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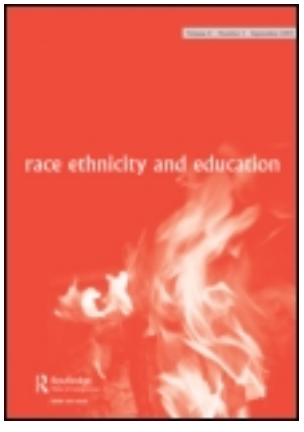

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In this article, we combine aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Disability Studies (DS) to propose a new theoretical framework that incorporates a dual analysis of race and ability: Dis/ability Critical Race Studies, or DisCrit. We first examine some connections between the interdependent constructions of race and dis/ability in education and society in the United States and why we find it necessary to add another branch to Critical Race Theory and Disability Studies. Next, we outline the tenets of DisCrit, calling attention to its potential value as well as elucidate some tensions, cautions, and current limitations within DisCrit. Finally, we suggest ways in which DisCrit can be used in relation to moving beyond the contemporary impasse of researching race and dis/ability within education and other fields.

Keywords: race; ability; dis/ability; Critical Race Theory; Disability Studies

In this article, we combine aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Disability Studies (DS) to propose a new theoretical framework that incorporates a dual analysis of race and ability: Dis/ability Critical Race Studies, or DisCrit.[1] We first examine some connections between the interdependent constructions of race and dis/ability in education and society in the United States and why we find it necessary to add another branch to Critical Race Theory and Disability Studies. Next, we outline the tenets of DisCrit, calling attention to its potential value as well as elucidate some tensions, cautions, and current limitations within DisCrit. Finally, we suggest ways in which DisCrit can be used in relation to moving beyond the contemporary impasse of researching race and dis/ability within education and other fields.

> For a century or more it had been the dream of those who do not believe Negroes are human that their wish should find some scientific basis. For years they depended on the weight of the human brain, trusting that the alleged

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> underweight of less than a thousand Negro brains, measured without reference to age, stature, nutrition or cause of death, would convince the world that black men simply could not be educated. Today scientists acknowledge that there is no warrant for such a conclusion… (W.E.B. Du Bois 1920)

Introduction: racializing ability, disabling race

Drawing on tools of scientific racism, including post-mortem studies of human brains, scientists have attempted to prove the inferiority and lower intelligence of African Americans in order to justify segregation and inequitable treatment within the United States and beyond. In his essay, *Racial Intelligence*, Du Bois (1920) highlighted some of these attempts to align ability with racial classification. These attempts included comparing skeletal and cranium sizes without regard to age or developmental conditions, and giving tests that required individuals to fill in details of pictures depicting things they had never seen before such as tennis courts or bowling alleys. Du Bois chronicled what is now widely recognized as a continued attempt throughout history to 'prove' people of African descent possessed limited intelligence and were therefore not quite fully human. This notion had been reified throughout the nineteenth century in the fields of phrenology and racial anthropological physiognomy that claimed physical attributes were the basis of intellectual, social, and moral growth. Black and brown bodies were viewed as less developed than white bodies, more 'primitive,' and even considered sub-species of humans (Trent 1998). This historical conceptualization of human differences was used to justify the slavery, segregation, unequal treatment, harassment, violence and even murder of black and brown bodies (Menchaca 1997; Valencia 1997).

Unfortunately, the legacy of historical beliefs about race and ability, which were clearly based on white supremacy, have become intertwined in complex ways that carry into the present day. Segregated special classes have been populated with students from non-dominant[2] racial and ethnic groups, from immigrant populations, and from 'lower' social classes and status since their inception (Erevelles 2000; Ferri and Connor 2006; Franklin 1987). A disproportionate number of non-dominant racial, ethnic, and linguistic continue to be referred, labeled, and placed in special education, particularly in the categories of Learning Disability, Intellectual Disability (formerly called Mental Retardation), and Emotional Disturbance or Behavior Disorders (Harry and Klingner 2006; Losen and Orfield 2002). These categories often referred to as high incidence categories, are the most problematic in terms of diagnosis because they rely on the subjective judgment of school personnel rather than biological facts. Although it is perhaps easier to conceptualize dis/abilities that are 'clinically determined' (i.e. based on professional judgment) as subjective, all dis/ability categories, whether

physical, cognitive, or sensory, are also subjective. In other words, societal interpretations of and responses to specific differences from the normed body are what signify a dis/ability. Indeed, notions of dis/ability continually shift over time according to the social context. Thus, dis/ability categories are *not* 'given' or 'real' *on their own*. Rather, [dis/abilities such as] 'autism, mental retardation, and competence are what any of us make of them' (Kiiewer, Biklen, and Kasa-Hendrickson 2006). Moreover, even dis/abilities that might seem self-evident are largely determined by relatively arbitrary distinctions between, for instance, what is considered poor eyesight and what constitutes blindness. Of course, while disability and ability are seen as either/or categories, how well someone can see or hear is largely influenced by the context – such as the existence of light and color and the degree of background noise and tone. Likewise, the definition (and even the terminology) of intellectual dis/ability has been revised continually, most notably when the AAMD (American Association of Mental Deficiency) revised the definition of mental retardation in 1973 from those with a measured IQ score of 85 to an IQ score of 70. In the stroke of a policy change, many people who had been labeled as mentally retarded were essentially 'cured' of their condition. This monumental change was largely the result of special education coming under fire for the over-representation of students of color in programs for students with intellectual dis/abilities.

Despite this change in definition, however, African American students continue to be three times as likely to be labeled mentally retarded, two times as likely to be labeled emotionally disturbed, and one and a half times as likely to be labeled learning disabled, compared to their white peers (Parish 2002). African American students, in particular, are at risk of being over-represented (Fierros and Conroy 2002), but Latino, American Indian and Native Alaskan students are also disproportionately represented, particularly in states with large numbers of students from these groups (Losen and Orfield 2002). Over-representation of students of color is much less likely in dis/ability categories that are sensory or physical in nature such as blindness, deafness, or physical impairments. This fact alone is evidence that race and perceived ability (or lack thereof) are still connected within educational structures and practices today albeit in much more subtle ways (Harry and Klingner 2006).

