

It Takes Two to Tango: The Identity of Those Doing Research on Identity

Paul Carr and Gina Thésée

Much has been written about race and racism in education, but less is known about the relevance of the identities of those conducting this research. While discussion on research methodology, especially in relation to qualitative and ethnographic approaches, often refers to the personal and subjective implication of the researcher in the research process, few studies address the problem of the origins of diverse researchers working on race-based research.¹ The effect of researchers' origins and perspectives can sometimes be critical in eliciting the participation of respondents, and can also shape and determine the input of those being studied. Similarly, one's origins might ensure whether or not a research proposal is approved, and, subsequently, the type of access accorded to those wishing to study race. After all, do governments and educational institutions really want to be associated with racist behaviour?

Undertaking race research is full of pitfalls, which can be compounded by the lack of understanding, analysis and commitment to the very principles one is studying in relation to antiracism-based transformational change. Indeed, an assumption cannot be made that all those studying race wish to somehow

reduce racism. There are numerous examples of how the early origins of colonial exploration used what would today be considered highly suspect racialized interpretations of indigenous culture in order to categorize people based on race. For hundreds of years, this racist ideology spurred slavery, segregation and contemporary practices of exclusion that have fundamentally shaped and altered political, economic and sociocultural actions and trends. Lubiano (1997) argues that not studying race would be a betrayal of our quest for freedom: "[Even] if race—and its strategic social and ideological deployment as racism—didn't exist, the United States' severe inequalities and betrayal of its formal commitments to social inequality and social justice would be readily apparent to anyone existing on this ground" (p vii). While acknowledging that all research has some political component to it and that no study can be approached in a universally objective, functionalist and dispassionate way, we must underscore how those involved in race-based research view their own involvement in the research process, the degree to which they feel that their own identities influence their perceptions and the actual outcomes of the research.

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This paper explores the experiences and reflections of two researchers who have undertaken race-based research separately and collaboratively. The two researchers come from different vantage points with respect to identity: one is female, black,² of Haitian ancestry, French-speaking and living in Montreal, and has a background in science education; the other is male, white, of English ancestry, English-speaking and living in Toronto, and has a background in sociology. These descriptors do not tell the entire story about ideology, lived experience, the influence of family, professional trajectory and other important influences. The essentialist stereotypes about who can conduct race-based research, their motivations and perceptions, are questioned in this paper. Further, in this paper the two researchers review their individual experiences in the research process, then compare their findings and discuss collaborative research. Of particular note is their emphasis on methodological considerations related to race-based research, which provide a vantage point to consider how research alters, disrupts and changes the institutional context for the betterment of society.

Contextualizing Race-Based Research

Merriam (1988, 6) writes that

Experimental research assumes that the researcher can manipulate the variables of interest—that is, there is a great deal of control over the research situation. (It) is also characterized by its major intent: to investigate cause-and-effect relationships . . . it is essential to assign subjects at random to experimental and control groups. In most educational situations, however, it is not possible to control all the variables of interest.

Further, Merriam (1988, 33–34) renders explicit the importance of “sensitivity and integrity” on the part of the investigator in qualitative research, as the “researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis.”

Bogdan and Knopp Biklen (1998, ix) elucidate the changing face of education research as well as the entry of the qualitative approach as a potential solution to strictly quantitative studies, which were considered inflexible in the past.

A field (educational research) that had been dominated by measurement, operationalized

definitions, variables, hypothesis testing, and statistics made room for a research agenda that emphasized description, induction, grounded theory, and the study of people’s understanding—an approach to research we refer to as “qualitative.”

Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) advocate mixed-methods research because of its “methodological pluralism or eclecticism.” Outlining the major tenets of quantitative and qualitative research, they argue that the intricate utilization of the most appropriate features of both paradigms is more likely to produce more effective research.

James (1999, 13) elucidates the necessary reflective nature of doing race work:

The greatest challenges I faced as an instructor of this course were in persuading participants that race, ethnicity and culture are not abstract notions, but that they affect all of us personally, from how we see ourselves and others to the way the institutions in our society operate; to see the extent to which we have internalized or operate with the meanings that have been given to these factors; and to understand that culture exists and that it shapes and informs the lives of all Canadians and that it is, in turn, acted upon by all Canadians.

When researching identity or race, the transformative nature of what is found through the process of questioning people and connecting within their visceral lived racial experience must be appropriately contextualized.

Satzewich (1998, 19) further highlights the problematic nature of race research in a collection of articles in a book on racism in Canada and sums up the lack of consensus as follows:

This book will no doubt be a disappointment for those looking for simple answers to these complex questions and for those who are looking for the final work on whether Canada is indeed “a racist society.” The authors in this collection do not agree on the significations of race and racism in contemporary Canada. . . . Based on these differing styles of sociological research, the authors sometimes arrive at quite different conclusions about the meaning and significance of race and racism in contemporary Canada.

