Narrating Identities: Schools as Touchstones of Endemic Marginalization

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This article examines a racial awareness activity conducted as part of a community-wide change initiative at which we found that the majority of racial identity events occurred in schools. Given the prevalence of schools in participant narratives, we argue that schooling is a societal marker, or what we will call a touchstone, of racial identity formation and marginalization that is enacted on an interactional level and that reflected historical and present day relationships. [touchstone case, race, narrative, marginalization]

HEREIN lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line.

—W. E. B. DuBois, 1903

Even before Barack Obama was President of the United States, the idea that the country is now a “postracial” society gained popularity. However, “postracial” identity is not what we have seen in our three-year ethnography of a community-wide change initiative. Identities based on race exist in insidious ways, both in global (macro-) and local (micro-) discourses. We were struck by how normalized and expected race-based marginalization was for the participants and how, in the end, racism was masked discursively. Bell (1992:6) talks specifically about the neutrality of race and its origins: “Indeed, the very absence of visible signs of discrimination creates an atmosphere of racial neutrality and encourages whites [and in the case of post-Obama America, some blacks] to believe that racism is a thing of the past.” As Bell suggests, it is a lack of overt racism on a large scale that leads to the belief in postraciality. Applied to current times and coupled with the election of the nation’s first ever African American president, some Americans have been lulled into a false sense of racial neutrality or the disappearance of racism altogether. The analysis presented here will challenge this complacency.

In this article, we present narrative excerpts from community members, service providers, and community leaders who told stories at a community-wide initiative meeting about when race became salient in their lives. This racial-awareness activity was deemed necessary to advance the progress of the initiative, where race had become an issue of dissension among team members during the planning and implementation phases of the process. The goal of the race narratives that were produced was to provide an increased racial awareness and understanding among all stakeholders that would also seek to improve communication and subsequent actions within the initiative. That the majority of narrated events in this activity occurred in school suggested to us that school may be a “touchstone case” of racialized marginalization (Gutiérrez, personal communication April 15, 2009). We explore the potential implications of schooling as a societal marker, or what we will call a touchstone, of marginalization, and discuss what this might mean for teacher education and research.

We use Critical Race Theory (CRT) to understand how the endemic nature of racism in America for nondominant groups is enacted in this community-wide, collaborative

change effort (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). The race narratives that we explored foregrounded the voice of the "other"; this focus was a natural pairing with CRT as it provided a counternarrative to the traditional discourse used to describe the schooling experiences of people of color. We also explore the complex tensions between white, black, and Latina/o members of the community and illustrate how these tensions played out on narrative and interactional levels in ways that reflected historic and present-day relationships among the three main racial and ethnic groups in this community. Blackness and whiteness were transposed against each other as Latina/o identities intersected around these cross-racial tensions (Quiñones et al. this issue). The racial awareness activity gives us a snapshot of the ways race is enacted across and within community groups, and what consequences the visibility or invisibility of race had on overall processes in this initiative. Implications of this analysis for collaborative community change initiatives emphasize how not having these conversations can foster or exacerbate mistrust among groups who may perceive each other as competitors for white power, rather than collaborators in profound change. Furthermore, this study has implications for the understanding of the subscript that still occurs in schools for people of color and suggests that people from nondominant groups are educated about their racial subordination in schools. Implications for teacher education suggest that we must deconstruct the issues of race and racism in a more meaningful way so that we do not send preservice teachers into urban schools to teach black and Latina/o children that they are second-class citizens.

Specifically, we examined narratives from a community-wide meeting in which participants were asked to tell a story about when they first became aware of race, theirs or another person's. The data corpus, a subset of the larger three-year study (see Introduction this issue), consists of over 100 race narratives, videotapes of these interactions, field notes, and interview transcripts. For this analysis, we focused on the following research question: how are race and racism discursively produced in cross-racial communication? After presenting our overall findings, we discuss what implications schooling as a touchstone case of racial identity marginalization might have on community change, educational research, and practice.

