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Autobiography as Counter-Narrative: An Empirical Study of How Race Enters and Structures the Stories of Our Lives

A Critical Engagement Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctorate of Education
In the College of Arts and Sciences
At National-Louis University

By
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April 13, 2007

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to learn about how race enters and then structures the narratives of our life experiences. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used as a lens through which to examine learning autobiographies and the CRT methodology of counter-storytelling was used to illustrate the ways in which race enters and structures the stories of our lives.

The data consist of personal narratives written by adult students who were not asked to consider their life experiences from a racialized perspective. That resulted in a level of authenticity of their voices. Analyzing the learning autobiographies through a CRT lens and then employing the CRT method of counter-storytelling made issues of race, racism and white supremacy immediately evident in the juxtaposition of a story and a counter-story.

The findings are presented as stories and counter-stories using a compilation of the data. They suggest subtle yet very significant ways in which our experiences are racialized, the results of which often lead to very different subsequent experiences. Using Bell's idea of applying allegory to present what I had learned, I created two chronicles, one of an African American woman and the other a White woman. The point/counter-point illuminated a look at seemingly normal, seemingly non-racialized, everyday experiences that played out in extraordinarily different ways, with race being the only significant difference between the two narratives.

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- Dr. Stephen Brookfield, Committee Member
- Dr. Mechthild Hart, Committee Member
- Drs. Tom Heaney and Randee Lawrence, Faculty

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PREFACE
Chapter Summaries

Chapter One

This chapter begins with a brief description of the focus on experience in adult education and the use of learning autobiography as an initial tool in the exploration of college creditable learning from experience. The chapter continues with a problem statement, the purpose of the study, including some background, questions guiding the study, an introduction and rationale for the use of the theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory. Also included is an introduction to the methodology that was employed. The chapter concludes with an introductory discussion suggesting the significance of the study, followed by a description of the how findings have been presented.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two addresses a review of the literature not addressed elsewhere in the study. While supportive literature has been interwoven throughout the study, this chapter provides a discussion of pertinent concepts either not sufficiently addressed elsewhere or requiring some preliminary introduction. Using the first two questions guiding the study as a conceptual framework, topics addressed included color-blind ideology, critical White studies and counter-stories.

Chapter Three

This chapter addresses the theoretical framework which undergirds this study and the methodology employed to engage in the study. As a critical qualitative work, the intention of the study was to instigate and reinvigorate the discussion of race within the discipline of adult education. The methodology employed was narrative analysis in the form of autobiography. Chapter Three offers a detailed discussion of the coding scheme and how it was developed. The chapter ends with a data display and the collapsed scheme.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four is presented in two parts. Part One: Findings is a presentation of the findings of the research, focusing attention on an analysis of the learning autobiographies and life histories and addressing the first two questions guiding this study. Using the collapsed coding scheme as an organizer, the findings are presented thematically. Part Two: Stories, Counter-stories and Chronicles begins with a compilation of six learning autobiographies I created from the actual learning autobiographies. Each story is followed by a counter-story and each reflects the findings related to that group of adult students as well as to the three propositions of CRT outlined previously in the study.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five begins with a presentation of two fictional chronicles created and written by me. These chronicles are a reflection of what I have learned about how race enters and structures the narratives of our life experience as reflected through a lens of Critical Race Theory. The first chronicle is of the experience of a White woman raised in the liberal 1960s and the second a Black woman raised in the same era.

CHAPTER ONE

LEARNING FROM OUR LIVES

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief description of the focus on experience in adult education and the use of learning autobiography as an initial tool in the exploration of college creditable learning from experience. The chapter continues with a problem statement, the purpose of the study, including some background, questions guiding the study, an introduction to Critical Race Theory and a rationale for its use as the theoretical framework and an introduction to the methodology that was employed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of the study to the field of adult education and a summary.

Adult Education, Experience and Learning Autobiography

Educational programs designed to serve adult learners, serve them in part, by offering opportunities that celebrate and validate adults' vast life experiences. Based, in part, upon the work of John Dewey (1938), who said, "...education in order to accomplish its ends both for the individual learner and for society must be based upon experience – which is always the actual life experience of an individual" (p. 113), education designed for adult learners often begins with an exploration of life experience.

When adults come to education, they bring with them a lifetime of everyday experiences that have been influenced by a complex combination of both societal identifiers and self identifiers, such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, a political affiliation or the socio-economic strata from which they come. In an effort to examine experiences for learning that may have occurred, adult students may be asked to reflect upon their lives as learners.

Those reflections often begin in the form of a written narrative such as a learning autobiography, or the story of one's life as a learner. The writing of those autobiographies is, for many adults, either the first time they have reflected upon their life experiences or the first time they have reflected upon their experience in the context of what they may have learned as a result of experience. Specific to the program in which I have taught, those narratives, along with other artifacts such as work product, examples of community projects or study related to personal interest, become the foundation for faculty to work with students as they examine life experience for potential college creditable learning that may have resulted from those experiences. The word learning here is being used as the action which transforms experience into new meaning.

To present learning as college creditable learning, students consider the subject matter within which the learning may have occurred. They may begin that process by researching whether there is a theoretical framework supporting that subject matter to help them interpret and/or further understand what they may have learned. An adult with many years of management experience, for example, might wish to explore what she has

learned about the essence of management by comparing her experiences and subsequent learning in the context of documented management theory.

Faculty might work with students to help them understand how those theoretical frameworks support and enhance the learning. Students become researchers, looking for connections between their unique experience and that which is known about similar experiences. It follows, then, that if one gains a theoretical foundation for a particular experience, they will not only understand their own experience more deeply, but when faced with another similar experience, they will have the theoretical wherewithal to respond with alacrity.

Problem Statement

While often considered fundamental to academic learning, a subject-based theoretical framework can offer learning from a rather narrow and limited context, especially when the learning was gained from life experience. Focusing attention on the subject or content area of the learning experience, students are not necessarily engaging in a critically reflective process about the experience or the learning. By not encouraging students to reflect upon the socially constructed aspect of experience, and, specifically race as a factor in either their experience or subsequent learning, a potentially rich lens for meaning making is lost.

Purpose

Experience, the full meaning of which, in this context, includes either participation in or observation of an event followed by some reflection on that event, does not occur in a vacuum. Experience occurs within a socio-cultural context. As such, any learning gained as a result of experience is socially constructed and should be examined beyond the subject content surrounding the learning. The primary purpose of this study was to learn about how race enters and then structures the narratives of our experiences and any learning we might glean from those experiences. By critically examining the learning autobiographies written by adult learners documenting their lives as learners, I hoped to learn how to read and understand when race, as a socio-cultural construct, enters the narratives of our life experience and then, how race can structure those narratives.

Further, by engaging in a study of how race enters and structures both the narratives of our experience and, then, subsequent experience, my hope was to instigate, within adult education, a sustainable dialogue about race. I also hoped that by examining the social construction of experience and the subsequent learning, considerations about learning from experience might expand beyond a focus on individual accomplishments to include, perhaps, understandings about the broader social context. And finally, my hope was that as a result of this study, we might begin to apply strategies of critical thinking, in the context of race, to the assessment of our life experience.

Background

My interest for this study began with questions about what adult learners learn from their life experience. I began by considering the many experiential learning projects I had reviewed from adult learners over several years. As I thought about those learning projects, I realized that the learning identified was almost always from either a required area of the liberal arts or, more often, reflecting content related to either the students' current work or a career area they hoped to enter. But even when the learning reflected an area of the liberal arts, it rarely reflected learning that might have a liberatory impact on their lives. Even students of color who talked about life experiences on the margins submitted learning for credit which reflected traditional liberal arts learning or work-related learning.

I wondered how what students learn from life experience might change were the students to consider the experience and subsequent learning through some critical lens. I began to explore the use of Critical Race Theory as the theoretical lens through which to examine life experience.

Study Significance

Adult educators often view life experience as a window to learning. In this study I have looked at life experience as a window to the racial reality of our lives (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. vii). For teachers of adults, it is about recognizing the ways in which our

students' narratives are influenced by racial group membership, and then further how those narratives influence both what the students learn from experience as well as subsequent experiences they may have. The study is about how students see and interpret their experiences and how race structures their experience and the narratives they write about their experiences. It is about how we use race to construct the narratives of our experience. With more understanding about how race both enters and structures the narratives of our experience, we can begin to make race a more prominent issue with respect to adult education. And, examining our students' experiences through a Critical Race Lens can help each of us recognize the complicit role we play in the continuation of racism and the possibilities that exist for significant change.

Utility of the Study to the Field of Adult Education

As a field, Adult Education has identified learning from experience as one opportunity to validate and celebrate learning with which adults often enter formal education. As we continue to find ways to accredit that learning, we owe it to our students, our communities and ourselves to critically examine the experiences so that we are not participating, knowingly or unknowingly, in either the marginalization or privileging of any particular students. The result of this study, an understanding of how racial group membership is reflected in the narratives of our experiences, can help us teach our students how to understand the way they represent their experiences and what they learn from those experiences. As a result, the learning gained from experience may gain depth

and breadth. And as learning from experiences changes, so changes subsequent experience.

Questions Guiding the Study

How does racial group membership enter and structure the narratives of our experience?

How does racial group membership structure our experience?

Theoretical Framework – Critical Race Theory

Brief Overview

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the late 1970s as legal scholarship that examined how the law has been, and continues to be, complicit in upholding White supremacy. Critical race theorists deconstruct liberalism in order to explicate the ways in which concepts of liberalism such as the slow but steady road to change, color-blindness, neutrality and objectivity do more to strengthen White supremacy than to dismantle it. By insisting on an historical as well as a socio-cultural context for experience, CRT is a perspective of the world that places race at the very center of every discussion and every experience. Critical Race Theory asks each of us to shift our understanding of what is real from the dominant discourse and to listen to the counter-stories of the people whose experience lies outside of the majority (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

Fundamental tenets of CRT include the notion that racism, rather than being unusual or an example of aberrant behavior, is normal business in this country. This is especially true since the Civil Rights Era when it became illegal to treat people differently because of their skin color. Since many acts of racism have become dangerously subtle, while only the overt acts are illegal, it has become increasingly difficult to cure ongoing acts of racism.

A second tenet reflects the CRT practice of speaking from the voice of the oppressed. Often, the voices are heard in the form of storytelling in which "...writers analyze the

myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000 p. xvii).

A third tenet of CRT speaks to the principle known as Interest Convergence, which suggests that “The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (Bell, D. 1979-1980, p. 523). In a discussion about the Supreme Court case regarding racial segregation in the public schools, *Brown v. The Board of Education*, Derrick Bell suggested that Whites would only support anti-racist causes when there was also benefit to Whites. He wrote, “...the decision in *Brown* to break with the court’s long-held position on these issues cannot be understood without some consideration of the decision’s value to Whites...” (p. 523). Bell described how Blacks had been “attacking the validity of these policies (of segregation) for 100 years” (p.524). And when complaints about the poor quality of the Black public schools were raised, they were responded to with directives to make the schools equal but remain separate.

Why then, in 1954, was there an interest in desegregation rather than in the separate but equal laws that were in existence? In describing the potential benefits to Whites, Bell (1979-1980) presented three scenarios in which there would be “...economic and political advances at home and abroad that would follow abandonment of segregation” (p. 524). First, he said that the decision “helped to provide immediate credibility to America’s struggle with Communist countries to win the hearts and minds of emerging

third world people” (p. 524). Second, the decision assuaged the anger of Blacks who fought in World War II and then came home to a country of racists. And, third, segregation was seen as a “...barrier to...industrialization in the south” (p. 525). Desegregation presented an opportunity to industrialize the south, “to transition from a rural plantation society to the sunbelt with all its potential and profit...” (Bell, D. 1979-1980, p.525).

Ultimately, one must consider the quality of educational opportunity for Blacks in public schools today. It is difficult to argue that desegregation served better than segregated schools might have if given equal resources.

A Brief History and Genesis

The Foundation in Critical Legal Studies

Critical Race Theory (CRT), having been officially established in the 1980s, drew from Critical Legal Studies (CLS), a legal response from the left to the Civil Rights Movement. With references to European and American philosophers such as Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Derrida, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, Martin Luther King, Jr., etc. Critical Race Theory offers a way to look at social, political and economic inequities that focuses attention on issues of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Like Critical Theory, developed by the Frankfurt School in pre-World War II Germany, Critical Race Theory looks at social, political and economic inequity among

groups. Unlike Critical Theory, which looks at that inequity as a function of capitalism, Critical Race Theory looks at economic inequity, among other inequities, as a function of racism. And unlike other critical theories, Critical Race Theory looks at racialized experience from the perspective and experience of people of color.

The foundation of CRT was built from legal scholarship which addressed racism, particularly as it was institutionalized by the law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). CLS developed as a radical response to the law by lawyers, activists and legal scholars who “challenged liberalism from the left” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). CLS scholars argued with the idea that the law was neutral and that for every case there would be one correct outcome. The notion of legal indeterminacy suggested that outcomes might be decided differently by “emphasizing one line of authority over another...” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 5). In their critique of liberalism, CLS theorists argued that both conservative and liberal legal scholars were working from a similar understanding of law as being neutral and separate from politics. These scholars argued that the belief that progressive law reform would take place gradually as a result of the “victory of the superior rationality of progressive ideas” was wrong (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995, p. xviii). CLS scholars cited the work of the Legal Realists of the 1920s and 1930s, who showed that “... the purportedly neutral and objective legal interpretation of the period was really based on politics...” (p. xviii). Progressive legal change would not take place as long as the legal system operated within a conservative political context. In fact, the unequal status quo would be strengthened by the liberal focus on the neutrality of the law and the constitution.

According to Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001) key early contributors to CRT were most often legal scholars of color, though not exclusively. And the fact that most were of color is significant because as the late Alan Freeman (not of color) suggested, antidiscrimination law did not address the actual experience of living as an underclass citizen. “From the victim’s perspective, racial discrimination describes those conditions of actual social existence as a member of a perpetual underclass” (Freeman, 1977-1978, p. 1052). And without having or understanding that experience, it would be difficult to recognize the complicit role that liberalism plays in the ongoing existence of racism in this society.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) suggest that Derrick Bell was “the movement’s intellectual father figure” (p. 5). They credited Alan Freeman, who was a member of the law school faculty at the State University of New York at Buffalo, as being a key early figure when he wrote the “pathbreaking piece that documented how the U.S. Supreme Court’s race jurisprudence...legitimized racism” (p. 6). Key examples of CLS writings that critiqued liberalism and the outcomes of the Civil Rights Era, and emerged as the foundation to CRT, included the work of Derrick Bell on the conflict between serving integration and serving the client and Freeman on antidiscrimination law. Specific examples included the Supreme Court’s decision on *Brown v. Board of Education* and the question of what outcome it would serve and for whom, and Freeman’s work on how antidiscrimination law helped to legalize racial discrimination (Bell, D. 1979-1980, Freeman, 1977-1978).

Derrick Bell and Brown v. Board of Education

The landmark Supreme Court Case, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) which was passed in May 1954 was, in part, a response to the separate but equal, *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896. In that case, it was decided that while separation may have been inconvenient, so long as no one's rights were violated, it was within the Constitution to maintain separation. During the civil rights era, it was determined that separate but equal was not equal. *Brown v. Board of Education* made segregation illegal and "court ordered the end of state-mandated racial segregation of public schools." (Bell, D. 1979-1980, p. 518) In 1980, more than 25 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, Derrick Bell offered an explanation of why he thought school desegregation failed and what options might be available for change. The explanation was situated in the context of his argument against the neutrality of law. Citing critics of *Brown* such as Professor Herbert Wechsler along with Wechsler's critic, Professor Charles Black, Bell questioned whether it was segregation that caused educational harm to African American children or whether it was something else.

Bell (1979-1980) suggested that Wechsler, although often a supporter of civil rights, focused his attention on the argument for integration. Wechsler thought that the argument for *Brown* was not principled, suggesting that it was equally as unjust to impose integration on those against it as it was to deny it to those who wanted it (Wechsler, 1959). Bell suggested that Professor Black, on the other hand, in arguing that

it was racial equality that was the focus of Brown, suggested that segregation was intentional and disadvantaged African Americans significantly (Black, 1959-1960). It followed that if segregation were disadvantageous to Blacks then it would be advantageous to Whites. And the road to equality would suggest that Whites would need to surrender some of the privilege gained through race (Bell, D. 1979-1980).

Bell (1979-1980) makes the point that while Wechsler's argument seems "misplaced" (p. 523) because what should be focused upon in the argument is racial equality "it is clear that racial equality is not deemed legitimate by large segments of the American people, at least to the extent it threatens to impair the societal status of Whites" (p. 523). Because the focus is not on racial equality, the question becomes upon what is the argument based? According to Bell, Wechsler's search for a guiding principle suggests "a deeper truth about the subordination of law to interest group politics with a racial configuration" (p. 523).

Bell's point is that the decision made in Brown v. Board of Education was made for reasons beyond the welfare of African American children. First, the decision helped to put the United States in a more favorable light with Third World Countries in the context of Communism. Second, a movement towards desegregation helped make real the spoken ideals of freedom and equality identified by the U.S. in World War II. And third, segregation was stalling real industrialization of the South. That industrialization could certainly support a growing U.S. economy (Bell, 1979-1980).

Once *Brown v. Board of Education* came to pass, the real challenge was desegregating the schools. Civil rights lawyers began, in earnest, to work towards creating racial balance in the public schools in the United States. As they worked to desegregate the schools, in the name of equal educational opportunities, the focus of attention shifted from equal education to integration (Bell, 1975-1976). This shift in focus was especially evident in that "...most school districts would not comply with *Brown* voluntarily...rather they...(were) determined to resist compliance as long as possible" (p. 470). In those early years, both plaintiffs and lawyers agreed that full compliance with the law to desegregate was the only appropriate outcome for segregated schools (Bell, 1975-1976).

By the mid-1970s there was a growing understanding that equal education may have to do with more than integration. And, furthermore, while integration was taking place, the quality of the educational experience for the Black children did not appear to be improving. In several large urban areas, racial balancing would be impossible due to the disproportionately large percentage of Black students. In Atlanta, for example, where in 1974 the city's Black public school population was 82%, local Blacks became "...discouraged by the difficulty of achieving meaningful desegregation..." (Bell, 1975-1976, p. 485). Local NAACP lawyers worked out a compromise plan that desegregated faculty fully, but only partially, children. Similar experiences with racial balancing in cities, including Boston and Detroit, were being similarly understood as inadequate to improving the quality of education for Black children. Local Blacks and Black educators were beginning to suggest that integration alone would not secure a quality

education for Black children, but that it was possible to focus on a quality education even where integration would not succeed (Bell, 1975-1976). Both civil rights attorneys as well as members of the national NAACP were against this compromise, as it stepped away from a hard-line approach to the implementation of Brown.

That hard-line approach was supported by middle-class Blacks and Whites who not only financially supported the lawyers working toward integration, but for whom integration was a successful experience (Bell, 1975-1976). So, in essence, the civil rights lawyers, including representatives of the NAACP, were serving the middle class, for whom all these changes were advantageous, but not serving the masses of poor Black children for whom Brown was originally fought and for whom desegregation was not serving, at least in terms of quality education.