A particular area of interest in race research relates to black or African identity, which has, more recently, led to the field of white studies. Referring

to W E B DuBois's critique of American society, Smith (1997, 186) postulates that "Black intellectuals are implicated in white culture by their education and in black culture by social, political, and emotional ties, thereby representing both and neither." Hall (1997, 299) writes of the deep penetration of racist ideologies within the psyche of the mind permeating the diaspora.

The diaspora is a place where traditions operate but are not closed, where the black experience is historically and culturally distinctive but is not the same as it was before.... The future belongs to those who are ready to take in a bit of the other, as well as being what they themselves are. After all, is it because their history and ours is so deeply and profoundly and inextricably intertwined that racism exists? For otherwise, how could they keep us apart?

Similarly, Dei (2003, 4) challenges whites to become engaged in the antiracism project through an analysis of their own personal experience.

How do some whites perpetuate racism and employ a powerful racist ideology without ever feeling that they abandoned the liberal democratic ideals and values of social justice for all? It is important to note that not all whites are indicted here as racists; however, there needs to be a recognition of how one is helped or hindered by such a system. Starting with the self means the white anti-racist educator must acknowledge his or her dominance and allow other whites to see their privilege by virtue of a white identity.

In sum, we contend, building on the work of others, that it is imperative that the complexity of racism and race be internalized and rendered explicit so that we can conduct constructive, effective studies. Further, it is critical that whites become engaged in the process of conceptualizing, developing, implementing and reviewing research on race. Race is not a problem or stigma to be attached uniquely to people considered racialized or "of colour." We are all part of the racialization project, and, therefore, there must be some recognition of the non-neutral role played by whites, in particular, in the process of creating a society in which racism exists.

Two Researchers' Experiences

Each researcher has studied race-based issues within in the educational context. Thésée (2003)

examined the experiences of racial-minority, particularly Haitian-origin, students in Montreal at the secondary level in relation to science education. Carr (1996) studied the institutional culture of the Toronto Board of Education in relation to antiracism, with a specific interest in the experiences of racial minority teachers, administrators, staff and decision makers. Although the specific focus of their research differed—one targeting student experiences and outcomes, and the other critiquing institutional culture—each is concerned with the racial dynamic.

Merriam (1988, 6) highlights the importance of selecting the appropriate research design: "an architectural blueprint. It is a plan for assembling, organizing and integrating information (data), and it results in a specific end product (research findings). The selection of a particular design is determined by how the problem is shaped, by the questions it raises, and by the type of end product desired." Both researchers undertook qualitative analysis based on a prolonged period of interaction with research participants. The research path followed by Thésée was more personal, given her identification and involvement in the community she studied, whereas Carr may have been perceived, generally, as being more "neutral," because his skin colour did not immediately imply that he was from a marginalized group.

Her Research

To start, I would like to highlight the work of Toni Morrison (1993), especially her essay on Africanism in *Playing in the Dark*. My reflection here requires that I internalize and embrace the position of a black female scholar in a world that is entirely gendered and racialized. To think about implications and parameters of my framework—and to struggle with and against them—forces me to diagnose myself introspectively and to explore the fears and desires that inhabit my consciousness. To use this common language, I need to operate in a way that avoids the long necklace of meaningful representations already made about me. I need to escape from those obfuscated images of black women, buried under the web of oblivion, indifference and racism. In order to complete this enquiry, I need to introduce and extend the other hand to a writer from Martinique, Patrick Chamoiseau, who helps demonstrate the paradoxical nature of my work. How can one write as part of the dominated, Chamoiseau

(1997) asks. To continue I would ask, how does one write about race-based research when you are a black woman scholar and, similarly, how can one take into account the contemporary exigencies for knowledge construction, in general, and in scientific research in education, in particular, when you are part of the marginalized?

I came to race-based research through a long, indirect route, started while I was teaching physical sciences in a strongly multiethno/racial high school of more than 1,500 students in Montreal. For several years, I had been observing, questioning and trying to understand the fact that some of the students at my school—namely, black students—were frequently absent from the advanced sciences classes. The immediate and official explanation for this was their underachievement in mathematics and sciences in the previous grades. No one except I seemed to be bothered by this situation. When I pushed a little further and asked guidance counselors and teachers how they understood the situation, I got a short, definitive list of reasons: (a) laziness and no interest in science, (b) absence of science in the family culture, (c) low socioeconomic status and (d) restricted access to science for their educational background. Black students, when asked about the reasons for their underachievement in science, argued that science is not for them, it's for the nerds, especially within white and Asian groups. In the academic literature on the underachievement of black students in science, I found the same types of explicative factors: (a) personal, (b) cultural, (c) socioeconomic and (d) educational. Yet, these answers from school guidance counsellors, teachers and students, as well as from the academic literature, appeared insufficient and unacceptable to me.

