analyzed them, and drew on critical and post-structural theories of race and embodiment to understand how discourses are constructed through the stories we tell about our teacher bodies. The exploration of this memory allowed us to critically analyze the social, cultural, and historical discourses of gender, race, and whiteness that shape our work and identities as women teachers.

Keywords

memory, race, critical theory, embodiment, whiteness, teacher identity



Figure 1: A photograph of the school hallway: The setting in the memory, including the blue line that runs down its center.

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A Memory

She dreaded passing time. A stranger to the battles of hallways past, she struggled to understand the pertinence of hallway teacher presence in the same way her veteran co-workers could. She stood, each day, with her clipboard signage on the straight blue line running a full clockwise scale around the school.

On this particular Tuesday, she stood in position on the blue line with little thought given to the cacophonous upheaval surrounding her position. She repeatedly pointed her finger towards the sign reading, “Be On-Time for Learning” and was repeatedly ignored by students of all genders, sizes, and colors. She stood still along the line with her feet planted with equally distributed weight in true ENVoY fashion. She did not approach students to redirect, engage, or partake. Rather, she pointed to her sign. Her sign to be quiet, to get to class on time, or, to walk. On this particular day, “WALK” was her sign of choice. In true student fashion, the sign was blatantly ignored.

As one student whizzed past her just brushing the end of her clipboard, she whirled around to remind the student—using her finger and clipboard, of course—to please walk through the hallways. As she turned, she felt her stomach lurch forward into her throat and her knees buckle beneath her. She was hit from behind by the clipboard brusher’s pursuer and the two of them went tumbling to the floor. The male student landed on top of her ankles and knees. Her dress was drawn up and the wind knocked out of her throat. The student’s shock and annoyance manifested into a low guttural growl. Though unsure, she is almost certain the noise had little to do with her, and more to do with having failed to catch his target. As the student got up, brushed away the dust and ran off, she brushed away a quick tear and returned to her spot on the blue line; frozen.

This memory was written in response to the prompt: Write about a time when you felt your teacher body being perceived in a very particular way (by students, parents, administrators, colleagues, or yourself).

Introduction

In the memory above, a new teacher feels a sense of dread while monitoring the hallway in between classes in her urban middle school. She is following her school’s adopted corporate behavior management protocol, called ENVoY (Educational Non-Verbal Yardsticks), in which teachers use *only* nonverbal communication (gestures, body movement, and signs) to “manage” their behavior/discipline interactions with students throughout the school day. In this

scene, the teacher stands on a tiled blue line that runs down the middle of the hallway and points at a sign on her clipboard to remind students to walk in the halls. The students ignore both the teacher and her sign. When one student runs past her she whirls around to prompt him to walk and is then suddenly hit from behind by a second student who was chasing the first. The impact knocks them to the ground and the teacher finds herself on the floor in the middle of the hallway with a male student on top of her, her dress drawn up, and the wind knocked out of her. At the end of the memory, the young man gets up, brushes off, and runs from the scene, while the teacher brushes away a tear and returns to the blue line to continue monitoring the hallway.

Our Collective, comprised of eight women English teachers (six White, two Bi-racial—White and Black, and White and East Asian) and one White woman teacher educator (me), gathered around this memory during our second session of collective memory work together. In order to present the results of our work with this memory in this paper, I first contextualize and historicize the construction of White women teachers' bodies, and then examine those histories in relation to the ways the memory's author used language to construct her own body in the memory. Then I explore three of our group's readings of the memory (that is, ways we approached and interpreted the story) that were generated via our collective discussion and analyses. These readings were produced through our own racialized and gendered identities, and we took care to recognize and question how our readings were both enabled and constrained by our own perspectives. In order to capture these readings, I use short transcripts from our session, and additional resources that illuminate our theorizing. Finally, I conclude this paper with a discussion of some implications for the possibilities of using collective memory work to enable new understandings for White women teachers as we aim to work with students of color in anti-racist, critically conscious, and culturally responsive ways.

Methods

Collective memory work (CMW) is a feminist and participatory method used to capture the "richness, subtlety, and complexity of...embodied thinking and being in the world" through an analysis of memory and language (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 3). CMW does not position memory as "the truth," but rather uses the literacies of writing, telling, listening, and analyzing our own and others' memories to produce truths in relation to what cannot actually be recovered—the moment as it was lived (p. 3). Through this methodology we bring theory into collision with our everyday lived experience.

For this study, our Collective met regularly to write, analyze, and theorize about memories of our teacher bodies based on the prompt: "Write about a moment when you felt your teacher body being perceived in a very particular way (by

students, colleagues, administrators, families, or yourself).” We each wrote specific, embodied memories based in response to this prompt and then shared and collectively analyzed them. This part of the process was akin to critical discourse analysis, where language construction, grammatical structures, and linguistic features were considered, and multiple, even contradictory meanings were entertained.