As critical special educators whose work involves challenging commonly accepted notions of dis/ability, we are most interested in researching the ways that race and dis/ability intersect. However, to date we have found very few theories that sufficiently examine the ways these two markers of identity interact with each other. Several scholars have noted that many in Dis/ability Studies (DS) leave race unexamined (Bell 2006; Blanchett 2006; Connor 2008a). Other critical special educators employ either DS on its own and mention race as a mitigating factor (Reid and Knight 2006). Others have begun to find points between DS and Critical Race Theory (CRT) with

view to showing CRT how this intersection can offer more nuanced readings of the way race and ability are deployed in schools and in society (Erevelles 2011; Erevelles, Kanga, and Middleton 2006; Ferri 2010; Leonardo and Brodderick 2011; Watts and Erevelles 2004). These efforts have contributed greatly to our understandings about how race and ability interact in complex ways, yet some of these attempts still seem to leave one identity marker foregrounded, while the other is an additive and subsequently defaults into the background. In the field of CRT, for instance, it has been noted that the topics of dis/ability and special education are not sufficiently represented or simply omitted, despite many overlapping interests and concerns that hold the promise of potentially strong allegiances between researchers (Connor 2008b). Similarly, there remains a vital task of fully accounting for race and critiquing the deployment of whiteness within the field of DS (Bell 2006; Blanchett 2010; Leonardo and Broderick 2011). Given the ways that race has figured so prominently in special education status, we would argue that it is nothing short of irresponsible to leave race out of dis/ability related research in special education.

Recently, scholars have begun to examine the intersection of race and dis/ability in more complex ways. For example, Erevelles and Minear (2010) illustrate the value of intersectional approaches to race and dis/ability, while specifying three differing approaches used in current scholarship 'on the constitutive features of multiply minoritizing identities' (127). They outline these approaches as follows:

> (1) anticategorical frameworks that insist on race, class, and gender as social constructs/fictions; (2) intracategorical frameworks that critique merely additive approaches to differences as layered stigmas; and (3) constitutive frameworks that describe the structural conditions within which social categories in the above models are constructed by (and intermeshed with) each other in specific historical contexts.

It is clear that intersectional work on race and dis/ability is complex by nature. Perhaps this is, arguably, what has drawn a small but growing constellation of scholars in CRT. At a recent conference on CRT, for instance, several researchers addressed the intersectionality of race and dis/ability in diverse areas such as mainstream films (Agosto 2012), teacher–student verbal interactions (Davila 2012), and notions of normalcy (Watson et al. 2012). The keynote presentation titled, *Intersectionality and the Primacy of Racism: Race, Class, Gender and Disability in Education* (Gillborn 2012), fully accounted for the intersections of race and dis/ability. While arguing that race can unapologetically be positioned at the front and center of intersectional work, Gillborn incorporated dis/ability as a marker of identity and social location, alongside the more widely accepted classifications of social class and gender. In other words, Gillborn recognizes that

it is fine for a primary interest to drive a researcher, but imperative that other dimensions must be taken seriously within the work, rather than giving a cursory nod before moving on. Thus, by analyzing multiple dimensions within a specific context, researchers are able to see how they can mesh, blur, overlap, and interact in various ways to reveal knowledge, such as Gillborn's research on black children identified as dis/abled in the UK revealing how perceptions of race can trump social class status. The product of deeply entrenched racism embedded within educational and societal structures, Gillborn's research shows how students who are positioned as black and disabled experience myriad educational and social inequalities.

Given the small but growing interest in ways that race and dis/ability are co-constructed, we argue the time is right to propose Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit). DisCrit explores ways in which both race and ability are socially constructed and interdependent. As scholars working within DisCrit, we seek to examine the processes in which students are simultaneously raced and dis/abled. Culling from the work of Solórzano and Bernal (2001) in which they illustrated how 'Chicana and Chicano students live between and within layers of subordination base on race, class, gender, language, immigration status, accent, and phenotype (Johnson 1998) so that these students do not "fit" neatly into a single category' (335), we believe that students of color who have been labeled with dis/abilities live in this same complex world where they do not fit neatly into any one category. However, for students of color, the label of dis/ability situates them in unique positions where they are considered 'less than' white peers with or without dis/ability labels, as well as their non-disabled peers of color. In brief, their embodiment and positioning reveals ways in which racism and ableism inform and rely upon each other in interdependent ways.

In order to examine the connections between the construction of race and dis/ability, we have separated this article into three parts. In the first section we explicitly name our rationale; why we believe it is necessary to add another branch to CRT and why the location of being both a person of color *and* a person labeled with a dis/ability is qualitatively different for students of color than white students with a dis/ability (Crenshaw 1993; Solórzano and Yosso 2001). In the second section, we outline the tenets of DisCrit. Finally, in the third section, we elucidate some tensions and cautions within DisCrit.

Rationale for DisCrit

Scholars outside Dis/ability studies might see an article about dis/ability and think, 'This is a special education issue so I do not have to concern myself.' However, we believe that issues of perceived dis/ability constitute issues of equity that involve all people. Like Du Bois before them, many critical scholars outside the field of special education have recognized that the social

construction of dis/ability depends heavily on race and can result in marginalization, particularly for people of color and those from non-dominant communities (Gutiérrez and Stone 1997; McDermott, Goldman, and Varenne 2006; Oakes 1995; Rubin and Noguera 2004). Given the racial gap in graduation, incidents of discipline, and incarceration rates, along with vast over-representation of students of color in special education and the lackluster achievement rates within many of these special education programs, we must critically examine why so many students labeled with a dis/ability, particularly students of color, are either experiencing failure or being perceived as failing and on what grounds.

We introduce DisCrit as an exploratory conversation wherein we ask, 'How might DisCrit further expand our knowledge (or understanding) of race and dis/ability?' We seek to add important dimensions to CRT analysis by considering the ways race and dis/ability are co-constructed. Our goal is not to replace or replicate CRT, but to recognize what it both enables and constrains and then propose the necessity of considering ability within the framework. Indeed, we are indebted to CRT, LatCrit and Fem-Crit (as well as Feminist Legal Studies), along with Dis/abilities Studies theorists, for laying the groundwork and stimulating our thinking in this endeavor (Bell 1987; Berry 2010; Brantlinger, 1997; Crenshaw et al. 1995; Delgado Bernal 2002; Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Erevelles et al. 2006; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; MacKinnon 1998/2011; Reid and Valle 2004; Solórzano and Bernal 2001; Solórzano and Yosso 2001). We draw on many of these works, not to co-opt them, but rather to illustrate points of connection between and among dis/ability and the various social locations theorized by these scholars with the intent to further develop theory that will be of service in understanding the lived realities of people. DisCrit is an attempt to recognize a confluence between fields that are profoundly connected but are, for various reasons, often unable or unwilling to engage in joint thinking and efforts to solve issues faced by people of color. The aim of DisCrit is to push DS and CRT to academically and practically bridge commonalities utilizing the tensions between the theories as places for growth instead of resistance and separation. Ultimately we want to extend CRT and DS in ways that are useful and thoughtful to better understand how concepts of race and ability are intertwined.