I started to extend my reflection more constructively while undertaking a master's degree and then a doctoral thesis in education. My first concerns were psychological, which I understood better when questioning how people of different cultures think in relation to time and causality. My starting point was the emphasis scientists place on these two concepts to construct the foundations of natural science (Piaget 1973; Ullmo 1969). Some anthropological work confirmed the pertinence of my reflection (Hall 1971). However, something was missing. I felt confused about the role played by the school context with respect to black students in science. The theory of cultural discontinuities

offered me a way to comprehend more effectively the minority educational experience, especially that of black students, in white schools (Ogbu 1982; Gadjigo 1990). Similarly, intercultural studies propose the acculturation theory, which has encouraged me to think about the migration experience of the black students in Montreal and about their adaptation strategies (Berry 1997; Segall et al 1999). These two theories led me to question the relationship between science in school and science in general. The concept of "knowledge construction" or, more literally, "relation to knowledge" ("rapport au savoir" in French) developed by French psychologists and educators (Charlot 1997; Beillerot, Blanchard-Laville and Mosconi 1996), rendered the research operationalizable by offering some key subconcepts to capture the schooling experience. However, theories of cultural discontinuities and of acculturation silence the specific schooling experience lived by young people from dominated, colonized and racialized groups. Similar observations of the same phenomenon some years later spurred me to address the institutional causes of this underachievement and marginalization. The influence of critical theory of such authors as Habermas, Freire, McLaren and Sauve further strengthened my research posture in denouncing the exclusion in science of equity-seeking groups and a weak appreciation for social justice. These factors, reference points and realities transformed my reflection as researcher and pushed me to more directly examine the issue of race and racism in education.

What were the barriers preventing me from seeing the racism around me? I noticed that black students I interviewed were cautious and prudent when asked to talk explicitly about race in education. Like me, they seem to be able to dance around the subject, without being able to express it. In my own evolution, from Piagetian psychogenetics to critical theory through cultural discontinuities, acculturation and knowledge construction, I developed an understanding of different dimensions of the problem, but I was still seeking a cornerstone, a more global and specific theory to comprehend the lived experience of black youth at school, especially in terms of their relation to science. I realized that the most difficult part of my evolution in research was to find, as Thornhill (1989, 27) puts it, the proper perspective, as the institutional racism underlying the experiences of black in western

societies “so clouds the lens of our mind’s eye and so blurs our vision that before we can begin our viewing, we must first address the issue of racism.” Thus, the anticolonial and antiracist theories set the table to enable us (me and Paul Carr) to articulate, frame and conduct our research on these topics (Dei 1996; Carr and Klaasen 1997).

It is not politically correct to introduce the race-racism issue when talking about education, and even less so when talking about science education or scientific research. From my experience, I can now add that the resistance seems even stronger in francophone environments than in English-speaking ones. Apparently, people feel that it is not helpful to criticize the educational system in terms of race, since this could have a deleterious effect on morale and on the general goodwill of many people working in education. One day, I clearly received the injunction: “Do not talk about this.” Therefore, who am I? What am I doing in the academy? Am I here to make people feel good about themselves and to comfort them about what is going on in education regarding black youth? Rather, I choose to denounce inequality, exclusion and suffering in education, and to work for social justice and the empowerment of subjugated people through education. According to my experience in academic encounters, I agree with Dei (1996, 2003) when he states that we might not want it to be that way but our words disturb societal peace when what we want is to disturb silence. We need to ask, who is fearful of the race-racism issue in science education and scientific research? And, more important, why?

I have elucidated concerns to be addressed when doing race-based research. I present them here in a framework I refer to as the four-trend resistance model (Thésée 2003). The concept of resistance accompanies the anticolonial and antiracist theories articulated by Dei and Kempf (2006). The model I propose is formed of four resistance strategies: (1) refuse, (2) question, (3) redefine and (4) reaffirm. Each strategy can be worked out alone or in conjunction with the others.

Refuse means to get the courage to say no to what has been done, said and written about being dominated, and what, in turn, destroys the body, the mind, the heart and the soul. Refuse deals with stopping the trivialization of experiences that cultivate denial, humiliation, domination and exclusion. This strategy is used to address different discourses,

which are infused into the mind continuously in everyday life. Refuse also aims to take on a perspective and to prepare oneself for a serious intellectual struggle. Concerning race-racism-based research, the following actions relating to refusal should be taken:

1. Refuse to demonstrate that race and racism do not exist. Their existence must be the starting point from which discussion can take place.
2. Refuse the law of silence and the strategies that mute voices.
3. Refuse the neocolonial context in research and in education.
4. Refuse the acontextual and ahistorical research perspectives that, in reality, insidiously perpetuate some of the more undesirable effects of context and history.
5. Refuse the suggestions of the “Bell Curve” effect and other notions that encourage eugenics.