The Persistence of Racism

A rich body of research has shown that race is a persistent factor in the educational outcomes and experiences for children of color in public and private education through K-12 and beyond (Noguera 2008). Most conversations over time have focused on a few topics, specifically, the achievement gap between black and white students (Jencks and Phillips 1998), different explanations for marginalization between teachers and administrators and students from nondominant communities that resulted in uneven academic experiences (Duncan 2002), disproportionality in special education (Blanchett 2006), and disproportionality in types and frequency of discipline for black and Latino children in schools (Monroe 2005). This research shows that U.S. education engenders systematic forms of racism as major barriers to academic success and that these barriers have negative effects on academic outcomes for black students (Codjoe 2001). Although these studies have critically investigated the issues that plague public education as they relate to black and Latina/o children, they have in most cases stopped short of tracing the ways in which racism and racial identity formation work discursively in and out of school to continue systems of inequality that produce and reproduce the outcomes that are often the crux of research. Taken together, this research confirms that racism is persistent in U.S. society and North America more generally. We contribute to this work by arguing that schools are a touchstone case of endemically racist ideologies that inform the discursive practices that are constructed by teachers, administrators, and students themselves (Ferguson 2001).

Theoretical Framework

In addition to the sociocultural framework articulated in the introduction to this special issue, we draw on CRT's conception of the "normal" science of racism in U.S. society as a basic premise for our investigation of race and its operation in this context (Dixson and Rousseau 2005; Tate 1997). CRT addresses the fluidity of power in social systems, the importance of the lived experiences of people from nondominant communities, the functionality of "rights" to legally redress wrongs experienced by people from nondominant communities, and white supremacy's inability to "articulate how law reflects and produces racial power" (Crenshaw et al. 1995:xxiv). CRT (as it applies to law and education) is a broad perspective that examines the role systems (legal, educational, and social) play in maintaining racial subordination of people from nondominant communities in the United States (Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Yosso 2002).

Although the change initiative we describe did not lie exclusively in the legal or educational realm, it exemplified how systems of oppression intersect in complex ways to maintain the subordination of children and families from racially nondominant communities. Because of the myriad issues the community movement attempted to address (see Introduction [this issue] for discussion of broader initiative goals), CRT is a useful tool in the examination of the ways in which race was invoked in a community effort that primarily affected African American and Latino/a families, children, and youth in an urban setting. Through this lens and in response to specific requests to pay attention to race from study participants, we were able to ask questions of the data concerning issues of race and racialized practices as they presented themselves during each phase of the initiative.

The experiential narratives of people of color as a subversive counter narrative to the truth regimes of white supremacy (Brayboy 2005) were particularly important tools in analyzing the narratives presented here. Ladson-Billings (1998:11) describes the importance of voice in CRT as closely related to the way stories and narratives add "contextual contours to the seeming 'objectivity' of positivist perspectives." Throughout our analysis, the stories that were told about racial discrimination and exclusion centered on the ways in which participants learned hegemonic racial designations and their meanings in relationship to themselves that were discounted and ignored. Finally, the interest convergence thesis (Bell 2004) informs our understanding of the presence and function of whiteness in this initiative. Interest convergence claims that whites will partner with blacks for racial justice when there is a perceived benefit to them that does not fundamentally threaten white privilege, and that does not amount to "more" justice than the privileges of whiteness gains. Using these principles of CRT, we examined how race and racialized identity were discursively produced in participant narratives.

Race Narrative Data Corpus

Precipitated by increasing tension between racial groups involved in the initiative, the Subcommittee (the smaller leadership group) asked the initiative's outside facilitators to focus the next Strategy Team meeting (the committee-wide group of which the Subcommittee was a part) on racial awareness. At the larger Strategy Team meeting, we video- and audiotaped all of the small groups at each table. The groups were directed to "start thinking about a time or experience that developed your awareness of your race or ethnicity that led to a deeper understanding of your race and how others view your race" (field notes, January 16, 2007). In what follows, we will show the thematic patterns we found throughout all the narratives but will focus specifically on schools as a key site of racial awareness and marginalization for participants.

The data corpus for our analysis here consists of field notes taken during participant-observation of this meeting and video- and audiotape recordings of whole group and small group interactions. Given that each discussion was structured around the answer to the question about when race became salient in their lives, each answer constituted a personal narrative that we then transcribed, and that constituted our unit of analysis. Each author began by open-coding the data individually using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006). Using constant comparative strategies (Corbin and Strauss 2007), we inductively developed themes, then subsequently met to develop analytic consensus.