As the facilitator of the group and researcher of the study, I utilized ethnographic methods and collected empirical materials including audio transcripts of our meetings, one-on-one interviews with each Collective member, and the copies of the written memories marked with additional notes from our sessions. I utilized “thinking with theory” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) and post-qualitative approaches (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013) to engage with theory and empirical material as I organized, synthesized, and represented the analysis conducted by the Collective for this paper.

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural theories of discourse, language, and identities (Bakhtin, 1981; Foucault, 1978), feminist poststructuralist theories of embodiment (Butler, 1993; Davies, 2005; Grosz, 1994; Grumet, 1988; hooks, 1994), and critical race and whiteness theories (Deliofsky, 2010; Frankenberg, 1993; Meiners, 2007; Tate, 1997) complement one another and serve as a conceptual framework for this study. This framework reflects and expands on the assumptions that Haug (1999) established as a guide for CMW analysis: (1) our identities are constructed, (2) we attempt to eliminate and smooth over contradictions in our memories and constructions of self, (3) all meaning is constructed—through language, gesture, appearance, and expression, and (4) language is not simply a tool we use, it also uses and shapes us (pp. 9-11). When it comes to understanding our gendered and raced identities as teachers, we work to resolve and eliminate contractions and tensions by reproducing normalizing narratives about so-called stable binary gender identities and White supremacy. However, despite our urge to smooth and fix our stories, contradictions and counter-narratives of the body live in the cracks around these powerful narratives. Together we worked to expand the notion of and disrupt the authority of text, re-imagine narrow conceptions of the body like the mind/body and male/female binaries, and, using the recent scholarship on embodied literacies (Jones, 2013), consider how literacies live in and through our bodies as we teach and learn.

White Women Teachers’ Bodies

In order to frame our Collective’s analysis of the memory, I first draw on the historical, social, and political histories of White women and teachers in the U.S., exploring how, through narratives of gender, sexuality, and race, White women

have been positioned as sources of cheap labor, colonial nation builders, and reproducers of White supremacist ideologies while also upheld as the nurturing mothers of the school and nation-state (Grumet, 1988; Meiners, 2007). A critical engagement with these racial imaginaries and gendered narratives helps me explore how white woman teacher bodies—including the teacher’s body in this memory—are positioned in a precariously contradictory way: both controlled (by the patriarchal and institution practices of the school) and as controllers/managers of students’ bodies in school. These histories are ever-present in the ways the memory’s author, and many of the women teachers in our Collective, narrated their experiences and constructed their identities through their written memories.

Gendered, Sexualized, and Racialized Histories

In *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* Madeline Grumet (1988) explores the social, economic, and political histories of women and teaching, beginning in the era of industrialization, a time when teaching was one of the few occupations available to women. She writes, “the ideal teacher was one who could control the children and be controlled by her superiors” (p. 43). This contradiction of control became naturalized within the profession of teaching as the role of teacher was feminized and sexualized, such that “control and be controlled” became aligned with teaching, femininity, and sexual reproduction. Grumet further argues that the “cult of motherhood and the image of the ideal woman extended into the training of the ideal teacher” (p. 43). In this way, the “feminization of teaching became a form of denial as the female teachers in the common schools demanded order in the name of sweetness, compelled moral rectitude in the name of recitation, citizenship in the name of silence, and asexuality in the name of manners” (p. 44).

Historically, the hierarchy in schools was, and in many ways still is, patriarchal and hetero-normative: men take on roles of leading and organizing schools and designing and producing methods of learning and curricula, while women, often silenced and excluded from this work, do the labor of teaching (Grumet, 1988). This hierarchy requires subordination, whereby students are subordinate to their teachers who are, in turn, submissive to their administrators. In the middle position of this hierarchy, women teachers are complicit in the reproduction and legitimization of the colonial discourses of the hetero-patriarchy through methods, pedagogy, curricula and the management of students’ bodies. Simultaneously, their male superiors subject women’s bodies to those controlling discourses. In this memory, the description of her teacher body in the school hallway reflects these competing hetero- and gender-normative discourses: women teachers as subordinate, malleable, and compliant, while simultaneously controlling, managing, and monitoring their students.

Further, a complicated history of race and women teachers’ bodies in the U.S. has harnessed White femininity (constructed as innocent, kind, gentle, pure,

nurturing, and good) and teaching to colonial nation building. Erica Meiners (2007) in *Right to Be Hostile: Schools, Prisons, and the Making of Public Enemies* describes the particular role that whiteness has played in the ways women teachers have been used to mediate civility in schools: “Empire building had always required control of institutional education, and White women, historically, have functioned to mask the Racial Contract in education” (p. 46). The Racial Contract Meiners references here, drawn from the work of Charles Mills, is maintained through a particular kind of silence, the cloaking of the state’s White supremacist ideologies beneath a veil of “commonsense” or taken for granted assumptions about structures of power (p. 44). Mills describes the Racial Contract as a political system, central to social practices, institutions, and disciplinary ways of knowing that are Western and White, but fail to account for the structured role White supremacy plays in shaping what counts as knowledge and who counts as fully human, a citizen, and an agent of knowledge production. Mills argues that this Racial Contract is so pervasive that it is most often invisible or taken for granted as “commonsense.” The overrepresentation of White women in teaching, he argues, is a manifestation of this contract, an expressed logic of the system of White supremacy (Meiners, 2007, p. 44).