Questioning means starting to analyze and question differently. For example, asking “What for?” centres concerns about ethics, outcomes and meanings. Asking “who benefits?” opens the issue of static privileged and nonprivileged groups in research. Questioning also strives to deconstruct what and how we have learned; that is, the accepted truth that can be toxic for identity construction. Questioning seeks to engage people in a process of decolonization of the mind (Nandy 1998; Shiva 1998; Thaman 2003). As Sauv  (1997) puts it, questioning the aims of research must be a visible component on the resistance agenda. Transforming the questioning makes the researcher a social-transformation agent seeking appropriate methodologies, rather than a methodologist seeking an interesting social research subject. Concerning race-racism-based research, the following questioning should be considered:

1. Questioning knowledge that we have been taught, including the symbolic dimensions (images, styles, attitudes, social relations, arts), the implicit dimensions (representations, beliefs, stereotypes) and the explicit dimensions (rules, laws, methodologies, data, analysis) as well as content of knowledge.
2. Questioning the univocal character of research. This includes natural and social science research claiming to be scientific and using an authoritarian discourse that mutes other types of knowledge. The discourse is centred on the ability to impregnate the mind without shattering

it, so the more subtle and insidious it is, the deeper the impact.

3. Questioning the fundamental concepts of science: universality, causality and temporality, objectivity, neutrality and verity.
4. Questioning the overlapping and ingrained nature of race, gender, class and culture (and other markers of identity) in research.
5. Questioning the certainty and rigidity of methodologies by daring to structure procedures differently;
6. Questioning “the historical conditions which motivate our conceptualization, attending the dividing practices by which knowledge and subjects, both school and individual, are constituted (Foucault, quoted by Willinsky 1998, 251).

Following the deconstruction process, reconstruction must take place. *Redefine*, therefore, means proposing other perspectives, other concepts, other definitions and other meanings. The responsibility to redefine or to rewrite knowledge is crucial. Aesthetic choices, ethical values, conceptual processes and collective rituals must be reshaped. Redefining aesthetics implies a change of perspective, thus allowing for self-analysis, rather than seeing oneself through another’s eyes. Redefining ethics is necessary in order to reshape values by taking into account ancestral mores, which are usually depreciated by progress-oriented scientific knowledge. Redefining conceptual processes requires the will to seek new links and creative reinterpretation, which can disrupt traditional interpretations based on a presumed truth. Regarding race-racism-based research the steps in redefinition are as follows:

1. Redefine the criteria for equilibrium between the sensitivity and integrity in research.
2. Redefine the outsider–insider and *etic–emic* positions of researchers.
3. Redefine an appropriate set of concepts to address race-racism issues.
4. Redefine a new line of research focused on appropriate perspective, ethics, methodologies.
5. Redefine the ways to transcend race-racism barriers for cooperation in research.
6. Redefine the relation between race, gender, class and culture with knowledge.
7. Redefine the specificity and systemic nature of antiblack racism.
8. Redefine the shared experiences but also the diversity of black diasporas.

To complete the resistance process we need to reaffirm the collective self supported by all actors at all levels (societal, communitarian, family, individuals of all ages) and enable it to support the individual *indigenous* self (Wane 2002). As Dei notes: “We are, therefore I am...I am, therefore, we are.” New strategies of self-affirmation must be considered, including pedagogical ones. Solar (1998) proposes an emancipatory pedagogy, which claims to rupture four characteristics inherent in the process of domination: (1) silence, (2) omission, (3) passivity and (4) disenfranchisement. She proposes to replace them by inserting transformative actions, such as (1) giving voice to the words, (2) working on memory, (3) participating actively and (4) feeling and acting out the empowerment.

1. Reaffirm the dignity of persons being subjugated, marginalized or excluded.
2. Reaffirm identities anchored within a self-determination frame.
3. Reaffirm the appropriation of social spaces within economics, education, research and science.
4. Reaffirm the emergence of resistance-resiliency epistemologies.
5. Reaffirm the reappropriation of self-esteem and power of the self and knowledge

In Louis Armstrong’s recording of “It Takes Two to Tango,” the metaphor of this dance calls attention to the importance of identity of each of the two persons involved and, in the same manner, for the harmony of the two being as they act as one. What about researchers involved in race-racism-based research? The starting point to cooperation in this type of research relies on the sharing of two strategies: the first one, refuse, and the fourth one, reaffirm. It is important that the researchers agree on these primary aspects of race-racism-based research; that is, we must agree on the things we should no longer accept, and the things we should promote and affirm throughout our research work. Only on this foundation can collaborative research, including questioning what is given as evidence and redefining conceptual tools, lead to what can be called a research tango.

His Research

By the time I started my doctoral studies, I had already been exposed to a number of inter-, cross- and multiracial/-cultural experiences in Canada, the

United States and France, where I was a foreign student for two years in my early twenties. In addition, I had focused my undergraduate and graduate students on the politics of difference, whether at the political level in relation to north/south issues and inequity in Canada, or at the sociological level concerning the conceptualization of identity. Being interested, open and engaged, however, is only a starting point to unearthing some of the many layers enveloping the race onion. From that vantage point, after learning that I was all of the identifiers (white male, of European ancestry, middle class and so on) and others, listed in the first section, meant that my identity and involvement in research were key descriptors in how I would be perceived, as well as how I would analyze what I found. At the same time, I felt that putting myself in the same box as those accused of wielding power, privilege and indifference toward marginalized groups to label and stigmatize minorities would not be fully appropriate. Otherwise, why would I have chosen to study race, and from the angle I did, if I was nothing more than a sum of the descriptors mentioned above?