Content analysis offered us a flexible but systematic approach to analyze text data more globally (Mayring 2000). This method informed our identification of the textual trends and patterns in the data and of how language and context were given meaning by participants (Stemler 2001). This analytic tool afforded us the opportunity for a subjective interpretation of context in text data by following a rigorous process of coding and identifying themes (Hsieh 2005).

Here, we adopted a conventional qualitative approach to content analysis, which allowed us to create coding categories based on our observations of patterns within the text data. As we defined our codes during our analysis, the codes became the foundation for our subsequent conceptualization for the research question (Hsieh 2005). This process is also known as an inductive category development, where coding categories are systematically generated based on data and research questions are created, reviewed, and revised as necessary during data analysis (Mayring 2000).

A common challenge with this form of analysis is the risk that findings will not draw credibility or internal validity with the population of study (Lincoln and Guba 1985); however, in the case of our research, the population of study is a part of our larger ethnography sample, which allows us to maintain a deep participant perspective.

Lastly and to connect to more local processes of racial identity formation, we analyzed the narratives as interactional achievements that served as resources for socializing emotions and attitudes, developing identities and interpersonal relationships, and constructing membership in specific communities that serve as primary means of making sense of one's own experience (Ochs and Capps 1996). According to Johnstone (1990), a narrative is a story that is made up of a series of events and has a specific reason or point for being told. Narrative allows the teller of the story to establish order among events and is a powerful way for a person to create and communicate their identity (Young 2008). This communication can also operate as a valuable social tool for connecting the self to others. Narratives are not only a reflective account of a situation but they also present the narrator's unique point of view on the occurrence, as they are both teller and listener (Ochs and Capps 1996; Schiffrin 1996). Narratives can give insight into how the narrator, protagonist, and listeners intersect at a multiplicity of morally organized, past, present, and possible experiences (Ochs and Capps 1996), and how members are socialized. Each narrative in our corpus was made up of a series of past and present events that shaped participants' experiences and the meaning they made of those experiences.

Context for the "Difficult Conversation" Community Meeting

The Strategy Team meeting where the race narratives occurred was precipitated by racial tensions that surfaced at an earlier Subcommittee meeting. A comment made by one Subcommittee member about who should lead resident recruitment initiated the focus on racial awareness at a subsequent meeting. As the process of recruiting residents evolved, it became clear to participants that there needed to be a person whose main job was to lead the effort to bring in more residents and to lead the Youth Support Work Team in

particular. At a Subcommittee meeting, Helena (Latina) suggested that Maria, a Latina and a native Spanish speaker, should be the person to do this. Reginald (African American) countered that he felt the person should be an African American because African Americans were the majority population in the targeted geography. Unbeknownst to participants present at the time, this comment deeply offended Helena. At the next Subcommittee meeting, Helena let the group know that she was upset about Reginald's comment. Given that Reginald was not present, the group resolved to bring it up at the next meeting when Reginald would be there. At this next meeting, Dennis, an African American male and one of the outside facilitators, asked the group to go to the back of the room and form a circle to have what he called the "difficult conversation" (videotape, December 4, 2006).

This conversation between Reginald and Helena set up a motivation to devote substantial time at the subsequent Strategy Team meeting to sharing experiences of race and racism to clear the air and to determine how these issues could inform the larger process and plans. The group decided to bring discussions about race to the Strategy Team meeting because they had benefited from the conversation about racial awareness themselves and saw an opportunity for the development of counternarratives about race to be voiced in a safe space. We use the stories generated at this larger Strategy Team meeting as the focus of our analysis and discuss these in detail in the next section.

