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Source: *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Spring, 2005), pp. 77-111
Published by: American Educational Research Association
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3699456
Accessed: 14-07-2017 12:09 UTC

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American Educational Research Journal
Spring 2005, Vol. 42, No. 1, pp. 77–111

Critical Care: A Color(full) Analysis of Care Narratives in the Schooling Experiences of Puerto Rican Girls

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In this article, the author explores the intersection between race/ethnicity and caring in the educational experiences of middle school Puerto Rican girls. Critical race theory and Latino/Latina critical theory are used as data analysis frameworks because of their emphasis on the roles of race/ethnicity and racism in shaping the circumstances of individuals and institutions. The author calls for a color(full) critical care praxis that is grounded in a historical understanding of students' lives; translates race-conscious ideological and political orientations into pedagogical approaches that benefit Latino/a students; uses caring counternarratives to provide more intimate, caring connections between teachers and the Latino communities where they work; and pays attention to caring at both the individual and institutional levels.

Keywords: care, critical race theory, Lat/Crit theory, Latinos/Latinas, urban education.

> The teachers I had last year, they didn't really care. . . . It's a bad school, they just want to get paid. (Reina,[1] Puerto Rican middle school girl)
>
> I think we have a pretty good teaching staff. We really, really care about the kids. (Mr. Weiss, White middle school teacher)
>
> I think a lot of it is that a lot of them [parents] just don't care. They just don't care. . . . They don't care about their kids. (Ms. DeAngelis, White middle school teacher)

The perspectives captured in these quotes reveal divergent views about the presence or absence of care in the lives of students within the same school

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community. What could possibly cause students and teachers to have such seemingly contradictory perspectives about caring? None of these three individuals mention racial or ethnic characteristics in their statements about caring. This is not surprising given that López (2003a) noted that modern-day race and racism operate in such subtle ways that we often fail to see how racialized practices and beliefs influence institutions and relationships. In this article, I contend that the role of race/ethnicity needs to be considered if these divergent caring perspectives are to be understood. I explore the intersection between race/ethnicity and care using data from an ethnographic study focusing on the experiences of Puerto Rican girls at one urban school.[2] In doing so, I examine the following two questions: (a) How are race/ethnicity and caring linked in narratives by and about the schooling of Puerto Rican girls? and (b) How can a race/ethnicity-based analysis contribute to a caring theory and praxis relevant and transformative for all Latino/a students?

Nieto (1998) highlighted the importance of exploring caring in the educational experiences of Puerto Rican students. She stated that "the care or rejection experienced by Puerto Rican students in U.S. schools can have a significant impact on their academic success or failure" (p. 157). Furthermore, Villenas and Deyhle (1999) claimed that "one of the most resilient myths about Latino families is that they don't care about their children's education" (p. 427). This assertion points to the ways in which narratives on caring are used to create false but powerful ideas regarding the education of Latino/a students. Gaining a better understanding of how to care for Puerto Rican students and their educational needs is imperative because, despite their long history as students in U.S. schools, Puerto Ricans and other Latino/a subgroups continue to face tremendous educational challenges (Nieto, 2000). Figures from the 2000 U.S. census reveal great disparities in educational attainment along racial/ethnic lines. For example, only 52% of Latino/as more than 25 years of age had completed high school or its equivalent, as compared with 72% of African Americans and 85% of Whites (Bauman & Graf, 2003). Compounding educational challenges are the obstacles created by the high rates of poverty that continue to characterize many Latino/a communities (Trueba, 1999).

Understanding and ameliorating the educational experiences of Puerto Ricans and other Latino/a groups is also necessary because of the dramatic demographic transformation these groups are currently creating in schools. In particular, Latino/a newcomers and established residents have changed the country's demographic landscape through both their increase in numbers and their movement into communities not previously populated by Latino/as (Hamann, Wortham, & Murillo, 2002; Vázquez & Torres, 2002). The Latino/a population grew from 1 of every 20 Americans in 1970 to 1 of every 12 in 1990, and it will increase to a projected 1 of every 5 in 2050 (Garcia, 2001). Information that helps us understand how race/ethnicity intersects with care in the educational journeys of Latino/a students is imperative if schools are to positively serve this increasing portion of their population.

To explore the intersections between race/ethnicity and care in the educational experiences of Puerto Rican girls, I begin by providing a historical background of the U.S.–Puerto Rico relationship and its impact on education. I then provide an overview of the present study, including descriptions of community and school contexts, participants, and the methodology used. Next, I provide a summary of critical race theory (CRT), Latino/a critical race (Lat/Crit) theory, and care theory. I highlight the tenets within these theories that are relevant to the present work and provide the framework for my analysis. After laying out the theoretical frames, I delve into the data to show how race is implicated in narratives focusing on caring and the education of Puerto Rican girls. On the basis of this analysis, I end with a discussion of how care praxis may be conceptualized to best serve Latino/a students.

Historical Background

Flores (2002) reminded us that media analysts and scholars tend to depict the growing Latino population in the United States as a wave of newcomers who have just begun to arrive in the present generation. This portrayal of the Latino/a population is incomplete and ahistorical, because it does not take into account the different trajectories that subgroups within this population have experienced in their relationship with the United States. For instance, the lives of all Puerto Ricans, whether they have migrated or not, have been inextricably linked with the United States since the turn of the 20th century, when Puerto Rico became a U.S. colony (Flores, 2002; Nieto, 2000). Studies focusing on the current experiences of Puerto Rican students in U.S. schools must thus be grounded in a historical and political understanding that considers the position of Puerto Ricans as a colonized people living within the colonizing country (Dobles & Segarra, 1998; Solís, 1996).

Puerto Rico's status as a commonwealth of the United States creates a unique set of conditions that have deeply influenced Puerto Ricans' experience in this country. For instance, the experience of Puerto Ricans is distinct from that of other minority, newcomer, and Latino/a groups because of the status of Puerto Ricans as U.S. citizens. Flores (2002) argued that this status represents a form of second-class citizenship because it has been imposed within the colonial context. This second-class status is exacerbated by the ancestry of Puerto Ricans as racially mixed people. In the racialized U.S. context, Puerto Ricans must constantly grapple with exposure to the perils of racism (Flores, 2002; Nieto, 2000).

The political status of Puerto Ricans has also created a migration pattern that differs drastically from that of other incoming groups. Citizenship status has allowed Puerto Ricans access to travel back and forth between the island and the mainland. Thus, the Puerto Rican migration experience is characterized by a pattern of circular migration over the course of a life span and across generations rather than by a single life-changing experience in which ties to the homeland are more drastically limited (Flores, 2002; Nieto, 1998; Walsh, 1998). This pattern of circulatory migration and its consequences have been deeply influenced by U.S. economic policies in Puerto Rico as well as by the conditions of the U.S. economy at the time of migration. For instance, Nieto (2000) explained that, unlike earlier waves of European immigrants, many more recent Puerto Rican migrants found it difficult to secure sustainable employment when they came to the United States because they arrived at a time when technical and professional skills were becoming increasingly important in obtaining employment.

Situating studies of Puerto Rican students within this historical background is important because, as argued by Nieto (1998, 2000), the conditions created by the colonial relationship have set the stage for difficult and unsatisfactory experiences for the vast majority of Puerto Rican students. Similarly, Walsh (1998) contended that colonial relations are produced and extended in U.S. schools through "policies, practices, meanings, and ideological/cultural representations that situate belonging, define success, and sculpt daily school life" (p. 219). The present study was grounded in the understanding that the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico is reflected in and also helps shape practices and meanings within institutional structures such as schools.

Community and School Context

Because public, urban schools within working-class/poor communities are the norm for the majority of Puerto Rican students (Dobles & Segarra, 1998), I conducted this study at a public school in a large metropolitan area in the northeastern United States. James Middle School (JMS) is situated in a working-class/poor residential neighborhood characterized by one-way streets lined with two-story row homes built 50 to 80 years ago. Some of the houses appear to be well maintained, but many are in need of cosmetic or structural repairs. Interspersed with the blocks of houses, small corner stores, and churches that make up the neighborhood are occasional warehouses or factory buildings that once provided ample employment opportunities for community residents. Some of the buildings and factories are operating, but many are boarded up and dormant, hinting at the way changes in the economy have affected the neighborhood over time. Thus, the community where JMS is located reflects the changes produced as the city made the transition from an industrial to a service economy. Employment opportunities, which once resided in the factories and warehouses offering low-skilled jobs for earlier waves of immigrants, are now concentrated in the retail shops or fast-food restaurants found in the neighborhood's commercial strips.

JMS serves students from two distinct neighborhoods, Parkside and Riverdale. As Table 1 indicates, Parkside underwent dramatic changes in the ethnic composition of its residents from 1990 to 2000. The new Latino/a residents were primarily Puerto Ricans or Dominicans who moved from adjoining predominantly Latino/a neighborhoods characterized by high levels of poverty. Some of these residents were able to afford homes that were priced relatively low, and some moved into rented or subsidized properties. The new residents moving into Parkside also tended to be poorer than the previous residents of the neighborhood. In 1990, 20% of the population lived below the poverty line; by 2000, this figure had risen to 40%.