Alan Freeman

About the same time that questions began to arise about whether or how Brown could serve the improvement of education for Black children, civil rights lawyer Alan Freeman was exploring how antidiscrimination law might, in fact, be serving racial discrimination. Freeman explored racial discrimination from the perspectives of both the perpetrator and the victim. From the perspective of the victim, “racial discrimination describes those conditions of actual social existence as a member of a perpetual underclass” (Freeman, 1977-1978, p. 1052). The perpetrator, on the other hand, “sees racial discrimination not as conditions but as actions...inflicted on the victim by the perpetrator. Because

antidiscrimination law is situated in the perpetrator perspective, it never addresses the “condition of the victim” (p. 1054).

The point of antidiscrimination law is to make illegal overt acts which discriminate against disadvantaged members of minority groups. Antidiscrimination law does not address the experience of living as an underclass citizen. The law reflects the perspective of the perpetrator and, as a result, looks at acts of racism and discrimination as poor behavior rather than a reflection of the social foundation of the United States (Freeman, 1977-1978). By addressing overt acts of discrimination, antidiscrimination laws make it possible, even legal, to discriminate so long as it is not done intentionally. What is meant by an intentional act is one that goes beyond the normal discriminatory nature of our society.

Using *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, as an example of a law written from the perpetrator perspective, Freeman argued that if the court had allowed Blacks to decide whether to attend White schools or get equal resources for their schools, it would have been written from the victim perspective. From the point of view of the laws that were created, the perpetrator perspective was clearly privileged over the victim perspective. What the law required was that Black children be allowed to attend White schools since the essence of the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* was the outlaw of segregation. And the outlawing of segregation was a reflection of the perpetrator perspective doing little to address the unequal opportunities for quality education afforded Black children (Freeman, 1977-1978).

The perpetrator perspective can be used to explicate the example above from the Atlanta schools in 1974. Had the civil rights lawyers been looking at the situation from the victim's perspective, they might have seen that integration alone would not affect a change in the quality of education. Quality of education needed to be the focus rather than segregation, which was an act of perpetration.

The point of CLS in the context of the beginning of CRT is its focus on the neutrality of the law. CRT scholars moved beyond CLS by shifting the focus from the neutrality of the law as the vehicle in civil rights to more specifically addressing issues underlying inequality and racism (Crenshaw, et. a.l., 1995).

At a fundamental level, Critical Race Theory reflects the criticism that issues of racial equality will only be addressed when there is simultaneous benefit to Whites. And because racism privileges working class Whites as well as elite Whites, there is little incentive to eradicate it (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001).

Critical Race Theory: Introduction to Education

Responding to Jonathan Kozol's 1991 findings in Savage Inequalities, and referring to the earlier works of scholars Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. Du Bois, both of whom "...used race as a theoretical lens for assessing social inequity" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, pg. 50), Ladson-Billings and Tate, in 1995 first introduced Critical Race Theory to

the field of education. They suggested that educational inequalities were “... a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized” (p.47). Ladson-Billings & Tate’s call “...to theorize race and use it as an analytic tool for understanding school inequity” (p. 49) began with a set of propositions about the intersection between race and property.

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the U.S.
 2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
 3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and consequently, school) inequity.
- (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, pg. 48)

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), argue that race continues to have a significant impact in the United States and in education, and that while it has been studied as a way to understand social inequality, “...the intellectual salience of this theorizing has not been systematically employed in the analysis of educational inequality” (p. 50). Race has not been studied as a specific issue related to the lack of equality in U.S. education.

The connection between property rights and human rights in U.S. society is extremely important to educational equality and can clearly and simply be seen when juxtaposing a public school from a wealthy community next to one from a poor community.

Historically as well as currently, those schools located in wealthy communities which collect substantive real estate taxes have schools which reflect the availability of funds. Comprehensive curriculum that has been identified as being essential for a successful life, along with the resources to support that curriculum, is available in more affluent communities. Schools in poor or less affluent communities, on the other hand, do not

have the benefit of either the enriched curriculums or the resources (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As discussed above, although *Brown v. Board of Education* called for the integration of schools, it did not accomplish the task of creating schools which were equal. Kozol has written extensively on the continuing inequality of educational opportunities for poor children in this country (Kozol, 1992, 2005).

The intersection of race and property develops further as a key determinant of inequity in education when White is described as property. Referring to the work of legal scholar Cheryl Harris in 1993, Ladson-Billings and Tate discuss Whiteness as property in the context of education. “When students are rewarded only for conformity to perceived ‘White norms’ or sanctioned for cultural practices (e.g. dress, speech patterns, unauthorized conceptions of knowledge), White property is being rendered alienable” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, pg. 59). And then simply being able to transfer what you are, that is, White, to your children, affords them certain rights of entitlement.

Critical Race Theory: Introduction to Adult Education

Elizabeth Peterson, in 1999, introduced CRT to adult education by suggesting that “CRT supports the need for an expanded dialogue on the role of education in the African American community” (p. 85). She was referring to the need for more diversity in the programs offered to African American adult students, saying that the “...one-size-fits-all solutions...have failed miserably in eliminating the social, economic, and political

disparities between the races” (p. 85). Peterson called for the use of CRT in adult education as a way for African Americans to speak from their own experiences.

Critical Race Theory in This Study

I am drawn to Critical Race Theory for a number of reasons. As a Jew growing up in the first generation post-World War II, in the politically charged 1960s and 1970s, I am challenged by the notion that, today, our focus on civil rights may actually serve to slow down the process of achieving social justice rather than moving us closer to it. And having spent much of the last twenty years or so living in a world that appears to have stopped aggressively fighting for an end to racism, because of the misunderstanding that as a result of civil rights the need no longer exists, there seems to have grown an even larger divide between the races.

At a fundamental level, Critical Race Theory (CRT) explores the permanence and hegemony of racism. And, at the same time, it looks at the impact of the intersection of race, gender, ethnicity and culture. “A critical race theory in education starts from the premise that race and racism are endemic” and permanent, and drawing from their definition of LatCrit Theory, Daniel Solorzano and TaraYosso (2002) suggest that “a critical race methodology in education also acknowledges the intercentricity of racialized oppression--the layers of subordination based on race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25). CRT is a robust theory in that while its original focus may have included only the Black/White

dichotomy, and the ways in which the law encoded White supremacy, it has developed into a critical theory which may lend itself to the possibility of achieving new and broader understandings of our experiences from whatever point of “otherness” we may come. By recognizing not only race as a subordinate position, but subordination based upon gender, race and gender, class, ethnicity, and intercentricity of one or more of those, the application of CRT in an adult education environment has the potential to become much broader.

Since the learning autobiographies of adult learners have not been systematically and critically analyzed, this study employs Critical Race Theory at a fundamental level, exploring the permanence and hegemony of racism. This study uses Critical Race Theory to both identify racialized experience in the learning autobiographies of adult learners, and as an opportunity to theorize race in the learning experiences of adults.

Critical Race Theory: Rationale for Application

In considering why I chose CRT as the theoretical framework within which to study the learning autobiographies of adult learners, I begin by considering the lens with which I have chosen to examine issues in adult education. Adult education, by its very name, covers all education beyond traditional-aged post-secondary education. It covers everything from community-based education, as a vehicle for social justice, to continuing medical education for doctors or MBA programs for corporate executives. It is an extremely broad and diverse area of education. My interest, in the context of this study,

lies in the notion of adult education as a vehicle for social change in an evolving democracy in the United States.

In studying the learning autobiographies of adult learners through the lens of CRT, I hoped to be able to contribute to adult education as a vehicle for social change by instigating sustainable discussions of race in adult education. By learning to recognize race in the narratives of the life experiences of our students, I want to bring issues of race back to the surface within the context of adult education and provide another opportunity to theorize race within education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

There are a number of critical lenses through which I could have chosen to view these learning autobiographies. A Critical Theory lens would have allowed me to view the students' life experiences in the contexts of power or class. I could have examined learning autobiographies of African American students as examples of repressive tolerance. Just the fact that African American adults are students might be viewed as an act of repressive tolerance in a society in which the White Christian male has been normalized. Marcuse talked about repressive tolerance as tolerance which is non-partisan, meaning that all points of view are valid and tolerated. When tolerance is granted to the "party of hate as well as to that of humanity... (it is) pure" (Marcuse, 1965, p. 85). And, "inasmuch as it (tolerance) refrains from taking sides... it actually protects the already established machinery of discrimination" (p. 85). As a result of continuing to tolerate practices which are suppressive, members of the dominant group have no difficulty holding onto their power and authority. In the context of adult education,

Brookfield's (2005) comment that repressive tolerance "...functions as a kind of pressure cooker letting off enough steam to prevent the whole pot from boiling over," is quite apropos (p. 211). Real tolerance would require a non-partisan response to oppression, meaning that suppressive practices would no longer have any validity and would no longer be tolerated.

I chose to use a CRT lens, fundamentally, because as Cornel West (1993) has said, "Race Matters." And within both Critical Theory and Critical Legal Studies, race was subsumed under class (Crenshaw, et. al, 1995). Ultimately, however, it is the connection to the study of law and how the law serves racism in this country that is the most compelling argument for the application of CRT. Even though, for example, *Brown v. Board of Education* was argued in 1954, and the ruling indicated that the *Plessey v. Ferguson*, separate but equal laws "...were inherently unequal..." (Harris, 1999 p. 187) in 1970 (a full 16 years later), the "...OCR (Office for Civil Rights of the Federal Government) notified a number of states that they were [still] in violation of Title VI for having failed to disassemble racially segregated systems of higher education" (p. 188-189). Even declaring school desegregation illegal, there were districts that maintained desegregation more than 15 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided. While desegregation was the law, either the rules of the law were not strong enough or the racist social structures in place were stronger such that neither desegregation nor equality in education was achieved.

Furthermore, with respect to education, race has not been studied sufficiently as a key element in the existing inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical Theory might have allowed me to explore the power disparities that exist between the social groups represented by White and Black adult students, but it would not necessarily address the reasons, from the perspective of race, as to why the disparities might exist.

As a counter narrative, CRT offered a view from a very different perspective and a new learning opportunity. And while as a nation we may have tried over the past 30 years or so to become a color-blind culture, what we have more likely succeeded in doing is to minimize the recognition and understanding of the damage done to students of color in education, by eliminating race as an issue of discussion or as a recognized, historical, factor of inequity. Even practices such as affirmative action, when principled upon the notion of distributive justice, where given a finite availability of wealth everyone should receive a minimum share, "...concentrate on the present and...overlook the past" (Delgado, 1984, p. 570).

On Bblack and Wwhite: a Stylistic Comment

Perhaps of no real significance, I spent some time considering whether to capitalize (B)black and (W)white or to capitalize Black but not white. I have read a few authors' discussions of how they decided to make similar types of decisions. In the preface of White-Washing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society, the authors explain, simply, that they have chosen to "capitalize the names of ethnic groups but not racial groups." (Brown et. al, 2003, p. xi) Other authors suggest that by capitalizing Black but not white,

i.e. privileging Black in this context, they hope to contribute to a shift in power from white to Black. I have gone through several iterations in this process. I began by capitalizing Black but not white. If, by virtue of this research, I am working to acknowledge the significance of racism as a necessary step towards its elimination, then my thought was to acknowledge the importance placed upon the word Black, as opposed to white, by capitalizing one and not the other. But, by not capitalizing white am I not also acknowledging the normalization of white and the racialization of Black? For a while I left both as lower case. The message there was similar to the one made by Brown et. al., above. Neither indicated an ethnic group, both were socio-cultural constructs and therefore neither deserved a capital letter. Ultimately, unless I am supplying a direct quote in which the author has not capitalized one or the other, I decided to capitalize both Black and White. If one goal of research about racism is an ultimate shift in power from White to Black, then it is essential to first acknowledge the existence of White power and privilege and to recognize White as a racial group.

It should also be noted that there was some switching back and forth between the use of the term Black and African American. Where I organized data by theme, etc. or introduced a topic, generally about African Americans and say, adult education, I used the term African American. Where I either referred to someone else's work or in the counter-stories I created from the learning autobiographies, I used the term Black. In each specific instance I tried to respect the context and therefore, at various times, used either one term or the other.

CHAPTER TWO: COLOR-BLIND IDEOLOGY, CRITICAL WHITE STUDIES AND COUNTER-STORIES

Introduction

While supportive literature has been interwoven throughout the study, this chapter provides a discussion of pertinent concepts either not sufficiently addressed elsewhere or requiring some preliminary introduction. Using autobiography as the data, the questions guiding the study were:

How does racial group membership enter and structure the narratives of our life experience?

How does racial group membership structure our life experience?

In considering those questions, the following discussion was prepared to explore topics related to color-blind ideology, critical White studies and counter-stories.

Color-Blind Ideology

The notion of color-blind ideology suggests that in matters of decision-making, one's color or race should not be part of the equation. At first pass and as a liberal approach to conduct, that notion appears progressive. If we all "come to the table as equals," then equality of opportunity should exist. A more critical analysis of the concept, however, would suggest that color-blind ideology is a dangerously conservative approach that

dismisses racialized experience from both a current and historical perspective and functions as a strategy for the maintenance of White privilege. "...by insisting on a rhetoric that disallows reference to race, blacks can no longer name their reality or point out racism" (Taylor, 1999, p. 184). If the experiences you have had leading up to "the table" are not equal, then when you stand at the table, you are not standing among equals.

In considering what is meant by color-blindness, one might wonder whether it is even possible not to consider something the very existence of which has been so fundamental in the history of the United States. Furthermore, is it possible to discuss race without discussing racism? Because there is no science to suggest that race is a biological descriptor, race must be discussed as a socially constructed concept. Cornell West (1993) said that "...blackness has no meaning outside of a system of race-conscious people and practices" (p. 25). In beginning to define Critical Race Theory, John Calmore (1995) suggested that "...race is not a fixed term; instead, it is a fluctuating, decentered complex of social meanings that are formed and transformed under the constant pressure of political struggle" (p. 318). When a concept is socially constructed, it has a socio-cultural and socio-political foundation, which changes as cultural and political contexts, among others, shift.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) suggests "There are at least three distinct variations on how social scientists approach this constructionist perspective on race" (p. 8). Beginning with the notion that as a constructed concept, race "is not real and social scientists who use the category are the ones who make it real" (p.8). And there are those who do not define race

but rather describe differences in the population as “racial.” And finally, the approach employed by Bonilla-Silva that “race...is constructed but...it has a social reality. This means that after race...is created, it produces real effects on the actors racialized as black or white” (p.9). Historically, Whites have enjoyed benefit as an effect of this construction and Blacks have been subordinated by it. It would seem, then, that the only real purpose to creating and maintaining “racial structures” would be the maintenance of a racialized culture in which one racial group dominates over another.

There is a complex history of racism in the United States. And while this discussion does not address that history in any complete fashion, it is useful to recall that White Europeans, like Columbus, came to the Americas, invaded and then colonized whatever and whomever they were able. “What Columbus did to the Arawaks of the Bahamas, Cortes did to the Aztecs of Mexico, Pizarro to the Incas of Peru, and the English settlers of Virginia and Massachusetts to the Powhatans and the Pequots” (Zinn, 1997, p. 12). But by the early years of the 17th century it became clear that the English colonizers were not going to be able to survive in this country without some help. The Native Americans would not be enslaved and by the time of Columbus, “African blacks had been stamped as slave labor...” (p. 24). “...Americans in New England entered the business and in 1637 the first American slave ship...sailed from...Massachusetts” (p. 26). If free direct labor, in the form of slaves, is the physical manifestation of what built this nation, then racism is the ideology upon which the nation was built.

Like race, color-blindness is also a socio-politically structured concept that changes over time. Its significance can best be explicated through a brief review of two historical and two current Supreme Court cases, along with a short critique of the color-blind nature of the Constitution.

Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896

As a modern concept related to racial group membership, color-blindness was first introduced by Justice John Harlan as the voice of dissension in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court ruling of 1896. It is important to note that the case was heard only 31 years after the ratification of the 13th Amendment of the Constitution which abolished slavery and 28 years after the 14th Amendment which gave full citizenship and equal protection to all people either born or naturalized in the U.S.

The case, *Plessy v. Ferguson* was about a Louisiana citizen named Homer Plessy, who, although visibly White, was 1/8 black, and as a result was arrested and jailed for refusing to move out of a coach section of a railroad car designated for Whites only. Plessy took his case to the Supreme Court arguing in part that the law created a “slippery slope” beginning with separate railroad cars but moving onto such things as separate sidewalks for Whites and blacks only. In addition, he argued that his arrest was a violation of the 14th Amendment’s “equal protection under the law” (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896).

The majority opinion written by Judge Brown suggested that it was the court's responsibility to act reasonably, and "...extend only such laws as are enacted in good faith for the promotion for the public good, and not for the annoyance or oppression of a particular class..." (Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896, p. 7). He went on to write that "...the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority" was a fallacy (p. 7). The fact that Plessy, who was only 1/8 black and 7/8 White, was considered black and as a result of his 'blackness' not allowed in the White section of the train would suggest that the law was not reasonable and did stamp "...the colored race with a badge of inferiority" (p.7).

In his dissent, Judge Harlan said, "Our Constitution is color-blind and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizen. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law" (p. 11). He went on to suggest that this decision would

not only stimulate aggressions...upon the...rights of colored citizens, but...encourage the belief that it is possible...to defeat the beneficent purposes which (were) adopted (in) the recent amendments of the Constitution, by one of which the blacks of this country were made citizens... (p. 12)

Nonetheless, the court upheld the ruling and the nation entered into the "separate but equal" era (Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896).

Brown v. Board of Education, 1954

About 60 years after Plessy v. Ferguson, the Supreme Court case of Brown v. Board of Education reversed the 'separate but equal' rules, suggesting "that racial discrimination in public education is unconstitutional." (Brown v. Board of Education, 1955, p.1) Brown

v. Board of Education was a combination of five lawsuits in different states, each one challenging the ‘separate but equal’ laws with respect to education. Each case addressed the significant lack of equality enjoyed by Blacks at segregated schools.

Following Brown v. Board of Education was an invigorated Civil Rights Movement. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1963, talked about his dream that his children might one day be “...judged by the content of their character,” and not just the color of their skin. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, etc. And if we could not discriminate on the basis of race, then race should no longer be a factor in decision-making. We grew to embrace the ‘liberal’ notion that race not only shouldn’t matter, but didn’t matter, and that at the end of the day, we are all members of the human race.

Color-blindness and Racialized Experience

A racialized experience is an experience that has been affected as a result of one’s racial group membership. In a country like the United States, where, while filled with people from all over the world, White European ancestry is normalized and dominant, every experience is racialized.

Color-blindness, however, like other characteristics of liberalism, does not place experience in any historical context. Referring to a “...formal-race concept of race...” Neal Gotanda (1995) explained that this is where, in the law, descriptions of race are

unconnected to any historically oppressed racialized experience. By doing this, he said “...the court denies the experience of oppression and limits the range of remedies available for redress” (Gotanda, 1995 p. 262). As a result, today, color-blindness is considered a “neo-conservative view...that calls for the repeal of affirmative action and other race- based remedial programs, arguing that Whites are the true victims” (Taylor, 2000 pg. 184). Race, and further racialized experience, outside of White European ancestry, has been removed as a relevant component to any decision-making process.