To explicate the role women teachers play in this colonial project, Meiners draws on Helen Harper’s description of the teacher as a “Lady Bountiful,” implicitly charged with “colonizing her ‘native’ students and molding them into good citizens of the republic” (p. 46). White women teachers participate in empire building by educating and “civilizing” Black and Brown students by controlling their students’ bodies and submitting to the control of their own bodies. Further, women teachers have been taken hostage by the rational and gendered concept of “teacher professionalism.” Jo-Anne Dillabough (1999) writes that

the professional [teacher] is ultimately one who is free to the extent that rational and independent choices about educational practice can be made. However, women teachers are at the same time constrained by the very “illusion of freedom” as they are continually reconstituted as “mothers” and “guardians” of the nation.” (Dillabough, 1999, p. 381)

Therefore, the social construction of women teachers naturalizes women as inferior to men and suggests that “women teachers’ professional identities can only be found within the so-called virtues of the private sphere” (home, domestic space, and motherhood) which is, paradoxically, considered “unprofessional” by the patriarchy (p. 381). This contradictory relationship between women and professionalism, that demands women teachers be “professional” while excluding and subordinating them from professionalism, presents yet another way women teachers’ bodies become positioned precariously in schools.

In this memory, it is through the teacher's literal silence and her body's stance, gesture, and movement in the enactment of her institution's protocol for behavior management (ENVoY) that she upholds/masks the Racial Contract and attempts to enact a "professional" teacher identity. Hetero-patriarchal power is obscured by contradictory notions of professionalism, while White supremacy is veiled under commonsense notions of authority in school: who is subordinate to whom, who gets to make the rules, which students must follow them, and how these rules reproduce the authority of whiteness, masculinity, and the relegation of Black bodies.

The Teacher Body

In her memory, the author describes her body as something that she must/can have precise control over; the language she uses is militaristic, objectifies the body, and reproduces the gendered hierarchy of the hetero-patriarchy. While students are depicted as free and movable (creating a "cacophonous upheaval" in the hallway), the teacher tightly controls how she stands, where she stands, how she holds her body, what she looks at, and what she points to. Her movements are exact and repetitive, for instance, she uses her finger to continually point at a sign affixed to her clipboard as she stands on the blue line. This use of militaristic language refers to "battles of hallways past," names her colleagues "veterans"—which contains the doubled meaning of being experienced and having served in a military—and describes her body standing "still," "in position," with "feet planted with equally distributed weight" like a soldier at attention. This presence of militaristic language in a memory of teaching highlights the presence of a patriarchal and colonial narrative of schooling and the author's perceived roles in that narrative. In this scenario, the teacher body plays contradictory roles: a soldier, following orders via the ENVoY management system, and a commander, giving orders to her students about how they ought to move their bodies as well.

In addition to the use of militaristic jargon, the language the author uses to describe her body objectifies it—she portrays both body parts and external objects as pieces of equipment she uses to perform hallway duty. She writes that she stands on the blue line with her feet planted, holds her sign, and "uses" her finger and clipboard to communicate to students that they are to walk in the hallway. In this way, both her body parts (her feet and finger) and the external items she carries (clipboard and signs) are presented as tools utilized to enact her role as teacher: conducting the surveillance and management of students' bodies as they move in the hallway. In fact, compared to her body parts, which remain passive in the memory, the blue line—another piece of equipment—is associated with the most active verb in the story: "running a full clockwise scale around the school." The blue line takes up agency in the story as an active and dynamic character—there is no part of the school that is without the blue line, and it regulates the compliance of

the other characters—managing students’ bodies moving along either side of it and the teachers’ bodies standing on it, at attention.

Three Readings: Ignoring and Acknowledging Race

With this construction of the professional teacher body—as militaristic, an object, and an officer—our Collective composed multiple readings of the memory. We began these readings with the aim of better understanding how women teachers’ bodies are socially, historically, and politically constituted, perceived, and imagined. As our interpretations developed and our critical analysis deepened, our aim shifted to understanding specifically how the author’s white woman teacher body was constituted in relationship to the bodies of her students of color. In capturing our initial statements of meaning about the memory, one was: *This is a story about ignoring and being ignored*. All of us felt connected to the notion of ignoring—whether it was the ways we felt ignored by our students, or the times we found ourselves ignoring our students, either on purpose or accidentally. We connected this notion of ignoring to controlling bodies, making bodies invisible, feelings of discomfort, fear, and uncertainty, lack of a connection or relationship between student and teacher, and the pressure to uphold teacher authority. It wasn’t until the end of the analysis process, when we revisited our initial statements of meaning, that we revised the statement to read: *This is a story about ignoring and acknowledging race*. The readings represented here demonstrate the progression of our analysis as we moved from considering the particular experiences and interactions of one teacher and one student to theorizing about larger narratives and systems of power between white women teachers and students of color.