Table 1
Ethnic Composition: Parkside Neighborhood

Ethnic group	Percentage of population: 1990	Percentage of population: 2000
White	95	64
African American	2	13
Asian	1	1
Latino/a	2	22

Note. Data were derived from the 1990 and 2000 U.S. censuses.

In contrast to Parkside, the Riverdale neighborhood population remained predominantly White, decreasing minimally from 1990, when 98% of residents were White, to 2000, when 95% were White (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990, 2000). The socioeconomic status of the Riverdale neighborhood also remained stable, with approximately 16% of residents living below the poverty line in both 1990 and 2000. Given the differing ethnic compositions of Parkside and Riverdale, it was not surprising that the majority of the Latino(a) students at JMS lived in the Parkside neighborhood.

At the time this study was conducted, JMS served 1,100 students in the fifth through eighth grades. Ninety-two percent of the students qualified for the free or reduced lunch program. Approximately 38% of the students were White, 33% were Latino, 26% were African American, 2% were Asian. Various private schools (mostly Catholic) served a large portion of Riverdale students, with the result that the percentage of White students at JMS was lower than the percentage of White residents in the combined Riverdale and Parkside communities. In describing JMS, teachers often spoke of the ethnic diversity present at the school, citing it as unusual in a district where many schools were highly segregated. Teachers often cited this diversity as one of the school's strengths.

While many teachers referred to JMS as a "multicultural" school, multiculturalism appeared to be defined as something embodied by the students at JMS. That is, teachers equated having an ethnically diverse student body with being a multicultural school where interactions involving members of different groups naturally produced understanding across cultures. Although JMS served an ethnically diverse student body, efforts to provide culturally relevant teaching or to create a multicultural curriculum were primarily limited to the initiative of individual teachers who chose to make this area a priority within their classrooms.

As one of the lowest-ranked middle schools in a low-performing and poorly funded district, JMS was a place where teachers and administrators sometimes felt disheartened and overwhelmed. Teachers struggled to stay encouraged when discussing their school's performance on the standardized tests that students were required to take and that held primary weight in assessments of the school. The concerns of teachers were understandable given the increasing importance placed by local, state, and national entities on improving performance on these tests and on the consequences of lack of improvement. The school also faced the challenge of operating without a fully credentialed teaching staff, because the district suffered from a teacher shortage. Teachers complained about having to spend an inordinate number of their preparation periods substituting in other classes. Students were affected by the lack of stability created by an incomplete teaching staff.

Method and Participants

I specifically decided to focus on Puerto Rican girls because research about Latino/as does not often specify among subgroups within the Latino/a population or speak to how gender[3] influences the experiences of students (Nieto, 2000). I used purposeful convenience sampling to ensure that the participants chosen for the study varied in their academic and social performance at school.[4] With the help of teachers, I chose nine second-generation Puerto Rican girls from low-income families who had attended U.S. schools for the majority of their kindergarten through middle school experience.[5] Table 2 provides a brief overview of the relevant background characteristics of the participating girls.

Although each girl represented a unique set of background experiences, personality, and set of behaviors, there were some commonalities among the girls' experiences and characteristics. As can be seen in Table 2, all of the girls identified themselves as Latinas (most often choosing the label Puerto Rican). The connections that girls made with Puerto Rico varied, but their ethnicity played a central role in the way they identified themselves. The participants as well as their parents expressed no doubt regarding their need to self-identify as Puerto Ricans, regardless of the girls' place of birth, length of time since arrival in the United States, or language spoken at home. This high level of cultural and linguistic maintenance is characteristic of the Puerto Rican population because of the circular migration pattern resulting from economic policies as well as the citizenship status of this population (Nieto, 2000).

The girls were also similar in regard to their socioeconomic background. In classifying families as having low incomes, I considered parents' socioeconomic self-descriptors alongside their level of education, employment, and yearly income and the sources of their income. The jobs the girls' parents held were concentrated in the service industry, yielding limited incomes and medical benefits for family members. In addition, several parents were disabled, leaving them dependent on government help as their main source of income. Parents' level of education ranged from elementary school to college. In the case of most of the parents, their education level or limited English-speaking skills (or both) precluded attainment of higher-paying jobs with medical benefits.

As a member of the Puerto Rican diaspora, I am particularly interested in using research to enhance and advance the educational experiences and opportunities available to Latino/a students. The methods and epistemolog-

Table 2

Participants' Background Characteristics

Name	Ethnic identity (self-reported)	Language(s) spoken at home	Parents' level of education	Parents' employment	School grades (K–8)
Clarissa Benitez	Puerto Rican	Mostly English	Mother: 5th grade; father: bachelor of science	Mother: homemaker; father: disabled	As and Bs
Elizabeth (Lizzy) Delgado	Puerto Rican	Mostly Spanish	Mother: 6th grade; father: 3rd grade	Mother: homemaker; father: disabled	As and Bs, Cs and Ds in middle school math
María Garcia	Mixed (Puerto Rican, White, Native American)	English	Mother: 9th grade; father: 11th grade	Mother: homemaker; father: hospital orderly	Range from As to Fs
Glenda Gomez	Puerto Rican	Mostly English	Mother: 12th grade; father: 12th grade	Mother: homemaker; father: tree surgeon, cook	Range from As to Ds
Yanira Lopez	Puerto Rican	Mostly Spanish	Mother: elementary school	Mother: homemaker	Range from Bs to Fs
Maríah Medina	Mixed (Puerto Rican and White)	English	Mother: 12th grade; father: 6th grade	Mother: homemaker; father: painter	As to Cs
Reina Ortiz	Puerto Rican	Mostly English	Mother: 1.5 years of college	Mother: hospital service worker	Range from As to Fs
Daisy Rivera	Puerto Rican, Latina	Spanish and English	Mother: GED; father: 9th grade	Mother: homemaker; father: supervisor, chemical company	As and Bs
Beatriz Soto	Puerto Rican, Boricua,[a] Mestiza	Mostly Spanish	Mother: 6th grade; father: 6th grade	Mother: homemaker; father: disabled	Range from As to Ds

Note. Language spoken at home refers to language participants spoke with their parents; all participants tended to speak more English than Spanish with siblings and peers. GED = general equivalency diploma.

[a] The term *Boricua* is often used by Puerto Ricans to identify their ethnicity and land of origin. The term is derived from the word *Boriquén,* the name given to Puerto Rico by the Taíno Indians, the island's original inhabitants.

ical foundations guiding this study were influenced both by my past experiences as a working-class student in Puerto Rican and U.S. schools and an urban teacher of Latino/a students and by my present interests as a mother of urban, multi-ethnic children. My identity, interests, and past personal and professional experiences influenced how I approached this study, as well as how I was able to gain access and build relationships at the research site.[6] These experiences and interests have convinced me of the enduring need to engage in research that highlights the complex ways in which race/ethnicity operates in the lives of Latino/a students and that seeks to build transformative practices. My goals were thus to engage in research grounded in the day-to-day lives of students and to inform and create theory and practice to benefit Latino/a students.

Driscoll and McFarland (1989) argued that qualitative research, including ethnography, allows researchers to focus on the complexity of participants' real worlds because it contextualizes actions and experiences. I employed various qualitative data-gathering methods to capture contextualized data about the girls' experiences. I began getting to know the girls in the fall of their seventh-grade year (September 1999) and continued fieldwork at JMS until their eighth-grade graduation (June 2001). Over the course of 2 academic years, I made 135 visits to the school, some lasting 1 hour and others the entire school day. Each visit was documented through extensive field notes supplemented with observer comments (Bogden & Biklen, 1992). These field notes included descriptions of what I saw and heard at the school site. I observed in classrooms, in the cafeteria and at school assemblies and sporting events. To understand the rhythm of the participants' day, I also shadowed each girl for the length of a school day.[7] I conducted hour-long interviews with the girls during their seventh-grade year and held individual and focus group discussions during their eighth-grade year.[8] I also conducted interviews with the girls' primary subject teachers (social studies, math, English, reading, and science). Table 3 provides background information on these teachers. I audio recorded and transcribed all interviews and focus group discussions.[9]

Data analyses were conducted throughout the research process via various qualitative techniques such as composing analytic methods, reading and studying data to develop a coding scheme, coding all data (both axial and selective coding), and developing conceptual maps to link codes and emerging themes to the research questions (Bogden & Biklen, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During the final months of data collection, I engaged the girls in discussions centered on brief summaries of preliminary findings. The purpose of these discussions was to clarify and correct, if necessary, my interpretation of data themes and patterns. The subsequent set of data obtained during these discussions was also transcribed, coded, and analyzed. A qualitative software analysis program, Hyperresearch, was helpful in coding the data, generating reports for each data code/theme, and revealing patterns of connectedness between data codes.