Most important to my identity, and something that is not visible from the exterior, is my relationship with my partner and my daughters. I also have a strong ideological connection to progressive (from my perspective, anyway) causes that seek to redistribute resources so that all peoples can live with dignity. In essence, my realization that I am more complex than a white, anglo, heterosexual male allowed me to understand that others are equally complex. However, as Dei (1996) notes, "lived experience" is key, and I cannot definitively say what it is to be, say, a black female. Thoughtful and spirited dialogue, compassion, and goodwill, however, make the process of advancing our understanding of race research more feasible.

Professionally, I have been privy to the process of government decision making, being, to a certain degree, an insider, all the while maintaining an outsider perspective through community experience (Carr 1997). Working with minority francophones, I often heard of how they felt they were marginalized and subjugated by anglophones. When I was working on issues such as pay equity and employment equity, I often heard of how women say they felt the same way about men. In both cases, little attention was paid to racial minorities, who, it could be argued, were confronted with

substantially more onerous systemic and individual barriers than francophones or white women. While I was involved in antiracism educational projects at the formal, institutional level, my whiteness was openly questioned, and at one point my "European-ness" was identified as an obstacle to my participating in curriculum work on an Afro-Canadian studies document. Again, it is critical to point out the intersectionality of all the forms and issues related to equity, especially in relation to social class, and how the blanket condemnation of a particular group can be hazardous to advancing social justice. Achieving gains in the area of equity is fraught with problems, is often incremental, is always political, and usually never done without a struggle. Therefore, the degree of sophistication of my analysis of identity, diversity, equity and power evolved steadily over a two-decade period, becoming more textured and critical, while I still questioned my own involvement as a person from the dominant group. My continuing work on whiteness, with a recent book on the subject (Carr and Lund 2007), has raised my sensitivity about the interplay between power and privilege juxtaposed against lived experience, and highlighted the reality that the race-racism debate walks a political tightrope. Therefore, I have learned over time that it is important and necessary to critically interrogate my own whiteness if I am to contribute to the advancement of social justice.

I chose to study the institutionalization of racism in education by examining the conceptualization, development and implementation of race, racism and antiracism in the Toronto Board of Education. I was interested in understanding how race is discussed, how it manifests itself and what the internal portrait of it looks like. I selected the institutional environment because I already had some expertise in the area of institutional analysis and administration, had access to a number of key figures through established contacts and was well positioned in the Ontario Ministry of Education to understand institutional processes. I sought to analyze the Toronto board because it was local and also because it was well known in education circles for being (a) progressive, (b) open to such studies and (c) staffed by a number of advocates and leaders interested in such work. In the initial phases, I was not overly preoccupied with my own racial identity in the study, particularly since I employed a qualitative analysis that forced me, to varying degrees, to understand

my own implication, in a general sense, in shaping the research. The ethical review required for the thesis proposal, in addition to the advice of members of my thesis committee, one of whom is a leading antiracist educator in Canada, also served to sensitize me to the concerns others might have with my involvement in such a study on race in education.

I sought to triangulate my research by consulting with three groups of respondents, each of which had subgroups. First, I interviewed 22 key decision makers on the board, who were directors, superintendents, trustees, consultants and other institutional leaders and/or advocates with specialized knowledge of race issues. I followed this phase with interviews with six principals, two of whom were from racial minorities. I then interviewed 25 racial minority teachers. Following the interview phase, I sent out questionnaires to all remaining principals in the secondary panel, and approximately 400 secondary school teachers, with the assistance of the teachers' union.

After conducting the research, I published several peer-reviewed articles, presented papers and gave talks to many educational groups. There appeared to be significant interest in the board and among various sectors involved in antiracist education. At the same time, I always had the sense that racial minorities and progressives, in general, were interested because it confirmed, and amplified their understanding of the existence of systemic racism. The institutional sector did not seem to be as embracing of the research for the obvious reason that acknowledgement of racism usually implies that something needs to be done to address the underlying conditions. And because the institution is conceived and controlled by whites, there is the likelihood of internal conflict, guilt and justification, especially in light of the fact that many whites deny the existence of racism (Tatum 1992; Dei, Karumanchery and Karumanchery-Luik 2004). My experience in interviewing and liaising with racial minorities in the study—whether at the teacher, principal or key decision-making level—was extremely favourable and encouraging. Many assisted in diverse ways throughout the research, providing additional information, documents and access to other informants. There seemed to be the sense that I was doing research that was helpful to exposing systemic racism, and that, perhaps, my identity,

ironically, played a favourable role in providing me with access to the system. Would a black male have received the same reception I did? Among many of the white respondents, there was the general sense that this type of research was intended to find racism, and, perhaps accordingly, there were many shielded responses, as well as suspicions that probing for racism can only lead to negative outcomes.

