

NOTE TO USERS

This reproduction is the best copy available.

UMI[®]

Making Meaning of Whiteness: Explorations by White Community College Faculty

by

Frances Trowsse

Thesis Completed in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Education

Lakehead University

Faculty of Education

Thunder Bay, Ontario

Canada

June 2007



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-31868-3
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-31868-3

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.


Canada

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It had been a long time since my undergraduate studies, and I am not sure that I would have decided to re-enter the world of academia and work on a Master's of education degree if I had not been encouraged to do so by Brenda Small. She started the ball rolling. Once I received acceptance into the M.Ed., the next critical piece that was quickly addressed was the need for a break from my work. My employer was very supportive. The rest was up to me. My studies began, and I realized quickly that I was in safe hands. I met some wonderfully dedicated and supportive people who served as mentors and nudged me nicely along this path that at first seemed endless. I first noticed Lisa Korteweg as I walked past her classroom and "heard" her teaching her class. I appreciated her presence in the classroom and remembered this when I needed someone to be on my thesis committee. Connie Russell had her work cut out for her when she agreed to supervise me. I cannot say enough about the learning that has taken place under her guidance. I thank Connie for understanding how I wanted to approach this thesis and then suggesting that I approach my desire to work on the topic of anti-racism education from the angle of Whiteness. Also, I thank Bob Jickling for taking time to examine my work and provide his much appreciated comment and support. I am grateful to George Sefa Dei and Leslie Brown, both of whom responded to me when I contacted them to ask for some help after reading their writing. I thank Susan Bebonang, who inspired the introduction for this thesis and spent hours talking with me. Patricia McGuire provided me with great mentoring and advice. When I was struggling with how to begin the proposal for my research, Patricia advised me to write the acknowledgements first, and so I did. I felt as though I had begun. Finally, I want to acknowledge all the happy and

loving times I have spent with a group of women sharing laughter and kindness. One of these women named our group, and I am sad to say she has passed on. Thank you, Sandra, for *Ah-nee-nah*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction.....	1
Purpose of the Study	4
 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	 6
Introduction.....	6
Racism and Anti-racism Education	7
Resistance to Addressing Whiteness	11
Resistance by Educators	13
Definition of Terms.....	17
 CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	 19
Anti-oppressive Theories of Research.....	19
Anti-oppressive Research Design	22
Recruitment of Participants.....	23
Study Sample	27
Researcher’s Role	28
Research Procedures	29
Data Analysis	30
Limitations of the Study.....	32
 CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	 33
Introduction.....	33
Focus Group Themes	34
Colour Prevails – The Right/White Way	35
Privilege with a Small ‘p’	39
Ethnicity and Colour	43
Sameness - Be like ‘Us’	46
Immigrant Syndrome	49
Expectations of the Education System.....	53
Institutional Issues	59
Individual Impacts	61
 CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	 63
Introduction to the Analysis.....	63
Colour Prevails.....	63
Privilege	65
Ethnicity and Colour	66
Immigrant Syndrome	68
Expectations of the Education System.....	69
Process	71
Recommendations.....	73

Concluding Reflections.....	74
REFERENCES	77
APPENDIX A: INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS	81
APPENDIX B: COVER LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS	83
APPENDIX C: COVER LETTER FOR COLLEGE.....	85
APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS	87
APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM FOR COLLEGE	88

ABSTRACT

This study examines Whiteness from the perspectives of White college faculty. The participants in this study responded to a letter of invitation to volunteer for this study. A total of 12 White faculty participated in this study, including the researcher. Nine participants were female, and 2 were male; 9 participants had 15 years or more of work experience with the college, and 2 participants had less than 5 years. Data were collected through discussions with two focus groups. The data were coded first by a word analysis and followed by a text analysis to support and identify themes. The findings are presented in six themes: (a) colour prevails - right/White way; (b) privilege with a small “p”; (c) ethnicity and colour; (d) sameness - be like “us”; (e) immigrant syndrome; and (f) expectations of the education system. The focus group sessions also produced six recommendations: (1) there should be a preparation process for faculty offering diversity courses; (2) administrators should consider the experience and background of faculty being assigned courses with content on diversity issues and, if needed, offer professional development that thoroughly examines Whiteness and diversity issues; (3) all faculty should engage in a discussion of Whiteness that could better prepare faculty to deal with issues of diversity and build relationships with students of colour; (4) discussions of Whiteness should be expanded to include all staff and students, perhaps as a responsibility of the Diversity Committee, a subcommittee of Academic Council; (5) a specific course on Whiteness could be offered in all programs; and (6) the college could develop a well-constructed media campaign that speaks a clear message of acceptance.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