Table 3
Demographic Profiles of Teachers

Teacher	Race/ethnicity	Current socioeconomic status	Current area of residence	Years of teaching experience
Ms. Butler	White	Middle class	Suburban	10+
Ms. DeAngelis	White	Middle class	Suburban	10+
Ms. Evans	African American	Middle class	Urban	20+
Ms. Lamar	African American	Middle class	Urban	5+
Ms. Logan	White	Middle class	Suburban	Not available
Ms. Morgan	White	Middle class	Suburban	20+
Ms. Nadler	White	Upper middle class	Suburban	15+
Mr. Riley	White	Upper middle class	Suburban	30+
Mr. Rosenfield	White	Upper middle class	Suburban	5+
Ms. Ross	White	Middle class	Suburban	10+
Ms. Russell	White	Middle class	Urban	5+
Ms. Sellers	White	Not available	Suburban	Less than 1
Ms. Simms	White	Middle class	Urban	10+
Mr. Weiss	White	Middle class	Urban	30+

Note. Data on race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status were self-reported.

These data analysis practices helped reveal the deep connections between narratives on caring and beliefs about the ways in which race/ethnicity affected the experiences of Puerto Rican girls in their school and community. While I entered the field with an interest in exploring the effects of ethnicity, class, and gender on the experiences of Puerto Rican girls, it was not until I had gathered the data and began in-depth analysis of the caring theme that I realized a race-based epistemology and methodology was necessary to analyze and theorize from the data.[10] Thus, I draw from the CRT and LatCrit epistemologies in my effort to expose and understand how race and racism are persistently present in the caring narratives perpetuated within the school context (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Caring Theory: A Brief Review

Noddings's scholarship (1984, 1992, 1998, 2002) on the ethic of care has consistently served as a framework for scholars who examine and critique the theory and practice of care within educational contexts (Alder, 2002; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Katz, 1999; Noblit, 1993; Thompson, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999). According to Noddings (1998), good teaching is predicated on the construction of caring relationships built on trust: "Genuine education must engage the purposes and energies of those being educated. To secure such engagement, teachers must build relationships of care and trust, and within such relationships, students and teachers [must] construct educational objectives cooperatively" (p. 196).

Noddings (1984, 1992) has argued that teachers need to initiate relations of trust and respect with their students by becoming engrossed in these students. Being engrossed implies being receptive to hearing, seeing, and feeling what others try to convey about her perspectives or situations. Noddings (1992) has also highlighted the importance of reciprocity as an essential element of care in unequal relations such as those between teachers and students. Reciprocity entails recognition and reception of the care offered by the person being cared for. Noddings (1992) warned that "no matter how hard teachers try to care, if the caring is not received by students, the claim 'they don't care' has some validity. It suggests strongly that something is very wrong" (p. 15).

Noddings's theoretical frame was helpful in my initial analysis of the data. As I examined the relationships between Puerto Rican girls and their teachers, it was obvious that engrossment and reciprocity were minimal in these relationships. Furthermore, Noddings's (1984) assertion that teachers and schools overemphasize aesthetic care also proved true as I examined data on how the girls and teachers described the care received by students. Aesthetic caring focuses on attention to things and ideas concerning the technical aspects of teaching and learning such as standardized curricula, goals, and teaching strategies. Individuals who care aesthetically are committed to the school-sanctioned practices and behaviors believed to lead to educational achievement. Noddings (1984) and Valenzuela (1999) have argued that this type of care is necessary but is often offered without the more personal form of authentic care that students desire.

Despite the usefulness of Noddings's theory in analyzing some of the data concerning caring, her theoretical frame did not yield sufficient explanatory power as I sought to understand how the present sociocultural context and the racial relations therein affected caring and teacher-student relationships. In this regard, Valenzuela's (1999) analysis of caring in the lives of Mexican youth was helpful. According to Valenzuela, if caring theory is to be beneficial to historically oppressed groups, it must include a politicized analysis of racial dynamics and of the complex relationship between the school and community of students. She stated:

> Less obvious to caring theorists are the racist and authoritarian undertones that accompany the demand that youth at places like Seguín High "care about" school. The overt request overlies a covert demand that students embrace a curriculum that either dismisses or derogates their ethnicity and that they respond caringly to school officials who often hold their culture and community in contempt. (pp. 24–25)

Similarly, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) and Thompson (1998) have drawn on the work of Black women teachers and Black feminist theories to argue that most caring theorists have promulgated a color-blind construction of caring by not taking into account the cultural specificity of what counts as caring or the political issues that matter in the lives of students of color. These race-conscious scholars have begun to push caring theory beyond a theory centered on interpersonal relationships to a theory that needs grounding in a consideration of the racialized contextual factors surrounding such relationships.

As I continued trying to make sense of the data in this study, the work of scholars who have linked caring with racialized perspectives, discourses, and practices (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Thompson, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999) convinced me of the need to ground my analysis in a theoretical framework that centered race/ethnicity issues and the way they operate to influence caring. My work seeks to highlight and extend these contextual nuances in care theory and practices by using CRT and LatCrit theory. These theories are helpful in my effort to disentangle the messy intersections of caring with race and racism within particular school contexts. This theoretical framework is necessary because it acknowledges the complex and pervasive ways in which histories, lives, and communities are racialized (Pillow, 2003). In the following, I describe several themes within these theories that informed the analysis and arguments put forth in this article.

Critical Race and LatCrit Theories as Analytical Lenses

CRT emerged in the 1970s as activists, lawyers, and legal scholars sought to explain and address the ways in which race, racism, and power continued to operate after the civil rights era (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The movement drew heavily on the critical legal studies movement, radical feminism, and conventional civil rights ideas to develop a framework that more squarely challenged the racialized ways in which laws affect people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Parker, 2003). CRT begins with the premise that, to understand how race shapes social life, one must contextually and historically examine the formation of social power along these lines (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This idea is particularly relevant in a study of Puerto Rican students because for more than a century the education of these students in both Puerto Rico and the United States has been deeply affected by the racialized sociopolitical dynamics of the colonial relationship between the two nations.

LatCrit, a theoretical strand of CRT, developed as Latino/a scholars sought to use CRT to examine the complex ways in which race and racism operate to shape the experiences of Latino/a populations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Haney-López, 1997). LatCrit theory has been helpful in articulating other factors such as language, culture, gender, ethnicity, immigration, and colonization that add complexity to Latinos racialized experiences (Auerbach, 2002; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gomez, 1998; González, 1998; Hidalgo, 1998; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Valdes, 1998; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, LatCrit scholars have highlighted the limitations of focusing exclusively on the Black/White paradigm in studies of race (Espinoza & Harris, 2000; Haney-López, 1997; Yosso, 2002). Haney-López (1997) argued that LatCrit theorists must retain the language of race because focusing exclusively on ethnicity can blind us to important aspects of Latino/a life in this country, can hinder our knowledge of the ways in which Latino/a communities are racialized, and can move us away from pursuing social justice. Given the close relation between CRT and LatCrit theory and the relevance of both to the present study, I use both frameworks throughout this article.

The use of CRT and LatCrit theory is a recent development in the field of education that offers potential for understanding the inequalities faced by students of color in educational institutions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In the following, I outline several prominent tenets of CRT and LatCrit theory relevant to the analysis presented here. A CRT/LatCrit framework centers race and racism and seeks to understand both the historical and contemporary ways in which race operates in society to influence individual experiences and outcomes (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 1989; Solórzano, 1997). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that CRT offers the potential for systematically centering a race-based analysis in understanding educational inequality. Pillow (2003) explained the salience of race to CRT scholars:

> Race in this way cannot be situated as on the side, as an add-on category, or as a package of diverse research methods. Rather, race in this work is central to the theorizing and asking of critical questions about a range of epistemological, social, cultural, and political practices, discourses, structures, and institutions. Race-based methodologies make visible what is often invisible, taken for granted, or assumed in our knowledge and practice and do this work out of necessity. (p. 189)

While centering race is a fundamental foundation of a CRT/LatCrit framework, it is also important to do so within a historical, contextualized analysis. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) supported this claim, arguing that one of the main elements of CRT is a transdisciplinary perspective that challenges ahistorical analyses.

Another tenet of a CRT/LatCrit framework is the idea that race/ethnicity-based forms of subordination are so endemic in everyday life that they appear to be normal and natural within our culture (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, Valdes, 1998). López (2003a) argued that the ordinary nature of racism blinds us to its presence in the structure of our institutions, in our relationships, and in our ways of thinking. That is, individuals do not even realize what present-day forms of racism are and the deep ways in which race and racism systemically structure and poison our social institutions. Critical race theorists move beyond relegating racism to irrational stereotypes or individual acts of hatred. This perspective on race thus differs from what Peller (1995) termed the mainstream integrationist ideology, which seeks to diminish individuals' race consciousness by promoting reductions in prejudiced perspectives through integration of social settings. Peller (1995) argued that the integrationist perspective accounts for the focus on education in civil rights work. The logic central to the integrationist perspective is that racism, as expressed by irrational stereotypes and acts of hatred, can be eliminated as children attend integrated schools and learn more about each other. CRT and LatCrit theorists move beyond this integrationist perspective and seek to unmask the everyday, cumulative ways in which racism operates in actions and institutional policies and structures to reinforce inequality among students of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker, 2003).