Teacher as Statue

As we discussed this notion of ignoring and being ignored, we described the teacher as statue-like in the story. We worked to understand how and why this memory constructed the teacher-as-statue and how being a teacher-statue was related to the concept of ignoring and being ignored. The following is an excerpt from our discussion when Kelsey first describes the teacher as a statue in the story:

Kelsey: I felt a lot of allusions, maybe, to a statue here. She stands still. Her feet are planted. Um, she’s being ignored. She’s just holding her clipboard or her sign. And then the sign gets also ignored. They are just both part of the landscape of this school hallway.

Kathryn: There’s a lot of equipment. Like, clipboards, signs, the blue line, even her body.

Tali: In the last sentence I thought the parallel structure was interesting because it says, “As the student got up, brushed away the dust and ran off, she brushed away a quick tear.” It’s like it’s focusing on the student’s physical brushing away of the dust. And then she brushes off a tear, which is a physical thing but it also kind of represents her emotional state, while the focus is on his physical state and disgruntlement.

Kathryn: In the end, he runs off but she is still frozen.

Kelsey: I feel like the brushing of the tear is a crack happening in the landscape.

This construction of teacher-statue helped us explore why the teacher felt ignored by students in this moment. While we had some discussion of the role that the students played in ignoring the teacher in the hallway (to disconnect from teachers, to resist authority), our group also worked to connect expectations of the ENVoY system of behavior management to the way the author used language in her memory to construct and objectify her body parts and describe them as pieces of equipment/tools. In order to follow the management protocol, the teacher is not allowed to use her voice in the hallway. However, the way Kelsey discusses the metaphor of teacher-as-statue reflects both the teacher’s literal stillness and silence and a feeling that the women teachers in our Collective have of their bodies disappearing, of being invisible in schools. A statue is a representation of a body without a human inside. As the teacher becomes a statue on the blue line, her human connection to students disappears. The students get so used to seeing a statue that they begin to take it for granted as part of the landscape. When Tali notices that the “statue” *is* human and has emotions at the very end of the story, she notes that the teacher is more than just a physical object in this moment. Kelsey incorporates that linguistic peculiarity into her metaphor of teacher-statue, calling it a “crack in the landscape.” But by the time the crack appears, the student in the story has run away.

What happens to the relationship between teachers and students when teachers’ bodies become statues? Can a statue teacher build and develop connections with students? Or does the teacher-statue get trapped in a pattern of ignoring and being ignored? The description of the teacher’ body as a statue is pertinent. She perceives the students in the hallway as ignoring her—they don’t seem to know or recognize her by name or respond to her presence or her sign. Likewise, she does not know the students’ names, nor is she allowed to talk to students in order to learn them. Their lack of verbal communication impedes the construction of a relationship that could make teacher and students more than strangers in the landscape of the hallway. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks

(1994) outlines several problems that arise when a teacher's body is erased or ignored. This state of bodily erasure in the classroom creates an environment where students do not consider that what they are learning is coming from actual bodies, thus leading them to believe that knowledge is neutral. hooks also writes that ignoring bodies allows for systems of power to be reproduced—systems in which subjectivity is denied to some and afforded to others (p. 139). But when we acknowledge our bodies, we honor our humanness—including our flaws, mistakes, and imperfections. Power can be more fluid, and systems of oppression can be challenged and disrupted. In other words, actual relationships can be cultivated.

As a teacher-statue, the author's body is erased of humanness until the moment it is knocked to the ground. The narrative turns here when the stillness of her statue body is broken by the whizzing and whirling of her body and students' bodies around her. There is something ephemerally playful about this movement that contrasts with the first two paragraphs of the memory. This magic movement, however, is interrupted when a student's body crashes into the teacher's and they both go tumbling to the ground. The action here is collective, not individual, and results in a young male student's body on top of a female teacher's, with her dress drawn up and the wind knocked out of her. She still cannot speak, only now it's not the discipline protocol that silences her but the physical effects of being knocked to the ground. Despite the fact that the teacher's role (standing on the blue line and following the procedures of hallway monitoring) has been completely compromised, she remains silent. Now would be the time to talk, to ask the student if he is okay, to tell the student to get off of her, to chastise him for being unsafe in the hall, to exclaim over her own pain, discomfort, or vulnerability, to say anything.