We believe, for instance, that racism and ableism are normalizing processes that are interconnected and collusive. In other words, racism and ableism often work in ways that are unspoken, yet racism validates and reinforces ableism, and ableism validates and reinforces racism. For students of color, race does not exist outside of ability and ability does not exist outside of race; each is being built upon the perception of the other (Crenshaw 1993). However, because racism and ableism are 'so enmeshed in the fabric of our social order, [they] appear both normal and natural to people in this culture' (Delgado and Stefancic 2001, 21). Our goals, then, align with Delgado and

Stefancic's (2001) desire to unmask and expose the normalizing processes of racism and ableism as they circulate in society.

A DisCrit theory in education is a framework that theorizes about the ways in which race, racism, dis/ability and ableism are built into the interactions, procedures, discourses, and institutions of education, which affect students of color with dis/abilities qualitatively differently than white students with dis/abilities (Crenshaw 1993; Solórzano and Yosso 2001).[3] The qualitatively different experiences of students of color labeled with the same dis/ability in comparison to white peers in education settings is illustrative. For example, students of color tend to be educated in settings segregated from the general population more often than their white peers with the same dis/ability label who were more likely to receive support in the general education classroom and learn alongside their general education peers (Fierros and Conroy 2002). In other words, dis/ability status justifies segregation and unequal treatment for students of color compared to their white counterparts. Additionally, African American students are '67% more likely than white students with emotional and behavioral problems to be removed from school on the grounds of dangerousness and 13 times more likely than white students with emotional and behavioral problems to be arrested in school' (Meiners 2007, 38). Dis/ability status works somewhat differently within higher education. For example, although there has been an increase in students with Learning Dis/abilities (LD) entering college, the majority of students are white and from families whose annual income exceeded $100,000 (Reid and Knight 2006); signaling that being white *and* possessing economic means allows a student with LD to gain access to higher education. The experiences of students of color with dis/abilities, such as where they are educated, with whom they are educated, and their access to college, tend to be qualitatively different than the experiences of their white peers with the same label (Blackorby and Wagner 1996). The role of the liberal, white middles class in maintaining structures and practices of privilege within education has been documented by Brantlinger in her study of social class and race interlock (2003).

Using DisCrit, we seek to address the structural power of ableism and racism by recognizing the historical, social, political and economic interests of limiting access to educational equity to students of color with dis/abilities on both macro and microlevels (Connor 2008a). We recognize that ability and dis/ability are perceived and created based on ideologies of race and located within social and institutional structures as well as personal attitudes. As Collins (1990) notes:

> First, the notion of interlocking oppressions refers to the macrolevel connections linking systems of oppression such as race, class, and gender. This is the model describing the social structures that create social positions. Second, the notion of intersectionality describes microlevel processes-namely, how each

> individual and group occupies a social position within interlocking structures of oppression described by the metaphor of intersectionality. Together they shape oppression. (492).

DisCrit seeks to understand ways that macrolevel issues of racism and ableism, among other structural discriminatory processes, are enacted in the day-to-day lives of students of color with dis/abilities.

Additionally, we find Crenshaw's (1993) work on intersectionality useful for theorizing the ways in which race and ability are likewise intertwined in terms of identity. Similar to Crenshaw's articulation of race and gender, students of color labeled with a dis/ability likewise 'have no discourse responsive to their specific position in the social landscape; instead they are constantly forced to divide loyalties as social conflict is presented as a choice between grounds of identity' (Crenshaw et al. 1995, 354). Although Crenshaw does not speak directly to dis/ability, Watts and Erevelles (2004) contend that students of color labeled as disabled, like women of color or gay and lesbian people of color, must also choose where to stand in social conflicts with groups that do not fully share their identities. Moreover, in terms of dis/ability identity, dis/abled students are often positioned such that they are likely (and even encouraged) to reject identifying as disabled as something that is inherently negative or shameful (Connor 2008a) rather than a potentially politicized identity or critical consciousness (Peterson 2009; Shakespeare 1996). The consequences of simply being labeled as disabled, even if one does not claim that identity, can result in rejection from cultural, racial, ethnic and gender groups (Goodwin 2003). Moreover, unlike race and ethnicity, individuals who are disabled, like individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) typically do not share this social status with their immediate family members (Morris 1991; Shakespeare 1996). DisCrit draws on insights from Dis/ability Studies to provide a discourse responsive to the social positioning of students of color with a dis/ability, reframing dis/ability from its subordinate position to a positive marker of identity and something to be 'claimed' (Caldwell 2011; Linton 1998b).

The ways in which over-representation of students of color in special education currently work, reinforces the racial hierarchies the US subscribes to, namely: (1) the under-representation of Asian Americans, which problematically allows them to be seen as a homogenized 'model' minority (Lee 2009); (2) the exclusion of Native Americans in almost all research and continues to emphasize their invisibility in education and larger societal discourse even though they are vastly over-represented in many categories of special education, particularly in states with large numbers of Native American students (Brayboy 2006; Fierros and Conroy 2002); (3) the over-representation of Latinos/Latinas in some regions of the country where their population is high and the ways those who speak a second language

intersects with notion of ability. Additionally, emerging bilinguals are more likely to be over-represented in middle and high school and this timing may coincide when they are exited or graduated from segregated ESL or bilingual programs (Artiles et al. 2005); and (4) and the continual over-representation of African Americans across the US, regardless of social class, positions them as the continual problem in American education (Erevelles et al. 2006). Each of these trends in over-representation must be examined in relation to race and ability. In this case, an additional consideration would include gender, given that most of these statistics represent males; at the same time, females of color are also disproportionately represented in disciplinary actions, special education and the juvenile justice system compared to their white female peers (The American Bar Association and National Bar Association 2001; Losen and Skiba 2010; Mendez and Knoff 2003; Oswald, Coutinho, and Best 2002).

As we frame our discussion of DisCrit, we draw on research that relies on the statistical categories of ability and race because these categories result in socially constructed inequities, not because we believe they are necessarily biological realities. This is essential to state explicitly as we do not want to impose identity categories upon any one individual or group of people. Instead, we seek to highlight how the process of structural racism externally imposes identities on individuals by applying socially constructed labels. We also hope to illustrate how specific consequences are associated with labeling. We therefore acknowledge that while ability and racial categories are socially constructed, they continue to have real material outcomes in terms of lived experiences.

DisCrit problematizes the ways that binaries between normal/abnormal and abled/disabled play out in a range of contexts. From the physical layout of K-12 schools, where special education is often relegated to separate hallways or even buildings removed from the rest of the students, to universities where departments of Special Education are often detached from Curriculum and Instruction in schools of education (Young 2011). Thus, in symbolic and material ways dis/ability occupies quarantined spaces (Foucault 1977: Graham and Slee 2007). Similar lines are drawn in such diverse contexts as film and media, to publications on dis/ability, to sports and recreation.[4]

Where particular kinds of texts get published and circulated is another salient example of this line between able/disabled. For example, articles that focus upon the over-representation of students of color are often published in special education journals, whereas articles that are perceived as general education topics are published in journals that are specific to general education. Thus, rarely do these topics of race and dis/ability intersect. When those of us in special education attempt to write for a 'general education' journal audience, editors respond that we must give explicit explanations for why our work should be read by those who do not work within the field of special education. This professionally enforced line between special

education and general education journals sustains and encourages the compartmentalization of these two artificially separated domains instead of seeing sharing the same field of education. Furthermore, the separation of research reifies the differences between ability and disability, emphasizing divisions among educators and the students we serve.