Current Supreme Court Cases:

- 1) Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*
- 2) Crystal D. Meredith, Custodial Parent and Next Friend of Joshua Ryan McDonald v. Jefferson county Board of Education, Et AL.*

Current color-blind ideology continues to strengthen its hold as a conservative ideology. In December 2006, the Supreme Court heard arguments on cases of school desegregation from Louisville, Kentucky and Seattle, Washington, having to do with whether race could be used in assigning students to public schools. In the Seattle case, Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1 et al., attorneys for the parents are suing the school district, suggesting “...that the Seattle School District’s race-based student admission plan is unconstitutional” (2007, p.1). In their argument summary, they stated, “Because it uses racial balancing, the District’s program for race-based admissions is ipso facto unconstitutional. Racial balancing...violates the heart of the Equal Protection Clause – the principle that our Constitution is color-blind” (p. 21).

The other current case, from Louisville, *Crystal D. Meredith, Custodial Parent and Next Friend of Joshua Ryan McDonald v. Jefferson county Board of Education, et al.* (2006), also argues the unconstitutionality, based upon the 14th Amendment, of a student assignment plan based upon race.

While, at the time of this writing, the Supreme Court has not yet decided either of these cases, the existence of the cases speaks to how the constitutional concept of color-blindness has become a force for re-segregation, and can and has been used as a vehicle for racial subordination and domination. Ultimately, “The danger of color-blindness is that it allows us to ignore the racial construction of Whiteness and reinforces its privilege and oppressive power” (Taylor, 1999, p. 184).

Critical White Studies

For many White Americans, the “everydayness” of racism is less than evident. But then the everyday experience of White and Black people, from the perspective of race, is substantively different. For most Whites, race is a seamless concept of everyday life. In fact, White is often not even seen as a race. In a study of White males conducted in the mid-1990s, Charles Gallagher (1996), found that the way Whites imagine and understand themselves can be described as an amalgamation from the naive response that race is relatively meaningless, through a humane response to “reach out to non-Whites,” to a feeling of being victims all the way to a more reactionary movement for a “return to White solidarity” (p. 6). Without life experiences similar to those of people of color, the

best one can hope to do with respect to recognizing and then understanding racism is to “intellectualize” what has happened to the “other” person. Critical White Studies is an exploration into what it means to be White, and if you are White and born in the U.S., what that might mean to you.

In his article, White Racial Formation: Into the Twenty-First Century, Gallagher (1996) says “...lack of ethnic identity...has created emptiness that is being filled by an identity centered on race” (p. 7). “After generations of assimilation, only Whiteness is left as an identity with any real social or political import” (p. 8). This is especially true of Whites born in the last quarter of the 20th century, who, having grown up after Civil Rights, in a technology-and media-filled environment, feel that “...social equality has been achieved...(and can) assert a racial identity and not regard themselves as racist...” (p.10). As a result, many young Whites see no real need for equalizing policies such as Affirmative Action.

Conversely, many Whites of the current generation continue to be rather oblivious to their “Whiteness.” Race is often only mentioned when referring to someone who is non-White, rendering Whiteness as regular/normal and non-Whiteness as irregular and different. “... [W]hite people frequently interpret norms adopted by a dominantly White culture as racially neutral, and so fail to recognize the ways in which those norms may be in fact covertly race-specific” (Flagg, 1997a p. 87). In another article, Flagg (1997b) says,

In this society, the White person has an everyday option not to think of herself in racial terms at all. In fact, Whites appear to pursue that option so habitually that it

may be a defining characteristic of Whiteness: to be White is not to think about it. (p. 220)

And the true beauty of this lack of critical awareness of being White is that if one is unaware, one can maintain innocence and honestly not acknowledge the benefit they derive from being White, because they recognize neither their Whiteness nor its benefit.

In a study completed in 2001, one purpose of which was to “examine the ways that power relations manifested themselves amongst the teacher and students in a class that foregrounded race...” among other issues (Cale, p.1), Gary Cale (2001) found that “many of the White adult learners in particular resisted identifying racism as a problem that merited any discussion in class...They expressed surprise and dismay that I insisted a problem existed...” (p. 2). Cale went on to say that,

Many White students resisted talking about racism because they argued that either they had never encountered it in their lives or that they were convinced that the playing field was now level....White students were silent most often during discussions about race, preferring...to hear about racism from the ones who were affected by it...The concept of white privilege was totally dismissed. (p. 3)

As a socially constructed concept that changes over time, whiteness, and who is White, has also changed over time. And Whiteness also appears to be hierarchical, meaning people can be more or less White and their status can and often does change over time. Of course the objective of those changes over time would be a movement away from Black and toward a more solid affiliation with White. “...America did not always regard its immigrant European workers as white ... it thought people from different nations were biologically different” (Sacks, 1997, p.395). Jewish immigrants to the United States, for example, were often considered “members of an inferior race” (p.395). Europe was

believed to be comprised of several races, "...ranging from the superior Nordics of northwestern Europe to the inferior southern and eastern races...and worst of all, Jews..." (p. 396). The Italians, Greeks and Irish experienced similar racialized placements. After World War II, however, many of these ethnic immigrants moved rapidly toward a middle class, suburban-living status, and along the way, they became White. Sacks explains "...changing notions of whiteness to be part of America's larger system of institutional racism" (p. 396). That movement from non-White to White is complex and connected to labor, politics and the economy among other things. Most significant, it seems, is not necessarily the movement toward becoming White so much as it is the movement away from being Black. What it means to be White is to not be Black.

White Privilege

White privilege refers to the opportunities one receives, the lifestyle afforded one in any and all aspects of life simply on the basis skin color. While white poverty certainly exists, it can, and often does, pay to be White. And even more importantly, if you are White, you don't even have to take responsibility for the privilege it affords you because "White is transparent. That's the point of being the dominant race" (Grover, 1997, p.34). And even more beautiful is the opportunity to maintain a naïve view of the United States as a model of Democracy that includes freedom and rights for all.

Peggy McIntosh (1997) explained being taught "about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage," but not being taught to see one of its corollary aspects, white

privilege...” (p. 291). She explained white privilege as “...an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions ... and blank checks” (p. 291). As the dominant race, whiteness has been so normalized that Whites can not only take advantage of privilege, but have also been systematically trained not to notice what we are doing or what is being done to and for us. “Privileged identity requires reinforcement and maintenance, but not seeing the mechanisms that reinforce and maintain privilege is an important component of this identity” (Mahoney, 1997, p.307).

White privilege is systemic. Privilege is the reflection of racism in a society in which racism is condemned and believed, for the most part, to be a thing of the past. It cannot exist without racism, but privilege can be enjoyed without recognition of either its existence or its existence as a result of racism. Members of the privileged group and their behaviors represent societal norms, “...the way things are...what is normal in society” (Wildman, 1977, p. 316), and as a result their privilege is an unrecognized “given” of everyday life. Whites are “...free to see themselves as ‘individuals’ rather than as members of a culture” (Mahoney, 1977, p.331). In a 2000 study, white supremacist consciousness is described as “consciousness that takes for granted the legitimacy of having white norms and values dominate U.S. society” (2000, Barlas, et. al, p.1). As free thinking, intelligent, anti-racist individuals, in a culture in which individualism is idealized and celebrated, we are raised to take responsibility for our own actions but not for those of the society in which we are privileged members.

White Privilege and the Constitution

Racism and White superiority and privilege are fundamentals of our U.S. Democracy and were built into the Constitution as the slavery compromise that fostered the ultimate acceptance of the Constitution. The framers of the Constitution "...at once promised freedom to whites and condemned blacks to slavery" (Bell, 1985-1986, p. 4). It was there that the notion of property rights trumping human rights gained initial and, to this day, significant prominence. There was even advantage to poor whites who neither owned slaves nor any other property for that matter. Their whiteness became the property that they could hold in perpetuity and that property, along with an implicit promise of more input into the political process, placed them above the lowest socio-economic rung -- African slaves. (Bell, 1988)

Numerous court cases over the years have argued aspects of that original compromise, but real change has been limited by the fundamental promise suggested in it: the promise that Whites would remain privileged. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, argued in 1896 and discussed above, for example, was an argument for White privilege and the property right inherent in their 'whiteness' (Bell, 1988). Current arguments reflecting affirmative action policy are similar in that they are being argued against as offenses to white privilege.

Counter-Stories: The Other *Reality*

When we were children, stories often began with the phrase, “once upon a time...”

Stories are about experience, an event occurring in a place in time, “...a product of experience and imagination...” (Bell, 1992, p. 13). Because stories are told, in one fashion or another, story-telling begins as a vehicle for placing experience into a broader context, but it can also be used as a powerful tool for creating meaning from experience. Stories are a representation of reality and as such are socially constructed (Delgado, 2000).

Personal stories, sometimes referred to as narratives, can reinforce a collective understanding of how the world operates by setting as normal the experiences of members of the dominant group. The stories told by the dominant group “...remind it of its own identity in relation to outgroups...” and as a result continue to reinforce the group’s position as dominant (Delgado, 1989, p. 2412). But when members of outside groups tell their personal stories, even when the experiences those stories reflect are similar to experiences of the dominant group, the meaning created in the story is often quite different.

Referred to as counter-stories, stories from members outside the dominant group can represent a challenge by “...subvert(ing) that ingroup reality.” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2413) Counter-stories, like stories, are told from the perspective of the story-teller. How each of us interprets and makes meaning out of our experience is subjective. It is a function of

our historical experience, fundamental values about the world and the belief systems upon which those values are based. Counter-stories can form as "...a bridge between individual experience and systemic social patterns...their analysis can be a potential tool for developing a more critical consciousness about social relations in our society" (Bell, L.A., 2003, p. 4). When the story-teller is a member of an outgroup, the story woven can challenge what is considered normal and just by the dominant group. By definition, stories are made up. That doesn't necessarily make them untrue; however, it can make them easier to hear – especially if you are a member of the dominant group and the story contradicts the reality you see and believe.

In a study about the stories people tell about race and racism, Lee Anne Bell (2003) found that while some Whites recognize an existence of racism, "...the majority of whites do not." This isn't particularly surprising given the differences in the life experiences between Blacks and Whites. The stories from "...People of Color and a few whites....attest to the ongoing existence of racism and affirm the long history of discrimination in the USA" (p. 22). The stories told by the Whites, by and large, "...minimize racism, trumpet dramatic progress and portray this society as either color-blind or as overcompensating to the point of 'reverse racism'" (p. 22).

Chapter Two Summary

This chapter provided a conceptual framework to aide in the understanding of the study findings. In considering the question, "How does race enter and then structure the

narratives of our life experience?” the chapter was organized to examine issues related to race from an historical, constitutional and legal perspective.

CHAPTER THREE: A CRITICAL QUALITATIVE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter addresses the methodology employed to engage in the study. As a critical qualitative work, the intention of the study was to instigate and reinvigorate the discussion of race within the discipline of adult education. The methodology employed was narrative analysis in the form of autobiography.

As a study of how race enters and structures the narratives of our life experiences, my data came from learning autobiographies submitted by adult students as they began a non-traditional, competence-based undergraduate program designed specifically for adults over the age of 24. After only cursory review of these autobiographies, it became noticeable that a discussion of race was absent from most. The White students simply did not address race. While many of the African American students did mention racialized experiences, more often than not, if there was any thoughtful analysis of a racialized experience it was from someone born prior to the Civil Rights Era. Addressing race was not an explicit directive of the assignment these students had received. That said, the absence of a discussion of race within these works was, in itself, telling.

One objective of the initial cursory review of the learning autobiographies was to create a coding scheme for the data analysis. To help develop the coding scheme, I decided to look at representative stories to help me learn how to read and code for implicit

references to race (Bell, 2003). I decided to broaden the data collection, first to autobiographies written by well known personalities who were likely to have addressed race within their narratives. Second, I added as a comparison group, the life histories written by graduate students, both masters and doctoral level, who had been asked to address in their narratives the issue of race in their lives. A more complete discussion of the data collection and initial findings is contained in the sections below on data collection and analysis.

Qualitative Research

Definition and Application for This Study

“...[T]he easy and the simple are not identical. To discover what is really simple and to act upon the discovery is an exceedingly difficult task” (Dewey, 1938, p. 20).

When we observe the quality of something, we are, in a sense, trying to identify the pieces that make up the whole of that thing. The addition or subtraction of pieces changes the whole into something entirely different. In qualitative research, meaning, or the whole, is created by the participants and the researcher, together, in a social context in a particular period of time. And if the pieces change, such as the social context or point in time or any of the people involved, then so does the meaning.

Qualitative research is personal research. It takes place in the daily experiences of the study participants. The researcher is not an objective bystander, observing from a distance, but is a subjective participant who “enters the research process from inside an interpretive community” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, pg. 18). Each of us as researchers brings to the research the eyes through which we have viewed the world, the ears through which we have heard it and the heart and mind that makes sense and meaning from everything we have seen and heard.

Qualitative research is about interpretation and as such is subjective in nature. There can be no real objective observation of one person to another. Any time we interpret our observations, we do so through the lens of our own life history. And recognizing that the act of observation impacts that which is being observed, the observation changes in a way that is unique to the particular observer and the observed.

Qualitative research is a uniquely human research. It was in the 1920s and 1930s in sociology, at the University of Chicago, where qualitative research gained prominence. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe the history of qualitative research in America as “seven historical moments” which overlap and continue to the present (p.2). These moments indicate both the chronological time and the historical field within which the moments occur. Beginning in 1900 with the traditional period where the focus reflected a positivist approach through the modern, postmodern and on, we are currently in the seventh moment which Denzin and Lincoln refer to as the future. The seventh moment is concerned with issues relating to social justice. It is where research becomes a “site for

critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom and community” (pg. 3). And, it is a moment in which researchers recognize themselves as co-creators of meaning in the process.

This is a qualitative study utilizing narrative inquiry as the method, learning autobiography as the method of data collection and Critical Race Theory as the theoretical framework through which to analyze the data. Unlike positivistic research, qualitative research allows for the “...construction and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time” (Merriam and Associates, 2002, pg. 4). While the subject-specific learning that can be gained as a result of experience is not necessarily inaccurate, at best it can be incomplete and at worst it can represent White experience as the standard against which learning should be judged (Calmore, 1995).

Recognizing learning as a social construct, by experience and learning through a different lens, the construction of subsequent meaning can change. Qualitative research looks at how the socio-cultural or socio-political aspects of an experience can impact the subsequent meaning of that experience (Merriam and Associates, 2002). It allows for meaning making relative to a particular context and through the eyes and mind of a particular researcher. My analysis of those learning autobiographies was influenced, in part, by my socio-cultural history and experience which includes being a Jewish woman raised in an ethnically diverse, lower middle class neighborhood in the City of Chicago in the 1960s.

Critical Qualitative Research

Critical qualitative research takes qualitative research beyond interpretation. It is about questioning the many assumptions that inform and influence the ways in which each of us interacts with the world around us. The objective of critical qualitative research is to make change happen by freeing ourselves from the constraints of our social, political, psychological, etc. assumptions. Critical qualitative research is about questioning and challenging power relationships, including those related to race, gender, class, ethnicity, etc., as well as the intersection of those social constructs (Merriam and Associates, 2002).

Understanding that as researchers, our selves entering the data is the beginning of the qualitative research process. Recognizing the implications for how our selves merge with the data is more complex, especially when as researchers we come from a position of more privileges than do the people we observe (Fein, Weis, Weseen, Wong, 2000).

Critical Race Theory is a robust theory that both allows for and encourages a critical or counterview of the world that begins with our life experience. And we may situate ourselves and examine our experience in whatever way we think is most apropos of the discussion, i.e. from the perspective of race, gender, ethnicity, etc. The application of CRT as a lens through which to examine the racialized life experience of adult learners has the potential to inform an ongoing and critical conversation about race and adult education. The phrase racialized life experience, or racialized experience, suggests an

experience in which racial group membership had a particular affect on the quality of the experience

This study is a critical qualitative research study in that its purpose is to understand and then to take action. While the study itself may not lead directly to action, it is my hope that the knowledge gained might encourage adult educators and programs designed for adult learners to consider race more significantly when examining experience for learning. I begin by examining learning autobiographies in order to gain an understanding of how race enters and then structures the narratives of our experience. The purpose of that learning is to be able to influence what can be learned from past experience as well as future experiences. If we have a more substantive understanding of the degree to which race insinuates itself into our experiences as learners, we might have an opportunity to influence future experience.

Narrative Inquiry; A Method of Qualitative Research

Narrative inquiry is a method of qualitative research; it is a means toward interpretation, meaning making and, ultimately, the understanding of experience. Using as its content the rich, detailed stories of our lives, narrative inquiry becomes qualitative research when the researcher engages in interpretation of her own experience along with the experience of the researched. “Narrative inquiry characteristically begins with the researcher’s autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41). Unlike formalistic research, which often begins by identifying a

theoretical framework within which the researcher examines some problem, narrative research begins by examining experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Formalistic research, it would follow, might conclude with a more definitive understanding of a theory by its replication in a new problem. Conversely, a narrative inquiry might conclude with "...the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic..." (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42). This study, in addition to looking for explicit references to race, looks at implicit, even nuanced references to racial group membership in the narratives of learning autobiographies.

Recognizing the foundation of narrative inquiry in the work of Dewey (1938), Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000) remind us that, from Dewey, we learn two fundamental concepts about experience that are particularly important in this study. The first concept explores the notion that experience is both personal and social. "People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but...they are always in relation, always in a social context" (2000, p. 2). Dewey (1938) says, "An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment..." (p. 41). Second, Dewey introduced the concept of continuity as a criterion for experience. "...the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p.27). "...[E]very experience influences in some degree the objective conditions under which further experiences are had" (p. 30). When adult students write about their lives as learners, in a learning autobiography, they often begin by reflecting upon their experiences as students

in a school setting. As they continue to reflect upon and then write about their reflections, the continuity of the experiences becomes more evident. Positive school experiences often lead to more positive experiences and so on. Explicit issues of race, for example, in the context of continuity, would likely only intentionally enter the narratives of our experiences if they were recognized as being intrinsic to the experience itself. Of course there are also implicit issues of race which might not intentionally enter the narratives of our experiences because they were not recognized as being issues of race.

Related to the notion of continuity is the idea that time, or when and where the experience took place, would likely change one's understanding of experience. But time of experience must be explored in a context of continuity. In other words, "...any event, has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 p. 29). Referring again to the foundation in the work of Dewey (1938) on experience, Clandinin and Connelly talk about narrative research as taking place in a metaphorical three-dimensional space "...in which narrative inquirers would find themselves using a set of terms that pointed them backward and forward, inward and outward, and located them in place" (p. 54). These terms refer to experience as taking place in the past, the present and in the future, from a personal as well as a social context and in a particular setting (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Learning Autobiography/Educational Autobiography – A Form of Narrative Inquiry

Most of the data for this narrative study came from learning autobiographies written by adult students as they were entering a non-traditional, undergraduate degree program which focused upon liberal arts education.

Those learning autobiographies became the adults' field notes as they reflected upon their lives as learners. Although written very early in the program, the experience of writing about one's life is often quite significant and offers adult students a sort of template to refer back to as they proceed with their education. These learning autobiographies represent an interpretation of the student's life as a learner. The assignment from which the learning autobiographies were created asked students to reflect upon their lives as learners--to identify and examine important events in their lives that, at the time of writing, were thought to have had a significant impact on the adults as learners. That assignment very likely reflected, albeit unintentionally, what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to as the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. Because as any event has a past, present and implied future, when students write about their life experiences, they may be looking at each one in a three-dimensional space.