In education, there is often the glossy classroom glow promoted to put a positive, upbeat spin on things. Dei and Wane (2003) speak of the urgency to understand and do, more so than celebrate, antiracism work. They recount how one of them was invited to give a lecture as part of African History Month and was instructed to carry out the feel-good compulsion of mainstream educators by instilling a positive message.

[I] was told to be upbeat in the lecture and to highlight “successes” in the community rather than producing simply “a voice of critique and despair.” Yes, we all want to work with a “philosophy of hope.” But it is also important to remember that sometimes we deliberately choose to leave the cheerleading at home and not just sing praises. There is a legitimate fear that too much cheering can create a sense of complacency and comfort.... (Before the “celebration”) we must first get the job done and then we can be proud of the accomplishments. Until then there is not much to cheer about. (p 1)

It is understandable that those in decision-making positions might be reticent about potentially denouncing practices or colleagues, because if they wish to survive and thrive in the system they will need to be, in reality and in perception, team players. I found several types of reaction to my research. Some teachers sent back the questionnaires with simple messages denouncing me and the research. Generally speaking, racial-minority respondents, whether at the teacher, principal or key decision maker/contributor to antiracist education level, were extremely willing to participate, offered supplementary information and leads, and were not the least bit suspicious of my personal involvement in the study. They did have, however, comments about how far the board, the ministry and the academy might want to go in considering the study. Few studies before had dealt with the issue of antiracism within the institutional context, the lived experiences

of racial minorities in the classroom and the boardroom, or the mechanisms by which equity is formulated and implemented in education. Because Toronto was considered at the time as a leader in this area in North America, there was some hope that this study might lead to informed discussion and reform. It should be noted that my own racial origin was not identified on any of the research protocols and letters of invitation to participate.

Reaction from white teacher respondents was more polarized. A significant minority was cynical about the research, charged bias and downplayed the need for antiracism education. For analytical purposes, I coded the responses of respondents by providing a fictitious name, a letter representing key contributors (K), principals (P) or teachers (T), followed by a letter identifying if they were white (W) or racial minority (R), and a number signifying the number of years they had worked at the board.

I find this type of research misleading and ignorant. This is an extremely limiting category [referring to the racial origin typology in reference to white], which I consider ignorant. I am Canadian. My ancestors are Irish. Race is not a scientific term. (Daisy-T-W-14)

The questions beg for a certain response. Assumptions are made that responses will be of a predetermined nature. (Keith-T-W-25)

Is your thesis going to truly benefit teachers and students and well-being of human [word crossed out] oops! P.C. [Politically Correct] Police being everywhere. (Madeleine-T-W-5)

This survey presumes there is a problem. Any problem is overblown. The only real problem is surveys like this. (Quentin-T-W-14)

A few respondents were openly hostile and stated that this type of research is misguided and unnecessary. Because their surveys were incomplete, and they didn't comply with the basic respondent information required to use their responses, no descriptors are used for their responses. I presumed, based on feedback from other participants, that these comments derived from white members of the board.

I find the survey offensively long. If you are prepared to come to my school and teach my students for an hour, I will be happy to use that time to assist you in your attempt to obtain a doctorate.

Forget all this racism garbage. Hire the best for the jobs. Do you take your car to the best garage or one where employees were hired by some arbitrary quota? Same goes with dentistry, doctor, store, etc. Let's get real.

I found the questionnaire contained questions I felt were racist, and predisposed to a predetermined outcome.

Many people took the time to consider the survey without providing responses. Two people called to say that they would not participate in the study. Another two sent back their surveys stating that they would not fill out the questionnaire, and another four sent back the questionnaires without a word on them. A number of white teachers, however, were also openly supportive of the research and said that the survey was "comprehensive and generally clear" (Oliver-T-W-20), "Questions were well articulated and thought provoking" (Queenie-T-W-12), "Very thorough" (Eartha-T-W-25), and "I enjoyed trying to be helpful in your endeavour" (Lawrence-T-W-30). In addition, another three white teachers telephoned to offer their support and said that not much of this kind of research was being done.

In terms of overall participation in the research, racial minorities were more willing and interested in being involved than whites. Approximately 25 per cent of all racial minority teachers in the secondary panel of the Toronto Board of Education, in the period 1993–1995, participated in the research. This was the first time that such a large percentage of racial minority teachers in the Toronto board had been involved in a study on the institutional culture of the board. The overall participation rate of white teachers was much lower. Institutionally, it would be fair to say that, despite the general acknowledgment that this type of research could be helpful, there was an overarching concern about talking about racism. Everyone in a position of power demonstrated the same rhetorical commitment to fighting racism, but was trepidatious about being linked with nonprogressive actions. At the same time, there was widespread support for the leadership shown by the board, followed closely by the typical institutional reluctance of critiquing the board or to be seen as out of step with the general orientation.