Instead, both bodies in the memory are silent and the blue line retains its power and agency in the narrative: both the teacher and the student are being policed. At the end of the story, despite the physical interaction between teacher and student, there is no greater sense of relationship or connection between them than at the beginning of the story. Even in collapsing in a pile on the floor together, they ignore one another. Silence and detachment between teacher and student disallow complexity or connection; ultimately, the landscape of the school hallway remains unchanged. In our next reading we directly addressed the construction of the student in the author's memory and we paid particular attention to what went unsaid about him.

Race as a Vacuum

Our second reading of the memory theorizes race as a vacuum in the story. In Haug's (1999) method, a vacuum is described as: "elements not mentioned in the written memory but necessary to the plausibility and agreement of the story" (p. 18). As we practiced collective memory work together, all members of the group

got better and bolder about pointing to vacuums, but in this case, it was the author herself who noticed what went unsaid in her memory.

Justine: So 91% of my students are African American, and this boy was Black, an African American boy, too. And I don't know if this is in there [the story] but a vacuum here is that I talk very briefly here about students of all sizes and colors and genders but I don't ever come back and say that this was a Black male and I think that adds to this notion of ignoring race in this story, too, and the way that plays out in it. I think I spend so much of my day trying to acknowledge and ignore race at the same time. [pause] And how, I think that silence here is an attempt to bridge some racial line in these hallways. Like, if we're not speaking maybe we're going to eliminate some racial, or cultural boundaries, and some norms, and just take silence as a universal and see what we can get from there.

Kathryn: And also what you said earlier about silence, and how you don't get into that power struggle.

Kelsey: You mean by leaving out race?

There are many potential vacuums in the story, but an important one is identifications of race. The author noted that, while she describes early in the story how students of all genders, sizes, and colors roam the halls, the gender of the student who collides with her is named (male) but not his size or color. In this transcript excerpt, she fills that vacuum by stating that he was a young Black man. The absence of his racial identifier in the memory is significant in relationship to the themes in the story around teachers and students ignoring one another, and ultimately, White teachers ignoring race. In her analysis, the author spoke about how, by leaving race markers (like Black or White) out of the memory, she is essentially ignoring race—and that, as a White teacher of mostly Black students, she feels like she spends much of her day vacillating between ignoring and acknowledging race. She also connects the ENVoY management system to the notion of ignoring race. She interprets the mandated silence in the ENVoY system as an attempt to eliminate racialized conflicts or interactions—struggles for power between white teachers and students of color. Through this logic, if white teachers cannot talk to their students of color, they will not say something that ignites a power struggle between themselves and their students. However, Kelsey's inquiry, "You mean by leaving out race?" helped us ask questions about whether a racial-less form of discipline management can ever exist—or if ENVoY perpetuates the myth of color-blindness by suggesting that non-verbal interaction can be a race-neutral approach to classroom management.

Ignoring and acknowledging race is thus related to a struggle between two conflicting and contradictory race narratives in schools: the color-blind narrative (Frankenberg, 1993), a White narrative of “equality” that attempts to erase the value or importance of race in schools in exchange for a story about how all people are “the same on the inside,” and a critical race theory perspective (Tate, 1997) which asserts not only that race matters deeply in the ways we construct it, but that by ignoring race white people perpetuate White supremacy and the oppression of people of color through institutions and systems of power. This struggle between racial narratives is alive for the author, a White teacher of primarily Black students. On one hand, she is well-versed in the dangers of the color-blind narrative of race and seeks to disrupt it, to honor and acknowledge systemic racism and the lived experiences of her Black students in school. On the other hand, she is constantly confronted by the color-blind narrative because she a) is White and b) she teaches in a U.S. public school—an institution that reproduces the color-blind narrative and other systems of White supremacy as it seeks to uphold/mask Mills’ Racial Contract.

As a teacher, the author must negotiate her participation in ENVoY—an administrative directive—both its non-verbal “race-neutral” approach to teacher-student interactions and her critically conscious beliefs about race. She negotiates these competing racial discourses as a White woman in the U.S., where whiteness is normalized and does not have to name itself. Ruth Frankenberg calls this positioning of whiteness “power evasiveness” (1993, p. 14) and Katerina Deliovsky calls it “white evasiveness” (2010, p. 37)—that which structures a White racial identity. Through this evasion, White people can choose not to engage in the complex power relations embedded in race relations, silencing themselves about race while continuing to hold racial power and privilege. Deliovsky asserts, “whiteness depends simultaneously on embracing and denying whiteness”—what she herself called ignoring and acknowledging race (p. 37). While much of our conversation about the role of race in the memory revolved around the author’s exclusion of the male student’s race, eventually we explicitly acknowledged that her whiteness was being ignored in the memory, too, and that naming the racial identities of both the male student *and* the female teacher helped us see how the memory can be read as a White woman grappling with her participation in a particular historical narrative about race.