Students examined themselves as individuals, but they did so while discussing and reflecting upon their families, communities, schools, churches, etc. They talked about how the past influenced the present and how they planned to be more intentional as they influence the future. In responding to the assignment directives, these adult learners considered the events of their lives which, from their perspective, had significant impact

on either the learning experiences that they had or those they did not have. They were asked to reflect upon how their life experiences shaped their lives as learners.

Learning autobiography is defined here to be the story of one's life as a learner. Pierre Dominice (2000) calls it educational biography and describes it as "A person's life history...understood as an educational process, and this biographical approach takes place in the context of higher education" (p.1). He differentiates autobiography from educational biography in that an autobiography is something one chooses to write at any time in his or her life, from any perspective. An educational biography, conversely, is a life history "...of a specific kind, focused on each author's learning, not simply any aspect of life that he or she chooses" (p. 2). The learning autobiographies used as data for this study reflect Dominice's definition of educational biography.

Learning autobiographies are an interpretation of people's experiences from the point of view of the moment at which they are writing. Learning autobiography is an individual's account of their life history as a learner; it is their accounting of experience and their interpretation of how experience affected their lives as learners. For an adult learner, the writing of a learning autobiography is an opportunity to reflect upon learning that is both formal and informal or experiential. It is an opportunity to make important those experiences and that learning which the adult author deems to be important.

While I have taught the introductory course in which these learning autobiographies were assigned many times, the particular autobiographies that will be used for this study will

likely not be from any of my classes. Since the autobiographies had to be anonymous in order to be part of the study, I cannot be completely certain. But since I have taught the course, I can speak to how the assignment is situated in the adult students' learning experience and discuss some of the commentary I have heard from students upon completion of the assignment.

First, the program in which these students were enrolled was a competence-based, liberal arts program for adults over 24 years of age. As adult learners, these students were free to take courses within the program. However, in order to be considered as candidates for a bachelor's degree, all adult students are required to complete an introductory seminar in which the major assignment was the writing of a learning autobiography. Students were assigned this work after having been in a class for almost four hours, during which they spent time reflecting upon and discussing, in small and large groups, their educational, professional and personal goals that explained why they were returning to formal education at that particular point in their lives. Because students were enrolled in a program that offered opportunities to validate informal learning or learning gained as a result of experience through the awarding of college credit, they began, early in their program, to consider what it means to learn and how experiences in learning, including formal, informal, self-directed, experiential, etc., have influenced who they have become as learners.

For many adults, writing a learning autobiography can be a very difficult assignment. For some, this may be the first time they have reflected upon their lives in much depth,

and for others, the reflections can sometimes remind them of painful or difficult times in their lives. While we are asking students to reflect upon their lives as learners, there can be "...some similarity between educational biography and psychotherapy" (Dominice, 2002, p. 20). When I teach this seminar I am intentional about discussing life history in the context of one's experiences as a learner, and while I recognize that the simple act of reflecting on one's life can be an opening into unknown and complex territory, I keep the group focused on the point of writing these assignments as a first step in taking control of their lives as learners.

Data Collection Phase 1

I began the data collection portion of this study by collecting approximately 80, unnamed, learning autobiographies, about 30 of which were written by African American students, 30 by White American students and about 19 by ethnically diverse students, including native Africans. The African American students, also referred to as Black students, are U.S. born of African descent. The White students, although of various ethnic descents, are U.S. born, and the ethnically diverse students are those for whom either English is not their native language or they were born in another country. While all names have been removed from the autobiographies, initially, I identified the African American students as the "A" learning autobiographies, the ethnically diverse students as the "B" learning autobiographies and the White American students as the "C" autobiographies. Later, in the Findings Chapter, I gave respondents names.

These autobiographies were collected from one faculty member who has taught in the program for more than 20 years. That faculty member alerted the Dean, IRB Chair and Diversity Committee of my request and asked for feedback if there were any concerns about the use of the autobiographies. No concerns were identified.

Preliminary Findings; Content Analysis – Phase 1

Often referred to as “...the classical method for doing research with narrative materials...”, content analysis allows for the breaking down of written material into analytical categories (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p. 112). Using the first of three propositions of Critical Race Theory identified by Ladson-Billings and Tate, IV (1995), “Race continues to be significant in the U.S.”(p. 47), along with the first of my research questions which asked how race enters the narratives of our experience, I read representative learning autobiographies simply looking for explicit references to race. My intent was to review for explicit references to racial group membership, representative autobiographies from each group of adult learners, the result of which would be the recognition and identification of themes and sub-themes to inform a layered coding scheme.

What I found from that initial review was that there was limited explicit reference to racial group membership across the groups. There were certainly implicit references, but without some example or standards against which to measure the reference, it would be difficult or impossible to design a coding scheme from implication. While those

references would serve as important implicit data later, the coding scheme would need to be designed from other autobiographies. I needed autobiographies of people who chose to write for no other reason than they wanted to share their story.

Writing an autobiography is an individual choice; the work belongs to the author from the beginning to the end. Authors of autobiographies may write about their life history from any perspective they wish.

In contrast, although adult learners are free to decide in the first place whether they want to attend sessions that focus on educational biography, they speak and write educational biographies only because these narratives have been required by their teachers, and they do so within a structure. (Dominice, 2000, pgs. 1-2)

The students in my study had been directed to write the story of their lives as learners. And because their learning autobiographies would serve as part of their admission materials, they were probably focusing upon material they felt would be considered academically relevant to faculty and may have felt less comfortable introducing the complex issues involved in race.

Data Collection: Phase 2

I decided to briefly examine portions of autobiographies of well known personalities who I thought might have addressed issues of race within their life stories. My intent here was to use these autobiographies to build a preliminary process to examine the racialized experiences of my students. Because each of these people has a publicly known life history, they would have been more likely to address experiences related to racial group membership in their stories.

My preliminary autobiography review included former President Jimmy Carter (2001), Senator Hillary Clinton (2003), Dr. Angela Davis (1974), and Dr. Elie Wiesel (1995). I chose each one for specific reasons.

Former President Jimmy Carter (2001) grew up in the South during the depression. Although he grew up in a difficult economic time period and in a family which often struggled economically, he was a privileged White boy and man amongst poor Black farmers and he was known to have reflected upon and written about that experience.

Senator Clinton (2003) was a teen and college student during the changing and turbulent 1960s. She was a product of depression-era parents who benefited from the booming economy of post-World War II. She is a member of the dominant White, Christian population, but as a liberal politician she would likely have an awareness of how she benefited from White privilege.

Dr. Angela Davis (1974) grew up in the same era as Senator Clinton. As an African American intellectual and a participant in the Civil Rights Movement, even though she wrote her autobiography in her early twenties, she would likely have written from the context of her racial group membership.

Dr. Elie Wiesel is a Jewish survivor of World War II and the Nazi extermination camps of Europe. Although White, his experiences were racialized and would serve this study as an example of racialized experience beyond the American Black/White dichotomy.

I designed an initial coding scheme by taking as my overarching theme, the first question guiding this study and as the unit of analysis, the first of the three CRT propositions.

Overarching Theme: How does race enter and structure the narratives of our life experience?

Unit of Analysis: Race continues to be significant in the United States.

Then I began to identify any explicit reference to race either about themselves, others or in general. I identified when the explicit reference was in the context of a description of a life experience about themselves or others or when there was simply a reflection or discussion on race and/or experience.

Preliminary Findings: Phase 2

Early in his story, President Carter (2001) wrote, “Our two races although inseparable in our daily lives, were kept apart by social custom, misinterpretation of Holy Scriptures, and the unchallenged law of the land as mandated by the United States Supreme Court” (p. 20). Also early in her story, Senator Clinton (2003) wrote, “But the University of Life was not just about art and literature. We visited Black and Hispanic churches in Chicago’s inner city for exchanges with their youth groups” (p. 22). Dr. Davis (1974) recalled, “We were the first Black family to move into that area, and the White people believed that we were in the vanguard of a mass invasion” (p.78). And Dr. Wiesel, (1995) early in his story said, “But during the darkest times, I would ask myself simple,

perhaps simplistic questions: Why do they hate us? Why do they persecute us? What did we do to arouse such cruelty?”

Several important themes, including segregation, racism and privilege emerged from this very preliminary analysis. First, while all four examples were explicit references to race, each one offered opportunities to consider implicit references to race. President Carter (2001) spoke to the laws which, while abolishing slavery, did not suggest equal rights for everyone. Senator Clinton (2003) referred to the different ways and places that White and Black people live in this country. The “inner city” is the place where Blacks and other less- advantaged people live. And Dr. Davis (1974) talked about fear and misunderstanding and how that fear can make entire communities simply move away.

The only passage which stood out as being particularly different was Dr. Wiesel’s (1995). While his was certainly a racialized experience, it also made clear the distinct differences in types of oppression. The Black/White dichotomy is about power and privilege and subordination. The Jewish/Nazi dichotomy was about elimination of a people. I thought it would be helpful to include an example of a White person whose racialized experience had been documented in order to help me read and analyze the racialized experiences of the adult students who were, for example, Bosnian refugees or Tutsi refugees from Rwanda. But ethnic cleansing is a different kind of racism. While racism can be violent and some would suggest that it does kill, I think that when we refer to racism in the United States, we are referring to issues of power, privilege and subordination.

Fundamentally those issues begin with the Black/White dichotomy. U.S. racism is fundamental to our form of democracy and our Constitution. As a result, I narrowed the study to include only African Americans and White, U.S. Americans and added three additional representative autobiographies. Those were the autobiographies of Drs. Maya Angelou (1969), John Hope Franklin (2005) and President Bill Clinton (2004).

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Dr. Maya Angelou's (1969) autobiography offered numerous examples of counter narratives about growing up Black in the 1930s in Stamps, Arkansas. Similarly, in Mirror to America, Dr. John Hope Franklin (2005) offered a study of Black life, including the years prior to the Civil Rights Era, that reflected the complexity of a discussion of racialized experience in this country.

In referring to the broadened group of representative autobiographies, I began again to look for references to race, both explicit and implicit, that might illuminate examples of racialized experience and how to recognize, in personal narratives, implicit references to racialized experiences. I looked for themes to emerge about similar experiences or similar time frames. It became noticeable fairly quickly that the six autobiographies, three Black, three White, also separated into two particular historical time periods in the United States. Drs. Angelou and Franklin and President Carter were all born and raised in the rural south between 1915 and 1924, years when Jim Crow laws were still in effect. Similarly, the Clintons and Dr. Davis were born between 1944 and 1946, the years between World War II and the Civil Rights Era. President Clinton was raised in the south, as was Dr. Davis, but Senator Clinton was raised in suburban Chicago.

In reflecting upon their youth in the segregated south, and their parents' livelihoods, President Carter (2001) and Drs. Franklin (2005) and Angelou (1969) shared childhood reflections from very different experiential perspectives. President Carter said that despite a

...mandate of racial segregation... [because of life on the farm] ...daily existence was almost totally intertwined. At the same time...the political and social dominance of Whites was an accepted fact, never challenged or even debated, so far as I knew, by White liberals or Black protesters. (p. 24)

He went on to say,

I knew a number of small farmers who owned their own land. Most of them were White, of course... Many of them were as poor as Black day laborers, but they were expected to maintain better houses, wear mostly store-bought clothes, and keep their children in school more days each year. (p. 37)

In a later, but related discussion, President Carter said, "By law, the average Black family got only \$8 because the presumption was that they could live more cheaply" (p. 97).

Dr. Angelou (1969), on the other hand, writes about how segregation in Stamps, Arkansas, was so complete, "...most Black children didn't really, absolutely know what Whites look liked" (p.24-25). Her grandmother, with whom she and her younger brother lived, was the only Black general store owner in Stamps (Angelou, 1969). That store was the pick-up place for the local cotton pickers. Dr. Angelou reminisced about the end of the work day when the pickers were dropped off. She said

...the pickers would step out of the backs of trucks and fold down, dirt-disappointed, to the ground. No matter how much they had picked, it wasn't enough....Then they would face another day of trying to earn enough for the whole year with the heavy knowledge that they were going to end the season as they started it. Without the money or credit necessary to sustain a family for three months. (p 9-10)

Dr. Franklin's father, on the other hand, was a well-educated, attorney at law. In talking about his father's law practice he said,

Attracting clients was not easy. Few, besides African Americans, had any interest in engaging the services of a Black lawyer. And many, Black and White, were simply too poor to employ a lawyer of any kind. ...those with economic resources viewed Black lawyers with a wary eye, if for no other reason than they seriously doubted a Black lawyer's chances in a court of law where a White judge and a White jury held him in such low esteem. (Franklin, 2005, p. 10)

He related the following (counter) story:

In 1911, when a client's case pending in Shreveport, Louisiana, was called, Buck stood as a signal to the judge that he was present and ready to proceed. In disbelief, the presiding judge asked my father why he was standing. When Buck made the simple reply that he was representing his client in the case, the judge retorted that no "nigger" represented anyone in his court. With that pronouncement, my father was ordered to vacate the courtroom. (Franklin, 2005, p. 10)

Although he was a licensed attorney, he was unable to earn a livable wage from that profession.

Recognizing that her family was from the "...not so poor," Dr. Davis (1974) recalled how her parents, in order to support their family, were forced to work outside of the areas in which they had been educated (p. 89). While her father, like her mother, was an educated teacher, he made so little money that he was forced to save enough to buy a service station in the "...Black section of downtown Birmingham" (p. 89). Recognizing her family as more fortunate than most Southern Blacks at that time, Dr. Davis added, "The prevailing myth...is that poverty is a punishment for idleness and indolence. ...I knew that my mother and father had worked hard...But I also knew that they had had breaks" (p. 89-90).

Finally, Senator Clinton (2003), referring to the same era in which Dr. Davis grew up, explained,

...in the years following World War II, men like my father who had served their country returned home to settle down, make a living and raise a family. It was the beginning of the Baby Boom, an optimistic time. ...Middle-class America was flush with emerging prosperity and all that comes with it – new houses, fine schools, neighborhood parks and safe communities. ...My parents were typical of a generation who believed in the endless possibilities of America and whose values were rooted in the experience of living through the Great Depression. They believed in hard work, not entitlement, self reliance not self-indulgence. (p. 1- 2)

Privilege as an overarching theme immediately emerges from these narratives, as does the inability of Black parents to provide a livable wage for their families and a severe inequity in educational resources available over multiple generations. Even with similar amounts of education, and in both the Depression economy as well as the growing post-World War II economy, Black parents were less able to provide a livable wage for their families. There is a kind of naïve invisibility of privilege that emerges in some of these narratives, an example being Senator Clinton's (2003) discussion of a "...generation who believed in the endless possibilities of America..." (p.2). While often implied in the discussions of educational opportunity or resources or in the context of one's ability to support their family, privilege is in itself a significant theme. Because the privileged group is "normalized" in society, those who hold privilege are often the least likely to recognize it. So, when Senator Clinton expressed, "My parents were typical of a generation who believed in the endless possibilities of America...", it is unclear whether she realized it was only typical of White parents at that time (p.2).

Another theme consistently emerging from these narratives had to do with educational resources. Given the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), separate but equal laws, the schools were certainly separate, but by no means equal. Even when, in 1954, the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, began the process of desegregation, "... many schools around the country remained segregated by race and class" (Zinn, 1980, p. 425). And continuing, "Supreme Court decisions in the seventies determined that there need be no equalization of funds for poor school districts and rich school districts..." (p. 425).

In referring to a move to high school at age eleven, which would have been in 1926, Dr. Franklin (2005) said, "...Booker T. Washington pales when compared with the enormous all-White Central High School, which covered an entire city block and contained, as I would later learn, every facility that the nation's best high schools boasted" (p. 24). In discussing his high school experience, President Carter (2001) said,

All White children around the Plains community...attended Plains High school. Black children in our part of the country had classes in more than a dozen churches or private homes, often with all grades crowded into a single room. They were usually furnished with chairs of various sizes, a Blackboard, and textbooks considered too dilapidated for use by White students. (p. 25)

Years later, when President Clinton (2004), Senator Clinton (2003) and Dr. Davis (1974) attended public school in their respective towns, similar differences existed between schools in White neighborhoods and those in the Black neighborhoods. President Clinton recalled, "High school was a great ride...but it bothered me that Hot Springs' schools still weren't integrated. The Black kids still went to Langston High School..." (p. 81). Later on he said, "My high school offered calculus and trigonometry, chemistry and physics,

Spanish, French, and four years of Latin, a range of courses many small schools in Arkansas lacked” (p. 86). As an adult politician reflecting on her high school experience, Senator Clinton said, “...when I chaired the Arkansas Education Standards Committee, I realized how fortunate I had been to attend fully equipped schools with highly trained teachers and a full range of academic and extra curricular offerings” (p. 14). And reflecting on her education, Dr. Davis said, “Carrie A. Tuggle School was a cluster of old wooden frame houses, so dilapidated that they would have been instantly condemned had they not been located in a Black neighborhood” (p. 87).

These themes, privilege, the ability to earn a living wage and the availability of equal educational resources, offered a solid starting point as units of analysis of the student learning autobiographies. There was also an emerging distinction between those adults born before and after the Civil Rights Era, and the emergence of a color-blind ideology. The initial coding strategy developed as follows:

Explicit Reference – Black adult students born prior to the Civil Rights Movement are more likely to write explicitly about racialized experience.

Implicit Reference through Counter-Narrative – Black adult students born after the Civil Rights Movement are less likely to write explicitly about racialized experience.

Recognition of Privilege – White adult students born prior to the Civil Rights Movement who were insightful about social injustice are more likely to recognize and reflect upon their racialized experience.

Unrecognized Privilege – White adult students born after the Civil Rights Movement are less likely to write about racialized experience because they are less likely to recognize its existence.

Data Collection: Phase 3

Data Triangulation

Realizing from the initial data analysis that explicit references to race would be rare in the learning autobiographies of undergraduate learners, and having an initial coding scheme in place, I broadened the data one more time. In this phase of the data collection, I collected life histories from both master and doctoral candidates in adult education whose assignments had included the examination of their lives from a variety of perspectives, including race. Since I had also been given the assignment to write a life history early in the doctoral program, I added my life history as additional data to this group. Given an undergraduate and possibly graduate degree, one might expect to see a more substantive reflection on the socio-cultural context of one's experience. I compared the outcome of the analysis of those histories to the ones written by the adult undergraduate students whose assignment did not include an explicit request to examine their lives from a racialized perspective, nor had they experienced the benefit of liberal arts education. Using the graduate students' life histories, I felt, would offer a stronger link to the implicit references to race and racialized experience. Additionally, triangulating the data in this way might offer the possibility for more substantive generalizability of the results (Marshall & Rossman, 1990).

Data Analysis: Phase 3

Coding

I divided the learning autobiographies and life histories into groups as follows: African American undergraduate students born prior to 1960, African American undergraduate students born after 1960 and those whose age was not clear in their writing. The next group included White undergraduate students born prior to 1960, White undergraduate students born after 1960 and those whose age was not clear in their writing. The third group was of the graduate students in adult education. They were grouped similarly to the undergraduates described above. Because I was looking at how race enters the narratives of our life experiences using Critical Race Theory as a lens, and in particular looking at the impact of the creation of a “color-blind” society, I decided to examine separately all those autobiographies/life histories of adult students whose ages were not identifiable.