Eliciting Stories about Race

At the next meeting, Dennis and Anika (the outside facilitators) began by introducing work by Singleton and Linton entitled *Courageous Conversations* (2006). Participants were given a set of agreements to follow as they committed to "take the risk of being as honest as you can because this is one of the most difficult conversations one can have. In this country we don't know how to talk about racism, at least not across races" (videotape, January 16, 2007). The agreements were to: stay engaged, experience discomfort, and expect and accept nonclosure. Dennis explicitly stated the aim of the small group work was "to begin to unearth people's assumptions and beliefs so we can have a better chance at examining some of the stuff behind that" (videotape, January 16, 2007). He began with his own story as a model for the group work. They put a Subcommittee member at each table to guide the discussion given they had already experienced this process in earlier Subcommittee meetings. Dennis's story:

So here's my story, so you can time me if you wanted to, oh actually Donna is going to time me in back. So I was the kid who loved school. I wanted to go to school 365 days of the year and I campaigned for year round school when I was in elementary school and I wasn't very popular with my friends as you can imagine. So my parents are still (unclear) school and I loved coming home and learning and talking about what had happened in school. Well I went to junior high, so I was in 7th grade, and all of a sudden in algebra class people started calling me Oreo. . . . I had no idea what Oreo meant, I had no idea, and I could tell from how they were using it that it probably wasn't a good thing to be and so I went home and asked my parents and they explained to me what it was and I was crushed, because it was one of the first times in my experience of being in my black skin and being a male in my black skin that I came to understand that not everyone thought that I could or should love school and that I could be smart, not everyone thought that. Some people didn't make that simply because of the color of my skin. So it was one of the first times I had this rude awakening. . . . I was one of the first times that had become aware that somebody else could think that right. So I used to think that everyone thought that everybody could and should love school and do well in school and what I found out was that wasn't the case, that there's some people who made assumptions about me as a black male and that I shouldn't be interested in certain things or like school in a certain way and that hurt me, it hurt me pretty deeply, and so it developed my awareness of my, not so much of myself but an awareness of how other people might see me, simply because of the color of my

skin. So for those of you who don't know, Oreo, Oreo cookie, black on the outside, white on the inside, so the idea was that I am black, have black skin and because I love school and love learning that that was the white thing and that that wasn't something, that wasn't a right of black people and we know that's not true. [Strategy Team meeting video transcript, January 16, 2007]

After his story, the group broke up into smaller groups of eight to ten people to answer the question. We will present representative excerpts of narratives after giving a brief overview of general analytic themes in the following section.

Linking Race to Societal Systems and Practices

Our qualitative content analysis shows that experiences participants narrated were all linked to systems and practices; that is, stories of individually directed acts of discrimination stories were not the majority. Seventy-four percent of people present at this meeting were people of color. Of the total stories people of color told, 52 percent were about school, and the remaining 48 percent were divided between employment, 17 percent; shopping at 14 percent; and the category of "other" at 17 percent.¹ The number of stories from people of color that identified schools as sites for learning about their status as marginalized citizens was alarming and thus became the focus of our analysis.

The Educational System

That narratives about school were ubiquitous led us to consider schooling as a possible touchstone case of racialized identity formation in the United States. We define touchstone here as a metaphor for the relative merit of a concept, similar to a litmus test. We argue that the high frequency of school-based narratives among African Americans and Latinos indexed that school was a touchstone of racialized marginalization. As the following example told by an African American woman illustrates, the educational system in the United States taught her that her race mattered and would be a factor in all of her schooling experiences:

I got to 6th grade and the teacher said that she had to break me to show me that no matter what that those tests must be wrong and what the test said was I cannot be still in (unclear). So (unclear) when I was very little I realized that no matter how well I read, no matter the fact that my (unclear) always agree, no matter what, this was what was going to matter when I first walked in the building, that I had to be better, stronger, smarter, and faster just to compete; I don't care what anybody else thinks because I'm young, educated and black and I love myself and I love my blackness above all else, but I think what that taught me was that obviously I had to hold tighter to my blackness because if it threatened that many people that they had to say it because prior to that coming up before I went to school all I got was your blackness is your beauty, your hair is beautiful, your skin is beautiful, you're coming a part of mother Africa . . . that's what was poured into me growing up and when I went to school kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade and 3rd grade my teachers I never had a black teacher until I got to college and (unclear) otherwise that's what the mindset was. [Strategy Team meeting video transcript, January 16, 2007]

This woman's narrated experiences with racism that shaped a negative understanding of her racial identity were learned in school. The teacher's stance was in sharp contrast to her self-identification shaped by home discourses. For this woman, the messages she heard at home were not what she heard from teachers who articulated the deficit models of race endemic in schools (Ladson-Billings 1998). There was a clear distinction here between

what the narrator learned about what it meant to be black from her home and what she learned at school about her racial designation, and what it meant in the larger society in regard to her academic potential. The teacher in this case took the perspective that as a black person, the narrator was intellectually inferior and that the “tests were wrong” because, in the teacher’s view, she could not be as smart as the test scores said she was. And while the narrator resisted racist treatment from the teacher, she learned that as a black person in the United States, her race would always matter, especially in school (“that’s what the mindset was”; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1999).