“You know how Native people joke and make fun of themselves – do White people do the same?” A Native friend asked me this question. She was talking about Native humour that reflects the stereotypical images that outsiders have of Native people. I contemplated inserting an example of such humour and decided after some discussion with this friend that if I were to cite an example of a joke, it might easily be misunderstood because it would be out of context. Therefore, I decided not to relate an example. However, I would like to add that the topic of Native humour has been well documented in Native literature (e.g., Taylor, 2005).

What seemed like a simple question asked in a joking manner led me to speculate further. I could not answer this question immediately, and I had to think carefully before I responded. I answered by saying that I did not think White people make fun of themselves in the same way. White people may joke about themselves, but the jokes are rarely generalized to all Whites or stereotypes of Whites. I speculated that perhaps this is because White people feel confident and secure about their Whiteness. If the jokes made by Native people reflect stereotypes of themselves, then White people perhaps do not make fun of themselves because they are not aware of being stereotyped. This made me see another difference in the life experiences of myself and my friend based on my Whiteness and her Nativeness.

Throughout this paper, I use the term *White* rather than *Euro-Canadian* because the term White is connected to an extensive body of literature key to this study. The terms Native and Aboriginal are used interchangeably, except when the study participants

or other primary sources used a different term. There is an ongoing discussion regarding terminology: Some people prefer the term Native, but others prefer the term First Nations. The naming and self-naming of others is a complicated and sensitive matter (Kivel, 2002). In this study, I take my cue from the study participants as to how they use and understand these terms.

When I began to think about a topic for my research, I felt strongly about investigating anti-racism education because I wanted to study an issue that would be relevant to my work as an educator working with both Native and White people. An experience that prompted me to pursue the topic of Whiteness occurred in one of my graduate courses. I was required to read some articles on Whiteness and found that while doing so, I became engaged in a process of self-examination regarding my own Whiteness that I had not considered previously. At first, I believed that I did not need to question myself about possibly being a racist educator because I did not practice racist behaviour or think racist thoughts. I had spent many years working in Aboriginal communities, and I had Aboriginal friends, so I thought that these realities precluded my having or being influenced by racist tendencies. However, after some self-reflection, I concluded that even though I have worked with Aboriginal people and have established friendships with them, I am not exempt from falling into stereotyping and racist traps. I realized that this thinking in and of itself is a racist trap and while it seems to create a situation, that is, White versus Aboriginal, it may reveal that all of us are susceptible, and all of us have racist tendencies as we all live in a racist society. It also hinted at the precarious notion that Aboriginal people should express gratitude for having a White

person be willing to associate with them or that having Aboriginal friends is tokenism and allows you to be absolved of the social category of racist.

As I was preparing for a class presentation on anti-racist education, I previewed the video “Blue Eyed” (Elliott, 1996) which aired on the CBC in 2005. It documented Jane Elliott facilitating an anti-racism workshop for White and Aboriginal participants. As I watched the video, I felt sorry for the White participants and thought that Elliott was too hard on them. I began to analyze my reaction in an attempt to understand why I was responding this way, and I realized that it was vital for me to explore this further as a White person and as a White adult educator teaching Aboriginal people in a postsecondary setting.

This research was a self-study as well as an exploration of other White people’s perspectives. The 11 participants in this study were White college faculty members who volunteered to participate in two focus group discussions of Whiteness. Each focus group met for two discussion sessions each, followed by a third contact when all of the participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts from their focus group sessions. Based on their feedback, adjustments were made to the transcripts. In the first meeting of each focus group, the participants were asked to define Whiteness. We then examined the idea in more depth, paying particular attention to the implications of Whiteness on our teaching.