We see this general–special dividing line being drawn in K-12 schools, teacher education programs, teacher certification, education research, and society at large. It is a line that is focused upon what children with dis/abilities cannot do, instead of emphasizing what their strengths are and what unique abilities they possess. It also reifies some students as 'regular' or normative and others as so different that their instruction should be left to specialists. DisCrit questions how this line is drawn, how it has changed over time for a variety of types of dis/abilities, who has the control over this line, and what effects the line produces in education and in society? In other words, DisCrit recognizes the shifting boundary between normal and abnormal, between ability and disability, and seeks to question ways in which race contributes to one being positioned on either side of the line. Like whiteness as a social construct or the phenomenon of differential racialization, which both expand and contract racial categories to include and exclude different people in order to limit and extend benefits of being labeled as such, ability and disability changes throughout history in similar ways and are deeply impacted by perceptions of race (Banks 2002; Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Leonardo 2007). In order to understand this phenomenological 'line,' it will be necessary to examine ways in which differential minority groups have become racialized in various regions of the country throughout different periods of time – and how beliefs about of dis/ability affect those occurrences.

Encountering the social construction of dis/ability, many people pose the question, 'Are you arguing that there are no physical or mental differences in abilities?' In response, we would acknowledge that there are, of course, corporeal differences among humans though those differences are rarely, if ever, as fixed and obvious as generally assumed. However, we *are* most interested in human *responses* to those differences we currently call dis/abilities.[5] We do not see the benefit of drawing what is inevitably an arbitrary (and unstable) line, where certain differences are not perceived as part of normal human variation, but rather become a 'thing' so different that we must call them disabled. Moreover, the very notion of difference relies on something else being normative. We are all different from one another. In other words, a person who is perceived as having a dis/ability is no more or less different from someone who is considered nondisabled than that nondisabled person is different from him/her. Yet, the person with the dis/ability is perceived as the one who is inherently different. However, there can be no difference without a norm, upon which difference is measured. We agree, therefore, with Baglieri and Knopf (2004) who state, 'The question is not

whether we perceive differences among people, but, rather, *what meaning is brought to bear on those perceived differences*' (525, emphasis added).

In the remaining portion of this article we put some of these ideas into specific tenets and then elaborate on each tenet. We do so not to be prescriptive, but rather to try to operationalize what kinds of specific questions and issues can be illuminated from a DisCrit approach.

Tenets of DisCrit

For DisCrit to be useful, we propose the following tenets:

(1) DisCrit focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy.
(2) DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race *or* dis/ability *or* class *or* gender *or* sexuality, and so on.
(3) DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms.
(4) DisCrit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research.
(5) DisCrit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens.
(6) DisCrit recognizes whiteness and Ability as Property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of interest convergence of white, middle-class citizens.
(7) DisCrit requires activism and supports all forms of resistance.

Tenet one

DisCrit focuses on the ways race and dis/ability have been used in tandem to marginalize particular groups in society. In other words, DisCrit focuses on the interdependent ways that racism and ableism shape notions of normalcy. These mutually constitutive processes are enacted through normalizing practices such as labeling a student 'at-risk' for simply being a person of color, thereby reinforcing the unmarked norms of whiteness, and signaling to many that the student is not capable in body and mind (Collins 2003; Ferri 2010; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Neither institutional racism alone nor institutional ableism on its own can explain why students of color are more likely to be labeled with dis/abilities and segregated than their white peers with and without dis/abilities; instead, it is the two working

together (Beratan 2008). Like Watts and Erevelles (2004), we argue that 'any discussion of racial and dis/ability oppression must necessarily, at the same time, engage with a critique of structures of "normativity" that are produced in an ableist and racist society' (292). As Ladson-Billings (1998) notes, when traits such as whiteness and ability are seen as normal, 'everyone is ranked and categorized in relation to these points of opposition' (9). Said differently, DisCrit recognizes that normative cultural standards such as whiteness and ability lead to viewing differences among certain individuals as deficits.

Moreover, DisCrit seeks to reject the commonly held assumption that those who are perceived as deviating from standards of whiteness or ability necessarily want to achieve those standards (Erevelles 2000). Many individuals who identify as having learning or other differences that we might perceive as dis/abilities, for instance, talk about the strengths they have because of their unique perspective in the world. They insist that they would not give up their so-called dis/ability to 'achieve normality' (Kunc, in Habib 2008; Mooney 2008). Yet, purposely 'falling short' of cultural standards, in addition to being seen as irresponsible and unintelligible, can be sanctioned if viewed as a burden to society. In an extreme example of this, a school district in Michigan worked to legally compel a deaf mother to get cochlear implants for her two deaf sons arguing that it was best for the boys and society in terms of their future employability and economic opportunities (Shapiro 2002).

Tenet two

DisCrit emphasizes multidimensional identities (Solorzano and Bernal 2001) rather than singular notions of identity, such as race, dis/ability, social class, or gender. Central, too, is a consideration of how certain identity markers, which have been viewed as differences from normative cultural standards, have allowed teachers, other school personnel, and society to perceive particular students as deficient, lacking, and inferior (Collins 2003). Therefore, DisCrit foregrounds issues that have previously not been given prominence in CRT and recognize how these other markers of difference from the norm, in addition to race, contribute to constructing dis/ability (e.g. culture, sexuality, language, immigration status, gender, class). Additionally, DisCrit acknowledges how experiences with stigma and segregation often vary, based on other identity markers (i.e. gender, language, class) and how this negotiation of multiple stigmatized identities adds complexity.

Tenet three

DisCrit rejects the understanding of both race and dis/ability as primarily biological facts and recognizes the social construction of both as society's response to 'differences' from the norm (Mirza 1998). Race and ability are

socially constructed in tandem, the perception of race 'informing' the potential abilities of a student and the abilities 'informing' the perceived race. Simultaneously, DisCrit rejects what Crenshaw (1993) has called the vulgarization of social construction, where critics claim that if race is considered a social construction then it should be seen as insignificant and be ignored. In other words, while recognizing the social construction of particular identity markers, such as race and ability, DisCrit acknowledges that these categories hold profound significance in people's lives, both in the present and historically. The error, however, made by those who make a false distinction between race as a social construction and dis/ability as a biological fact, distinguishing dis/ability from aspects of identity that are seen as culturally determined 'differences,' continues to justify the segregation and marginalization of students who are considered dis/abled from their 'normal' peers. As stated above, this phenomenon is particularly true for students of color with dis/ability labels who are more likely to be segregated than their white peers with the same dis/ability label (Fierros and Conroy 2002). Segregation, particularly of black and brown students labeled with a dis/ability, would be illegal if based upon race, but is allowed because dis/ability is seen as a 'real' rather than a constructed difference (Beratan 2008; Kim, Losen, and Hewitt 2010). DisCrit renounces the uncritical assumption that segregation is necessary or rational approach to dis/ability any more than it would be necessary or rational approach to other identity markers. Moreover, simply 'fixing' over-representation of students of color is insufficient if by doing so, we still leave segregation based on dis/ability intact – something that DisCrit finds unjustified and problematic.