In addition to my effect on the research, I concluded research had an effect on me. It changed the way I define reality; it forced me to consider the

numerous, insidious, far-reaching ways that racism takes hold of the mind and spirit. I could see how race slithered its way through intricate institutional mazes and culminated in extremely unsettling results. While connecting the dots between our supposed democracy, equity and accountability, I realized how a plethora of measures mesh together to reinforce exclusion and injustice. At the same time, I met a number of people who had achieved success, were strong and effective advocates who demonstrated that change is possible. However, the image or metaphor that I retain is of an ultrasophisticated 300-metre ocean liner—the system—jammed full of satellite, cutting-edge technology that requires 20 kilometres of clearing distance to swerve past a lone iceberg of race and racism in the distance; in other words, it is difficult to challenge, alter and transform institutional intransigence and systemic racism. Last, I must acknowledge my own whiteness, masculinity, privileged Europeaness and other descriptors I must acknowledge because we live in a society that accords status and privilege to them. History is not neutral, and I feel no less the person I am by considering these pivotal issues of power and privilege. Understanding whiteness may, indeed, be an important contributing force to changing and diminishing institutional forces inclined to deny the existence of racism.

Discussion

Discussing race research necessarily involves addressing the issue of identity. To what degree does one's identity legitimate or impinge upon the research process of a particular study? We have already touched on some important methodological considerations that contextualize the research on race. Underscoring our analysis is the widely accepted contention that identity is a social construct that changes with diverse contexts (Dei 1996). However, in a society in which race has played such a defining role in the allocation of power and privilege, race and racism cannot be neglected as variables in the diagnosis of why, how and what research on race is all about. We must consider the concepts of blackness and whiteness, in particular given that the focus of our individual research, intertwined with empirical research suggests that antiblack racism (Wright 2002) is the most visceral and entrenched in society. Several concrete examples that follow extend our analysis.

In 1959, John Howard Griffen (1962) consumed drugs to alter his skin colour then embarked on a journey of the southern United States as a black man, a Negro, according to the vernacular of the day. He documented his journey in a book, *Black Like Me*, which has sold more than 10 million copies. Read by generations of high school students, made into a movie, and brought to lecture halls and television sets across the US and abroad, Griffen's story laid bare the sordid experience of African Americans. Of course, Griffen was able to wash away his colour after a few months, but he was unable to remove the effect of the humiliating experiences he had lived through. There are many ethical issues to Griffen's story. At an academic level, was it research? From Griffen's vantage point, his quest was universal, "[a] story of the persecuted, the defrauded, the feared and destroyed. I could have been a Jew in Germany, a Mexican in a number of States, or a member of any 'inferior' group. Only the details would have differed. The story would be the same" (Griffen 1962: preface). To what degree did Griffen's ordeal sway the masses as well as the elites, and would a man of African origin have been able to achieve the same result at that time? Far from the proverbial ivory tower of academic discourse, Griffen exposed a problem in American society that has plagued the US since its inception. Forcing whites to acknowledge their implication in racism is critical to understanding that this is not a problem caused by "people of colour."

Playing on the title of Griffen's work, Walcott (1997) wrote of black Canadian culture in *Black Like Who?*, insisting that the book is not a "treatise on blackness in Canada. Instead, [it is an] attempt to articulate some grammars for thinking Canadian blackness" (p xiii). Walcott emphasizes border crossing, migratory experiences, the salience of language and the plurality of black experience. Focusing on the work of black Canadian artists, Walcott (1997, 112) stresses that "language here charts black community through the experience of colonialism, imperialism and migration. The words do not and cannot reveal the entire historicity of black exploitation in Canada, yet they reveal the traces, the contaminants, of black slave labour and migrant labour histories." (Re)positioning identity in order to understand lived experience of others, therefore, demands an understanding of the people being discussed. By way of example, as illustrated by Walcott, the lyrics of rap or hip hop music could

be interpreted quite differently, depending on the level of appreciation and familiarity the listener has with the artists in question.

Prince (2001) wrote of the individual and systemic manifestations of racism in society and within the academy in *Being Black*. In the chapter entitled “Black Like I and I,” she exposes the exclusionary tactics used by decision makers to isolate blacks from participating in projects deemed to be focused on the black reality, and then taking the credit for moving society forward. She also suggests that Black History Month, because of manipulation or lack of content, sends the distorted message that the recognition generally given does not address the real issues. Politics determines the degree to which issues can be addressed, by whom, how and, ultimately, what profile is accorded to ensure discussion.