I shared with the other 10 participants my personal experiences and reflections on the ongoing reconstruction of my White identity. I believed that it was important to confront my personal position in relation to this topic rather than be excluded by claims of remaining neutral and objective as a researcher. I also hoped to demonstrate my own

journey, struggles, and convictions so that the other White participants felt safe in expressing themselves, knowing that their responses would be valued and treated with respect. As Fine (1994) argued, “Participatory qualitative researchers who are interested in self-consciously ‘working with the hyphen’ between Self and Other must do so by ‘unpacking the notions of scientific neutrality, universal truths, and researcher dispassion’ ” (p. 71).

I took my inspiration for this research project from McIntyre (1997), who also situated herself within a study of Whiteness and chose to work alongside her study participants. She commented that the self-examination she experienced was not “without a great deal of struggle” (p. 29) and that as she worked through the process, she found herself “refocusing the lens” with which she viewed her “own reality” and that it was an exercise “fraught with contradiction and questions” (p. 29). She found neither simple answers to racism nor “simple strategies for being a white participant-researcher investigating the meaning of whiteness with a group of white student teachers” (p. 29). In my study I wanted to explore Whiteness alongside some of my White colleagues.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my investigation was to provide White college faculty colleagues the opportunity to critically examine their own personal and professional understanding of Whiteness. I hoped that this process would lead to an increased awareness of Whiteness among faculty that would influence and enrich their relationships with students, colleagues, and staff. I also hoped that the findings from this study would extend beyond the college, with the participants initiating a similar discussion of Whiteness among their family members, friends, and other associates.

At the community college where the study took place, there is a growing population of Aboriginal students. It is difficult to provide an accurate account of the number of Aboriginal students in attendance at the college because they must self-identify through the application form. However, according to the 1996 census, the Aboriginal population in the community where the college is situated comprises approximately 10% of the overall population (Haluza-DeLay, 2002).

I am a college faculty member. Given the increasing Aboriginal student population in my college I am sad to report that I have often heard Aboriginal students describe their personal and educational experiences of racism at the college. The incidents have involved people from all echelons in the college: teachers, other students, administrators, and staff members working in such areas as the cafeteria and the bookstore. Rather than focus on student experiences of racism, I have chosen to limit my sample to White faculty to bring a different analysis into this college context: the awareness of the instructors. I want to emphasize that it is not just students who play a role in racism. Indeed, in my student-teacher interactions, the students are the ones who confirm that they experience racism, be it subtle or overt, when dealing with faculty and staff. I thus turned my attention to faculty perspectives.

The following is a description of the remaining chapters. Chapter 2 represents a literature review that is organized in four parts: racism and anti-racism education, resistance to addressing Whiteness, resistance by educators and definition of terms. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, Chapter 4 presents the findings which are reflected in seven themes and Chapter 5 is a discussion of the how the findings connect with the literature, recommendations, and concluding reflections.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A literature review on any educational topic is bound to be large and unwieldy but in the case of a contentious and controversial topic such as Whiteness and racism, the literature is even more voluminous. To contend with this volume, I have chosen to organize the literature review into four parts: (a) racism and anti-racism education in Canadian educational institutions (elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels); (b) Whiteness as one part of anti-racist pedagogy in educational settings; (c) the anticipated resistance to addressing this topic; and (d) resistance by educators.

Much of this literature originates from the United States, but I made a concerted effort to focus on Canadian literature because my study was conducted at a Canadian postsecondary institution. The literature on racism in Canada, unlike the majority of the American literature, often highlights the interactions and relationships between White and Aboriginal peoples. Even though Canada encompasses a diversity of cultures and ethnic groups, Aboriginal people hold a unique position grounded in legal documents with the Canadian government. Their history coupled with their legal status is the basis for their ongoing struggle to be recognized as a nation. Aboriginal people remain “a vibrant element in Canadian society” (Haluza-DeLay, 2002, p. 1). Aboriginal peoples are described as the founding nations of Canada, but they experience an ongoing struggle for recognition of their right to self-determination in Canadian society, hence the use of the politically laden term “First Nations” is important.