Tenet four

DisCrit empathizes with John Powell's words, 'I feel like I've been spoken for and I feel like I've been spoken about, but rarely do I feel like I've been spoken to' (Dalton 1987, 81). A similar mantra in dis/ability rights circles, 'Nothing about us, without us' (Charlton 2000, 3), also speaks to this tenet. DisCrit, therefore, seeks to disrupt the tradition of ignoring the voices of traditionally marginalized groups and instead privileges insider voices (Matsuda 1987). DisCrit invites understanding of ways students respond to injustices (i.e. being constructed as deficient, or being segregated and stigmatized) through fostering or attending to counter-narratives and explicitly reading these stories against the grain of master narratives. Attending to counter-narratives encourage us to learn how students respond to injustice, not through passive acceptance, but through tactics such as strategic maneuvering. In one study, for instance, young women labeled with an invisible dis/ability would physically or verbally deflect or avoid being identified by peers as being in special education not simply to pass as 'normal,' but to counter easy assumptions about who they were as young women (Ferri and

Connor 2010). In another study of young woman with intellectual dis/abilities, Erevelles and Mutua (2005) illustrate how the claiming of subjectivity can even entail the acknowledgment that one *is* in fact a woman, because others, including family members, may fail to acknowledge the adult status of individuals with dis/abilities and see them instead as perpetual children.

We emphasize that DisCrit does not purport to 'give voice,' as we recognize that people of color and/or those with dis/abilities already have voice. Research that purports to give voices runs the risks of speaking for or in place of people of color with dis/abilities, which can reinforce paternalistic notions. Although the perspectives and insights of historically marginalized populations have been ignored in traditional research and education reform, we argue, instead, that it is imperative for readers to listen carefully and respectfully to counter-narratives, and for researchers to use them as a form of academic activism to explicitly 'talk back' to master-narratives. Matsuda (1987) highlights the benefits of contrasting counter-narratives with the master narrative, 'When notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice, are examined…from the position of groups who have suffered through history, moral relativism recedes and identifiable normative priorities emerge' (325).

Tenet five

DisCrit considers legal, ideological, and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of certain citizens. The root cause of this denial of rights is the belief in the superiority of whiteness, wherein a racial hierarchy was created with whiteness at the apex, blackness at the base and all other races falling in between (Bonilla-Silva 2006). To be clear, this hierarchy had only two permanent fixtures, whiteness and blackness; differential racialization meant that other races could shift in their positions, but none could match the superiority of whiteness (Delgado and Stefancic 2001).

Salient is that pseudo-scientific knowledge emerged not as objective findings, which is what they were presented as, but as ways to reinforce the belief of whiteness as superior (Valencia 1997). Through the 'science' of phrenology, craniology and eugenics among others, it was 'proven' that people of color had less capacity for intelligence than whites and laws, policies and programs were created that discouraged reproduction of particular types of people, particularly the poor and people of color, along with racial mixing (Menchaca 1997). We must acknowledge differential racialization, however. In other words, that race is an ever-shifting category. For example, whiteness was not always the property of poor whites or certain immigrant groups (Roediger 1991). Forced sterilization in parts of the US was directed not just at people who we would now recognize as people of color, but also poor whites and Eastern Europeans immigrants who were thought to be feebleminded (Selden 1999).

DisCrit, therefore, offers the possibility of a more complicated reading of the basis of white supremacy. Without racialized notions of ability, racial difference would simply be racial difference. Because racial difference has been explicitly linked with an intellectual hierarchy, however, racial differences take on additional weight. Historically, scientific knowledge in the form of phrenology coupled with anthropological physiognomy did not simply reinforce racial hierarchies; it created their possibility. Today, various notions of dis/ability (identified through what are assumed to be objective clinical assessments or responses to 'evidence-based' interventions) reinforce similar race and ability hierarchies. Said another way, dis/ability and race first became equated and molded through pseudo-sciences, but later further cemented through seemingly 'objective' clinical assessment practices. The dis/ability-race nexus were then reified through laws, policies, and programs until these concepts became uncritically conflated and viewed as the natural order of things (Baynton 2001). DisCrit consequently challenges beliefs about the inferiority of the intelligence and culture of people of color, born within pseudo-sciences and later upheld by contemporary assessment practices.

Legal policies also worked to 'racialize' dis/ability both historically and currently (Schweik 2009). Black codes were used against freed slaves after Reconstruction that criminalized vagrancy or laziness in a way that implied African Americans refused to work due to mental illness or dis/ability instead of refusal to work due to unfair and dangerous labor practices (Alexander 2010; Davis 2003). These codes criminalized actions such as vagrancy, absence from work and insulting gestures only when the person was black. In 1974, the *Lau vs Nichols* case along with the Lau remedies, established the need for bilingual education and attempted to end the practice of finding limited English proficient speaking children disabled through English-only instruction (Baca and Cervantes 2004; Baker 2001). Currently, IDEA has made racial disproportionality in special education is one of the three priorities for monitoring and enforcement (Kim et al. 2010). Overall, we see how legal policies have racialized dis/ability and therefore made students of color with dis/abilities the beneficiaries of a double-edged sword wherein they receive specialized services due to the dis/ability label, but endure segregation, stigmatization and 'debatable quality of educational outcomes' (Hart et al. 2009). Thus, DisCrit renounces imposed segregation and promotes an ethic of unqualified belonging and full inclusion in schools and society.[6]

Finally, the focus on over-representation can deflect concerns about the lack of special education supports in under resourced schools that students of color are more likely to attend. Kim et al. (2010) note:

> For minority children, there is a tension between the misuse of special education identification, placement, and discipline as a means of school exclusion,

> and another equally troubling phenomenon, the failure to identify poor and minority students with disabilities who need high-quality special education and the related procedural protections.

