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# PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT: AN ASIAN QUEER CRIT PERSPECTIVE IN ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Mitsunori Misawa<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

One of the foundational philosophies in adult education since its establishment has been the importance of creating multicultural educational environments that are inclusive and democratic for the diverse populations, and this is one philosophical aspect that needs to be emphasized in the field as more and more diverse populations enter into higher and adult education. For instance, when teaching adult learning theories that deal with educational contexts, there is an onus on an adult educator to point out the importance of having a good understanding of diversity and multiculturalism. Creating educational environments with diverse populations in mind is a key aspect of adult and higher education.

When contemporary scholars address diversity and multicultural issues, they often refer to a cross-cultural perspective that is called *border crossing*. Border crossing is described as diverse populations who live between two or more cultures or ethnic backgrounds. In the USA, the concept of border crossing is typically utilized by people of color or by people from non-dominant cultures when generating scholarship and research from their own voices that enrich the literature with non-dominant perspectives.

Literature dealing specifically with border crossing in education has seen an increase in publications over time. Such literature contains powerful voices and provides an important understanding of people of color's teaching and learning experiences while focusing on racial and ethnic perspectives of research populations. For historical reasons and out of necessity, the powerful voices in border crossing literature have extensively expressed the perspectives of African American and Latino/a scholars with very little from scholars with Asian heritage even fewer providing insight into the perspectives of scholars who are gay and have Asian heritage.

With that in mind, the purpose of this presentation is to provide an understanding of the effect of the intersection of race and sexual orientation from a queer crit perspective (a subset of Critical Race Theory) on the development and establishment of one's professional identity in higher education in the United States. In particular, this presentation will address how Asian and gay identities are integrated into a queer crit scholar's professional identity development by looking at an autoethnographic study. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How does the intersection of race and sexual orientation influence the educational experiences of a gay Asian scholar in higher education in the United States?

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2. In what ways does the intersection of race and sexual orientation shape the professional identity of a gay Asian scholar in higher education?

The significance of this presentation seems to be a twofold. First, this presentation will provide a better understanding of the troubling intersection of race and sexual orientation from a queer crit perspective. Because the intersection of race and sexual orientation has not been a highly discussed topic in academia, this presentation would offer an opportunity to open up talks on that intersection. Second, this presentation will provide a practical application of how to process or deal with conversational topics about race from an Asian perspective and sexual orientation from a gay perspective in adult and higher education by an adult educator.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In order to talk about the intersection of race and sexual orientation from the perspective of a gay Asian scholar, a version of Critical Race Theory based on Asian ethnicity and queer identity perspectives was utilized to frame the study. That main theoretical framework is called Asian Queer Crit. The following topics referring back to this framework that will be addressed in the presentation are:

1. The centrality of the intersection of race and racism with sexual orientation and homophobia.
2. Challenges to mainstream ideologies.
3. Confrontations with ahistoricism.
4. The centrality of experiential knowledge.
5. Multidisciplinary aspects.
6. Social justice perspectives. (Misawa, 2010)

### **Methodology**

The methodology for this study was autoethnography. According to qualitative researchers, autoethnography is defined as “a form of autobiographical narrative that explores the writer’s own experience of life. It is an approach in which the researcher/subject draws upon his or her experience, story and self-narrative to examine and connect with the social context” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 201). Since Critical Race Theory allows me to critically examine my own experiences from an Asian Queer Crit, an autoethnography seemed to be appropriate as a research methodology in this case.

In addition, using an autoethnography allowed me to utilize a perspective of Critical Race Theory, which emphasizes counternarratives and counterstorytelling. Counternarratives and counterstorytelling are types of “writing that [aim] to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). For this study, the data sources I used were my own narratives recorded previously in journal entries and autobiographical documents developed over time. Data from those sources were analyzed using a thematic analysis to identify commonalities.

### **Findings and Implications**

The data revealed two major themes: 1) Negotiation of positionality when crossing cultural borders, 2) Perpetuation of stereotypes, and 3) Sociocultural love-hate relations. Each theme will be discussed in a talk about professional identity development in higher education by providing some examples using the Asian Queer Crit framework.

In addition, implications for adult education and the Asian Diaspora in adult education will be provided. For example, I will argue that in order for adult educators to create an inclusive learning environment, they need to take into account each adult learner's positionality. When adult educators make efforts to include diverse perspectives in their practice, they need to utilize a less monolithic ideology of multicultural diversity; one where learners' identities are complex and even at times troubling for their learners in terms of sociocultural identities and positionality. The main implication being that adult educators need to be able to initiate and develop an intersectional approach to their practice when they deal with learners who are minorities who cross cultural and ethnic borders every day to survive in US society, including its institutions of higher education.

### **References<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> References are available upon request from the author.