

education review // reseñas educativas
a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

editors: **gustavo e. fischman / melissa cast-brede / gene v glass**

Supported by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University

November 10, 2014

ISSN 1094-5296

Mitchell, Dymaneke D. (2013). *Crises of identifying: Negotiating and mediating race, gender, and disability within family and schools*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

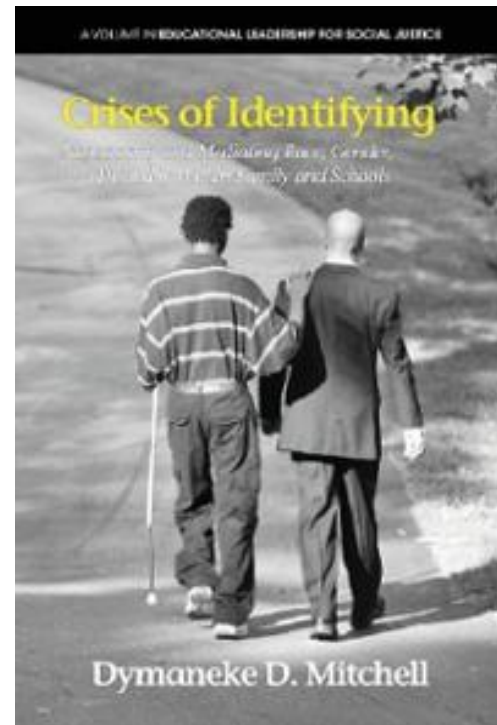
Pp. xvi+162

ISBN 978-1-623-96091-9

Reviewed by *Christopher S. Lanterman*
Northern Arizona University
United States

Dymaneke Mitchell weaves an intricate tapestry of theory, narrative, and analysis in her account of the lived experiences of six African American individuals with disabilities in *Crises of Identifying: Negotiating and Mediating Race, Gender, and Disability within Family and Schools*. Mitchell illuminates the ways in which these individuals negotiated and mediated the intercontextual nature of their multiple identities in this collection of case stories.

Mitchell presents this monograph, part of Information Age's Educational Leadership for Social Justice series, within an interdisciplinary methodology. She identifies her collection of case stories as a "case study research informed by and heavily incorporated with 'autoethnographic sensibilities'" (p. 16) in order to capture the interplay between her own experiences as an African American, deaf female and those of her five participants. Grounded in critical Black feminism and disability studies, Mitchell explores identities of race, gender, and disability within discourses of power and privilege through her



theoretical grounding in essentialism, intersectionality, intercontextuality, identification development, and personified leadership. She uses the approach of “particularizability” (p. 36) in presenting rich, detailed narratives.

Particularizability facilitates the reader’s connection to the ways in which the three men and two women in Mitchell’s study (re)negotiate and (re)mediate their crises of identifying within family and school. In addition to the crises of identifying documented in the stories of King, Black Her Story, Jose, Kim, and Starbucks 311, each case story illustrates the ways in which negotiating and mediating the intercontextual nature of race, gender, and disability became catalysts for personifying leadership.

Throughout the book, Mitchell effectively connects key theoretical frameworks with her analysis of the case narratives. For example, in her profile of Starbucks 311, Mitchell describes the ways that essentialist discourses around quality of life existed relative to Starbucks 311’s blindness. Similarly, Mitchell documents the ways in which Jose’s parents challenged prevailing essentialist discourses by advocating for his placement in general education, supported by a paraprofessional, when such placements challenged the status quo of educational practice in the 1970’s.

In Kim’s case story, Mitchell describes a therapist who challenged the essentialist discourse of disability. The therapist recognized the propensity for children to be spoiled in a protective response to their disability, and coached Kim’s mother against this practice. In contrast, Kim’s extended family persisted in treating Kim like a baby because of Kim’s cerebral palsy. The crises of identifying as a disabled individual are reflected in Kim’s struggle to navigate the differential pressures and expectations between school and family.

Similarly, crises of identifying exist within and between identities. King describes negotiating his identity as a Black man with his identity as a blind man. King’s story brings to mind Lynn Manning’s (2009) poem, *The Magic Wand*, in which he describes “the profound metamorphosis” as “I whip out my folded cane and change from black man to blind man with a flick of my wrist” (p.

785). King's experiences point to the social construction of identity, which further complicates the process of identifying within and among multiple identities.

Mitchell synthesizes her analysis of these case stories into three themes which surfaced within the narratives: performance, identity hierarchy, and the contextuality of self. The theme of performance reflects patterns of reifying or troubling the status quo in the ways each individual interacted with others and within different contexts. Mitchell skillfully connects elements of performance across the five narratives, while still allowing for interpretation and flexibility within the broad theme. In Jose's case story, for example, Mitchell describes performance as a means of passing, or minimizing his disability in order to more easily fit in as capable. Alternatively, Mitchell suggests that performance reflects Kim's propensity to spend more time with White friends, because she was criticized by Black people for not acting Black.