Additionally, DisCrit is interested in ways that race and ability shape ideas about citizenship and belonging. Race and dis/ability figure into who is perceived as an ideal citizen, including who is allowed to represent or signify a nation, how nations pursue 'building' a strong, healthy population that is ready for competition in work and war, and ways nations seek to reproduce and expand. We acknowledge that dis/ability plays out contra to these notions – triggering stereotypic associations with weaknesses, including fears of individuals seen as unhealthy, unable to adequately compete in work and war, with their reproductive potential questioned, feared or even forcibly managed (Terry and Urla 1995). It is important to make these connections – not just historically, but also in the current context of immigration restrictions, punitive policies, and the changing demographics of schools (Caps et al. 2005). Furthermore, DisCrit acknowledges ways that marginalization in schools flows in multiple directions at once – illustrating how English Language Learners, for instance, are also marginalized and generally perceived from a deficit lens, which leads to their citizenship and belonging also being questioned (Olivos and Quintana de Vallidolid 2005).

Tenet six

DisCrit recognizes whiteness and Ability as 'property,' conferring economic benefits to those who can claim whiteness and/or normalcy (Harris 1993) and disadvantages for those who cannot lay claim to these identity statuses. For years, populations fighting for Civil Rights, such as women and people of color, have been positioned as disabled, or unfit in some way that justified their exclusion from the rights of others who fit the norm (Kudlick 2003). In addition to the denial of basic rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, society also diverted economic resources to those within the dominant class, which kept marginalized groups economically fettered by not providing access to fully participate in all aspects of society. In turn, those being denied rights often claimed to be deserving of civil rights by claiming membership within the categorization of whiteness or ablebodiedness, thereby denying membership in the categories of being 'colored' or disabled (May and Ferri 2005).

Some who advocate for a strong deaf culture argue they should be categorized as not disabled (Baynton 2001; Lane 2002), but as a linguistic minority. Early suffrage posters, advocating the right of women to vote, often relied on juxtaposing visual images of the educated and cultured white woman with images of men of color and men who were visually coded as insane or feebleminded (Ferri 2011). We recognize that individuals who resist labels of color and/or dis/ability are making strategic attempts to

partake in the benefits of being perceived within the normative cultural standards of able bodied and white. These benefits of passing for white and/or able bodied in some extreme cases could literally mean survival, while for others it might simply afford opportunities to benefit from the economic and social privileges enjoyed by dominant groups. However, these attempts ultimately reify binaries of able/disabled and white/black and solidify property and other rights as only accessible to some (Harris 1993).

Due to a societal subscription to whiteness and ability as property, DisCrit holds that the political interests of oppressed groups have often been gained only through interest convergence. Interest convergence, a concept Derrick Bell (1980) put forth, holds that 'the interests of blacks in receiving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites' (22). Bell uses the example of the legal ruling of *Brown vs Board of Education*, which was passed at a time when it was in the best interests of whites, who were working to defeat communism and needed to win the hearts and minds of those in third world and, for that matter African Americans in the US, to end segregation. Laws protecting people with dis/abilities, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which sought to extend many of the same protections to people with dis/abilities that were extended to people of color in the Civil Rights Act of 1965 (access to public accommodations and protection from discrimination). Thus, resistance to even basic accessibility provisions and efforts to remove disabling barriers from society must be marketed as good for all (Asch 2001; Guinier and Torres 2002). The common example of curb cuts and wider sidewalks, which were useful for parents with baby strollers and people pulling wheeled suitcases, helped to justify the time and expense of making sidewalks accessible for people in wheelchairs. Moreover, as schools face budget crises, fewer students may get dis/ability labels or be placed in segregated special education classes, not because teaching is becoming more responsive to their needs or because segregation is wrong, but because these may be seen as saving money. However, DisCrit does more than identify when just the interests of dominant groups align with those who are of color *or* those who are labeled disabled; DisCrit also makes visible the ways in which the same labels provide different opportunities to students of different races. For instance, labeling a white student with a learning disability may lead to more support in the general education classroom and extra time on high stakes tests, which can ensure access to college, whereas for a student of color, the same disability label can result in increased segregation, less access to the general education curriculum, and therefore, limited access to secondary education.

Tenet seven

DisCrit supports activism and promotes diverse forms of resistance. Many Critical Race Theorists call for activism that links academic work to the

community. This avoids sterile ideas being handed down from the ivory tower without practical application as well as 'studying the natives' wherein people who know nothing about the community suggest ways to fix it based on deficit perspectives (Dixson and Rousseau 2005; Stovall 2006). DisCrit acknowledges the need for activism and the reasons behind it, but recognizes that some of the activities traditionally thought of as activism (e.g. marches, sit-ins, and some forms of civil disobedience) may be based on ableist norms, which may not be accessible for those with corporeal differences. Those with admirable equity-based goals can inadvertently maintain and perpetuate inequity for other groups. In other words, to suggest that activism cannot occur from behind a desk may be missing a larger point about what it means to resist forms of domination. If theory can be violent, that is if theory can erase large portions of the population by ignoring their needs and realities, we also believe that theory can be emancipatory, offering oppressed groups a language of critique and resistance (Leonardo 2004). DisCrit supports diverse expressions of resistance that are linked to and informed by the community, whether that be academic or theoretical, pedagogical, or activist.

To summarize, each of the tenets we put forth shares the desire to reject forces, practices, and institutions that attempt to construct dis/ability based on differences from normative cultural standards. We reject attempts at the containment of people of color with dis/abilities due to their perceived divergence from normative cultural standards. Instead, we encourage society to become more encompassing of diversity and perceived difference, at the same time we question the very norms that create difference. Becoming more encompassing includes removing the policing and enforcement of normality, dissolving barriers that actively dis/able people, and focusing instead on learning from those that have historically been uniquely positioned as having what Baker (2002) terms 'outlaw ontologies' (663). As Matsuda (1987) plainly states, 'Those who have experienced discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen' (63).

Tensions and cautions

There are several tensions between DS and CRT that may have previously kept some theorists from forging a coalition or engaging in dialogue. We see these tensions as productive sites for furthering knowledge, with the potential to transform current inequities in our education system. People of color have been historically positioned as dis/abled and inferior in order to justify limited rights. During slavery some would try to restrict African Americans' bid for citizenship rights by stating that they were feeble-minded and lacked intelligence; in other words, too flawed to participate in self governance. A common response from African Americans (and other people of color) was to argue that they were not dis/abled and, therefore, deserving of

their rights (Baynton 2001). Although we recognize that dis/ability has long been associated with deviance and lack of intelligence and that this might explain why people of color would fiercely fight against labeling themselves as dis/abled, we also believe this ideology is grounded in hegemonic notions of normalcy. Unfortunately, subscribing to the binary of abled/disabled pits marginalized communities against each other and ignores the fact that rights should not be taken away from anyone, dis/abled or not.