This discourse demonstrates the teacher’s vehement opposition to believing a counter-narrative about the intellectual capabilities of African Americans. In this case, there was a “divergence” between the point of believing that African Americans are intellectual equals and the need to maintain white supremacy. Being institutional actors in a racist system, it would be difficult for a teacher to make that transition without doing some serious investigation of white privilege because racial inequality is a foundational principle in the U.S. educational system (Bell 2004). This young student’s need to be validated and treated humanely in an educational environment is in direct opposition to whiteness, thus causing violence, not relief, to be visited on the student by her teacher.

Similarly, the following narrative from an African American woman who was part of the original Subcommittee illustrated this divergence between home and school, and the power of schools to position children from nondominant groups as incapable.

Okay. I’m Alicia. I came from a large family, lived in Hannibal Housing. A family of—well, we lived in two parts of the city. The Lakeside Housing Authority, Hannibal Housing. And then, we lived on Raleigh Street across town. What I didn’t know was I was black. I did not know that. And my mother taught us that we were human beings and I was American. And that if I got a proper education that I could be anything or do anything I wanted to do. And she said that when I go to school that the teachers are there to educate me and to, you know, give me more understanding about reading, writing, and all the other things. Because I had a—I wanted to learn. I wanted to learn a wealth of knowledge. I love learning. And then, I went to school. And when I got to school, I found out I was black. Everybody around me were—role models were white. There wasn’t that many people of color that was in positions that made me think that if you get a good education you could move up the corporate ladder or something like that. And I wanted to write. I wanted to put my feelings and thoughts into writing. And my experience with my first teacher told me that who—who do you think you are? You’re this little black girl. You can’t write. You can’t put all those words down on paper. Who are you? So, that made me say, what’s going on in this world. I thought I was a human being. That’s what I am. I thought I was American. And I found out that you could be a human being in this world and be American, but you’re black. And that makes you less acceptable than all the other races that are around you. And I always asked the question, why. (ten second pause) Why? And it just confused me. And that was my first experience of what I did not know. I didn’t know I was black until I came into the Lakeside City School District. [Subcommittee meeting video transcript, December 4, 2006]

In this example, the narrator stated that she learned of her racial designation and the derogatory meaning ascribed to that designation in her schooling experience (“And when I got to school, I found out I was black”). What we observed to be a consistent theme of racist transmission of the deficit model through schooling contexts reflects Bell’s (1992:3) claim that, “despite undeniable progress for many, no African Americans are insulated from incidents of racial discrimination.” In the case of the black woman above, she transitioned from the colorblind ideology taught to her at home to the ideology of schooling that positioned her as inferior and unable to write well enough to become an author. She was forced to experience the oppressive nature of insidious racism and taught that she was not just a human being; she was in fact a black human being, which meant subordinated status on all terms. And this experience occurred in the very place where most Americans (black and others) believe it is safe and appropriate to send their children to get

an education to better themselves socially and economically: school. Instead of reinforcing the student's understanding of herself as a capable and equal member of society, she was notified by her teacher that she was not capable because of her racial identity ("who do you think you are? You're this little black girl. You can't write. You can't put all those words down on paper. Who are you?"); this was a very different message than what she heard at home. These early school experiences made her aware of her race and showed her the institutional boundaries that she could come to expect throughout future endeavors.