Dangers of Intimacy

Once we filled the race vacuum—that the student in the story is Black and the teacher is White—we began our third and most critical reading of the complex and contradictory work that teachers do to ignore and acknowledge race. In this reading, we invoked the socio-historical narrative that imagines a danger in intimacy between White women’s bodies and Black men’s bodies, and we analyzed the

memory for the ways it both reproduces and attempts to disrupt this powerful narrative. The following is an excerpt from this part of our group analysis:

Kristin: Do you think you [author] were also trying to save the innocence of the boy a little bit in your memory? Because there's this story about dangers to young White girls from Black males who are assaulting them. And you get to save this this boy from being villainized through that archetype of Black men.

Justine: Well, and here "*the two of us*" went tumbling.

Kelsey: Yes, that's the two of you together.

Justine: And "*he lands,*" my dress "*was drawn up*"...I don't think I'm implicit in the action.

Kristin: And you left out how hurt you really were.

Justine: Well, the bruise only showed up the next day. But it did hurt in the moment.

Kristin: I know when I talk to people about my school I try to leave out the demographics. But people always ask and I don't want to tell you because...it's just going to perpetuate the terrible things you already think about Black kids.

Justine: He's annoyed that he landed on me. He didn't mean to. And I want to make that clear. And I didn't know that I wanted to make that clear. But I see that now.

Here, Kristin evokes the racial imaginary that Black men are a threat to White women when she asks Justine if she was "trying to save the innocence of the boy" through her use of language in the memory. Here, when Kristin asks the author if she was "trying" to save the innocence of the boy through her written construction of the memory, she questions the author rather than the text, which is misaligned with Haug's (1999) analysis methodology in that it assumes authorial intentionality. However, Kristin's inquiry did lead our Collective to critically examine the ways white people construct racial narratives and imaginaries to preserve and protect white dominance over people of color in relation to this story and white teachers' relationships with students of color. This racial narrative of dangerous Black men and innocent White women can be seen through U.S. colonial history; it is a story

constructed to reinforce White racial purity and supremacy. In *White Femininity: Race, Gender, and Power*, Deliovsky (2010) traces this racial narrative back through the history of European colonialism and slavery as a way Whites created “rigid boundaries of colour in an attempt to ensure European women gave birth to only ‘White’ children” and thus maintain the purity of the White race (p. 34). Policing the boundaries of intimacy between White women and Black men became a necessary feature of the construction of White women as victims and Black men as sexual predators. Further, this narrative justifies a need for White men to protect the virtue of White women (thus further constructing women as weak, dependent, and vulnerable) and to “suppress and control Black and Indigenous populations—ultimately, to secure White [male] control” (p. 34).

While our Collective did not cite Deliovsky’s historical and theoretical work in our analysis of this memory, we were familiar with this racial narrative of violent Black men, those “terrible things you [White people] already think about Black kids” that Kristin describes. As our discussion became a more critical reading of race in the memory, we also attuned ourselves to the dangers of these racial narratives and imaginaries—both for White women teachers who are positioned as the vulnerable victims and for Black men (Black students) who are constructed as perpetrators of violence. Not only did we sense risk and danger in how these stories position Black bodies and justify the violence done to them, but we worried about how, even by acknowledging and discussing these racial imaginaries, we were complicit in their reproduction, and thus fortified them. Indeed, we see manifestations of this narrative in many aspects of our lives today—from the violent and sexualized representations of Black men in the media to the words of White supremacist and murderer Dylann Roof, who used this false narrative, “you rape our [White] women” as justification for killing nine Black men and women in a church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015. Our Collective’s familiarity with this narrative was not a surprise to me, nor was their ability to deconstruct the ways in which the language in this memory was simultaneously reproducing and seeking to disrupt it.

In our analysis, we noticed how the story evokes this dangerous narrative and simultaneously works to protect a Black male student from being constructed as a violent Black man. We saw how the author protects the boy through the vacuum of race and the specific language she uses to describe the collision between the White female teacher and Black male student in the hallway. First, we revisited the lack of a racial identifier for the male student in the story. We read the fact that the student’s race is erased as an attempt to avoid reconstructing a story about a dangerous Black man attacking a White female teacher. Leaving out his race might keep the reader from applying those biases and stereotypes to this interaction, or as Kristin says, “to save this this boy from being villainized through that archetype of Black men.” But the thing about vacuums is that we (readers) *do* fill them in, and a

dominant racial narrative like this one can lead one to fill in the male student's race, to make him Black even though it's never stated.