A third tenet of a CRT/LatCrit framework is that it challenges ideologies claiming that the legal and educational systems operate to ensure objectivity, meritocracy, neutrality, and equal opportunity (Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Such claims are promulgated through stock stories or tales that people tell to explain social reality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In the present study, these stock stories often involved a form of strategic rhetoric intended to mask racialized perspectives. Lewis (2001) explained that strategic rhetoric involves the use of terms such as *welfare, inner city,* and *crime* as a form of code language in which race is discussed without being named. The use of strategic rhetoric is important in a CRT analysis because it is a powerful tool through which racialized ideological claims can be obscured and normalized. A CRT/LatCrit framework thus seeks to expose color-blind stock stories and strategic rhetoric that mask White privilege. These stock stories are false and damaging to people of color, and they serve to obscure the ways in which dominant U.S. groups benefit from their power and privilege (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

A key element used by CRT/LatCrit theorists to expose and critique dominant color-blind ideologies is the use of counterstorytelling. Counterstories are race-conscious versions of reality told by people of color (Delgado, 1989; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The counter-insights offered through a race-conscious analysis can provide a powerful tool to critique the color-blind ideology of meritocracy, objectivity, and equal opportunity and the ways in which this ideology shapes the experiences of African American and Latino/a students (Delgado, 1989; López, 2003b; Parker, 1998). Delgado Bernal (2002) asserted that, through critical raced-gendered epistemologies, "students of color can be seen as holders and creators of knowledge who have the potential to transform schools into places where the experiences of all individuals are acknowledged, taught, and cherished" (p. 125). Counterstories go beyond presenting an objective reality that appears natural in our social order, instead highlighting the ways in which society is stratified along racial lines to primarily serve the interest of White individuals. López (2003b) reminded us that counterstories generally do not fit socially acceptable notions of truth regarding the way our educational system operates.

Beyond providing alternate visions of our social reality, a race-based analysis should also shape our efforts to concretely transform social institutions. Recently, CRT/LatCrit theorists have advocated for the development of a critical race praxis that offers the potential for transforming racial inequality (Lynn, 1999; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Valdes, 1998; Williams, 1997; Yamamoto, 1997). This emphasis on moving beyond theory to concrete praxis and transformation is the final tenet of CRT and LatCrit theory employed here. Ladson-Billings (1998) reminded us that students of color and their communities cannot afford the "luxury of CRT scholars' ruminations . . . where the ideas are laudable but the practice leaves much to be desired" (p. 22). The lessons learned from using CRT and LatCrit frameworks in this analysis can contribute to a race-centered critical care praxis that is relevant to marginalized groups of students within educational institutions.

Findings

With the CRT/LatCrit tenets just outlined in mind, I turn now to the findings to illustrate how an analysis centering race/ethnicity can inform our understanding of caring as it relates to the education of Puerto Rican girls. Through a race-based analysis of the findings, I make obvious how these CRT tenets are illustrated in caring narratives and practices at JMS and how the tenets should inform caring theory and praxis. The theme of caring was present early and continually during the 2 years I collected data for this study. There were several ways in which both teachers and students incorporated care or caring into their narratives concerning the education of Puerto Rican students.

Caring theory has given considerable attention to the importance of the type and amount of caring perceived or present within the teacher-student relationship. Not surprisingly, both teachers and students discussed caring when I asked them to describe teacher-student relationships and interactions at the school and within classrooms. However, this is not the only way caring was discussed at JMS. As I coded and organized the data, I noticed that the theme of caring was often present in excerpts of conversations coded into such categories as descriptions of community, parental involvement, and ideologies concerning educational success. Thus, for present purposes, I define caring broadly, focusing both on what students and teachers say about how schools and teachers care for Latino/a students and what teachers say about how Latino/a families care for their children, their children's education, and their community.

The first part of this section focuses on stock narratives about the caring present at JMS. These narratives, articulated by teachers, focus on perceptions of how race/ethnicity affects the level of care present within the families and community of JMS students. After discussing this dominant care narrative, I present data supporting the existence of a nascent caring counter-narrative at JMS. This narrative, articulated by the girls in the study as well as by some of the teachers, is built on observations regarding how race/ethnicity affects the care offered to students through attention to their educational needs and attention to who they are within the context of the teacher-student relationship.

Powerful Caring Stock Narratives

Caring as a Racial/Ethnic Attribute: "And the neighborhood has gotten worse"

As teachers spoke of the community in which they worked, they often used the language of caring. Caring, in this narrative, was described as a quality that could be owned by members of a community and that could be demonstrated in varied ways such as maintaining a nice community, valuing education, and ensuring that children did well in school. Interpreting the data in this study through a CRT/LatCrit analysis makes evident the ways in which beliefs about the presence of this type of care were racialized. In this narrative, the racial/ethnic characteristics of individuals and their communities were linked to the amount of care displayed. However, this link between caring and race/ethnicity was not always obvious or explicit. Instead, strategic rhetoric was continually employed in the prevalent stock story of care described subsequently.

When describing the care present in the community where they worked, teachers often focused on changes the neighborhood had undergone over the past several decades. Mr. Riley, who had been teaching at JMS for more than 30 years, provided historical accounts of change within the neighborhood. These accounts included his racialized interpretations of the attitudes and dispositions of community residents. For example, in the following he offered his analysis of demographic changes in the neighborhood:

> I've seen this place change and the neighborhood has gotten worse. It went from blue collar to working class to welfare and then now. When I first started here the Polish mothers used to scrub their steps and have everything nice and clean. . . . As the factories left, the neighborhood changed and it became welfare. Ninety-three or ninety-five percent of our kids receive government aid or welfare, OK, because we're a Chapter 1 or a Title 1 school. And there's free breakfast, free lunch, and they qualify for that. And a lot of them, you'd be surprised that these, I mean, I've had families and it's the same thing. They didn't go to school, the children don't go to school. They got into the welfare system and that's what they've been living on ever since.

Mr. Riley's assessment that the neighborhood had "gotten worse" was accurate if the neighborhood was measured in terms such as the value and quality of the housing stock, the availability of jobs, the number of boarded-up properties, or the poverty level. However, Mr. Riley's statements reflected a form of strategic rhetoric in which he suggested that the ethnicity and social class of community residents were responsible for the demise of the neighborhood. Mr. Riley did not mention that the new welfare and poor residents tended to be Latino/a and African American families. However, he did compare them with the blue-collar, Polish families that once populated the neighborhood and asserted that the former residents demonstrated they cared about the neighborhood by keeping things "nice and clean."

Similarly, Ms. Nadler explained that as the racial/ethnic composition and home ownership status of the neighborhood changed, the care and pride demonstrated by residents and the subsequent condition of the neighborhood had diminished:

> It was a nicer place to work 13 years ago and I've seen it just go downhill from one year to the next. When I first started teaching here 13 years ago it used to be an all-White neighborhood. . . . When I came here I never looked out the window and saw graffiti, graffiti on the front of the building, graffiti on that side, there wasn't any of that. And I just see more Whites moving out and Blacks and Latinos moving in. But they must be living in rented properties or something because if you have a home you'd have pride and take care of it. And I don't know, that's kind of my thinking of why the neighborhood looks like it does. You don't care about the place, you have no ownership in this neighborhood . . . I think that some people that are on welfare, I know that some people have to be. . . . But I just think that people don't have pride anymore. Because you're getting a message here if you're given something for nothing. And who cares, like the people put up with it and look at this.

Ms. Nadler's statements illustrate how her perceptions of the neighborhood have changed as properties changed hands. As the community surrounding and served by JMS became increasingly populated by low-income Latino/a and African American families, it also lost its reputation as a desirable place for teachers to work. While the former White homeowners had accrued a favorable status as people who cared about their neighborhood and valued and cared about education, the new Black and Latino "renters" who were changing the face of the community were constructed as deficient in regard to care.

Mr. Weiss, who grew up and still lived in the neighboring Riverside community, offered a more balanced view of the neighborhood, talking about both positive and negative characteristics. His analysis reflected a consideration of how changes in the economy had affected the community. However, his assessments were also similar to Mr. Riley's and Ms. Nadler's in that he concluded that hard work and a value and concern for education were attributes no longer as abundant in the neighborhood because of its changing demographic composition.

> When I grew up here this was very much a blue-collar area. But it was a hard-working area. Education was extremely important. There was no question that education was extremely important. In the years since that, the community doesn't see the school as being the shining light out there for education. In some ways I would like to be almost the lighthouse out there. I don't think the community sees us that way. In some ways, I think that we're considered like a necessary evil almost.