Other overtly racist events included name calling in school and finding racist notes in school desks or on car windshields. One African American male told the following story about what happened to him when he moved to a different school as a boy:

I was taught the difference between ra- racism when I was very young. I was born and raised in Baltimore Maryland (inaudible). I went to school and (inaudible) pledge of allegiance (inaudible). My parents separated. She (we) came to Georgia. It was a hard lesson you know. The first day of school. (inaudible) He told the principal and they took me in the office and beat me for there for more than three hours. Before I admitted saying something to him that I didn't even say. I spent eight years in Georgia going to the office almost every day. Getting ten licks or more, more than once a day. With boards with duck tapes on them. And the barber straps (then)? Hit me so many times pain didn't even (inaudible). And it went on that way all the time I was there until I just dropped out of school (inaudible). Because the teachers called me—I mean I learned so many names. Coon-these are teachers—porch monkey you know darkface. I had one teacher take me out to the hallway and threaten to take me out to the back there and beat me up. And Maryland was like the Mason Dixon line. So you come up here you're gonna say I'm from the South. I go down there they call me Yankee. I didn't know what a Yankee was. Still don't really know. But you know that's what they call me. Yankee, (n-word), porch monkey. I seen the Klan. At that point in time I learned. Twelve, I think like twelve or thirteen, I learned a big difference between . . . (colors). I wasn't used to, I didn't- In Baltimore all I seen was blacks. I didn't even see anything-see that many Whites until I went down South. Then didn't see thing besides Whites—like Hispanics and stuff—until '91 when I came to [Lakeside]. So . . . I guess it just came to me in. Like it like . . . It wasn't like in small sections it came like in one powerful punch. [Strategy Team meeting video transcript, January 16, 2007]²

For this young African American man, moving to Georgia after his parents separated was when he "learned a big difference between (colors)." The physical and verbal abuse, while traumatic, seemed almost normalized through the use of commonly accepted narrative structures such as past tense, temporality (Ochs and Capps 1996), and in the closing lines that bring the plot to an end with a resolute theory of the events ("so . . . I guess it just came to me in, like it like, it wasn't like in small sections it came like in one powerful punch"). The matter-of-fact closing symbolizes the end of one chapter and the moving toward a new one. For people from nondominant communities, oftentimes these racial experiences were merely one of many to reference, and there was an understanding of the possibility that there would be many more experiences to come.

Our data indicates a "divergence" of interests in that it was not beneficial to the institution of schooling to treat black and Latina/o youth humanely by providing them with a quality education and preventing violence and other forms of abuse and discrimination from being visited on them for any reason, but especially because of the color of their skin.³ In this analysis, we are not claiming that individual teachers are racist. Rather, we understand teachers to be institutional actors in a larger system of education that is predicated on racial injustices where they are in effect "forced" to maintain white privilege, namely the ultimate right to exclude through discursive practices that enact a deficit ideology about African American students. Based on the interest convergence thesis (Bell 2004), if there was no "perceived benefit" to an asset-based view of African American students it could be expected that teachers would be apathetic or vehemently opposed to equitable academic achievement for children and youth from nondominant communities.

The source of this opposition or apathy would be related to the level of threat the students' successful achievements held for the safety of white privilege.

Before concluding our discussion, there are two other patterns we believe are important to have a richer picture of the narratives: self–other binaries and shifting roles. We will discuss these themes in more detail, followed by our conclusions.

Self–Other Binaries in Cross-Cultural Communication

One pattern we noticed during analysis proved to be key to our understanding of how race and racism were discursively produced in this initiative. We noted what we are calling a self–other binary in narrative focus that varied depending on the racial identity of the narrator. In analyzing these diverging viewpoints (Wortham 2001), we found that the majority of participants from nondominant communities (75 percent) told stories about what happened to them personally, while all but one of the white people told stories about what happened to other people.⁴ This distribution highlighted that people from nondominant communities were more likely to be the subject of racial categorization; meanwhile white people were usually in the position to categorize others on the basis of race. For this reason, traditionally marginalized groups tended to identify with their race, whereas white people rarely had to consider their own race. Therefore the shared experiences of the nondominant group members were direct as opposed to the rather indirect experiences of their white counterparts.