Next, we attuned our analysis to who or what in the memory is given agency during the moment of collision. The way the author constructs language in the memory clearly establishes that she is not the target of the student, and that the student's actions are unintentional and accidental. She does this by making the action of the collision collective instead of individual, "the two of them went tumbling," implying no fault of one individual for the accident. In addition, she uses passive verb construction, "her dress was drawn up" to indicate that the male student does not actively mean to hurt her. He is not described as doing the action of drawing up her dress nor is he positioned as directly responsible for her intimate exposure. Further, the author describes the male student as "annoyed" and "shocked," terms that avoid directing culpability at him, perhaps even suggesting that he, too, is a victim. While the description of the student includes his "low guttural growl," which we decided sounds like an animal noise (and were concerned about this characterization of the student as an animal because of its racist reverberations), the memory does suggest (or hopes, at least), that the boy's noise has nothing to do with the teacher, that his intentions are not malicious. Instead, the memory reads, he made the noise because he had "failed to catch his target" (the other student), and she is or was never his "target."

The memory is more explicit about some things—that the male student is lying on top of the teacher and that her dress is drawn up—and these details pull us toward an interpretation of this moment as a dangerous story of intimacy and violence. At the same time, the language minimizes the physical and emotional pain that the teacher experienced because of the collision. While the teacher does brush away a tear, it is a single tear that is characterized as "quick." This language reduces the physical pain and discomfort that the author felt from being knocked to the ground, and doesn't begin to describe the emotional vulnerability she felt in that moment. Further, it fails to address conclusions that might be drawn by someone who witnessed the event, who might have seen her with her dress drawn up, underwear exposed, a young Black man lying on top of her. There is a real danger here for both the teacher and the student. Dismissing her own pain and describing the student's action with language that highlights his lack of malicious intent can be read as an attempt to tell a story without a villain or a victim. Otherwise, the Black male student could be easily villainized, placed into that historical narrative that young Black men are dangerous and a threat to White women, therefore also to White power and control. At school, he would no doubt be disciplined, perhaps harshly, as a result.

When the author uses language that avoids the construction of this dangerous narrative, in doing so she also masks a story about race. In fact, the focus of the ENVoY discipline protocol in the story and the narrative of teachers and students as

strangers who ignore one another *is* a story about race in school. In the end, the teacher again stands frozen on the blue line—both physically and emotionally—and she is also, perhaps, frozen in terms of what action to take to connect, build relationships, or interact with her Black students. But the student has gotten up, brushed off the dust, and run away, leaving the teacher to care for her wounds and deal with the tear, the crack that has emerged in her statue-like performance. It's a crack in her authority, a crack in the role of being the teacher in control, a crack in this silence = invisibility of race, a crack in the racial narrative that draws rigid boundaries between herself and her students. As she returns to the blue line to continue monitoring the hallway in silence, she also constructs a memory that ignores the racial interaction that has just occurred.

Toward the end of the analysis excerpt, Kristin draws on her own experience of avoiding race by “leave[ing] out the demographics” when she talks to people about where she teaches. This presents yet another example of how competing narratives live in the practice of acknowledging/ignoring race. Kristin is anxious that if she tells friends, family, or acquaintances that she teaches primarily Black students, powerful narratives of race, including deficit-oriented stories about what Black kids or families lack or links between Blackness and violence, will be reproduced and reaffirmed. Kristin acknowledges that these narratives are “terrible” but masking race seems to be her only strategy for dealing with them. In other words, Kristin sees the narratives as more powerful than she is to combat them, and thus disrupting the narrative a more difficult task than simply ignoring it.

Conclusion

CMW requires a willingness to embrace vulnerability and a collective sense of trust on the part of the Collective. In writing this piece, I used excerpts from the recording of our analysis to explore the increasingly complex readings of the memory we did as a group—and where relevant, I drew on social, historical, and political theories of gender, race, and teaching that complement our analysis. Other aspects of the potential of CMW are described below, including the value of the author as participant in the process, the approach to stories as multiple and contradictory, and the role that vacuums play in uncovering powerful discourses in our memories.

First, our analysis of this memory illustrates how, in CMW, the author of the memory is not passive. Writing the text in the third person and addressing the text rather than the person in our discussion (and in this paper) are aspects of CMW that engage the author as a participant in the analysis. In this case, Justine took up analysis of her own memory, bravely addressing the vacuum of race and in so doing bringing us all into a more critical discussion. CMW requires the author to engage in critical self-reflection and remain open to multiple interpretations of the memory and its construction, even interpretations that might name racist, classist, or sexist

discourses in the memory. For example, the author must stay open to exploring readings that position her as an equity-minded disrupter of racist narratives, and readings that explore how she ignored race and reproduced White supremacy via the narrative of “color-blindness.” During this vulnerable process, we all worked to engage with the ideologies the text produces, understanding how we are complicit in that production, rather than relying on a simple story about author intention. However, looking beyond author intention is often more difficult to do than expected, as was illustrated in Kristin’s question to Justine about what she was “trying” to do in the memory, and for Justine as she grapples with her own participation in these racial imaginaries and narratives.