The detailed coding structure can be found in the Appendix. Following is a summary data display.

Summary Data Display

Data Collection Phase 1

80 learning autobiographies,
30 African American
30 White
19 ethnically diverse

Data Analysis Phase 1

Limited explicit reference to racial group membership across groups
Civil rights movement and creation of color-blind society

Data Collection Phase 2 - Create Initial Coding Strategy using autobiographies of well known personalities who (probably) wrote about racialized experience

President Jimmy Carter – recognized and wrote about his privileged experience
Senator Hillary Clinton – liberal politician likely aware of her own benefit from privilege

Dr. Angela Davis – involvement in Civil Rights Movement; early work a likely influence of Critical Race Theory

Dr. Elie Wiesel – racialized experience as Jewish survivor of Nazis

Data Analysis Phase 2

U.S. racism is about privilege; ethnic cleansing is not about privilege

Eliminate Dr. Wiesel; substitute Drs. John Hope Franklin and Maya Angelou

Eliminate ethnically diverse learning autobiographies; narrow scope to U.S.

Black/White dichotomy

Initial Coding Strategy

Explicit Reference – Black adult students born prior to the Civil Rights Movement are more likely to write explicitly about racialized experience.

Implicit Reference through Counter-Narrative – Black adult students born after the Civil Rights Movement are less likely to write explicitly about racialized experience.

Recognition of Privilege – White adult students born prior to the civil rights movement who were insightful about social injustice are more likely to recognize and reflect upon their racialized experience.

Unrecognized Privilege – White adult students born after the Civil Rights Movement are less likely to write about racialized experience because they are less likely to recognize its existence.

Data Collection Phase Three

Data Triangulation

For comparison, life histories from both masters and doctoral candidates in adult education whose assignments included examination of their lives from a socio-cultural/racial context were added.

Data Analysis: Phase Three

Learning Autobiographies and Life Histories

Collapse of Coding Scheme:

African American Students

Theme:

Explicit or Implicit Reference to Race

Sub-Themes:

Racial Group Membership Self-Identification

Pride in Heritage

Experience with Racism

Value of Education and Learning

American Dream

White Students

Theme:

Recognized or Unrecognized References to Privilege

Sub-Themes:
 Racial Group Membership Self or Others
 Pride in Heritage
 Experience with Racism
 Value of Education and Learning
 American Dream

Study Limitations: Black/White Binary and Class

In focusing entirely on the Black/White binary, this study made an assumption that an understanding of that binary was fundamental to an understanding of racial privilege and subordination. This narrow view of marginalization has been criticized by historians and scholars. Juan Perea (2000) calls this "...marginalization with marginalization." In discussing Andrew Hackers' book, Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal, Perea said that what "...writers on race fail, or decline to understand is that, by focusing only on Blacks and Whites, they both produce and replicate the belief that only "two prominent players, 'Black and White.' Count in debates about race" (p. 346).

Also of significance was the lack of discussion about class. In choosing not to examine the data from a Critical Theory perspective, including issues of class, in addition to a CRT perspective, the study addressed the Black/White binary as an almost one-dimensional phenomenon, race. The Black experience was examined from the perspective of adult undergraduate learners who had not benefited from higher education at the age at which most traditional students go to college. Although there were many reasons suggested for why they hadn't attended college earlier in their lives, the lack of financial resources was identified often.

Chapter Three Summary

Chapter three began with an introduction to qualitative research, critical qualitative research, narrative inquiry and a discussion of how this study reflected those categories and methodologies of research. There was an in-depth and chronological discussion of the data collection and analysis process which was followed by a summary data display. The chapter ended with a discussion of the study limitations.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings of the study are presented in two parts. Part One is a presentation and discussion of the findings of the research, focusing attention on an analysis of the learning autobiographies and life histories and addressing the first two questions guiding this study. Using the collapsed coding scheme as a framework, the findings are representative of actual comments taken from the students' work. Part Two is a compilation of six learning autobiographies I created using the experiences of the students. There are three stories reflecting the experience of White students. Each story is followed by a counter-story representing the experience of an African American student.

Both sections have been designed to answer the questions guiding the study:

How does racial group membership enter and structure the narratives of our experience?

How does racial group membership structure our experience?

Part One: Findings

I decided to analyze and write about the African American adult students first. Since they represented the counter-narratives, I wanted to privilege them by putting them in the

forefront. Also, I think the findings of the African American students offer a conceptual counter-narrative that provided, for the reader, a critical lens through which to read the findings of the White students later on (Bell, 2003).

African American Students

I separated the autobiographies of the African American undergraduate students into groups of those born before and after 1960. And I think there was some difference worth noting with respect to when the students were born. Often the difference was subtle and it certainly wasn't exclusive, but it was noticeable enough to be addressed. There were no African American graduate students born prior to 1960.

Explicit or Implicit Reference to Race

Racial Group Membership Self-Identity; Explicit References to Race

African American undergraduate adult students born prior to 1960

Oftentimes the initial reference to race came in a description of early childhood education. And race was also often identified in the context of a story in which an early experience with racism also occurred. For example, Beverly reported, "During the early 1960s...we attend an all Black segregated school." She immediately went on to explain, "This was significant in my life because this was the first time that racism entered my young life." Similarly, Shelley reported, early in her learning autobiography, "We were

the only “Negroes” (that’s what we were called back then) who attended the school. I can still remember being taunted by the “White Kids.”

Lydia, who was born in 1957, talked about her childhood in inner city Chicago as being “idyllic.” She didn’t mention race until she began to talk about high school, when she said,

...my high school was a parochial school...High school was where I first experienced interracial friendships....prejudice and racism...I don’t believe in a color-blind society. When someone meets me, I want that person to see the proud Black woman that I am.

And Celeste, who was born in 1954, introduced herself with a description of the first time she met her White maternal grandfather on the day she was born – in the hospital. She said, “On that auspicious day my maternal grandfather comes to the hospital, takes one look at me, declares I’m too dark (translation, I can’t pass for White), and he is never seen again.”

William, who was born in 1935, first referred to race in the telling of an experience traveling with his grandmother as a child, on a Jim Crow train. He recalled, “I noticed that the passengers remaining in the coach resembled the conductors. The passengers made to exit to the Jim Crow car, looked like me...I began to understand the basis for the conflict of races. It was skin color!”

African American undergraduate adult students born after 1960

While this group includes a larger number of students (11), there were fewer explicit references to African American self-identity. In addition to those 11, I added to this group the two African American students whose ages were not identified.

Merle began her autobiography with, "...I am a 25-year-old African American mother of three." The only other explicit self-identification, from Darian, was somewhat less direct. Darian said, "...While growing up in an African American community I was fortunate to get involved in sports and stayed away from drugs." And, late in her autobiography, Marion reported, "...I would become the President of the Black Student Union..."

African American graduate students

The graduate students were somewhat more explicit about self. Gary, the only male, recalling what happened after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated said,

The next weekend, my father took me downtown to show me all of the damages. He tried to explain what life would be like for me as an African American male or as we were called in the 1960s Negroes.

Again, the doctoral students were somewhat more explicit. While not at the very beginning of her work, Susie described herself explicitly when she said, "I am what you can physically see, an African American woman." She continued, "Ironically, I was born a 'negro,' according to my birth certificate and raised 'Black' which was the box you

checked off on applications and forms.” And she ended her work, saying, “...I am African American, ‘negro’, and ‘Black’.”

And, in recalling her graduate school experience (prior to her doctoral work), Triana explained, “My graduate experience transformed me emotionally and intellectually...I learned so much about the social dynamics of racism that my Black identity soon became the most essential part of my self-definition.” And later she said, “...I am the only full-time African American professor teaching at a mostly White Catholic college.”

Pride in Heritage

Although somewhat infrequently and often not explicitly, the African American students did mention their heritage. They told stories in which their pride was evident, but they also related stories in which they felt tension, in the context of heritage, from other African Americans.

African American undergraduate students born prior to 1960

Shelley recalled an experience from elementary school where she was the only African American child in the classroom and the teacher was also African American.

...[S]he was so hard on me. I was so confused because I thought she would go easy on me...But she treated me harsher than the other teachers...Little did I know, she meant it for my good. One day I decided to ask her why she treated me so harshly, she replied, ‘I want you to know that you are just as good as every other child in this class, and you will be held to the same expectations.’

When bussing began and more African Americans came to her school, and were not being treated as well as Shelley and her family were being treated, she said, "...things became harder for us, we were hated by the other Blacks because they thought we were 'Uncle Toms. '"

Later, Shelley talked about going to a more integrated high school and having a very different experience. She said,

When I got to high school I had a culture shock, there were Black students and we were not the minority. However, they didn't like me because I spoke 'too White.' They wanted to know why...I told them we...went to school with White kids and that was the way we were taught to speak. The Black students started to tease and make fun of us...because our father lived with us and we weren't on 'Welfare.'

Brianna said simply,

My parents, and grandparents worked hard to instill in their families positive values...to be survivors, and to draw upon the best of our ancestors to create a passage through life's trials and tribulations...Coming from a strong Black family background, I was always taught never to give up and always strive to reach your dreams.

Celeste, in relating stories about her parents' activities in the Civil Rights Movement, said, "I go to 'Freedom School' and begin to learn the freedom songs of the Civil Rights Movement. The die was now cast."

African American undergraduate students born after 1960

In recalling what a difficult life her grandparents had, "They were Black and uneducated, racism and poor conditions made it very difficult for them," Gayle recalled the lesson

they had taught her. “My grandparents instilled in me at an early age to get all you can and make it work – don’t let nobody tell you – you can’t do it.”

African American graduate students

In thinking aloud about the different names that have been used to identify African Americans, i.e. Negro, Black, etc., Susie said,

I can understand that the past labels may be seen as derogatory, such as colored, negro and even Black. I agree that the term African American is more celebratory...I have some exposure and knowledge of my rich, creative, heroic, strong, yet oppressed history...

Racism: Explicit Experiences

African American undergraduates born before 1960

While almost all of the African American students related some experiences with racism, those born before 1960 were more likely to relate them as overt experiences. Beverly and Shelley, both mentioned earlier, described their first experiences with racism in elementary school. Denise, in recalling an experience in which she, for the first time, received a new book upon being bussed to a White school on the north side of Chicago, also recalled “...a large group of parents met us with picket signs and angry, hostile faces...I and others were spit on and called racial slurs by parents and, surprisingly....by the school staff.” Lydia recalled how parochial high school was integrated and

...we had to deal with a daily barrage of ignorance from White students. They asked humiliating questions about our color, asked to touch our hair and many

(asked)...whether...we had a right to be in a parochial school...because...there could ...be no such thing as a Black Lutheran.

William, who was earlier quoted regarding his experience with Jim Crow laws as a young child, later described being chosen as one of 150 “Negro students...to integrate _____ High School. ...We were greeted on the first day, with a huge painted sign on the North wall. ‘WELCOME NIGGERS!’” And Celeste, in talking about her experiences growing up with mixed-race parents who were actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement, said, “...I saw White mothers foaming at the mouth, screaming obscenities to kindergarten children trying to enroll in school to get an equal education.”

Racism: Implicit Experiences

African American undergraduates born after 1960

While there were certainly references to overt racism, the younger students seemed more likely to express experiences that could be defined as covert. Dianna, for example, talked about her experience trying to build a career as a merchandise buyer in downtown Chicago. She said, “It also came to my attention that there were no African American buyers in the more well known stores and that if you wanted to persevere in this field, you were on your own.” Later, in talking about another job she held, she said,

After being there for almost three years I came across a document that was left in the photocopier that listed every employee’s name and salary. By this time I was the only African American in the company and also the lowest paid from the media buyers down to the receptionist!

Gayle talked about enrolling in a university with the longterm goal of law school. She spoke with an advisor who counseled her to major in Criminal Justice. Gayle said, “That

was pure undercover racism. Once I started researching Law students' undergraduate majors – I realized Criminal Justice students usually did not graduate and go to law school.” And Cherise, in relating a story about being a teenage mother with a sick baby, said,

After two months of being a mother my daughter became very ill. I made numerous trips to the emergency room but no one knew what was wrong with my child. The doctors kept telling me I was not feeding her correctly...I guess I wasn't taken serious because I was a teenager.

Experiences With Racism: Explicit and Implicit

African American graduate students

The graduate students tended to share overt experiences. Kate, who self identified when she talked about her brother as an African American male, earlier recalled,

...my grandfather would have to leave Mississippi because he had been so successful in managing the land that it became extremely profitable. The Whites in the city could not fathom the idea that a Negro was making more money than they...he became a target of the Klu Klux Klan...

Later she recalled going to a private school where there were only two other African American students. She said, “It was here...that I experienced racism directed at me. It was the first time that I had been called a “nigger” and it was not something that I had been prepared for.” Triana, in relating experiences as a high school student, said,

I can remember sitting in my high school history class listening to my history teacher narrate what he considered were the important facts about U.S. History. Based upon his personal agenda...he decided what would be useful for me to know. African Americans were secondary and on the margins of U.S. history...I learned very little about African American contributions to history, science, arts and literature...

Growing Up and the Value of Learning and Higher Education

African American undergraduate students born prior to 1960

There were numerous and substantive references to the value of learning and education from both age groups of students. In a particularly poignant reference, Denise said,

When I was four, I remember my mother coming home from working two jobs with a very large purse, really a semi-suitcase, from which she would pull out two things for me and my sister. Something to eat and something to read.

Similarly, Lydia, in referring to early childhood experiences, said, “My mom taught me to read when I was three and I’ve been an avid reader ever since.” She went on to explain, “Reading is the way I live, the way I learn. It’s as important to me as love, clean air, food and water. Everything I ever learned...I learned from reading.” Also, very early in his autobiography, William said, “My family believed in a college and in-home education. I was reading before entering Kindergarten.” Carol, whose mother raised both her and her sister alone for many years until she remarried, said, “After graduation my parents insisted I go to college.”

African American undergraduate students born after 1960

Albert began his learning autobiography by recalling, “It was an August day when I first learned to read. I was somewhere around four years of age.” In referring to her life after high school graduation, Merle recounted,

“...I was independently working and carrying my own weight after separating from my children’s father...I knew that it was very important for me to get my diploma in order for me to move ahead in the workforce. I also knew that I wanted my children to finish high school.”

Also referring to her need to move ahead, Cherise said,

...I have advanced in my understanding of underwriting and although no promotions, I will not give up...This is part of the reason I have decided to pursue a college degree. ...the major reason I made this decision is for the self-fulfillment. I have a strong need for inner growth.

And Marion, in recounting her family's disappointment when she didn't graduate from high school, said,

...My family only understood one thing: That I did not graduate and was a disgrace to not only my family but my race. Understand something, for African Americans of the middle-class, education has been our only means of overcoming racist-obstacles. Education for the Black underclass has proven to be their only way out of both economical and social depressed conditions. Education for the Black race in America, has been the one variable that has helped to elevate individuals in the race, and subsequently the race as a whole.

African American graduate students

Gary, the masters level student, started right out saying, "My mother spent time reading and explaining the homework of my siblings to me when I was 4 years old." Much later he said, "...To the disappointment of my parents, I joined the military instead of going to college. ...An education is the key to almost every form of success in the United States....Malcolm X always said knowledge is power." Kate, the doctoral student, described herself in part by saying, "...I am the product of two parents who believe in the value of education and the concept of life long learning." And later she recalled,

Looking back at the history of my family, education has always played a vital role in the make-up of our family...Our family looked at education as a means to moving upward economically and giving us an avenue to understanding our history.

American Dream or Getting a Piece of the Pie

For the African American students, 'Getting a Piece of the Pie' was also about privilege, but more often than not, it was about the privilege from which they did not receive benefit. It was evident in the lost dreams of childhood. In particular, there were several references to childhood dreams of becoming a lawyer or doctor that just seemed to melt away. While many had aspirations of higher education when they were young, those who were able to begin higher education often focused their attention upon career schools or junior colleges. Other implicit themes which seemed 'telling' with respect to privilege were access to *quality* education and *quality* health care.

Similarly to what will be evident in the findings from the White students, the word 'privilege' was never mentioned and the concept was not addressed directly. Unlike what will be evident from the White students, the attitude of entitlement was not an evident thread throughout the narratives of the African American adults. One student, however, Celeste, did use the word 'entitled' in her work. The African American students never mentioned such experiences as buying a first car, buying a house, moving to a bigger house or moving to the suburbs. The references made to moving to a better place were only to avoid experiences with racism or so that the children could attend better schools.

There are no examples from the African American graduate students in this category as their comments did not seem to support this argument.

African American undergraduate students born prior to 1960

Denise recalled,

...due to financial reasons, I cannot afford to attend college, but I apply to several anyway. I had hopes of attending [a 4-year college] but was discouraged by the fact that I would not be accepted without attending a junior college first. ...I enroll in ...Institute for an Associates degree in Accounting.

Brianna referred to a childhood dream when she recalled,

One of my life long dreams as far as I can remember was to become a successful criminal lawyer...But alas, this was not to be, my parents could not afford to pay for these courses and I had to set aside my dreams and hope of becoming a lawyer, because my family needed me to help at home with the younger kids.

Very close to the end of her learning autobiography, Celeste said, "I have learned that it is better to continue fighting the good fight than giving up. I have learned that I am just as entitled as anyone."

African American undergraduate students born after 1960

After discussing her disappointing experience as a buyer, the profession she had thought about since high school, Dianna decided "...to choose a job in healthcare...(and) enrolled in a continuing education class at _____(Jr.) College of medical terminology."

Gayle talked about her "desire to go to Law School." She said, "I was astonished by how the law gave birth to slavery and then the law erased slavery." But when she spoke with a counselor, informing the counselor of her interest in law school, the counselor misadvised her. The counselor told her to major in Criminal Justice. Gayle recalled

that “Once I started researching law students’ undergraduate majors – I realized Criminal Justice students usually did not graduate and go to Law School.”

And Cherise, whose story about going to the emergency room with a sick infant was told earlier, told of another experience with another sick child. She said,

When my son was about five months old he became very ill. Again, the doctors were at a loss as to what was making him so ill. ...Finally we were sent home with instructions on how to care for him, although no one knew what was wrong. After being home for a brief moment, we felt we should go back to the emergency room. ...the doctors informed (us) our son would probably have not made it through the night. Thank god you brought him back.

White Students

While I separated the autobiographies into groups of students born before and after 1960, amongst the White undergraduate students, in the context of this study, the differences were insignificant and as a result, the results are presented without reference to age. There was, however, some noticeable difference between the White undergraduate students, graduate students and the doctoral level graduate students. Age seemed to be less of a factor than education level.