It is important to note that all of these teachers brought some complexity to their neighborhood analysis by discussing, to varying degrees, the impact of a changing economy on the neighborhood. However, while they acknowledged the intersecting influence of social class and race/ethnicity, their arguments were based on a European model of immigration. This model is founded on the notion of individually driven progress within a meritocracy. As López (1987) noted, the experience of Puerto Ricans in the United States exposes the mythological quality of the upward mobility ideology within a meritocracy. In particular, the local economies and communities where Puerto Ricans have settled have been harshly affected by such forces as industrial flight, racially isolated schools, gentrification, and racism (López, 1987). A CRT/LatCrit analysis of these data thus reveals the ways in which narratives focusing on the care present within communities can implicate the race/ethnicity of community residents as causing care deficits while at the same time ignoring the role of race and racism in creating particular historical and political circumstances that disadvantage communities populated by people of color.

Caring as a Mask for White Privilege: "They don't care if their kids succeed or fail"

Beyond highlighting how race/ethnicity and racism are central to teachers' perceptions about the presence of care within the JMS community, a CRT/LatCrit analysis is helpful in exposing how stock stories perpetuating the ideology of meritocracy, individualism, objectivity, and equal opportunity were used to explain how caring influenced the success of students. One of the ways in which teachers connected care with school success was by describing the level of school-sanctioned parental involvement at JMS. Ms. DeAngelis, who stated that she knew little about the community where she worked, acknowledged that the demands of work constrained parents' ability to become involved at the school. But she also interpreted minimal parental involvement as a lack of caring. In explaining why she thought parents were not more involved in school, she stated:

> Everybody has to work, everybody has to work. But I don't want to say that's the only reason [for limited parental involvement]. I think a lot of it is that a lot of them just don't care. They just don't care. . . . They don't care about their kids. They don't care if their kids succeed or fail. I mean, when I have kids and I don't see their parents all year, what does that say?

Ms. Logan also linked caring to the level of parental involvement with the school:

> I don't think that people care. People, meaning, I don't think that there's enough, I know you can debate the parent situation from here to forever. Somebody once told me that the best thing is to teach in an orphanage because they don't have to even think about that, there's no parents. And that really struck me when they said that. I

> know that I should not put my values on these kids. I know that that's wrong, but yet we believe that our values are true and honest and we have good intentions.

While Ms. Logan did not mention race in her comments, she distinguished herself from her students through such language as "these kids" and "our values." In suggesting that an orphanage would be the best place to teach because of the lack of parental influence, she also implied that perhaps the school and teachers would be better able to care for and serve "these kids" without the interference of parents. Similarly, Noddings (2002) suggested that some schools that serve inner-city minority students might be better equipped to care for students than some parents and should consider implementation of a boarding school model.

Narratives about the level of care present in families were also used as teachers distinguished between high and low academic performers. For example, Mr. Rosenfield stated that "some of the ones that succeed have parents at home who care enough about their education to get them motivated." Similarly, Mr. Riley believed that successful students had parents who "[are] letting them know that they care about what they're doing, they care about their marks, they care about how you behave in school: the things that you need to care about." Hidalgo (1998) and Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) have argued that casting success and failure as an individual phenomenon is a racist interpretation because it castigates those who fail for not trying or caring enough while school structures, policies, and practices are left unexamined. The narrative that was present at JMS linking school success with the level of parental care offered to children rested on the ideology of meritocracy and individual achievement. It thus served to normalize the racist assumption that the amount of caring present in families was racially determined and that increased levels of caring by Latino/a parents would pay off in higher levels of school success.

The link made between race and caring was also obvious when teachers compared their experiences in White contexts with their experiences teaching children of color. For instance, Ms. Ross noted how the care offered by families through their involvement in the education process was central in explaining the differences between the school district of which JMS was a part and the mostly White district where she lived. In responding to a question from the author asking her to compare these districts, she stated the following:

> *Ms. Ross:* Family [explains the difference between districts]. Absolutely, family. In my districts it's parents, parental expectations, parents being concerned about education. I live in one of the premier school districts. . . . I mean, you have parents that come in here and say that they're interested. Most of them don't care. I think just the key is that education isn't important to them. . . .
>
> *RR:* And what do you attribute that to?
>
> *Ms. Ross:* I think because a lot of the parents, again, I don't know. I'm not a city person. I just think people grow up and have their little lives and it's worked for them and they're happy with that and they're not

aware of what's out there. They have their own small world. And I'm not saying this to put them down, because hey, people take different roads and paths.

RR: So, it's worked for them, by that, what do you mean?

Ms. Ross: They've gotten by and that's all they know. It's interesting, I come from a coal mining area myself. My mother had to quit school. Nobody in my family went to school. It was just something that I wanted to do. . . . So I try to look at the successes versus the failures. I keep saying, "You're not stupid, nobody is stupid in here. You're lazy. You could do it if you choose to do it."

Ms. Ross attributed success to the work ethic, care, determination, and values present within individual families. Her experiences and the White contexts in which she grew up and lived provided justification for her to perpetuate meritocratic notions of success and failure that masked White privilege. In addition, this perspective did not necessitate an exploration of the ways in which the "roads" and "paths" taken by individuals were influenced by contextual forces. A CRT/LatCrit framework challenges accounts such as these that do not consider how historical and sociopolitical forces affect the opportunities and subsequent success available to people of color. Understanding these data through a CRT/LatCrit framework leads me to argue that these misunderstandings and misconceptions regarding the contexts in which students live also influence how caring is conceptualized, distributed, and received by teachers and students at school. In the following, I focus on the words and actions of one teacher, Mr. Rosenfield, to further illustrate how teachers' racialized perceptions of a community can influence the care they offer within their classrooms.

Caring as Normalized Racism: "Well, maybe it's a good home away from a bad home"

Mr. Rosenfield was a conscientious teacher who put time into looking for resources to engage his students and into preparing lesson plans, grading papers, and attending professional development sessions to learn more about effective teaching methods for his subject area. In this regard, Mr. Rosenfield could be described as a teacher who cared about his students. The presence of this type of care at JMS was indeed confirmed by some of the girls. For example, María acknowledged that teachers cared about students but explained that this care was limited to pedagogical and academic concerns.

> Most of the teachers, all they want to do is teach the kids and that's it. . . . But I don't really think that they actually care, care. Like I'm always there for you and you can talk to me, no. . . . What I'm trying to say is that they care about the kids' schoolwork, not their personal lives, like what happens at home.

This distinction that María made between teachers' concern for students' schoolwork and their concern for students' personal lives is at the heart of differences between aesthetic/technical caring and authentic/relational caring (Noddings, 1984; Valenzuela, 1999). Aesthetic caring focuses on attention to the technical aspects of teaching and learning such as curricula, academic goals, and teaching strategies. This was the type of caring the girls often described when they talked of how their teachers cared for them. However, simply focusing on this distinction between aesthetic caring and authentic caring is not enough, because it does not place sufficient attention on the ways in which race intersects with and affects the distribution and reception of caring within schools. Mr. Rosenfield illustrates the importance of framing an analysis of caring through a racial lens.

Mr. Rosenfield's assessment of the community where he worked and his assumptions about the lives of families within that community led him to surmise that it was best for students to separate the classroom from their homes and neighborhood. For example, he stated:

> I think [kids have] a lot of problems at home to deal with. Single parents, no-parent families, alcohol problems, drug problems, simply lack of quality parenting. And they bring, they come to school with the neighborhood. In the class it's reflected in their attitude, the way they talk, the way they dress, excessive use of profanity. We try to, one of the things we try to teach them is to separate the classroom from the neighborhood. I used to say that we try to make this school a home away from home. But I don't say that anymore because if the home environment isn't good this isn't really . . . well maybe it's a good home away from a bad home.

In separating the classroom from the neighborhood, Mr. Rosenfield magnified the purported differences between the "good home" provided at school and the "bad homes" of some of the students. What Mr. Rosenfield missed seeing were the barriers to caring relationships that were created by separating the homes of students from the school. He also did not seem to realize that some of his students resented the negative perceptions that he held about them and the misunderstandings he had about their lives. These barriers and misunderstandings were obvious in the way Mr. Rosenfield interpreted interactions with students and parents. In the following, he describes a confrontation with Yanira's mother.

Mr. Rosenfield: Yanira's been really nasty, terrible, a pain in the butt. As a matter of fact, her mother came in the other day and tried to have a confrontation with me.

RR: Why?

Mr. Rosenfield: Because I had asked Yanira, did she grow up in a barn? I haven't seen the mom all year. She has never come in to pick up report cards. But when she thought I'd insulted her she came in right away. So that shows you where her priorities are.

RR: How did that conversation go?

Mr. Rosenfield: It went all right. We worked it out. I tried to get her to understand that it's Yanira with the problem, not me.

Yanira did not speak favorably about her relationship with Mr. Rosenfield. In his interactions with Yanira and with Yanira's mother, he assumed that Yanira's home was the source of her negative classroom behavior. His solution focused on getting the mother and daughter to understand that they were the source of the problem. This absolved him of any responsibility to understand how his views and actions regarding the context where he worked contributed to a contentious, negative relationship with Yanira.