Racism and Anti-racism Education

Canada has a long history of institutionalized racism when dealing with people of colour (Blackwell, Smith, & Sorenson, 2003). In the case of Aboriginal peoples they have been marginalized through the designation of reserves and through the residential school system. Native children and Native families were brutalized when the Canadian government forced children to be taken from their families and communities and to live in residential schools (Blackwell et al., 2003). Although it was presented as an educational opportunity, the main agenda of the government was to assimilate Aboriginal children into Euro-Canadian society (Blackwell et al., 2003).

Residential schools were particularly brutal and damaging to Aboriginal people. The Canadian federal government and church officials were responsible for establishing and operating these residential schools. Parents were told by priests and Indian Affairs agents that they had to send their children to these schools. Because parents did not understand the English language or did not have power in these situations, they were not able to successfully challenge the authorities who took their children away (Hill, 1995). Today, the Aboriginal population is still dealing with the long-term effects of residential schools. Ongoing challenges include the inability of those who were raised in the residential school system to parent their own children, along with the need to reclaim lost language, culture, and community (Hill, 1995).

As a result of the residential school system it is understandable why Aboriginal people do not view the education system as providing equity and the means to potential economic gain for Aboriginal people. This places White educators, such as the

participants and myself, in the precarious situation of having inherited a perception of education as institutionalized racism against Aboriginal people.

According to Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003), members of groups identified by racial and ethnic characteristics, such as Aboriginal people, African North Americans, and non-European immigrants, frequently experience educational inequity. This assertion was supported by research in the study *For the Love Of Learning* which was conducted by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 1995. The Ministry's report suggested a vision and an action plan to guide the reform of elementary and secondary education in Ontario. However, the Ministry has not accounted for how many of the recommendations of this report have actually been implemented in Ontario school boards.

Some of the most comprehensive data in the Ministry's (1995) report relating to equity considerations came directly from the Toronto District School Board. They include the following statistics:

36% of black [*sic*] secondary school students were 'at risk' based on their grades in English and math [and] even black students who have university-educated parents, or parents in professional occupations, or who live with both parents, continue to do disappointingly. (p. 9)

In addition, the report's data indicated that in 1991, "while 74 percent of all Grade 9 students were taking courses at the advanced level, only 53 percent of Portuguese students and 61 percent of Hispanic students were doing so" (p. 13). This would seem to indicate low representation of the Portuguese and Hispanic students at the advanced level in comparison to the larger student body.

In a similar vein, Carr and Klassen (1997) reported on data from secondary school students in Toronto that indicated that many Black students are streamed into lower level programs and have a higher than average dropout rate. They also noted that Black and

Aboriginal peoples share this social inequity because they both have lower educational outcomes than other groups (p. 68). Carr and Klassen outlined some factors explaining this inequity, including irrelevant curriculum, lower involvement of parents, limited teacher effectiveness, and alienating school culture.

In response to problems such as these, Banks and Lynch (1986) argued that White teachers must understand how “race and culture interact to cause educational problems for many ethnic minority students” (p. 16). They asserted that White teachers or administrators need to see how their own lived experiences [Whiteness] could impact on the relationships they develop with racially diverse students.

Even though much of the literature refers to elementary and secondary education, similar problems occur in postsecondary education. In a study on race relations in Thunder Bay (Haluza-DeLay, 2002), the participants described their experiences of racism within the university and college settings. The examples ranged from blatant (e.g., assault on a student living in residence) to systemic (e.g., student feeling prejudice from a teacher and believing this was the reason for lower grades).

Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003) contended that the “structure, curriculum and practices at every [educational] level [should be] informed by, and reflective of, the diversity of human knowledge and experiences in Canadian society” (p. x). They suggested that the public education system should be committed to challenging practices inside and outside of school that unfairly limit educational opportunities. As well, they challenge all educators to ensure this does not happen wherever they work within the Canadian public education system.