Racial Group Membership Self Identification

When White adult students described themselves or talked about their life experience, they rarely, if ever, mentioned race. And, if they also happened to be Christian, they

seemed even more unlikely to self-describe from any socio-cultural context at all. We were reminded of their Christian group membership when they talked about the schools they attended or holidays they celebrated. The only mention of race in the White undergraduate learning autobiographies, and even those were somewhat obscure, came from Maureen and Jennifer. Maureen talked about her early learning experiences at a university. She said, “While in college at Purdue my inquiries got a little more sophisticated. I then questioned the government, the educational system, the social infrastructure, immigration, religion, race relations in America, the economic system and most importantly myself and my beliefs.” Jennifer recalled an experience from her youth when she traveled to South Dakota on a mission trip. She said,

I remember first pulling up to the pristine little church on a hill, the house of worship for the people of the Sioux Indian Reservation. ... As I sat there trying to imagine how I could get to a phone to call my parents to pick me up, I noticed a little dark face peaking out around the pews looking at us. We made eye contact and both of us smiled.

It is interesting to note that only the White doctoral students did refer to race in their life histories and two of the three did so to self-describe. They mentioned race or socio-cultural context early in their work as a means to more fully describe who they were.

Stacey said,

I grew up in a Jewish family, in a non-Jewish community, in a liberal Midwestern city...As a White person from an upper middle class family I was in the dominant social group in our neighborhood and in my schools, although I experienced anti-Semitism early on.

And Wendy introduced herself as “...a married, Jewish, middle-aged mother of young children who grew up with middle class values in an often poor, working class household.” Whether Jewish is classified as a race is not the point here, nor is it an

argument in which I plan to engage. The point is that both of these White adults, as opposed to all the other White adults, described themselves from a socio-cultural perspective. And, Stacey articulated her dominant social group membership. None of the undergraduate or masters level graduate students mentioned anything of the sort.

Pride in Heritage

The White undergraduate students made no mention of heritage such as racial group membership or ethnic identification. The two White doctoral students both mentioned their ethnic heritage when discussing growing up as Jews. Stacey suggested the centrality of her heritage to her life when, early on, she said, “As with most people, my family has been a primary site for learning and formation. I grew up in a Jewish family, in a non-Jewish community, in a liberal Midwestern city...” Wendy was more explicit and discussed, at more length, the centrality of her Jewish identity to her life. She related an experience from her childhood about singing Christmas songs in school.

There was this time, for example, when I was in primary school, maybe kindergarten or first or second grade, when we were preparing for what was still called, the Christmas Assembly. I came home singing the song my class was preparing to sing at the assembly. I don’t remember the title, but the words included something like, ‘Jesus loves me...’ After my mother visited the school, and I was no longer involved in signing that song, I remember realizing that ‘this is who we are, we are different.’

Racism: Explicit or Implicit

None of the White undergraduate students mentioned experiences with racism whatsoever, whether victim or perpetrator. None of them mentioned civil rights or

recalling life-changing experiences as a result of the Civil Rights Movement. Even those born before 1960, who would have grown up during the battle for civil rights, made no mention.

All three of the White doctoral students addressed racism in some way within their work. Sandy, as quoted earlier, said, "...I...think about and evaluate the culture I was born into, the bigotry, bias and prejudice I carry from that upbringing." Also mentioned earlier, Stacey, while traveling in Africa, recalls an experience where she was the only White person and "...was startled by the fact that I still held privilege. I found myself thinking a lot about how much residue of colonialism was really left." And she talked about experiencing "...anti-Semitism early on." Wendy, in recalling the centrality of the Holocaust of World War II to her life, said, "As I look at the world today, I am always mindful of the Holocaust and my concerns...for many ethnic groups throughout the world grow daily."

Privilege

The White undergraduate students did not appear to consider racial group membership when they described themselves or their experiences. They made no explicit or implicit reference to being White. One could surmise their group membership, however, in the details of their experiences and the ways in which privilege, often unrecognized, structured their narratives. Again, for the undergraduate group, there seemed to be little, if no, difference between those born prior to 1960 and those born later.

Kelly, Richard and Charlotte, for example, each made reference to a life of privilege.

While they appeared to be aware of their privilege in that they acknowledged some characteristics of privilege, it is not clear whether they recognized their life experience as anything other than “normal.” Kelly said, “My mother was the ‘stay at home and raise the five children’ type of mom.” Richard reported, “I was born...the sixth child in a family of nine children, two parents and one grandmother.” And Charlotte said,

I had a wonderful childhood growing up in the northern suburbs of Chicago, I had a ‘stay at home’ mother, father who worked downtown, and three siblings. My childhood memories are of playing with the neighborhood children; having our own parade down the block, or a game of kickball...after dinner. ...I took piano and ballet lessons and life was great.

Still others, clearly recognizing that they were privileged, reported on that privilege as though privilege itself was relatively normal. Delores said,

Growing up in the northern suburbs of Illinois, in a middle class family, there were not many things I longed for or needed that I did not already have. My life as a child was filled with memories of hot summer days, bare feet, swimming and climbing trees.

Bob said, “...I began school; I do not recall enjoying it. ...However, before going into first grade we moved out to the suburbs and I actually liked where I went to school.”

Similarly, graduate student Sophie reported, “I was born in 1960 in Indianapolis, Indiana. My Dad was a General Foreman in a steel foundry...My mother was a stay at home Mom, as were many women in the early ‘60s’.”

The White doctoral students seemed more aware of their privilege. In reflecting upon a trip to Africa when she was 22, Stacey said,

This trip was the first time I was presented with something radically different to compare my life. ...As well, I found myself for the first time in a racial minority, although as a Jew I had been an ethnic minority all my life. In many places I was the only White person and was startled by the fact that I still held privilege.

Sandy also recognized privilege when she said, "...To reflect on how I came to be what I am, to think about and evaluate the culture I was born into, the bigotry, bias and prejudice I carry from that upbringing."

Growing Up and the Value of Learning and Higher Education

Given that the assignment the undergraduate students were given was to write their "learning" autobiography, it is interesting how little emphasis was placed on a discussion of the value of learning and education in their work. Many of these adults had begun college earlier in their lives but for different reasons found it necessary to drop out.

Several students made reference only to the type of high school they attended, i.e. mention was made when they attended private or parochial schools. Kelly explained, "My grade school and high school learning years encompassed the Catholic school experience and the 'all girls' high school experience." Later on, she said, "A divorce, now I was a single Mom trying to hold it all together! I did just that for a good many years, had a great income, nice home, girls were in private schools." Debbie said, "...I grew up in a middle-class neighborhood and went to Catholic School through high school." Devin, in reflecting upon his eighth-grade graduation, said, "...I have narrowed my choice of high schools down to two. Lane Tech was one of them and Holy Cross was the other. I ended up at Holy Cross...not too far from where I lived." And Bobby said,

“When I was 13, I started to attend...a college preparatory school...I attended...because the swim team was a better caliber than the local high school.” Although he didn’t appear to agree, Dale’s parents acknowledged a value for higher education. In referring to that, Dale said, “After Junior High, my parents realized that the large public school environment was not doing much for me, and enrolled me in a private Jesuit high school.”

In addition to a lack of substantive comments regarding the value of education and learning, several of the students mentioned rather non-educational reasons for having begun college in the first place. Delores, for example, said,

...In 1986, fresh out of high school I move to Normal, Illinois to attend Illinois State University. The only two reasons I choose to attend Illinois State, were one of my best friends would also be attending and the school accepted me.

Similarly, Jennifer said, “...I went off to Illinois State University right after high school because that was what everyone else did.” And Bobby, who had hoped to be admitted to an Ivy League School, said, “I did not gain admittance to an Ivy League school, but (three schools) offered me admission and a scholarship. However, I wanted a better swimming program than these schools offered...”

Only one of the undergraduate White students, Dale, made mention of learning or higher education as a primary value in their childhood homes. And a few even mentioned their parents’ lack of respect for higher education. Kelsey said, “When I graduated from High School, I didn’t think about going to college. Years ago, college was not expected after high school like it is today.” Corinne said, “I grew up in a middle class home in Chicago

where there weren't high expectations for education especially for the girls." And Kathleen began the first sentence of her learning autobiography with, "Finish high school, get a job, get married, and have babies-that's what I thought life was about." And later she reported, "I went to a Catholic grade school and an all Girls high school where they encouraged traditional values. I considered going to a community college, but a job seemed to be the right path to follow." The most direct comments came from Joanna, who said,

I was on the honor roll in elementary school as well as in high school. It was unfortunate however, that I did not have the parental support or guidance to fully embrace college in either preparation or attendance. ...my parents didn't believe in college. It was their belief that in college a person traded in their common sense for book sense.

Only Dale reported, "I come from a family where intelligence and technical skill are highly valued. My father is an engineer....his father was a technical salesman...My mother's father is an electrical engineer..."

Again, the responses from the White doctoral students differed. Stacey reported on the importance of education as a primary value when she recalled,

Learning was highly valued in my family, and my grandparents and parents actively encouraged both school and learning. ...As a child I used to hear the story of how my paternal grandfather came over on the boat from Ukraine when he was sixteen years old and started kindergarten as a sixteen year old. This story was told to demonstrate the pride that should be associated with learning, regardless of context."

Recalling how her mother and aunt decided that her aunt and uncle should become her legal guardians so that Wendy could attend a better high school in their neighborhood, Wendy said, "In Jewish families, education is paramount." She went on,

...in our house, where there was no money to support education beyond the public schools, (college) was also a foregone conclusion. ... In addition...my sisters and I went to Hebrew School, took piano lessons and...my mother took me downtown to the Art Institute and signed me up for Saturday classes... My expressed interest in art was important enough that somewhere money was found to pay the first semester's tuition. ...I looked into financial aid...

American Dream or Getting a Piece of the Pie

Privilege in the form of attending quality schools, access to quality medical care, living in the suburbs, buying houses, buying bigger houses and/or buying cars is a common thread throughout most of the White adults' learning autobiographies. And while never mentioned explicitly, or perhaps even recognized, there is an attitude of entitlement that comes through in discussions.

Richard, for example, seemed to have come from a family with limited discretionary spending money. As mentioned earlier, he was the sixth child in a family of nine children. He attended parochial schools and he talked about getting a job at 13 as a "helper on a milk truck ...If I could make a little extra money, it would help my mother buy more things for the family and I'd have a little spending money of my own." A little later, Richard talked about how he got his drivers license at 16 and, "...with the permission of my parents, I bought my first car..."

Later, discussing his wife's third pregnancy, Richard described a medical emergency.

"...a complication caused her to hemorrhage severely. After paramedics arrived and

stabilized (her), they rushed her to _____ Hospital. Near death, the doctors medi-vaced my expectant wife by helicopter to _____ University Medical Center.....”

In relating a very difficult time in her life, having been diagnosed with a deadly disease, Kelly related,

...my doctor told me with radical surgery, I might have six months to live...and that was if I beat all the odds, which were 96% against me! ...My decision led me to Mayo clinic where my team of doctors helped save my life.

Sylvia, who graduated from high school and got a job because that's what women did if they didn't get married, talked about her love of travel and how she wanted to buy a car. She said, “My goal to purchase my first car was accomplished through hard work and overtime and the just reward was a 1968 Camaro.” After getting married, Sylvia reported,

We endured the sacrifice of travel during the first two years of marriage as we set the goal to purchase our first home. ...Within six years, our family had outgrown our modest home... We sold our house...and moved to another suburb.

In addition to privilege as access, there is also a thread about privilege as the ability to get a job and even build a career without a college education. Again, Kelly related, “...I was a single Mom trying to hold it all together! I did just that for a good many years, had a great income...” Gerald said, “...I have been fortunate to succeed without an undergraduate degree because of my specific skill set. But the future holds many opportunities that I want to capitalize upon with a degree.” And Corrinne reported,

“...My career continued progressing and increasing in responsibility.” Later she said, “...I was approached by (another) Insurance to join their company in an area where I had little knowledge. It was very flattering for someone like me who didn’t have a degree.”

Part Two: Stories and Counter-Stories

Following are stories and counter-stories that I created from the student narratives which were the data for my study. Some are a compilation of a few narratives and others follow one student’s narrative more directly. Each pair of stories/counter-stories is followed by a short discussion indicating the themes most evident within the pair.

Following the last two stories are some general observations that reflect both sets. The first is the story of a White woman named Sylvia born in 1957. The second, a counter-story, is about an African American woman named Kathy who was born in 1954. The third story is Bobby’s, a White man born in 1964. And the final is a counter-story of an African American man, Darion, born in 1963.

Sylvia

I was born in 1957. Getting my drivers license at 16, I felt the dream of freedom. Having been educated in a girls parochial school, both at home and at school, I had been raised to understand trust and responsibility. I was ready for life.

Growing up, my mom was home raising us kids. In our house, dinner time discussions turned into debates and during those, my mother would run to the bookshelves to look something up in order to prove her point. I grew up in a household that looked for answers to questions.

While my friends were planning for high school graduation in June of 1975, and to begin college the following fall, I decided to drop out of high school and plan my wedding. I wouldn't need to finish school because I was going to be married. While the era when women automatically stayed home with their children while the men provided for their family was pretty much over, I was not terribly interested in education and no one was really encouraging me to get a college degree.

Three years later, having worked as an accounts payable clerk since we got married, I was pregnant and my husband and I were looking for a home in the suburbs. Life was fun and moving pretty quickly. I realized that I wanted to do more than just be at home with the kids, so I decided to start a business from my home. Other than my accounts payable job, I had no real business experience to do this, but going back to my experience growing up, I did my research and looked for answers to questions. I worked very hard and my business took off.

Over the next few years, we had two more children, my business continued to grow, we sold our first house and moved to a larger house in the same suburb and then we filed for divorce. I knew that I had to hold it all together and I did just that. I sold my business

and took on a full-time corporate job. There was more security than in running my own business and I still made a good salary, but now I had insurance and benefits as well. My kids and I were able to stay in the house and we even took a couple of nice vacations over the next few years. While I was alone, I was taking care of my family and giving them the good life they deserved.

Then one day I received the most terrifying news ever. I had cancer and was told that I really had only a very short time to live, possibly only months. After the shock of how this could have happened, I began to do research on the disease, treatments and cure rates. My research led me to Mayo Clinic where my team of doctors helped to save my life. Miraculously it has been seven years and I'm still celebrating and still counting.

My life radically changed from that experience. I had some time to consider the decisions I had made along the way, what I had completed and what I had not completed. My children were now well on their way to completing their educations and I would no longer need to be the primary financial support for them. I decided to enroll in the local community college and began pursuing the education I had walked away from so many years ago.

I started by taking introductory business courses because, well, that's what I had been doing for many years and I knew that I could be successful in those courses. But as I experienced education I realized that I was really no longer interested in business and that even if I was, I already knew enough to be successful. I wanted to learn something

completely new. I began to consider my experiences over the past 20 years and realized that what I could be passionate about was issues relating to women. Having been out there on my own, taking care of my kids and working and getting sick and getting better, I wanted to find something to study that would allow me to work with women in need. After taking some courses in family dynamics and crises intervention, I have decided that I want to complete my bachelor's degree and go on to a graduate program in social work. I've done my research and I think that with a solid foundation in liberal arts, I'll have what I need to be admitted into a social work program and the opportunity to begin another chapter in my life.

Kathy

I was born in 1954 in Chicago. Both my parents were born and raised in Indiana and both came from families with eight children. They met, fell in love and had eight children of their own. Their coming together was the start of a strong, proud and loving African American family. My father worked at least two jobs to support all of us and still we had very little money. I remember always wishing for more space and privacy and for some of my own toys.

Working hard and getting a good education were two of my parents' most important lessons. I remember learning to read before entering kindergarten and how my older sisters and brothers would read to me every day when I was little. I'm still a very avid reader. I'll read everything and anything, that's just how I learn. Coming from a strong

African American family, I was taught never to give up. As far back as I can remember, I dreamed of one day becoming a criminal lawyer.

We moved into a neighborhood on Chicago's south side that was mixed. There were Polish and Italian and Hispanics. We were the only Negroes (that's what we were called back then), but the schools were better and that was all that was important to my parents. I can still remember the names the White kids called us when we first got there. For the first year they would fight with my brothers every day and call my sisters and me names. Then, after about a year or so, that all stopped and we started to get along.

Then bussing began. Black children were being bussed to neighborhoods like ours and the Whites who lived here were not accepting them graciously. I was confused; after all we were Black children attending the mostly White school. Later I learned that while we had been accepted, they didn't want any more Blacks to attend their school. I guess accepting us allowed them to feel as though they weren't really racist, but then when other Blacks wanted to send their children to our school, it was too much for them. Those were difficult years for my brothers and sisters and me. We had become friends with the White kids in the neighborhood and as a result were not really accepted by the Black kids being bussed in.

I graduated from high school in 1972. I was the first in my family to graduate from high school. It was a proud moment for us all, especially my parents. I would be the first to go to college. I was accepted into the university and was getting ready to move away

from home when I found out that I was expecting my first child. My parents were very disappointed, but I was determined to raise this child well.

When my beautiful child was born, I was ready to go back to school. It would not be the university, however, because I needed to make a living. I went to secretarial school instead. When my daughter was about two months old, she became very ill. I made many trips to the emergency room, but no one knew what was wrong with her. The doctors kept telling me that I was not feeding her correctly. They insisted that I take her home and try different remedies. I think, because I was a teenager that I wasn't taken seriously. After a long and exhausting weekend, I took her back to the clinic on Monday morning. The nurse took a look at my daughter and immediately took her from me and rushed her upstairs to the pediatrics ward of the hospital. There was a lot of rushing around and doctors worked on her for at least an hour before telling me what was going on. Finally, they came out and said that she was severely dehydrated and would need to stay in the hospital. They told me that had I waited another 24 hours, my daughter would have died. My daughter endured surgery and a stay in the hospital, but she survived and became a healthy baby from that point on.

I began to work at an optical shop not far from my apartment. My focus became raising my child and seeing that she received the education she would need to build a decent life. When my daughter went to pre-school, I began to volunteer whenever it was possible. And the more I volunteered, the more I realized that I wanted to work with young children.

One day a teacher in the toddler room asked me if I would be interested in working in her room for a couple of hours a day. That day changed my life. The following spring I worked full time and attended school part time. I was determined to move forward and achieve my AAS Degree in Education. And when my daughter graduated from kindergarten, I received my degree. I became a head teacher with my own pre-school classroom.

With the support of my family all along the way, I have continued to pursue my dream of an education. Now that my daughter is in elementary school and I have a good job, I plan to start again to achieve my goal of becoming a lawyer. And I want to purchase a home for my daughter. Having a child at a young age did not change my goals or aspirations to be any different than before. I will achieve them as I stay focused and know where I want to go in life.

Explicit or Implicit Reference to Race; Recognized or Unrecognized References to Privilege

Although similar in many ways, the story and counter-story of Sylvia and Kathy have some notable differences that can be attributed to race. Kathy experienced racism during her school years and as a result of her parents' wish for her to be well educated, experienced being an outsider in both groups. Accepting Kathy's family into the White neighborhood allowed the Whites neighbors to feel as though they weren't racist. When

bussing began they felt comfortable protesting since they had already allowed a Black family to move in and became friendly with it.

Sylvia made no reference to privilege, racial group membership, experiences with racism or the value of education. She suggested that learning was important in her home but made no mention of the importance of formal education. Sylvia focused upon issues related to the American Dream. In referring to dropping out of high school to plan her wedding, she seemed to have taken her education, including the option to attend college, for granted. Her focus was on buying a home in the suburbs and building an at-home business because she "...wanted to do more than just be at home with the kids..." When Sylvia became gravely ill, she looked for medical care at what is sometimes considered the hospital of last resort and was helped so that she could plan for a future. Her tone suggested the general availability of that level of medical care to those willing to do the necessary research. When Kathy's infant, on the other hand, became ill, the child was near death before Kathy was able to obtain proper care for her.