Unlike the African Americans we highlighted above, the narratives of whites in this activity demonstrated a disassociation of sharing personal stories of race. Rather, the tendency was to take an outside position when telling their stories and discuss the lives of other people. The following story told by a white male represented how whites talked primarily about what happened to other people and is representative of stories told about general activities (travel in this case):

Let's see, okay, start me. Mine was about 10 years ago I was rooming with (names friend). Those that don't know, (names friend) he happens to be black. And we were in the (conference name). So, we would travel together and we'd room together. And there's a couple of things I didn't know. We had some discussions and just the first night he put on this thing of baby oil. What are you doing? What the heck? . . . And all of the sudden, he starts—brings out the baby oil and he starts putting it all over. And he goes—(names friend), why are you doing that? He says, because otherwise I turn white. I didn't know about this. And then another one, it really hit me is when—I was going to talk about I really didn't know, is growing up of thinking that police were fair and that there wasn't any bias. And (names friend) and I, laying there at night, shared different experiences. And even at—he was director of human personnel at the time. And he said in the last year he'd been pulled over like five times. I said, for what? He said, once I was walking down the street and they wondered what I was doing in the neighborhood. And other times, they just pulled me over. And I said, why? And he looked at me and—he really didn't look at me, but I go, seriously, what do think. And that just sort of hit me, that, in fact, he was being pulled over. He—not because of his education, I mean not because of his leadership, but because he was black. And that just hit me, of just the inequities and the unfairness that was—that occurred towards black men that I had never—and still have yet, to this day, I always tried walking down different neighborhoods, but I haven't gotten pulled over yet, so. [Strategy Team meeting video transcript, January 16, 2007]

As an outsider (e.g., a nonresident of the neighborhood), this person explained racial awareness through the account of one of his black friends, indirectly making the statement that race is a “black” thing. Although the narrator had no direct experience or emotional attachment to the situations that he explained, his understanding of the stories positioned him to learn from these stories and try to see from the lens of the story participant. The narrator's subject position indexed that the firsthand experiences of being “raced” in the United States were exclusive to people from nondominant communities. As a white male,

the speaker had not himself experienced racism, which meant that he did not have firsthand knowledge of what it meant to be a marginalized person in this society. This absence of firsthand knowledge created a void of knowledge for the white male as he did not understand the nature of his friend's cultural orientation exemplified through his "ignorance" of his friend's basic need for skin moisturizer. Additionally, this story indexed that there was little to no understanding among whites of the everyday lives of people from nondominant communities.

This exchange reiterates the importance of the voice of color in constructing the counternarrative to the dominant white male discourse. CRT's voice of color thesis situates nondominant narratives, specifically African American, to be valid knowledge, expert knowledge on the issue of race in U.S. society (Dixon and Rousseau 2005). These experiences revealed to the speaker that there was an alternative view of the world with which he was not familiar that was specifically tied to the friend's racial designation. In this instance the African American and his white companion experienced the "lived" world differently because of race. That difference was reflected materially through the unequal number of times that they were both stopped for alleged traffic violations.

Shifting Roles: From Narrator to Teacher

A second pattern emerged when looking at the narrative corpus interactionally: when African Americans and Latina/os told their stories, group members from nondominant communities in the small groups responded most typically using affirmations in a call and response pattern, while whites remained quiet. However, when white people told their stories, the members from nondominant communities shifted into more of an explanatory discourse and register that resembled teacher discourses (e.g., they "taught" the white narrators the meaning of their story). The call and response pattern disappeared, while African Americans and Latina/os leaned forward in their chairs to speak directly to white narrators in an instructional tone, rather than the group as a whole. The extent to which narrators indexed their own viewpoints was indexed primarily by the use of first-person and third-person pronouns. This insight led us to understand that narrators shaped and were shaped by their experiences with race and how they came to develop a self through an evolving reflective awareness of themselves in relation to people, events, and time within their narrative.

Conclusions and Implications

We have presented our analyses of narratives produced at a community change initiative meeting where community members, school district leaders, and community organizations discussed racial awareness. Using a CRT lens, we presented evidence that school was a significant site, a touchstone case, of racial awareness and marginalization in ways that perpetuated endemic racism (Bell 1992; Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Ladson-Billings 1998; Tate 1997).