There are two dominant pedagogical approaches to racism: the colour-blind approach and the anti-racist approach. In the “colour blind” approach, White teachers often claim that they practice colour blindness in the classroom, meaning that from their perspective, they treat all students equally and fairly, regardless of skin colour (Johnson, 2002). However, this response would suggest that racism is not an issue if one simply disregards skin colour. One teacher in Johnson’s study stated:

I thought it was wrong to see color. Like the T-shirts that say, “Love Sees No Color.” As I’ve come to learn, you’re missing the person who is that color. You’re missing a big part of that person if you refuse to see it My eyes have been opened. (p. 153)

Johnson (2002) analyzed staff development programs designed to teach educators multicultural content and strategies to help them teach more equitably. Most professional development programs do not allow teachers the opportunity to deconstruct their own interpretations of race and experiences of race in the classroom. The colour-blind approach and use of multicultural staff development can be easily regarded as a simplistic approach that is inadequate. Johnson argued that a more effective approach would be to have White teachers actively reflect on their concepts of race and racism, and then deconstruct and reconstruct their own racial views. Johnson commented, “The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you can alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change the world” (p.153).

In contrast to the colour-blind approach, the anti-racist strategy is to start with the concept of race and examine Whiteness and White privilege as key factors in the perpetuation of racist practices (Manglitz, 2003). The discourse on anti-racism education began in Canada in an effort to transform schooling and education to better cope with a changing demographic in Canadian society. Dei (1996) clarified that “the purpose of anti-

racism education is to help create a just and humane society for the well-being of all people” (p. 26). Examining Whiteness is good anti-racist practice for all of Canadian society.

King (1991) encouraged people to probe more deeply into issues of racism. She advocated examining the underlying structures that inform the way teaching operates while working toward change in attitudes and behaviours. Henry, Tator, Mattis, and Rees (1995) described the racism that manifests in a variety of practices: attitudes and practices of teachers and administrators; curriculum that is Eurocentric; the incidence of harassment such as racial graffiti, physical and verbal abuse; prejudiced streaming; and the devaluation of parental and community participation.

Resistance to Addressing Whiteness

If you are a White person, have you ever wondered how your skin colour relates to your identity? As a White person, I had not given much thought to my White identity, given that my skin colour has placed me in a position of advantage. Wherever I am, when at home in Canada, I do not have to wonder what people think about me, nor do I have to worry that I am being judged on the basis of my skin colour. A discussion of skin colour conjures up biases, prejudices, and assumptions, the most predominant assumption being that White-skinned people are considered the social elite in Western society: We have the power and the privilege, and everyone else is on the outside of this selective circle and is deemed ‘less than’ for not being White. I think the majority of teachers do not consider themselves the elite or the privileged. Yet, when their Whiteness is pointed out, they become extremely defensive that they are being judged by their skin colour – even though that is precisely the point.

Kivel (2002) defined Whiteness as “a constantly shifting boundary separating those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation and vulnerability to violence is justified by their not being white” (p. 15). Through his definition of Whiteness, Kivel made it clear that White skin colour brings entitlement. Accordingly, any discussion of Whiteness should begin with skin colour. This definition highlights an underlying theme to this study, that is, the correlation of privilege and entitlement with White skin colour. The question of how White skin colour came to mean entitlement and how Whites enjoy surfing on the inequitable treatment of non-Whites is central to understanding the ill treatment or judgment of those who are not White. It is imperative that White people think about how they may have, or are, contributing to racism and discriminatory actions. This effort may lead to a more equitable world for all.

Researchers have disagreed on how Whiteness and White privilege should be examined; however, researchers have been consistent in explaining that Whiteness is a socially constructed phenomenon. “The social construction of Whiteness refers to the ways that White and all other racial identities have been historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced over time and do not refer in an essential or biological way to human bodies” (Manglitz, 2003, p. 122). Manglitz also commented that the “meaning and significance of race, including Whiteness, is not a natural, fixed category but a social construct that evolves in relation to changing historical and political conditions” (p. 122). Other socially constructed phenomena include gender, socioeconomic status, age, and sexual orientation. These socially constructed phenomena are the basis for categorizing people and setting them apart. For example, the White heterosexual male is viewed as the person with the most power and privilege in society; following that, the White

heterosexual female is presumed to carry White authority over men and women of colour (Kivel, 2002).

Resistance by Educators

There have been initiatives to encourage discussion about Whiteness and White privilege in higher education and to help White people address their own racism within academia. McIntyre (1997), for example, worked with White teachers to facilitate discussion and reflection on their White identity. Through her study, a process was established to support and encourage White teachers to critically examine their Whiteness. It was hoped that the White teachers would come to know how their Whiteness situates them in a place of privilege and how this positioning may have an effect on their relationship with students of colour.