Although both women were focused upon taking care of their children, their expectations for what privileges their children could and should receive were very different. Sylvia believed her children should be able to live in a house and take good vacations – to have the "...good life they deserve." Her expectations did not seem to be recognition of privilege although her attitude did reflect a sense of entitlement. Upon regaining her health, Sylvia's long-term goal shifted to one of self-fulfillment, to study social work. Kathy was focused on raising her child and "...seeing that she received the education she

would need to build a decent life.” Kathy’s long-term goal remained to become an attorney and purchase a home for her daughter.

Bobby

My life has been short, but filled with many blessings and challenges. I was born in 1964 in Colorado and I have two older siblings. Only a couple of months after I was born the doctors determined I had a double hernia and they would need to operate. I was taken to a hospital that specialized in the care of young children and babies, and the operation was successful. I recovered quickly.

During my young years, my parents moved around a lot. I attended four different schools leading up to the 5th grade and that had a profound affect on my life. Since I was frequently the new kid in class, I somehow felt special, not intimidated. My parents got me involved in competitive running when I was eight years old. I was a bit on the heavy side and my mother thought it would be a good way to help me loose weight and get and then stay fit. When I went to try out for the team, there were over 100 kids and they were only going to keep 25 due to the limited space in the program. During the tryouts I continually came in last, but the coaches noticed the extreme amount of effort I exerted. Although I was probably the slowest runner in the gym, the coaches decided to put me on the team. I was extremely uncoordinated, so the coaches really needed to teach me how to run properly. Eventually I learned to run quite well and quite fast. My grandfather

came to watch me when I was running in a state meet. I won the 50-meter race. I gave him my gold medal and he could not have been prouder.

When I was 11 we moved to Chicago. The move was difficult for all of us, as it was in the middle of the school year. The first week at my new school I was in three fights, and the next year my parents decided to have me attend a private parochial grade school instead of the public school. We picked a home in an area where I would be able to train with a good track team.

I attended a private college preparatory high school because it was an excellent education and the track program was much better than the local public school. And when I graduated, my parents and I decided that it would be best for me to attend one year of postgraduate school at another preparatory school on the East Coast. My hope was to improve my grades enough that I could be admitted to an Ivy League school and hopefully to run for that school. Well, I did not gain admittance to an Ivy League school, but I was accepted at several other top-notch schools, each of which had a decent track program. I chose one that offered me a full scholarship and a chance to train for the Olympic trials. I did participate in the trials and didn't do very well. But the experience will always be one that I cherish.

Over the next three years I went to school, but I was really paying more attention to running than to studying. I continued to gain experience and skill, but unfortunately I also gained a number of injuries, one of which was enough to end my career. In the

middle of my senior year, I decided to quit running. Shortly thereafter I also lost interest in school and decided it was time for me to take a break from all that and get a job. It was shortsighted, I know, but at the time, it was what I wanted and what I needed.

Well, that was 14 years ago and until very recently I never looked back. During those years I married, had two children, and grew a very successful business with the help of a start-up loan my father co-signed for me. My wife and I built our dream home and experienced incredible joys.

But I did begin to look back. I'm still a very young man and just as competitive as I was as a runner. I realize that there is more to life than my job and my company and I'm ready to begin to explore what there is. Because of the current markets, etc., I was able to sell my company and earn an excellent profit. I can now begin to think about the next phase in my life and how I would like to spend my time. First, I'm going to finish that degree started so long ago.

Darian

I was born at Cook County Hospital in Chicago in 1963. I am the youngest of eleven children. My birth was memorable because I was a breach baby and my mother almost died giving birth to me, her youngest child. At the age of five I lost my grandmother to cancer. She had lived with us all my life. Even then, at the age of five, suffering through

that tragic event, I exhibited the ability to quickly learn, by whatever means, the lesson life was trying to teach me.

With all those older sisters and brothers, there was always a game of ball taking place somewhere. I found basketball and quickly developed quite a skill. I attended the neighborhood elementary school and was offered a scholarship to a private parochial high school to play basketball. While I was there, I won numerous awards, including best new player and most valuable player. While growing up in the African American community I was fortunate to have gotten involved in sports and stayed away from drugs. My involvement in sports encouraged me to finish high school and keep focused.

When I graduated from high school I was offered college scholarships to play basketball, but I turned them all down. I needed to start working in order to support my son. I attended a local Jr. College instead. After a few starts and stops, I achieved my Associate of Arts Degree.

My girlfriend of four years and I got married in 1985, and over the years we had two more children. I have been fortunate to work for the government since graduating from high school. Over the last 20 years I have worked in several positions, each of which has given me much new experience. I have had many jobs and gained many new and very different skills.

I am very happy with the direction that I have chosen to go in over the years. The best move I ever made was to attend that private high school. My mother wouldn't let me leave when times were hard. She made me stay even when I faced racial problems with some of the students. I was one of only a few African Americans and I became friends with a lot of the students and convinced them to change their opinion of African Americans. After 20 years we still talk and hang out on occasion.

Going back to school at this stage in my life, I know I appreciate it more. And I have the patience required to succeed. I have a chance to show my sons and daughter how important it is to get an education. I also have a chance to enjoy studying with my children. None of this would have been possible without the incredible support of my wife. We've been married for 20 years.

I have positioned myself for an early retirement. I'm hoping to be able to start a business for my sons at that time. And I even think that maybe I would like to teach political science someday. After all, I have been involved in politics for more than 20 years.

*Explicit or Implicit Reference to Race; Recognized or Unrecognized References to
Privilege*

Like the woman's stories above, Bobby and Darian share some similar experiences, although there are also some significant differences which might be attributed to race. Reflecting the endemic nature of racism in this country, Darion reported that even though

he experienced racism in high school, “after 20 years (these old friends) still talk and hang out on occasion.” One might wonder about the friends from high school for whom, perhaps like the neighbors in Kathy’s story above, having an occasional Black friend might be advantageous.

Darion seemed to have had talent and, as a result, was recruited to play ball in high school and later, in college. Bobby, on the other hand, although a very hard worker, was not talented. Nonetheless, he too was offered opportunities of which he took advantage and from which he was able to benefit.

And while, similarly to Sylvia and Kathy above, both men focused on providing for their children. Because of Bobby’s financial success, he was able to shift his long-term goal to one that would be self-fulfilling, while Darion continued to focus on the care of his children. While he contemplated taking an early retirement, he said, “I’m hoping to be able to start a business for my sons at that time.”

Chapter Four Summary

Chapter Four: Research Findings were presented in two parts. The first part included representative samples from the undergraduate students’ learning autobiographies and the graduate and doctoral students’ life histories. The samples were organized according to the themes and sub-themes as identified in Chapter Three.

The second part of Chapter Four included two stories and two counter-stories. Each pair was written to apply a broader view of the findings as they were organized according to the themes and sub-themes. Each pair was also written with the explicit intent to compare and contrast, in the contexts of their references to either race or privilege, the ways in which race enters and structures experience and the narratives of the life experiences of the White and African American students.

CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Derrick Bell (1992) introduced us to the use of stories as, perhaps, a more compelling means to revisit racial themes many have explored before. Rather than reporting fact-reflecting life experience in an academic or legal fashion, Bell created stories, "...a product of experience and imagination..." that offered an "...allegorical perspective..." on current conditions (p. 12-13). Ladson-Billings (2006) suggested that chronicles are narratives constructed out of "historical, socio-cultural, and political realities of...people of color" (p. xi). The two chronicles I created to begin this chapter, one of an African American woman and the other a White woman, came from what I have learned from reading the learning autobiographies of adult students over many years. They represent, perhaps as Bell might have suggested, an allegorical representation of what I have learned.

Beginning with the two fictional chronicles I created following Bell's example, this chapter draws conclusions from a synthesis of the findings regarding the different ways in which race enters and structures the narratives of African American adult students and White adult students. Stepping beyond the themes and sub-themes identified in Chapters Three and Four, in Chapter Five I analyze the chronicles with a more specific and direct application of several of the tenets of Critical Race Theory.

The chapter and the study conclude with a discussion that begins with the implications of the findings for Adult Education, and ends with an examination of how adult educators can use this information as a tool to begin a sustainable discussion of race.

Chronicles

Evelyn's Story

I was born in the summer of 1952 in a small town in Indiana. My father was a Political Science professor at the Indiana University and my mother was a stay-at home mom like most everyone's mother at that time. Along with my younger brother, Robert, we lived in a cute little Victorian fixer-upper right in the middle of town. As a university intellectual, my father was completely uninterested in anything having to do with home repair, so we got used to living with plastic on the windows, an occasional bucket in the living room when it rained and many interesting intellectuals who would come for dinner and spend the evening in heated discussion about public policy, the Civil Rights Movement and later, the war in Viet Nam. And the kids were never sent away from the table; we were invited to participate in the discussions and offer our opinions about how the world could be saved. Our parents were intellectual liberals who believed that children should be treated like adults and, if they were treated as such, they would behave like adults. By 1960, I was dreaming about becoming a civil rights attorney and moving to Chicago or New York.

My mother, although a stay-at-home mom, was quite the intellectual herself. She had a college education, and like me, she had dreamed of becoming an attorney. She and my father met during the first semester of graduate school, and once they decided to get

married, my mother quit work to plan her wedding and later to manage our home and our lives.

Although we lived in a small town, because it was a university town, there was quite a bit of diversity. That said, our schools were segregated with White children attending Wallace Elementary and everyone else, Blacks and other ethnics, attending Murphy Grade School. There was only one high school and it was 1966 so we all went to school together. Coming from such a liberal, educated household, of course I became friends with all the Black and ethnic students. My parents welcomed my new friends into our home.

High school, given the time in history, was quite an adventure. We protested everything from the civil rights and the war in Viet Nam to women's rights and the right to smoke marijuana. It was a wonderful time to learn about democracy and to challenge it. It was a time that saw the easing of sexual mores, interracial friendships and the music was fabulous. When I graduated from high school in 1970 my parents assumed that I would walk right into Indiana University. I had other plans. I was heading off to Europe with my boyfriend, a backpack and the \$500 my parents had given me for high school graduation. That money, which was supposed to be used to get me a car to drive to the university, would support me for the next six months. Dale, my boyfriend, and I were going to travel for three months ,and then get jobs in restaurants in Paris to experience the life of art and music and culture in a uniquely integrated urban city.

When Dale and I returned to Indiana we decided to get jobs, get an apartment to share and go back to college when we felt that the curriculum was relevant to the needs of the world in which we were living. We were busy protesting everything and anything and partying. To support us, Dale took a job in construction and I became an assistant teacher in a newly opened Head Start preschool program down the block from our apartment. Although I didn't have the credentials, the director of the school felt that I could do a good job and suggested that I take some courses in early childhood at the local junior college. I did just that and before I knew it, I had my own class and was building a career in early childhood education. Our center was becoming a model of an integrated early-childhood learning environment.

Dale and I got married and had three children over the next several years. Because Dale was still in construction, we never had that much money, so I continued to work at the pre-school. To be honest, I loved working and felt that my career was an extension of me and what was important to me. After working there for six years, I became the assistant director of the center. I would need much more education to become the director.

The start of 1987 saw our marriage begin to fall apart. Dale and I had been together for more than 17 years. We both realized that what interested us in our teens and early adult years was no longer of interest. Dale still liked to party and I was tired of living in an apartment with three teenage kids. We divorced and I needed a better job.

I left the Head Start program which had been the only job I'd had as an adult. The kids and I moved to Chicago so that I could find a better job. I ended up working for an accounting firm as the office manager. While I had no experience in accounting, because I had been in administration at the center, the accountants felt that I could oversee their office, the work flow, supplies and whatnot. They were also impressed at my having come from a profession known for its hard work and low pay. They were right; the new job was perfect for me. I was tired of fighting for more money for teachers and more services for the poor mothers in our center. I still believed in those things very strongly, but I was worn out after the divorce and needed to focus on my kids and myself.

After two years at the agency I started to get bored. Well, the firm said they would support my continuing education with a solid tuition reimbursement policy, and I began to reconsider my dream of becoming a civil rights lawyer in a big city. While I am a little worried about whether I'll be accepted into law school, one of the attorneys at the accounting firm said that there's a good chance that I will be accepted, given current affirmative action policies. I feel really proud to have been one of the folks out there, years ago, demonstrating and protesting equal rights for all!

Connie's Story

I was born in 1954 in a Black, working class neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. We called it, "Chocolate City." My father was a minister at the neighborhood Baptist Church

and my mother, who wanted to stay at home and take care of me and my three younger brothers, worked nights as a maid in a large hotel chain because we needed the money. It was a really exciting time to grow up. Civil rights was the discussion at everyone's dining table and the Church became the center of the community where teaching and learning about everything having to do with civil rights was taking place. As the minister, my father was in a position to encourage people to get involved in the cause and to stand up and be counted with respect to inequality and all the other problems we faced. My parents were particularly upset about the quality of education my brothers and I were receiving at our neighborhood school. Many times, on a Saturday night, we would have ten or fifteen people at our house, organizing a march or discussing issues like school desegregation, affirmative action and so on. My brothers and I participated as well. While we were too young to really understand what they were talking about, because we watched TV, we knew that White kids lived differently than we did. By the time I was 8 or 9, I decided that I was going to be a lawyer when I grew up.

When I started school, an option called bussing had become available in Chicago. Bussing offered an opportunity to kids from the Black South Side to attend schools on the White North Side. Civil rights and desegregation laws made that possible. Of course we had to take city busses for more than an hour each way to get to school every morning. My parents had heard about the difficult experiences some children were having at the integrated schools, and since they really didn't want their daughter on a bus all alone anyway, they decided that I should stay in the neighborhood and attend the local Catholic School. Since my father was a religious leader we were able to receive the necessary

tuition assistance. Having seen on TV what white kids' lives were like, I have to admit that I was a little disappointed.

I attended Catholic elementary and high schools. Beginning in the fifth grade my dad hired me to be a teacher's assistant in the Sunday School in our Church. By the time I was in high school, I had my own Sunday School class of five year olds. I taught there all through high school and for several years after I graduated. I've always loved working with children.

Having grown up in the 1960s, I became more and more interested in politics, etc. The War in Vietnam was in full force and I joined high school friends in a march against the war, in downtown Chicago. In fact, I began to protest many things, women's rights, the war and racism. It was such an exciting time because while we could see that the world, especially the United States, was in trouble, there was the sense that "we" young people could make some changes. We could lead the world and our country in a new direction. Soon I started college at the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle Campus. There I became involved with the group, Students Against the War, and began to explore myself as a woman, a Black, a Catholic, in the world at that time. Fairly early on I realized that while life was difficult for any Black, for a Black woman, it was particularly challenging. We not only had to deal with racism, but we were also women and fell victim to sexism both inside our cultural group and outside.

In my second year at the Circle, I met a young man named David. David was Black and had grown up in the south suburbs. His parents were professionals and they had wanted him to go away to college, but he decided that it was more exciting to be in Chicago and involved with all the political changes taking place. We fell madly in love and decided to move in together. Both of our parents were horrified. But at that time, it was something “everyone” was doing and we wanted to be part of the group.

We found a small apartment on the North Side, which was considered “cool” at the time, especially for Black kids who grew up on the South Side. We both continued at the Circle until we realized that I was pregnant. Well, the first thing we did was to get married. It was really wonderful and our parents were very happy.

Once the baby came I really felt like I wanted to give it the kind of life my mother had wanted for me. So, much to the disappointment of my parents, I quit school and planned to stay home and care for my beautiful new baby. David completely agreed. He continued in school and worked full time. We didn’t have much but it seemed to be enough.

When the baby turned two, I found that I didn’t really care for being home all the time and we simply needed more money. By now David was in law school and still working, but there just wasn’t enough money. Since I had spent years working for my father as a Sunday School teacher, I decided to explore opportunities at local daycare centers. In our neighborhood was a new day care that was started inside a hospital. It was brand new

and looking for teachers, teacher's aides, etc. I applied for work and was immediately hired as a teacher's aide. I just loved working there. It was a great schedule and I was able to take our baby to work with me. I stayed there for six years, working in every age group from newborn through four year olds, and I brought our second child there as well.

When our second child was only two, we suffered the most devastating blow. Although we didn't know it, David had a rare congenital heart ailment and died, suddenly, when he was only 28 years old. I didn't know how I could go on. My children and I moved back home with my parents, and I spent the next couple of years just trying to get up and go each day.

When I finally began to feel better I started looking for work. My plan was to find a place of my own and start over again. I would need to make more money this time since I had three mouths to feed. I also wanted a fresh start. I decided to move out to the suburbs and to look for work as a teacher in a daycare center. In addition to a new start, I wanted my children to experience diversity and to understand that the world expanded beyond our south side neighborhood. I quickly found a job as an aide at a mostly White but integrated Daycare and Preschool. I immediately enrolled in a junior college and began taking early childhood courses. As soon as I had enough credits to be certified in an early childhood school as a lead teacher, I began looking for a new job. While I had lots of offers to be an aide, all the directors told me that for a lead teacher position they really preferred people with undergraduate degrees. Feeling like I had no other choice, I left early childhood and looked for other work. Since working with children and teaching

was my only experience, I wasn't really offered much. I finally found an entry level position at a bank and began a nine-to-five job. It was a bit grueling with small children and certainly not my passion, but I knew this was what I needed to do.

I've worked for five years and have had a couple of promotions. I don't make nearly enough money but I feel good being out on my own. Also, the bank has a limited tuition reimbursement policy. It won't be enough to get me through the degree, but it will get me started. I am also applying for student loans so that I can be sure to finish my degree. I'm ready to get back to school and pursue my dream of being a classroom teacher. This time I think I'll make it.

Discussion: A CRT Analysis

Introduction

The stories of Evelyn and Connie represent what I have learned about the ways in which race enters and structures the narratives of our lives and our subsequent experiences. And they reflect my own vision of life in this country at a specific point in time for women like Evelyn and Connie, and for many others like them. I like these women; each could be my friend.

Connie and Evelyn were intelligent, independent and self-directed women. Both came from stable, two-parent families and, although their marriages ended very differently, both entered into loving, long-term relationships. And like many of the adults in my study, these women came to a point in their lives when they, alone, became responsible for the welfare of their children. It was really at the point of creating that safe, loving and life full of opportunity that we began to see the long-term impact of race on their lives, as we view the divergent paths their lives took. And it is also at that point in their narratives where the ways in which race enters and structures our narratives becomes most evident.

Race is Important; Racism is Endemic

Growing up, both Connie and Evelyn lived in segregated neighborhoods and went to segregated elementary schools. While desegregation was the word of the day, the neighborhoods were not desegregated. So if African American parents wanted their children to go to better equipped, more affluent schools, they would have to send their children on busses across town to predominantly White neighborhoods. While certainly supporters of desegregated schools, liberal, educated White parents, like Connie's, probably did not consider sending their children to school in African American neighborhoods. Nor did they consider moving to predominantly African American neighborhoods. The idea was to be able to send African American children to schools in the more affluent White neighborhoods.