In his concern with the aesthetic dimensions of teaching and learning, he believed it was best to conduct his classroom as if it existed in isolation from the homes and community of the students. Interpreting Mr. Rosenfield's words and actions without examining the racial/ethnic context in which they occurred or his racialized beliefs about that context does not provide enough information to determine why students in his class, such as Yanira, may have felt uncared for. Given the racial/ethnic and social class differences between students and teachers at JMS and the associations made between the racial/ethnic makeup of the community and negative characteristics, Mr. Rosenfield's aesthetic, decontextualized care can be described as a form of racist care. As he acted on his belief that students' homes were bad and uncaring places, he attempted to care by saving the students from those homes instead of by joining parents in a collective effort to care for students. In the following, I use excerpts of field notes and conversations with Mr. Rosenfield to further illustrate that his beliefs about the community seep through and affect the way in which he cares for students.

> It is a dreary, cool afternoon and I am spending the day with Yanira. Students come into Mr. Rosenfield's American history class where they are supposed to take a test. After the tests are distributed, Mr. Rosenfield walks around the room giving directions about the test and about the way students are supposed to behave. Some students get to work immediately, while others are talking or asking questions without raising their hands. As Mr. Rosenfield passes out tests he says, "I'm not playing games with this class. You came in noisy and you continue to be noisy. [To a boy who is talking]: Keep your mouth closed. And don't even look at me like that 'cause I'm sick of you. I'm going to call your mom at lunch 'cause it's every day with you [the boy becomes quiet]." Mr. Rosenfield has several exchanges similar to this with other students. Sometimes they provoke a verbal response from students. Mr. Rosenfield responds by sending students out of the room or with threats to call home or to keep students for detention. In the middle of the class, he comes back to me looking frustrated and says: "It's usually not this bad in here. They're just out of control. There's also two to three nitwits in here that just make it impossible for everybody. I would love to be a fly in their homes to see what's going on in there."

CRT/LatCrit scholars remind us that racism is perpetuated through everyday practices normalized within institutions such as schools. Mr. Rosenfield's classroom provides one example of the ways in which racist care can become normalized in the attitudes and practices of school members. The racist sentiments expressed by well-intentioned teachers at JMS congealed to form a distant and racialized relationship between the school and the community. Sadly, many of the teachers seemed unaware of how their ways of thinking influenced their relationships with students or their classroom practices. As noted by López (2003a), present-day forms of racism are often invisible to the well-meaning individuals who perpetrate them. Villenas and Deyhle's (1999) review of ethnographies focusing on Latino/a students showed that schools' treatment of such students is consistently racially constructed in a way that perpetuates negative beliefs about youth and their families. According to these authors, "CRT as an explanatory tool helps us position schools' and larger society's negative perceptions of cultural differences in family socialization and education within a framework of power relations and the castification of Latinos in the United States" (p. 423).

Emerging Caring Counternarratives

Caring as a Structural Attribute: "If he really cared about our schools, he would give money to our schools"

Beyond illuminating the centrality of racism in daily life, CRT/LatCrit scholars seek to uncover the counternarratives that challenge color-blind dominant views claiming objectivity, neutrality, and meritocracy. Amidst the powerful narratives at JMS that claimed that caring was racially determined and fostered a "lone-ranger" mentality in regard to the care of students, there existed an emerging counternarrative that slightly shifted assumptions about how race operated to influence care. This narrative placed less attention on caring within the racialized bodies of people of color and focused more on the ways in which structural factors influenced the distribution of care along racial lines. While I noticed the presence of this narrative as I looked at the data focusing on the girls' perspectives, it also included the perspectives of some of the teachers at JMS. One of the ways in which the girls linked race and caring was through their descriptions of school facilities. The environment in which the girls were educated provided pervasive images that shaped the ways they interpreted how their educational needs were cared for. For instance, María described her school as follows:

> I'm not proud of this school. This school needs a lot, a lot of work. Like the ceilings, for one thing, are falling apart. They have a lot of roaches crawling out of the wall and it's disgusting. Like this one time this roach was crawling up the wall and it distracts the whole classroom. . . . We need a new lunchroom, a new cafeteria. . . . I feel like I'm in prison, it's nasty.

Students described the demoralizing conditions and poorly kept school building they faced each day and suggested that their school was not sufficiently cared for. In addition, they surmised that those with the power to effect change did not show sufficient care for their school. For example, in the words of María:

> Like, nobody really cares much about our schools and all that. If they came here, they would see that it's like down the drain. Like if they really cared about our schools, the school board or the government or whatever they call it. If they really cared about our schools, the mayor of the city, there you go; if he really cared about schools he would give money to our schools.

According to Maríah, inequities between schools are perhaps caused by the different financial resources of schools, which she measured according to teachers' salaries. Her description of the situation at JMS was marked by hesitations, deep breaths, and uncertain phrases ("I don't know," "I guess"):

> The school is poor because they don't have a lot of books and stuff. And they need to change their books and get higher books. [And] it's the people that work here. They don't earn enough money. They need to make more money to make the schools not that poor, more in the middle. . . . Because, I mean, I don't know [she sighs]. I mean the richer schools, their teachers and their people. I don't know. They make more money, I guess.

Maríah's assessment that her teachers' salaries were less than those of teachers at "richer" schools was actually quite accurate. Relative to surrounding suburbs, the JMS school district consistently ranked lower in teachers' salaries and in expenditures per pupil. Clarissa also pointed to the inequities in resources available to different schools to explain the differences she had observed between schools. For instance, Clarissa stated that if kids and their schools were to change, more resources were needed: "[For the school to change it would take] the principal getting some money, painting over this school, cleaning up the graffiti, cleaning up the floor, getting new carpet, chairs, tables, getting new everything." She also suggested that perhaps some public schools had more resources because they "maybe get more money from the government, like maybe the schools get loans." The girls believed that part of caring for them meant ameliorating the unequal distribution of educational resources they observed between schools.

As the girls complained of the physical appearance of the school and the concurrent lack of care from those who held power, they pointed to the ways in which racial/ethnic and class characteristics primarily determined whose educational needs received more care. The inequities that they witnessed did not match the common discourse they heard about equality in America, and they struggled to understand why some schools and their students were better cared for than others. The girls' narrative of the unequal distribution of care along race and class lines was apparent as they compared their school's physical appearance and the resources present in their educational setting with those of schools serving White students outside the city.

For instance, several of the girls speculated that, in terms of appearance, schools located in predominantly White, wealthy suburbs would be much better cared for than JMS.

RR: So, are there some schools that aren't ghetto?[11]
Lizzy: Yeah.
RR: Where are those schools?
Lizzy: Like the real clean ones in the suburbs.
Reina: That's 'cause a lot of rich White people go there. They like their schools clean, the rich White people.
RR: So, why is it like that? How come there's some schools that are. . . .
Reina: 'Cause if it ain't clean then I throw stuff around. But if it is then I won't.
Lizzy: Some kids just don't care.
Clarissa: It's the kids.
RR: It's the kids, but you all are the kids.
Lizzy: Yeah, but not everybody in this school is White and it's by race.
RR: Well, here's a question. What would happen if rich White people start coming to this school?
Reina: They'd turn like us. [laughter]
RR: What does that mean, turn like you?
Reina: They're going to start throwing stuff.
Lizzy: Unless, we turn like them. [all three girls laugh loudly at this remark]

The girls began their critique of the unequal distribution of care with the observation that race/ethnicity and social class were primary factors in determining the care that different schools received through allocation of facilities as well as through resources such as better-paid teachers. Unlike the narrative that emphasized the lack of care present in students' communities and families, this narrative began to explore how structural factors influenced the care given to the educational needs of different students. However, it is important to note that although the girls hinted at structural forces that influenced the distribution of educational care, the preceding passage also reveals the power of dominant stock stories. As this conversation shows, in the absence of pedagogical space to explore and expand a race-based, structural analysis of the distribution of care, the girls intermingled their analysis with essentialized notions of what it meant to be "White and rich" (associated with being clean) or what it meant to be "urban and Puerto Rican" (associated with not caring and being dirty). Left unexamined, these perspectives reflect an internalized racism associating the presence of care with "whiteness." However, there were other ways in which counternarratives on the intersection of race and care were expressed at JMS.

Caring as Knowing: "They don't live around here, and they don't know it"

A second way in which the girls linked race and care was by arguing that the racial/ethnic differences between them and their teachers affected the amount and type of care teachers offered to them. The girls were aware that their community differed along ethnic and class lines from the communities where their teachers lived, and they were also aware that their teachers had limited knowledge about their community. For example, in another conversation, Reina, Lizzy, and Clarissa explained the racial differences between their community and the communities of many of their teachers.