The basis of this country's "race" problem is the black-white binary that stems from slavery in the United States (DuBois 2005; Delgado and Stefancic 2001) and is endemic to everyday life for communities from nondominant groups. The prevalence of race and racism in the United States privileges whiteness by means of excluding all people of color and positioning them as "other" (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). As the personal experience narratives we have presented indicate, racialized events were "ordinary, not aberrational—'normal science,' the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of people in this country" (Delgado and Stefancic 2001:7). The persistence of racial formations as constitutive of daily activities, particularly in schools, help explain

why African Americans and Latina/os participating in this activity told stories about their personal experiences with racism as opposed to observed experiences of racism in the stories told by whites. The matter-of-fact "it's just the way it is" resignation was palpable.

The nature of the race conversation in the narratives was useful in its potential to bring up new and different communication about race than that which would normally come up in day-to-day interactions. The conversations served as a "psychological" relief from the burden of racial discrimination and racialized identity formation for the people of color telling the stories. Initiative leaders were hoping that by dealing with the racial issues up front, the racial ideology would not transpose itself onto the process and appear in the policies and practices of the community change initiative. The flaw in this process was that there was never a follow-up on the results of these conversations, nor was there any further direction on how the initiative would move forward, beyond "business as usual," after receiving such information (O'Connor et al. this issue). Even after these stories were told, "race" as a word was removed from all public documents in an effort to make the plan more palatable for potential funders (Larson et al. this issue). Therefore the results of this communication may have benefited those who participated, but may not have transferred into a meaningful impact for the initiative or within the community.

The realization that racism will always be experienced in the United States showed how people from nondominant communities were resigned to not fighting racism at every turn and would not take the liberty against all odds to name their reality through the use of their unique voices of color. Bell (1992:x), referencing Fanon, states, "In a similar vein, Franz Fanon conceded that 'I as a man of color do not have the right to hope that in the white man there will be a crystallization of guilt toward the past of my race. . . . My life [as a Negro] is caught in the last of existence.' " Bell himself goes on to comment that although Fanon recognized [as Bell does also] that racism was endemic in U.S. society, he also "insisted" that people of color recreate their reality at every turn and refuse the prescribed narratives put before them by the dominant group. This is a difficult task that must never be put aside. The apparent unwillingness to stay the course because of this dismal outlook is one of the reasons why race is such a difficult topic to discuss. The danger lies in allowing that perceived hopelessness to eradicate racism to prevent the conversation from occurring in the first place.

These findings have significant implications for teachers and teacher education programs. Based on our analysis, a majority of what nondominant groups learned about their subjugation in society was learned in schools. It appeared that interest convergence played a key role in perpetuating the exclusionary discursive practices of teachers. Recognizing and fighting against these marginalizing practices should impact the ways in which teacher education programs engage in conversations about race and racism with all students, especially mainstream students as they tend to represent a large portion of the U.S. teaching force in urban areas. To that end, it will be important for teacher education programs to ask the "hard questions" about race and white privilege that will help students work through their conceptions of race and racism in U.S. society. This is important work that must be done. Teacher education programs that do not attempt to engage preservice teachers in examination of their racialized ideologies and change them will do a disservice to all the children and families that these new teachers will encounter in their teaching experiences.

Our analysis indicates how important the discursive production of racial identity is in current times and that it is not a historical problem that we have solved. In many ways, what we have presented here is not new, at least not to members of the African American and Latina/o communities we observed; daily microaggressions inflict deep and long-lasting pain (Solórzano et al. 2000). The believability of their narratives to those present reflects the historical embeddedness in African American experiences and culture that is

not just a performance, but a felt reality (Maines 1999). It is also not a new finding that white narrators invoked white innocence (Ross 1997) as an excuse for their shock at the realization of racism. What we hope to accomplish through this work is the continued, albeit difficult, conversation, reflection and action, or praxis (Freire 2007), about race and racism that will continue to challenge complacency.

Notes

1. The "other" category includes stories that do not fit into other categories, and whose general topic (e.g., "travel") was infrequent or unique in the data corpus.
2. We substituted "n-word" for the term used because of our political stance regarding the power of words to do harm.
3. For this article, we focus on African American narratives. The full narrative corpus includes Latina/os and analyses showed consistency across these groups.
4. This person (white male) told about an experience he had with his African American girlfriend.

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