We believe that dis/ability must be primarily understood as a political and social category. As Erevelles and Minear (2010) note:

> Unfortunately, rather than nurturing an alliance between race and disability, CRT scholars (like other radical scholars) have mistakenly conceived of disability as a biological category, as an immutable and pathological abnormality rooted in the 'medical language of symptoms and diagnostic categories' (Linton 1998, 8). (132)

Other marginalized groups have, to date, largely failed to recognize dis/ability as a socially constructed identity. Instead, relying on hegemonic notions of normality, they view dis/ability as purely biological fact that is apolitical, asocial, and ahistorical. In other words, when deaf activists insist that they are not disable – they are more than likely subscribing to a medical model definition of dis/ability rather than a social model one. Similarly, people of color who argue that the problem of over-representation is the *inaccurate labeling* of kids of color as dis/abled, still see special education labeling as appropriate, even necessary, for those children with 'real' dis/abilities. To complicate matters further, Gillborn's (2012) study mentioned earlier reveals how racism can also impede the opportunities for people of color in accessing reasonable accommodations for impairments. In sum, in addition to giving labels, racism can withhold them.

Some DS scholars ignore or minimize racial dimensions that affect the social construction of dis/ability or include only a cursory mentioning of race. A lack of or limited discussion of race focuses on only one dimension of a person, dis/ability, and ignores multidimensional identities. Other DS theorists take up gender, yet many leave it out (Jean and Samuels 2002; Wendell 1993). Those who focus on this singular dimension of a person often claim that dis/ability creates a universal experience, that it is an essential or primary identity marker. However, we would ask, 'What is universal about dis/ability experience – is there really one dis/ability experience or isn't it mediated by the particular social, historical, and political context?' (Ferri 2010, 141). There are a variety of dis/ability labels and each can be experienced differently depending on cultural contexts, social class, race and gender. Resisting essentialism, we recognize that having a dis/ability is not universal and in fact, is qualitatively different for individuals with the *same* dis/ability depending on cultural contexts, race, social class, sexuality, and

so on. Likwise, *dissimilar* dis/abilities are experienced in various ways as they intersect with these and other markers of identity.

We also recognize that intersectionality, or 'the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed' (Crenshaw 1993, 1245), can be, and often is, co-opted or misused (Delgado 2012). As Jones (2009) notes:

> …the ubiquitous use (or misuse) of the respective frameworks can sometimes leave the impression that a scholar's most important objective is to 'test' the respective theoretical approaches – spotting gender or difference here, there, and everywhere – not, instead, to use these frameworks to illuminate the complicated and sometimes contradictory ways in which situated interaction is linked to structural circumstances. (91)

We want to consider how race and dis/ability are built together in order to recognize that boundaries of only racism or ableism leave out a wealth of experiences without forgetting that other social locations affect how the social world is constructed.

Along with productive tensions, there are also explicit cautions that should be noted. DisCrit recognizes that we cannot conflate race and dis/ability; they are not interchangeable (Ferri and Connor 2006). This is not to say that those of color who are labeled dis/abled should be ashamed of their race or their dis/ability label. Instead, it recognizes that to be of color does not make one dis/abled and to be labeled dis/abled does not make one of color. Moreover, we must resist the urge to assume that all types of oppression result in the same or equivalent experience (Spelman 1990). We must not assume that because an individual has experienced oppression of one type (e.g. ableism), that that person knows what it is like to have experienced oppression of other types (e.g. racism). A recent example of this occurred during the Occupy Wall Street protests when a Slutwalk sign, held by white feminists, quoted John Lennon by saying, 'Woman is nigger of the world.' The sign implied that positions of subordination are exactly the same, when in actuality, they are quite different (Simmons 2011). To be a woman is not equal to being black, to be a black woman is not equal to being a white woman and to be a black woman with a dis/ability is different than being a white woman with a dis/ability. Moreover, there is a diversity of experience within any of those categories based on social class, culture, nation, and so on. Additionally, this is an example of traditional activism (e.g. protesting and marching) with an equity aim can have unintended consequences as it does not guarantee equity. Instead, DisCrit attempts to address ways in which race and dis/ability, as socially constructed and maintained systems of oppression, have been used in tandem to justify limiting access.

Additionally, DisCrit acknowledges that if we are not careful, dis/ability can be assumed to refer to every type and degree of dis/ability. As mentioned earlier, we are wary of any attempts to suggest universal experiences, or

essentializing one identity marker of a person. DisCrit rejects any attempt to offer an account of the life and experience of all people with dis/abilities without their voices. Instead, it encourages understanding about ways in which society limits access and embodiment of difference. While Berry observes, 'Commonality of race does not produce commonality of self-identity' (Berry 2010, 24), we believe this to also be true of dis/ability. Therefore we respect any movement in which people take up the label that has been a point of oppression and rework into a point of pride. Crip culture reclaims the dis/ability label similar to gay communities reclaiming queer (Warner 1999), and the black pride movement of 1960s and 70s (VanDeBurg 1992). We believe that oppressed individuals and groups have the rights to name themselves, in contrast to privileged individuals and groups creating norms that perpetuate their privilege and labeling others in contrast to that norm. This work is not neat, tidy, or simple. As the late poet Laura Hershey (1991) stated, 'You get proud by practicing.'

Conclusion

In this article we have articulated the need for simultaneously keeping race *and* dis/ability at front and center in our research. We have put forth DisCrit as valuable both as a theoretical framework and as a methodological tool to help investigate intersectional positionings to reveal what has been, to date, missed, dismissed, hidden, or purposefully unacknowledged within educational research. We believe that this shared branch of CRT and DS holds great potential for interanimating, expanding, and deepening what is understood about the interconnectedness of race and dis/ability. Its scope can encompass critiques of structures and systems, historical movements, contemporary practices, and how they relate to current education reforms. Connecting macro levels of analysis to on the ground explorations of how systems of race and dis/ability are experienced at micro level, DisCrit foregrounds communities that are impacted by their position at these (and other) interstices that influence the degree of access to all aspects of life, including: education, housing, health, transportation, public services (libraries, parks, stores), wealth, culture, supportive and community services. DisCrit, however, does not seek to simplify our understanding of oppression; rather, it seeks to complicate notions of race and ability by recognizing ways they are intertwined.

It is imperative that in an age of mass standardization within education as a result of *No Child Left Behind*, institutionalized sorting mechanisms such as *Response to Intervention*, privatization of public educational services, the imposition of the Common Core Standards, and the accountability of teachers tied to student test scores, that we do not lose sight of the most vulnerable population of dis/abled students of color. These students have historically be been among the first to fall through the cracks, as they do

not and cannot fit rigid norms imposed upon them, and are now even considered a 'liability' for teachers (Ball and Harry 2010; Danforth, Taff, and Ferguson 2006; Dudley-Marling and Gurn 2010; Ferri and Connor 2006; Slee 2011; Smith 2009).