The media are also complicit in legitimating public and academic discourse. One telling example relates to the work of Professor George Dei, of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, who has influenced a generation of students through his prolific work on antiracism education. Dei has written a number of books, dozens of peer-reviewed articles, a plethora of studies, countless lectures and presentations, and helped establish the Centre for the Study of Integrative Antiracism Studies. Despite all of this, his work was not well known in Canadian society until the media swarmed on his call for government and society to consider “Black-focused schools” at a public forum in Toronto in February 2005 as part of Black History Month. Front-page coverage was accorded to Dei’s remarks, which were only a small part of the positions covered by the six panellists. The Ontario government responded by rejecting the notion outright. The avalanche of calls to call-in shows, newspaper articles, public commentaries and debate that followed demonstrated a deep-seated unease with the concept, and also spoke to the way that voice plays a significant role in determining who can speak on such issues. What is most telling about Dei’s comments was that little attention was paid to the substance of his comments and analysis; instead he was attacked for the suggestion that we should “return to segregation,” which had absolutely nothing to do with his proposal and which he at no point advocated. The issue was not why black students achieved lower outcomes or the lack of accountability on the part of government; instead, the controversy centred on

how someone could dare suggest focusing on race, even though the social construction of race plays an undeniable role in education. This anecdote reinforces our contention that the racial origin of the person undertaking research on race is of paramount importance, notably in terms of the perception and the validity of the study at hand, and the rationale for doing race research must be highlighted. Identity may be an entry point into a research-domain but it does not ensure that there will be an insightful analysis. At times, being part of the group being studied or enquiring about race within an institutional context can present particular issues for those of the same identity. In studying race and sport in the US, Hoberman (1997), after presenting some dismal facts related to the status of African-Americans in education, writes that “it is unlikely that any black intellectual would choose to write so critically about the impact of athletic achievement on African-American life” (p xii). Acknowledging the general critique that whites who undertake research on blacks are doing so to benefit their careers or are reinforcing “the growing black-pathology business,” Hoberman (1997) states that a “motive [of the research] was to produce a socially useful analysis of black subjugation to white institutions and the racial folklore that sustains it; this meant following the black athlete around the post-colonial world and connecting his status to that of his ancestors, who once dealt with colonial masters whose interest in sport was both passionate and political in nature” (p xii). Hoberman also attempts to challenge and dismantle race research that supports a biological interpretation of racial identity.

D’Souza (1995), in his controversial book *The End of Racism*, makes a number of detailed arguments against commonly held viewpoints on race relations in the United States, at least from the minority perspective. He enters the race research realm by acknowledging that

as a “person of color,” I enjoy an element of ethnic immunity that enables me to address topics with a frankness that would be virtually impossible on the part of a white male. I believe this is a part of what is wrong with the American race debate, which excommunicates many participants whose cooperation is essential to develop just principles for the emerging multi-racial society. (p viii)

D’Souza also alludes to the burden and problematic nature of “people of color” pronouncing on

issues that may diminish those very (racialized) communities. Thus, the legitimacy of location becomes a central component to the way race research is received. It would be fair to say that D'Souza's book was much better received among conservative ranks than marginalized and progressive thinkers.

The salience of identity in doing race research is evident in relation to the naming, identifying, categorizing, labelling and appropriation of terms to define groups. Who has the power and legitimacy to label identity? From Negro to black to Afro- to African to American, is there one correct term? Rap artists have popularized, within limited circles, the use of pejorative labels to describe the most virulent, overt manifestation of racism. If a white person were to do the same, what would be the reaction? Who creates the normative standards used to judge such cultural manifestations? Can this be considered sociolinguistic empowerment? How does society understand the use and appropriation of language? Similarly, what is to be said about the majority of white people denying that they have a racial origin?

Morrison (1997, 4) views "the potency of racist constructs in language" as fundamental to the project of (dis)empowering society:

My effort to manipulate American English was not to take standard English and use vernacular to decorate it, or to add "color" to dialogue. My efforts were to carve away the accretions of deceit, blindness, ignorance, paralysis, and sheer malevolence embedded in raced language so that other kinds of perception were not only available but were inevitable (p 7). The proverbial "power of the pen," therefore, must be considered in relation to the salience of the research produced.

Both of us have been challenged to understand the other's perspective, to uncover why and how race evolves or dissolves the way it does, and to debate how change and transformation are possible. In sum, we have argued for an enhanced appreciation of the merit of recognizing, contextualizing and addressing the concerns related to researchers' identity, which can affect the impact, reception and utilization of race-based research. The issue of validity, reliability, triangulation and ethics is intertwined, we believe, with researchers' identity. A more transparent examination and disclosure of how researchers approach race-based research can only enhance the quality of research produced.

Notes

1. While this paper deals primarily with the racial variable, it is important to acknowledge that race is a social construction and must be considered in relation to other forms of identity. Therefore, the discussion on intercultural relations cannot be disconnected from an analysis of how race is understood in society.

2. Lubiano (1997, ix) grapples with the complexity and problematic nature of the terminology in discussing race: "I use 'black Americans' rather than the more conventional 'African Americans' to refer to the history of racial demonizing and binarism that has supported, and continues to support, the white supremacy that structures US democracy. Using 'black Americans' is simultaneously a way to remember the defiance of that demonization and binarism articulated in the antiracists' reclamation of the term."

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