Seeing and understanding the multiplicity of racial narratives about bodies in schools is important in the ongoing work of becoming a critically conscious and culturally responsive teacher. In a widely viewed TED Talk, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) discusses the “danger of a single story.” Power, she says, “is the ability not to just tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person.” The single story creates stereotypes, flattens experiences, and positions people on a hierarchy of power—which leads to discrimination and oppression. CMW, however, begins with several suppositions: stories are always multiple, meaning is always being made and remade, and contradictions are inevitable when we tell our own stories. By making explicit the multiplicity of interpretations of a story, CMW reveals the contradictory narratives that live in our memories. Memory-work can help us understand the difficult and easy ways we respond to our racial imaginaries when we encounter them in moment-to-moment interactions and why we might use our stories to mask or erase certain aspects of our lived experience. When we interrogate the construction of our memories, we can ask ourselves: How does this narrative construct a White woman teacher? How does it construct our White students? Our students of color? What larger narratives of race, teaching, and learning do these constructions reproduce and how? These questions keep the focus on the multiple ideologies produced in and through discourse in the memory. Finally, this work asks us to hold all of those stories at once—not to find the “truth” or figure out “what really happened” but see these readings as “truths,” even contradictory ones, that we use to speak or write ourselves into existence.

In our analysis of this memory, one of the contradictions we explored was competing narratives of raced bodies in schools—“color-blindness” vs. critical race theory. We used the word “ignore” to describe a position a White teacher might take in relation to her students’ raced identities, both in moment-to-moment interactions with them and, in a larger way, to perpetuate a color-blind approach to race. While the term “ignore” opened up for us an engaging critical discussion of race in schools, it also fails to fully encapsulate the social, political, historical, institutional, and cultural effects that these powerful race narratives, pedagogies, and practices

have on students in classrooms. The end of our memory analysis led us to ask more specific, critical questions about teachers' and students' bodies and racialization: Who has the privilege to decide when race is "ignored" or acknowledged in school? How does a behavior program like ENVoY "ignore" race by disallowing verbal interactions between students and teachers around issues of behavior/discipline (i.e., highly charged racial constructs in schools) while creating an elaborate system of non-verbal signs, signals, and gestures that control and manage Black and Brown students' bodies in insidious ways? When White women teachers "ignore" race as a strategy for protecting Black students, whom does it serve and what dangerous race narratives does it allow to go unexamined? Is our Collective's response—to avoid reproducing the narrative of dangerous Black men—reflective of our own fears of racial intimacy, or our sophisticated understanding of and resistance to racial narratives, or perhaps both? These questions remind us that becoming a more critical and culturally responsive teacher is truly an ongoing process of "becoming" not a checklist or set of skills to be mastered, and that White teachers must attune themselves to race; acknowledging race is only the first step in this process. We are complicit in the reproduction of White supremacy even as we attempt to disrupt it.

Thus, a third important aspect of the collective memory work process is the naming and analyzing of vacuums in our stories. Depending on who we are communicating with and for what purposes, as speakers/writers we leave out information all the time—expecting our audience to make connections and fill in the blanks. But there is power imbued in those vacuums—both the *what* and the *why* of the unsaid. Naming and interrogating the ever-present vacuums in our lives can thus become a powerful new form of knowledge and way of seeing the world. First, the vacuum itself holds meaning; when the author described generally her students of "all colors" and then failed to name her own race or the race of the male student in the story, that lack held the weight of race, and all of the power, privilege, and oppression embedded in schools as racist institutions. Second, how the vacuum gets filled in also helps us see how we as readers make meaning from stories and the narratives that shape the ways we see the world. When Justine herself filled the vacuum with the student's race in our analysis session, and also acknowledged her own racialized identity, we were able to move forward with critical theorizing about the role of race in the story. Some of us admitted that we had imagined the student as Black, but others had left him colorless in their imagination—perhaps as a way to avoid addressing racial narratives, or to make this a story about a new teacher who feels ignored rather than a story about race.

As a Collective, we learned new language for thinking and talking about teaching, race, and gender in classrooms as we worked with this memory. In particular, the notion of ignoring/acknowledging race was a new way in which we attuned ourselves to the construction of race in schools, and our roles in that construction as White and Bi-racial women teachers. We also came to a more

complex understanding of what ENVoY as a behavior discipline protocol is doing to the bodies of students and teachers in schools. Our initial reactions to ENVoY were mixed—some were curious about the power of non-verbal interactions and others were shocked and appalled by its perceived rigidity or about being purposefully silent in interactions with students. This memory allowed us to critically examine one moment of the ENVoY protocol in context—and to consider how every classroom management program, policy, or system is ultimately about power, authority, control, and bodies. Race, social class, gender, (dis)ability, language, and other factors always play a part in the enactment of control; in other words, teaching is a political act and our bodies, political actors.

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