We believe that DisCrit can be used to help push past the impasse experienced in researching the perpetual over-representation of children of color within dis/ability categories that trigger more restrictive environments. It is obvious that responses to address over-representation are inadequate, serving too often as lip-service to one of the USA's most longstanding problems. Many institutional attempts at rectifying over-representation are pro forma and are not taken seriously. For example, Volugarides (2012) describes how in one suburban district, disproportionality was simply referred to its official designation within State Education Quality Assurance reports as 'indicator nine,' instead of examining the practices that led school officials to be cited for noncompliance yet simultaneously state, 'We don't have a problem here.' In another example, Artiles (2011) studied the US Department of Education's relative risk ratio thresholds for disproportionality, noting the ineffectiveness of states determining and self-monitoring their own ratios, some with ratios of 5:1 (439).

In a fitting nod to CRT, Artiles et al. (2010) cull from the work of Tate, Ladson-Billings, and Grant's (1996) analysis of *Brown vs Board of Education's* implementation, to conclude that researchers cannot 'Mathematize social problems with deep structural roots because such calculations are not likely to unearth historical precursors and ideologically laden processes that constitute them' (296). Artiles et al. (2010) also connect disproportionality to resistance within educational research to acknowledge cultural influences. They write, 'The reluctance to frame disproportionality as a problem stresses technical arguments that ignore the role of historical, contextual, and structural forces' (282). Furthermore, they note, 'Similarly, this position has ignored the notion of culture and its impact on professional practices' (282).

In her work on how systems construct ability and create disproportionality, Kozleski (2011) urges the research community to go beyond its self-imposed boundaries and embrace what has 'found to be powerful allies: activity theory, systems thinking, and complexity theory' (5). It is clear that by researching the situatedness of people in different environments and how they function within those contexts, *cultural* practices can be contrasted with *institutional* practices. As Arzubiaga et al. (2008) points out, it is incumbent on researchers to understand 'not people's cultures, but how people live culturally…[and therefore become able to] reimagine communities, particularly those historically marginalized and construed as culturally deprived, devoid of resources, and/or culturally stagnant' (314).

In their analysis of classroom-based research, Artiles et al. (2010) noted the deliberate sidestepping of cultural locations, including those of the

researcher, the researched, and the context in which the research occurs. Their work reveals the inadequacy of traditional models of inquiry in furthering knowledge of cultural differences among children and the professionals who research them. Arzubiaga et al. (2008) note that

> Systematic analysis of empirical studies published over substantial periods of time in peer refereed journals in psychology, special education, and school psychology show that researchers have neglected to ask questions, or to document and/or analyze data that would shed light on the role of culture in human development and provide alternative explanations for student achievement and behavior other than student deficits, which are often assumed with minority group status. (311)

The critique of traditional research methods (particularly within special education), the ineffective responses to reducing disproportionality, and the movement by some scholars toward more culturally-focused understandings of how difference is constituted are all movements compatible with DisCrit. At the same time, influenced by the collaborative work of White Studies theorist Zeus Leonardo and DS scholar Alicia Broderick (Leonardo and Broderick 2011), DisCrit problematizes the very notion of over-representation. After all, what would be the correct 'representation' of children of color in dis/ability categories? According to whom? Based on what rationale? In many ways, the exploration of these questions can be seen as the tip of the iceberg in terms of how DisCrit has the potential to deepen our understanding about complicated issues.

This article is a beginning. We acknowledge that DisCrit is a theoretical framework that is very much a work-in-progress. We have endeavored to make the case for expanding the fields of CRT and DS by engaging with each other through an intersectional approach to understanding ways in which society configures notions of ability and disability both in and out of schools. DisCrit contends that a non-intersectional approach to research, one that attempts to side-step particularized contexts and the dynamic forces of culture manifest within them, provide limited – even misleading – conclusions that do not necessarily serve the people being studied, despite claims to the contrary. Much of the limited work within the field of special education is a major case in point (Brantlinger 2006).

In closing, by contributing to broadening ideas about how research is conceptualized and carried out, DisCrit holds great potential for looking at old, seemingly intractable problems through a new lens. Ultimately, its purpose is to contribute pushing past current theoretical and conceptual limitations with several fields, including CRT, DS, special education, and multiculturalism, among others. In going forward, we invite other researchers to engage in conversations around the promise of DisCrit, and partake in related difficult discussions linking race and dis/ability to education, laws, civil rights, human rights, in the quest for a more socially just society.

Notes

1. We deliberately use 'dis/ability' instead of 'disability' throughout this article to call attention to ways in which the latter overwhelmingly signals a specific inability to perform culturally-defined expected tasks (such as learning or walking) that come to define the individual as primarily and generally 'unable' to navigate society. We believe the '/' in disability disrupts misleading understandings of disability, as it simultaneously conveys the mixture of ability and disability. We have maintained the use of 'disability' when referring to its official use within classification structures and organizations. We provide a more comprehensive discussion troubling of disability as fact in the introduction of this article.
2. Like Gutiérrez, Morales and Martinez (2009), we use the term non-dominant to recognize and emphasize 'the central issue is the power relations between those who are in power and those who, despite their growing census numbers, are not' (238). This term is an alternative to minority and other terms that may refer to but do not draw attention to those communities that have historically and currently experienced marginalization by dominant communities.
3. We are drawing insights here from the work of Crenshaw (1993) and Solórzano and Yosso (2001) on race and gender.
4. In the field of general publishing, for example, tags within the library of congress tags for books that have a dis/ability focus are often placed in the self-help category. This impacts where these books are shelved in libraries and bookstores, continuing to designate dis/ability to be seen as a health concern, rather than a cultural or political issue. Sports is also illustrative as there are times when dis/abled competitors are seen to be disadvantaged and in need of separate or segregated spaces in order to 'level the playing field.' Yet, at other times, it is argued that technologically advanced prosthesis or other dis/ability related accommodations provide unfair advantages. In this case, disabled athletes are seen as having super-human abilities, disqualifying them from competing with non-disabled athletes. Either too impaired or too enhanced, individuals with dis/ability are barred from participation. A third example can be seen in the way that recreational activities get coded as therapies when they involve dis/abled people. If an individual does art and is disabled, their activity is coded as art therapy. If a disabled individual works out, people assume they are in physical therapy.
5. We acknowledge that dis/ability is an elastic category because it expands and contracts over time and throughout cultures. What is considered a dis/ability today may or may not have been seen as a dis/ability 100, 50, or even 10 years ago! Because dis/ability is socially and historically contingent, dis/ability is always shifting and moving as a category of difference.
6. We do recognize and respect the rights of those from non-dominant communities to self-select segregation (e.g. some people with autism prefer smaller or quieter environments with less interaction, separate schools and programs for LGBTQ kids who may need them, schools for girls only, schools and programs exclusively for the deaf).

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