The second theme, identity hierarchy, recognizes that identities alternately manifest dominance over one another relative to the contexts within which they are operating. Mitchell suggests that this hierarchy is determined both internally and externally. Identity hierarchy suggests that social construction of identity can be created when society views one dimension of an individual as dominant, such as King's blackness.

The third theme Mitchell identifies in her analysis of these case stories is the contextuality of self. Mitchell describes the ways that each of her participants define themselves within and among their racial, gender, and disability identities, and in the contexts of family and school. This defining process, that Mitchell names contextuality, provides a compelling coda to her analysis. The difficulties of negotiating and mediating multiple identities are revealed in the self-portraits unveiled in Mitchell's interviews with King, *Black Her Story*, Jose, Kim, and Starbucks 311.

Mitchell's use of supporting quotes from both the literature and participant narratives contributes to the depth and clarity of her own narrative and analysis. This approach dovetails

effectively with her methodology. The extensive application of quotes excerpted from her literature review clearly invokes the sentiments expressed by the theorists on whose shoulders her study stands. Among others, these include Fuss, Creswell, Thomas, Berube, Gabel, Hooks, Charlton, and Linton.

I found some aspects of Mitchell's analysis confusing or misguided. For example, Mitchell lauds Jose's parents for successfully achieving his inclusion in general education prior to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. The ADA does maintain some jurisdiction over the practices of public education, but the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, originally passed as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) in 1975, seems to be more relevant in this context. Mitchell also refers to paraprofessionals throughout her book. She uses this label broadly to refer to any professional, other than teachers or caregivers, who support students with disabilities. However, paraprofessionals in school settings have a proprietary role, typically distinct from physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, or other related service providers. A paraprofessional is designated by a local education agency to provide instructional support for tutoring, behavior management, translation, and other instructional support activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Special education, as described in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, and its associated related services and supports are not the main focus of Mitchell's analysis. These apparent misunderstandings divert the reader's attention from more critical and informative aspects of her analysis.

Crises of Identifying: Negotiating and Mediating Race, Gender, and Disability Within Family and Schools illustrates Dymaneke Mitchell's deep and considered analysis of the discourses of power and privilege that affected the lived experiences of five Black, disabled men and women. Supporting this analysis with her own insights as a deaf, Black woman allows for a strong researcher voice in this collection of narratives that

Mitchell calls case stories. Mitchell concludes with a discussion of the implications for this research for the fields of disability studies, teacher education, and special education. Mitchell offers many thoughtful questions, challenges and considerations for the application of her research to teachers and scholars in these disciplines. At the core of her argument is the need for more robust teacher training relative to disabled students of color (p. xi). As a guide for educators and pre-service educators, I believe this book offers insightful and illustrative accounts and analyses of the complexities of negotiating and mediating identification within multiple identities. Nonetheless, the deep and complex theoretical foundation on which she builds her thorough analysis may discourage all but the most stalwart readers of educational research.

References

- Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004).
- Manning, L. (2009). The magic wand. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13, 785. doi: 10.1080/13603110903046069
- U.S. Department of Education (2004). *Title I paraprofessionals non-regulatory guidance*. Washington, D. C.: Author. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/paraguidance.pdf>

About the Reviewer

Christopher S. Lanterman
Northern Arizona University
United States
Chris.Lanterman@nau.edu

Christopher Lanterman has been a teacher educator in the department of Educational Specialties at Northern Arizona University for twelve years. He teaches courses in the B.S.Ed. in elementary and special education, as well as in N.A.U.'s disability studies minor. Mr. Lanterman is currently pursuing his Ed.D. in curriculum and Instruction at Northern Arizona University. His research interests are in the areas of universal design for learning (UDL), disability studies in education (DSE), and pre-


service teacher self-efficacy. Mr. Lanterman has published two book chapters on universal design and its relation to postsecondary education, and has presented papers and workshops on universal design for learning and disability identity at state, national, and international conferences. Mr. Lanterman earned his M.Ed. in special education at Northern Arizona University in 2002.



education review // reseñas educativas
a multi-lingual journal of book reviews

editors: **gustavo e. fischman /**
melissa cast-brede / gene v glass

Supported by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University

 *Education Review/Reseñas Educativas/Resenhas Educativas* is supported by the edXchange initiative's Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*. Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and ***Education Review***, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or ***Education Review***. ***Education Review*** is published by the Scholarly Communications Group of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University.

Please contribute reviews at <http://www.edrev.info/contribute.html>.

Connect with *Education Review* on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Education-Review/178358222192644>) and on Twitter @EducReview