Even Connie and David subscribed to the idea that the White neighborhood was the place to be. After all, when they got their first apartment, it was on the north side, which was thought to be “cool.” At that time, in addition to being the “cool” side of the city, it was also predominantly White.

When the young women needed jobs, both looked in the early childhood industry.

Connie had many years of experience as a classroom teacher. Evelyn, on the other hand, had no experience and no college. When we first read Evelyn’s story of how she was hired as an assistant teacher and after taking several courses at a local junior college was promoted to a lead teacher, we quietly applaud her fortitude as well as the foresight of the director in hiring someone who is willing to work hard and learn. Working hard and getting ahead is, after all, the “American Way.” And work hard she did, for six years, after which time she became the assistant director of the center. Evelyn recognized that she would “...need much more education to become the director.”

When Connie applied to be a teacher’s aide at the newly opened daycare in her neighborhood, she was “...immediately hired...and...just loved working there.” Like Evelyn, Connie worked hard for six years, “...in every age group from newborn through four year olds...” all as a teacher’s aide.

Without having read Evelyn’s story first we might not even have thought about the unfairness of keeping an experienced, somewhat college-educated person as a teacher’s aide for six years. After all, Connie was happy and felt like it was a good place for her

and her children. It isn't until after David's death that we saw, explicitly, the long term implications of her never having been promoted beyond that entry-level position. And when Connie moved to Chicago, we also saw the long-term implications of her having been promoted to the role of assistant director. We also saw her being credited with having worked in a field many, at the time, felt served primarily poor and minority children.

Interest Convergence, White Privilege, Critique of Liberalism & Color-blindness

After David's death and Connie's recovery such that she could again begin to care for her children on her own, she moved to an integrated suburban neighborhood and once again looked for work as a teacher in a daycare center. She knew that it would most likely not be too difficult. She was educated and experienced and African American. She thought there might be a need for someone like her in a recently integrated daycare. Almost immediately, Connie "...found a job as an aide..." at a mostly White but integrated center and preschool. Needing to make more money, she enrolled in a local junior college to get the certification courses needed to be a lead teacher. But she was never hired as a lead teacher. Connie had lots of opportunities in her slightly integrated suburban neighborhood to work as an aide, but was told that to be a lead teacher she'd need an undergraduate degree. Having almost three years of college by now and no professional position, Connie was forced to leave the field she knew and loved and look for other work.

Both women left the childcare industry and headed off to earn more money to better care for their children. Evelyn was tired of fighting the system and just wanted to take care of herself and her children for a while. While she had certainly enjoyed her years in the center, working in a Head Start Program was not her dream and there were other opportunities available to her. The real beauty of privilege is to be able to benefit from participating in socially appropriate work, but then be able to move on when that work no longer serves your need. And to be able to take advantage of this privilege without recognition is irreproachable.

Because of her experience as an administrator Evelyn was hired as an office manager. With the availability of a solid tuition assistance program, she was encouraged to complete her undergraduate education. And Evelyn would come to understand that as a result of affirmative action, she would likely be accepted into a law school program.

Connie, having no other experience beyond being an assistant teacher in a preschool, managed to find an entry-level position at a bank. After five years and a couple of promotions, she planned to use the limited tuition reimbursement policy, along with student loans, to go back to school to complete her degree. Although she once dreamed of becoming an attorney, Connie now focused on her dream of becoming a lead teacher in a classroom.

Both women continue to move ahead, positively and productively, perhaps even happily and with feelings of accomplishment. But Evelyn will move ahead more quickly and

will, ultimately, achieve more and get farther. Even if from here on in, both women are treated exactly the same, because their historical experience was different and was racialized, equal treatment will never have an equal effect.

Critique of White Experience as Normal

What Evelyn accomplished represented what was possible – normal. There’s nothing about her story that explicitly suggested a racialized experience. The only mention of race in her story was quite abstract. Evelyn was a principal at what became “...a model of an integrated early childhood learning environment.” She didn’t knowingly take advantage of White privilege although when her experience is juxtaposed with Connie’s it is clear that Evelyn benefited from that privilege.

Connie’s experience represented a challenge to the notion of white experience as normal. Connie self-identifies as “Black” within the first half-dozen words of her autobiography. She never mentioned experiences with racism because outside of her childhood, and after civil rights, most of her experiences with racism were more likely to be implicit, like not being hired as a lead teacher in any of the daycare programs to which she applied. Nonetheless, her experiences were racialized and she wrote about them as such.

How Race Enters and Structures the Narratives of Our Life Experience

Drawing upon all of the data used for this study, one can see that race enters and then structures the narratives of our life experiences very differently, depending upon whether each of us recognizes a racialized life experience. At a fundamental level, racialized experience is both outside normal experience and, as opposed to experience reflecting the spirit of the individual which is often seen in non-racialized experience, racialized experience is often part of a collective experience. We rarely, if ever, read about either a celebration of privilege or recognition of privilege. Limiting the discussion to race, members of the dominant culture have the privilege of examining their experiences as reflections of their individualism.

Racialized Experience as *Outside* Normal

The African American adults almost always self-identify, racially, very early in their stories. They either simply say that they are Black or African American or they refer in some way to their pride in being Black or African American, or they recall an experience in which they were the victims of racism. They self-identify because being Black or African American is a fundamental aspect of their lives and because it represents an identity outside of what is assumed unless otherwise noted. The need to identify that fundamental suggests recognition that being Black or African American is not considered the normal, so it must be said, explicitly, or one runs the risk of being thought to be “the normal” or White. And once race is recognized as a fundamental of self identity, a

context is set for the remainder of their story. Maya Angelou (1969) expressed it, early and in different ways, in her story. “If growing up is painful for the southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat. It is an unnecessary insult” (p. 6). “What sets one Southern town apart from another, or from a Northern town or hamlet, or city high-rise? The answer must be the experience shared between the unknowing majority (it) and the knowing minority (you)” (p. 19). All her future experiences can now be contextualized within the counter-experience of being the “...knowing minority...”

Racialized Experience as Group Experience; Non-Racialized Experience as Individual Experience

When African Americans identify themselves as members of a racial group, they are also placing their experience in a socio-cultural context. They are identifying themselves as individual members of a larger group, and as such are recognizing and articulating the impact on their lives of that group membership. They are also recognizing that as a result of group membership, their lives reflect the lives of other members of the group.

Angela Davis (1974) expressed that sentiment when she said,

I was not anxious to write this book. Writing an autobiography at my age seemed presumptuous. Moreover, I felt that to write about my life, what I did, what I thought and what happened to me would require a posture of difference, an assumption that I was unlike other women – other Black women – and therefore needed to explain myself. I felt that such a book might end up obscuring the most essential fact: the forces that have made my life what it is are the very same forces that have shaped and misshaped the lives of millions of my people. (p. xv)

Not only do the African American narratives reflect a socio-cultural context, but there is also a collective quality that becomes evident in the writings. There is an acknowledgement that being an individual is secondary to being part of a group.

When Dr. Franklin's father, an attorney, heard a judge invoke, "...no 'nigger' represented anyone in his court," as he prepared to present the case of a client, his father was not just an attorney; he was an African American attorney (Franklin, 2005, p. 10)

Rarely did group membership, such as race or ethnicity, etc. come out in the learning autobiographies or life histories of the White adult students. The exception would be the two Jewish doctoral students who made mention, almost immediately in their work, of their group membership, and their life histories went on to reflect that group membership. The Jewish experience in this country was also a racialized experience at one time. As recently as the early decades of the 20th century there were "... warnings by scientists, policymakers...that 'mongrelization' of the nordic, or Anglo-Saxon, race – the real Americans – by inferior European races...was destroying the fabric of the nation" (Sacks, 1997, p. 395). Jews, like other lower European immigrants, became White after World War II, for example, when the "... 1940 census no longer distinguished native whites of native parentage from those...of immigrant parentage, so that Euro-immigrants and their children were more securely white by submersion in an expanded notion of whiteness" (p. 400-401).

When Senator Hillary Clinton (2003) said, "...My parents were typical... They believed in hard work, not entitlement, self reliance not self-indulgence," there was the sense that opportunity was there for the taking (p. 1-2). Any(one) willing to work hard could benefit. The spirit of possibility for the individual was evident. And that theme of individuality ran through many of the learning autobiographies, etc. of the White adult students.

Implications for Adult Education

I began this study by recalling the importance of experience to learning, and the history of that idea to the field of adult education. Beginning with the work of John Dewey and on to the many scholars since then who have focused their life's work around the study of experiential learning, as adult educators, we take pride in examining, celebrating, validating and even accrediting learning gained as a result of life experience. And we have accomplished that accreditation by examining the learning through some theoretical lens such that it can be appropriately placed within an existing content area represented in our colleges and universities. The problem, I suggested, was in the limited and narrow contexts within which experience was examined.

Recognizing that race not only enters but structures the narratives of our life experiences as well as our subsequent experiences, by broadening the contexts within which we examine these experiences, adult educators have the opportunity to assist students to

broaden, substantively, the learning gained as a result of experience. Perhaps of more importance is the opportunity to engage in a sustainable dialogue about race.

It comes as no real surprise that Black adult students refer to racial group membership while White students do not. This is not a new observation, but to see it so completely, that is, where none of the White students even appear to recognize that they have racial group membership is striking. Even more striking is the recognition that for many White students, the reasons for their lack of recognition as having racial group membership grew substantively from the liberal ideologies of the Civil Rights Movement. We were raised to be color-blind and we are raising our children similarly.

Inherent in color-blind ideology is the notion that race is irrelevant. And while we all know that race is relevant, because we were raised, after civil rights, to not see color, White Americans have been encouraged to see white privilege as privilege that comes as a result of being a citizen of the United States. So, to even begin to engage in meaningful dialogue, Whites must first recognize whiteness as a race.

While race can be a problem for those people whose experiences are racialized, racism is a white problem. And for those White Americans who recognize and acknowledge (whether publicly or privately) their racist beliefs, I have little faith that much can be done to change their minds. But, for the many White Americans who do not even recognize white privilege or white supremacy, there is some hope through education.

To think critically is fundamental to education. What other reasons might there be to become educated? If we cannot see and understand our lives, then what is it we hope to gain from education? It is time to examine our experiences with the same focus on criticality that we expect when we ask students to examine arguments in an entry-level critical thinking course. It is time to go beyond the theoretical frameworks of traditional content areas when we examine experiential learning. It is time to examine experiential learning through a critical lens that includes how racial group membership shapes life experience.

Racism and the Law: Implications for Social Justice

As I have engaged in this study, I have come to more fully understand and agree with Ladson-Billings and Tate when they encourage educators and researchers to keep studies employing Critical Race Theory grounded in the law. Because our legal system, beginning with the Constitution, is the driving force behind the system of racist ideology that is in place, one important way to begin to attack and change that ideology is by addressing each law that refers to race or privilege and questioning whether it privileges Whites over Blacks. That is why I examined current, as well as historical, Supreme Court cases having to do with race and education. And it is also imperative that people begin to understand the political structure underlying and influencing the legal structure.

As a liberal, White educator, I have found it particularly disturbing the degree to which racism is embraced and normalized, yet remains unrecognized, in reasonably well-

educated, liberal middle-class America. Cloaked in the so-called “liberal” ideology of color-blindness, racism exists in a stealth-like state, maintaining order but without real recognition of the vehicle from which the order is maintained. And I believe that the vehicle is liberal ideology itself, and it is espoused by educated members of the White and African American middle class.

The recent movie, *Crash*, is a good example of the way in which liberal ideology supports the maintenance of white supremacy. Early in my study I had considered exploring the use of interview as a tool to gather data for this study. My teacher, Dr. Elizabeth Peterson, suggested that I consider using that movie as a prompt to begin discussions of race and experience. At the time, the movie was in early release and there was an abundance of discussion and applause for what was considered by many to be an honest representation of racism in this country. I wondered to her whether that was the best idea since, for one thing, Black men, in the movie, had been portrayed stereotypically and negatively. Dr. Peterson responded that the White men were also portrayed negatively. In fact, most of the characters poorly represented their racial group.

Further, as some “critical” movie critics have noted, while an unintended result, the movie itself is an excellent representation of white supremacy and the racial hegemony needed to maintain that supremacy. “Its faux humanism and simplistic message of tolerance directs attention away from a white-supremacist system and undermines white accountability for the maintenance of that system” (Jensen & Wosnitzer, 2006). Even the racist White police officer, who commits a violent act of sexual assault on a Black

woman, ends up as the hero of the day when he saves the very same woman from the impending explosion of her car.

The point here is that this movie has encouraged discussions of race and racism. And in those discussions, if they are critical, can be the possibility for an uncovering of racism and white privilege that operates in that stealth-like state referred to earlier. Perhaps what is most important about this movie is not whether it has the potential to encourage positive change in this country, but that without even trying or, perhaps, noticing, the movie, “covertly promotes social narratives that are problematically racist” (Smith, 2006). This is where I believe Critical Race Theory can be a useful tool. By suggesting that racism is endemic to our society, one engages in a critical review of everything, first, from the point of view of race. And when you begin to look at the movie, beginning with the assumption that our society is racist, you can see beyond the somewhat simplistic message that racism exists in us all.

The real issue, I believe, is not whether racism exists in all of us, but the degree to which a system of white supremacy is foundational to life in the United States. By embracing liberal ideologies such as color-blindness, we have found a way to avoid recognizing and discussing racism as a fundamental facet of our society. As a result, we have allowed white privilege to gain strength and to do it in such a way as to suggest that racism exists, somehow, outside of privilege. Color-blindness is such an insidious characteristic of liberal ideology that I have even heard middle-class Black graduate adult education students suggest that race has little to do with one’s ability to succeed in this country.

Final Thoughts

The power of the findings in this study is twofold. First, the data are all personal narratives written by adult students who were not asked to consider their life experiences from a racialized perspective. That results in a level of authenticity of their voices with regard to race which is not easily questioned. Second, analyzing the learning autobiographies through a CRT lens and then employing the CRT method of counter-story telling makes issues of race, racism and white supremacy immediately evident in the juxtaposition of a story and a counter-story. The point/counter-point allows one to look at seemingly normal, seemingly non-racialized, everyday experiences that play out in extraordinarily different ways. And often, the only significant difference between the two narratives is race.

I have come to believe that it is not only privilege that encourages Whites to remain color-blind, but it is also the inability to admit that for all these years since the passage of the Civil Rights Bill, we have continued to live in and support a society based upon White supremacy.

Personal narratives, whether our own, a stranger's or a well known personality's, especially when they are analyzed retrospectively, appear to be an accurate and honest representation of how race structures our life experiences. The nuanced differences in our experiences that result from racial group membership then begin, much like a row of

neatly placed dominoes slowly falling down, to structure subsequent experiences. And when we are able to critically analyze these experiences, we may also have the chance to begin a shift in tide.

EPILOGUE

Introduction to Researcher

I am a Jewish, married, middle-aged mother of young children who grew up with middle-class values in an often poor, working-class household. Today, I am White. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s I lived in a two-flat on what used to be called Chicago's northwest side. Albany Park, having once been a predominantly Jewish lower-to-middle class neighborhood, had become an ethnically diverse poor working class neighborhood where I was exposed to a multitude of languages, incredible smells, multigenerational extended families, fabulous music, a sense of belonging, households in near poverty to ones of the upper middle class, and a uniquely Cuban neighborhood born as a result of the Cuban revolution.

For a number of years, our little two-flat sat between two three-flats in which lived families from Puerto Rico and Mexico and Greece and Cuba and, I believe, Appalachia. And upstairs from us lived a wonderful family of five, half Jewish, half Methodist. We lived together, all 10 of us, plus our two big dogs and oftentimes more people when relatives came to stay for a while (sometimes months) in a building with two bathrooms.

Life was integrated, families knew each other and we were in and out of each other's homes and each other's lives. If there was a mother home, then she was everybody's mother and had the inherent right to holler at whomever she felt was deserving. At the same time, she could comfort and feed anybody who was hungry or hurt. In retrospect,

while perhaps not really so, it felt like a safer era when children could explore the world a little and experience the freedom of learning from life.

All the while living in this diverse environment, my home was Jewish and I was being raised Jewish. In a poor/working-class neighborhood, education was about sending kids to school. There existed a sense of the teacher as the supreme knower of all things education. Many parents felt that if it was presented in school, then it was appropriate and for the most part, they complied with those unspoken rules. But there were some areas where some parents felt compelled to be more vocal. There was the time, for example, when I was in primary school, maybe kindergarten or first or second grade, when we were preparing for what was still called the Christmas Assembly. I came home singing the song my class was preparing to sing at the assembly. I don't remember the title, but the words included something like, "Jesus loves me..." After my mother visited the school, and I was no longer involved in singing that song, I remember realizing, "this is who we are."

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APPENDIX

Detailed Coding Structure

Theme:

Explicit References to Race

Sub themes:

- A. Race as characteristic of self-identification (eg. Black Woman, Mother, Wife, Student)
- B. Experiences with overt racism
- C. Priority of education/learning in Home
- D. Poor quality educational opportunities/resources (public schools)
- E. Pride in Heritage
- F. Black on Black criticism
- G. Lack of higher education opportunities due to lack of financial resources
- H. Education interrupted due to pregnancy or birth of child
- I. Raised by mother/mother raising child
- J. Overt anger at racism
- K. Reference to Whites who understand
- L. Childhood neighborhood
- T/T Attendance at parochial/private schools because public schools lack quality
- X/X Lack of quality health care

Theme:

Implicit References to Race

Sub themes:

- AA. Childhood neighborhood
- A/A Early exposure to violence
- BB. Experiences with covert racism
- CC. Priority of education/learning in home
- DD. Poor quality of educational opportunities/resources (public schools)
- EE. Pride in Heritage
- GG. Lack of higher education opportunities due to lack of financial resources
- HH. Education interrupted due to pregnancy or birth of child
- II. Raised by mother/mother raising child
- MM. Higher education aspirations to include private colleges that cater to minorities and/or Jr. Colleges

- NN. Early dreams of higher education/professional attainment seem to melt away
- OO. Maintaining early dreams of higher education requires multiple extra preliminary steps
- PP. Youth overshadowed by adult responsibilities

Theme:

Recognized Privilege

Sub themes:

Any overt reference to wealth, power, opportunity, entitlement

Any acknowledgement of privilege recognition

Any mention of themselves as member of White race

Theme:

Unrecognized Privilege

Sub themes:

- CCC Priority of education/learning in home
- C/C No encouragement for higher education in home (no need belief)
- OOO Optimism (American Dream)
- P Growing up in suburbs
- PP Moving to suburbs
- PPP Opportunity to experience "youth"
- Q Growing up in a house
- QQ Buying a house
- QQQ Buying house or condominium when single
- Q/Q Reference to middle/upper middle/wealthy neighborhood
- R At home mother
- RR Marrying young
- S Moving to bigger house
- SS Opportunity to earn (spending) money as pre-teen/teen
- SSS Invitation to join professional apprenticeship groups that lead to good paying union jobs
- T Parochial/Private schools
- TT Expectation of quality public school
- TTT Played Multiple Sports
- U Purchasing home as single mother
- UU Divorce with no change in economic lifestyle
- V Driver's license at 16
- W Buying a Car
- X Quality medical care
- Y Long-term educational goal
- Z Career growth without degree