Reina: They think it [the neighborhood] is disgusting.
RR: Why?
Reina: Because they live all the way up far from here.
RR: And how is where they live different from here?
Reina: Like you don't know.
RR: Tell me.
Reina: It's cleaner. It's more White people. If you go there, that's all you see, all White teachers. 'Cause that's their community.
Lizzy: They think this community is dirty.
Clarissa: That it's dangerous.
Lizzy: They're probably scared.
Clarissa: Of getting jumped.
RR: Are you scared?
Reina: No.
RR: Why do they think it's more dangerous?
Clarissa: Because they don't live around here, and they don't know it.

As the girls spoke of the differences between their community and the communities of their teachers, they brought up race/ethnicity as a topic that influenced the perceptions that teachers held of their community and of them as members of that community. What was troubling about this dynamic was not that the teachers did not live in the same community but that, as the girls ascertained, their race and class positions influenced the assumptions they formed of the girls' community and of the girls as members of that community. These perceptions, in turn, influenced the way caring was distributed and perceived within the context of the teacher-student relationship. Yanira and Maríah expressed their frustration at the misrepresentations and misunderstandings that developed from the geographical, racial, and class chasm between their teachers and them as students.

Yanira: Like Mr. Rosenfield, he don't live around this neighborhood, that's why he's so preppy around here.
RR: What do you mean?
Maríah: He thinks he knows it all.
Yanira: Yeah, but he don't know 'cause he doesn't live in a bad neighborhood like this. He lives in a nice neighborhood, all nice and peace and quiet. So of course he's not going to know like what we go through. . . . And all the time I think that they don't know that's why they think like that. They think that we hang on the corners, they think we're thugs, like whatever. That's just the way we is. That's just where we want to hang at. Because if we were thugs we'd be everywhere, we'd be in every corner hustling. Sometimes, we just want to hang. Like with me, I be at one corner and one corner only, and my mom know where I'm at, she know what I'm doing. But they be thinking that they know everything. We be wearing bandannas and have makeup. . . . And the teachers, they always calling us like thugs. Just because you wear bandannas and

> baggy clothes that don't mean they're thugs. That's just the way they is. . . . They don't know. I'm tired of these people saying that we're thugs and stuff and the girls are like "ho's" because they wear little shorts.

Yanira's frustration was evident as she described the ways in which limited knowledge about her community affected the assumptions that teachers sometimes made about her life and the lives of her peers. What seemed particularly troubling for Yanira and Maríah was that some teachers claimed expertise regarding their community, and regarding them as members of that community, without experiencing life there. While the teachers praised the school for its multiculturalism and positive racial/ethnic relations, some were oblivious to the connection the girls made between racialized perceptions of the community and the care they felt they received from their teachers. Noguera (1995) asserted that teachers and administrators who are not familiar with their students and the communities where they live are more likely to misunderstand them, fear them, and construct a deprived, stereotyped image of their families and communities.

As is obvious from the preceding passages, the girls lamented the misperceptions and lack of knowledge that some of their teachers had of them as members of the community served by JMS. The girls longed to be cared for, not only personally but also as members of a particular community. Fortunately, there were several teachers who contributed to this counternarrative of caring emphasizing more personal, context-conscious forms of care. These teachers suggested that, to care for students, they needed to understand the community context where the students led their lives. For example, Ms. Lamar stressed the importance of treating students with patience and concern and of being sensitive to where they came from while also not making assumptions about their lives or their homes. Her description of the community acknowledged the struggles that residents faced as they attempted to "keep their heads above water" in the context of a poor/working-class community:

> The families are hard working. I mean, if I had to paint, take a broad brush and paint a description, it would be that. They're hard-working people. Everyone is scuffling. I get that feeling. Everyone is scuffling to keep their head above water. You know, to do the best they can. And you can see that when you go through the neighborhood. I mean, you don't get the sense that it's easy for anyone in this neighborhood. It's not.

Ms. Lamar also demonstrated a willingness to use the community as a learning site. For example, she initiated a project with students in which they cleaned up and planted flowers in an abandoned lot adjacent to the school. In addition, an essay she assigned required students to focus, think, and write on their views of their neighborhood and community.

Ms. Evans was another teacher who emphasized the importance of caring for students in a more personal way. When I asked her what advice she would give to new teachers coming into JMS, her response was as follows:

> I think that they need to realize that this child could be your child. You have to treat that child as if they have your last name. And what does that call for? Patience, tolerance. Yeah, patience. How would you treat your child? That is the biggest thing that I would say to any person, whether you're a veteran teacher or not. Because some veteran teachers don't do that also. They don't handle them with care.

Ms. Evans's suggestion of treating students "as if they have your last name" implies a more familial relationship in which students are treated with the same degree of care offered to family members. Ms. Simms also stressed the importance of connecting with students on a personal level. She explained that it was hard to get to know all of her students but that it was important, nonetheless, to understand their lives outside of the school context:

> You have to understand from where they come. . . . You need to watch very closely. You need to listen very closely before you attack. And it's so easy for all of us to attack. But you have to understand from where they come. You have to try to get to know them.

These teachers demonstrated both aesthetic caring and authentic caring in their classrooms while also paying attention to the community context in which education took place. However, the overall culture of the school did not reflect this vision and approach to caring as students moved from classroom to classroom throughout their school days. Although individual teachers could provide a healing balm or a resting place from racist classroom practices, structures, and ideologies, this was not enough to shelter students from the deleterious effects of an institutional environment that constructed their community as deficient in care, maintained rigid barriers between the school and the community, and perpetuated decontextualized aesthetic forms of care within the school. In addition, while the teachers focused more on students' personal lives, this type of care did not always involve attention to ways in which racial dynamics between students and teachers and between the school and community affected the care students received or needed. In the final section of this article, I build on the seeds of hope offered by the emerging counternarrative to discuss how we might better care for Latino/a students.

Implications: Toward a Color(full) Critical Care Praxis

The preceding analysis showed that beliefs about race/ethnicity influenced the production of particular care narratives within a school site. These narratives about care support claims made by CRT/LatCrit theorists regarding the central role that race and racism have played and continue to play in shaping the everyday circumstance of individuals in this country. A race-centered analysis also illustrates the power of dominant stock stories in normalizing racism through care narratives that claim objectivity and neutrality within a merit-based system. In addition, a CRT/LatCrit analysis can expose counternarratives or alternate versions of how race/ethnicity influences caring. These counternarratives provide an avenue to begin reinterpreting caring theory and praxis to better serve Latino/a students.

Valdes (1998) argued that, in the present context of majoritarian backlash, LatCrit theory needs to foster socially transformative policy, politics, and practices that are accountable to Latina/o communities. The lessons learned from the present race-conscious analysis of care narratives offer the opportunity to contribute to a critical race praxis relevant to marginalized groups of students such as the Puerto Rican girls who took part in this study (Valdes, 1998; Yamamoto, 1997). I thus respond to this call for transformative, race-conscious praxis by using the tenets of CRT/LatCrit theory outlined in the preceding analysis to discuss several major elements of a critical care praxis. First, critical care is grounded in a historical and political understanding of the circumstances and conditions faced by minority communities. Second, critical care seeks to expose how racialized beliefs inform ideological standpoints. Finally, critical care translates race-conscious historical and ideological understandings and insights from counternarratives into authentic relationships, pedagogical practices, and institutional structures that benefit Latino/a students.

A critical care praxis begins by acknowledging that, to care for students of color in the United States, we must seek to understand the role that race/ethnicity has played in shaping and defining the sociocultural and political conditions of their communities. For centuries, racial/ethnic and cultural characteristics have been used to justify colonial relationships between the United States and other nations, including Puerto Rico. The legacy of racial/colonial oppression present in the relationships between Latino/a nations and the United States cannot simply be ignored, because it continues to affect the daily lives of individual Latino/as and their communities. Educators thus need to care enough to understand how such issues as White privilege and racism, colonization, migration, and citizenship have played out in the communities where they teach and have affected the education of Latino/a students. Critical care thus builds on the work of those who have argued that caring theory needs to be politicized and needs to address questions of otherness, difference, and power if it is to be effective in the case of historically oppressed groups (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Thompson, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999).

A color(full) critical care praxis also calls on teachers to unpack their ideologies of progress, opportunity, and success within our society. Educators must examine how racial dynamics privilege some groups in our country at the expense of others and must deconstruct dominant viewpoints about such issues as our country's opportunity structure, the nature and impact of discrimination, and the significance of their particular group membership (Sleeter, 1996). As was evident in this study, deficit-based, racialized caring narratives were often articulated when teachers used their own experiences as well as the historical experiences of White immigrant groups as ideological foundations. These narratives did not account for the insidious nature of racism in structuring conditions in communities and schools. Bartolomé and Trueba (2000) argued that, if teachers are to more effectively connect with immigrant and U.S.-born minority youth, they must work toward political and ideological clarity:

> Ideological clarity requires that teachers' individual explanations be compared and contrasted with those propagated by the dominant society. The juxtaposing of ideologies, hopefully, forces teachers to better understand if, when, and how their belief systems uncritically reflect those of the dominant society and support unfair and inequitable conditions. (p. 279)

While much can be done in terms of both the preservice and in-service preparation of educators to ensure that they are exposed to critical, race-conscious versions of history and ideology, another element of critical care praxis is that it responds to the particular contexts in which schools are located. In this way, critical care calls on educators and schools to reconceptualize their relationships with students in ways that respond to the counterstories about race/ethnicity present in the communities of these students. It was clear in this study that, in the absence of opportunities for listening to such counterstories, deficit care narratives predominated. Delgado (1989) offered a vision of how listening to counterstories can alter perspectives and more intimately connect teachers and students within school settings:

> Members of the majority race should listen to stories, of all sorts, in order to enrich their own reality. Reality is not fixed, not a given. Rather, we construct it through conversations, through our lives together. Racial and class-based isolation prevents the hearing of diverse stories and counterstories. It diminishes the conversation through which we create reality, construct our communal lives. . . . It is through this process that we can overcome ethnocentrism and the unthinking conviction that our way of seeing the world is the only one—that the way things are is inevitable, natural, just and best—when it is, for some, full of pain, exclusion, and both petty and major tyranny. (p. 2439)

To be able to listen to the narratives of students and community members, educators and schools need to be more intimately connected with the communities where they work. Valenzuela's (1999) call for teachers to become students of the communities where they teach offers an example of what critical care might look like as teachers and schools connect with communities in new ways. This approach is also important because it disturbs the usual power dynamics in schools as teachers take on the role of learners. If teachers are to be learners in the communities where they work, they must acknowledge the contributions that others can make to their knowledge. In addition, community residents and families need to be reconsidered as experts on the context where they lead their lives and where the school is situated. A critical care praxis thus leads us to ask questions such as the following: What might it mean for students' communities to become sites of learning for practicing and preservice teachers? How might teachers' views of students and relationships with families be altered if professional development activities involved the community as a center for learning? What would it mean for school districts and schools of education to support teachers as they spend time talking with community members, walking through neighborhoods with parents and students, or visiting the homes of students they teach?

Reconceptualizing the relationship between educators and students also builds on the emphasis within caring theory on the importance of authentic interpersonal relationships between teachers and students (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999). The girls in this study displayed an awareness of the many ways in which differences between them and their teachers affected their relationship with teachers. One of the frustrations expressed by the girls was that many of their teachers knew them only in their role as students. This type of relationship often led to misconceptions about how the girls' lives within their particular community shaped who they were as persons. This tendency to treat the student-teacher relationship in a vacuum created a school environment where it was difficult for students to feel cared for in substantive ways. Critical care is attuned to the differences between students and teachers and calls on teachers to care for students authentically, with an understanding of how these differences can affect relationships. This focus on differences involves moving beyond pride in having a multicultural school because of the racial/ethnic diversity represented by the students. In addition, building relationships of authentic care must move beyond making assumptions about who students are and what their lives are like within their particular communities. Instead, concerted efforts must be made to create sustained interactions that allow students to share their perspectives of how ethnicity, social class, and gender dynamics affect their daily lives.

A critical care praxis must also seek to transform race-conscious ideological and political orientations into pedagogical approaches. Lynn (1999) highlighted the importance of political ideology and cultural identity in shaping the type of pedagogy that teachers adopt. He argued that teachers who practice a critical race pedagogy acknowledge the endemic nature of racism in structuring society and then work to create liberatory forms of practice for students. Ladson-Billings's (1994) vision of culturally relevant pedagogy can also serve as a starting point for teachers and schools committed to providing critical care to their students. Developing pedagogies that center race/ethnicity is especially important given that the student population in public schools continues to include students of color who differ from their teachers in regard to ethnic, language, social class, and place of residence characteristics. The rapid growth in the number of students who are diverse along these lines has not been matched by similar growth in the number of diverse teachers. The majority of teachers who will continue to serve students of color will be White, middle-class women (Bartolomé & Trueba, 2000).

Educators' efforts to critically care by providing a racially conscious pedagogy should also lead to opportunities to use the community as an extension of the classroom. Various scholars (Castaneda, 1997; Fránquiz, 2001; Mercado & Moll, 2000; Moll, 2001; Rivera & Pedraza, 2000) have described programs serving Latino(a) students that offer promise for successfully integrating the community into the curriculum in ways that engage students.

While integrating the community into the curriculum is not a new strategy, it is a suggestion not heeded often enough by schools in low-income, inner-city communities.

Finally, a major component of a critical care praxis is that it acknowledges the importance of addressing care at both the individual and institutional levels. As demonstrated by the emerging counternarratives expressed by the girls who participated in this study, acts of caring offered by individual teachers or caring pedagogies enacted in individual classrooms are limited in their potential to transform education for students when they take place in an institutional context that does not explicitly and intentionally address the ways in which educational care is unequally distributed along racial/ethnic lines. While the caring practices of individual teachers offer seeds of hope for more substantive change, those committed to offering critical care must move outside their classroom doors to challenge hegemonic educational practices, policies, and structures that work against educational justice for all students. Nieto (1998) summarized the importance of both individual and institutional acts of care in the educational success of Puerto Rican students:

> Caring implies that schools' policies and practices also need to change because simply changing the nature of their relationships with teachers and schools will not by itself change the opportunities the children are given. Hence, changing both personal relationships among teachers and Puerto Rican students and the institutional conditions in their schools is essential if these students are to become successful learners. (p. 159)

Paying attention to institutional caring thus necessitates a reconceptualization of caring theory that moves beyond the aesthetic/authentic dimensions of caring emphasized in interpersonal relationships and classroom practices. To critically care for students, it is also imperative to interrogate and seek to alter the ways in which educational care is unequally distributed along racial/ethnic lines.

Understanding the salient role played by race/ethnicity in the ways we care for students and their educational needs is an important challenge facing educators. To make caring theory relevant to the lives of Latino/a students, we must explicitly pay attention to the ways in which race/ethnicity and social class matter in determining how they receive and interpret caring within as well as outside the school walls and in determining what sort of caring we need to make education a positive and productive experience for Latino/a students. CRT and LatCrit theory emphasize the ways in which race/ethnicity and other markers of difference matter in the lives of individuals and offer a tool for rethinking educational theories and practices of caring. We must use these color(full) theories and seek to implement the color(full) practices they beget. Otherwise, we risk missing opportunities to care for Latino/a students in ways that will create the potential for education to be transformed in ways that critically matter.

Notes

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and Maenette K. P. Benham for their invaluable feedback on this article. Special appreciation also goes to Laurence Parker for offering his insights and support.

[1] All names of places and individuals are pseudonyms.

[2] Data were part of a larger study focusing on the inextricable ways in which race/ethnicity, class, and gender operate in the schooling experiences of Puerto Rican girls.

[3] For further discussion of issues of gender and ethnicity in this study, see Rolón-Dow (2004).

[4] The girls selected did not vary significantly in terms of their behavior and academic performance during elementary school. Report cards listed the behavior of seven of the nine girls as being satisfactory or outstanding in elementary school. Similarly, five of the nine girls received As and Bs in elementary school. In middle school, however, the range of behaviors and academic performance displayed by the girls was broad.

[5] Because I was interested in exploring how contextual factors in U.S. schools influenced the experiences of Puerto Rican girls, I focused on girls who had received most of their schooling in U.S. urban schools.

[6] Being a former teacher was helpful in gaining access to the research site and in getting to know the teachers. With students, however, I emphasized my status as a university student. To build rapport with students, I also talked about my experiences growing up in Puerto Rico, living in the city, and spending time in places within their community. During my visits to JMS, I made an effort to frequent the places where students spent their time. Thus, I spent the majority of my time in the students' lunchroom, in hallways, or sitting in the back of classrooms. My ability to speak Spanish and my Puerto Rican background were helpful in building rapport, particularly with parents. However, what seemed most important to the girls were my consistent presence at the school over a period of 2 years, my assurance that what they shared with me was confidential, and my visits to their homes.

[7] I shadowed each girl twice, once during her seventh-grade year and once during eighth grade.

[8] The interview protocols and focus group discussions involving the girls, teachers, and parents included questions and activities centered on the following themes: identity (ethnicity, social class, gender); family, peer, and community descriptions; school life; and educational success, failure, and opportunity. Some of the interviews with parents were conducted in Spanish. I transcribed these interviews in Spanish and later translated them into English.

[9] Supplementing these school interviews were nine parent interviews conducted in the homes of the girls. Visiting the homes of the girls and talking with their parents allowed me to gain insights into how the girls' identities and schooling experiences were influenced by their home contexts and also allowed me to visit with the girls in a more informal, familiar setting. An analysis of themes uncovered in the parent interviews was beyond the scope of this article.

[10] The dissertation study from which this article drew was grounded in the feminist theory of women of color and on theoretical frameworks addressing schooling inequality along racial and class lines.

[11] In asking the girls this question, I was drawing on their previous descriptions of their school as being a "ghetto school."

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Manuscript received February 27, 2004
Revision received August 3, 2004
Accepted August 10, 2004