The efforts of McIntyre (1997) supported the notion that if more White teachers are willing to discuss their Whiteness openly, they could then offer students the same opportunity to learn about the social construction of discriminatory phenomena and Whiteness. Even though this process could evoke emotional responses that may be uncomfortable for Whites, it is a necessary part of becoming more informed and educated. Hopefully, new knowledge about Whiteness gained by teachers and students, be they White or of colour, may serve to improve and strengthen the dyadic relationship. Identifying power imbalances in society can help in identifying similar power imbalances in the classroom, such as that between a White teacher and student of colour.

King (1991) provided another example in her study of an effort to have Whites critically examine their Whiteness. She set out to explore with her students “the dynamics of a liberatory pedagogy” (p. 134). Given that King was responsible for teaching a course

on social foundations, she decided to use the course as a vehicle to have her students “consider alternative conceptions of themselves and society” (p. 134). King had her students examine their positions and identities and then identify how they may have accepted the belief systems or socially constructed systems that underscore racial inequity. As a White adult educator, she wanted to challenge her students to question themselves and examine their acceptance of racial inequity.

King (1991) also addressed the complexity of efforts that educators have made to practice equity within their classrooms. For example, she cautioned the reader to take heed of “new watchwords” (p. 133) that are often heard today in education. Expressions such as “celebrating diversity” (p. 133) infers that within a democratic society, all students will be educated equitably. Although such a pronouncement is positive, King explained that if White teachers have little personal experience and understanding of diversity and inequity, they lack the ability to advocate for and recognize equity in their classrooms. It is not an obvious process, and even the best-intentioned teachers will make mistakes, given that they are part of an inequitable society.

According to King (1991), this process is particularly challenging for teachers accustomed to an audience or a student body composed of a privileged and “monocultural” social group (p. 133). In this case, teachers and students may mean well when they speak of wanting to be accepting and supportive of an environment that treats all students equally; however, the real challenge is whether or not they can strive for this outside a context of security and status in their own White identity.

It is also important to investigate the role of educational administration and policy. Messages from administrators can influence the classroom relationships between

teachers and students. For example, Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003) commented on responses toward equity and diversity that fail to move “beyond abstract idealism indicated in the ‘shoulds’ ubiquitous in educational forums” (p. 3). Messages consistently encourage teachers to incorporate equity and diversity education in all of their activities, events, displays, and so on; schools to strive to reflect all groups in their displays; and all children to achieve the highest educational level of which they are capable. However, the question remains: How does one fulfil all of these “shoulds”?

I discovered through my review of the literature on Whiteness that this discussion opens up the potential for many questions and unpleasant comments. Many White people do not like to refer to themselves as White and may choose other terms such as European, Ukrainian, Irish, and so on. When the subject of racism comes up, many do not want to claim being White “because it opens us to charges of being racist and brings up feelings of guilt, shame, embarrassment, and hopelessness” (Kivel, 2002, p. 8). Rather than being discouraged by these negative comments, I reaffirm the value in offering a group of White educators the opportunity to reflect on Whiteness that will enrich the relationships they build with students of colour. I trust that if a White teacher has the opportunity to gain knowledge about Whiteness then a deeper understanding of her relationship with the student of colour would seem more likely than not.

Blackwell et al. (2003) discussed the notion of race and suggested that it is meaningless because it has no scientific reality and lacks consistency. They argued that race cannot be defined precisely because people do not fit into neat categories: We either fall between categories or we are a blend of categories. They suggested that the concept of race should be abandoned because muddled thinking, oppression, and injustice are all

attached to it. Nevertheless, there is a need to make a case that, although scientifically dubious as a concept, race as a social construct embedded in racism still has a profound impact and must be discussed directly.

Resistance to discussions of Whiteness is to be expected. Power and privilege are twin beneficial phenomena that reinforce this resistance and must be considered within any discussion of Whiteness. Many teachers may express trepidation about relinquishing their power and privilege (Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003). Teachers can resist equity and diversity in education because these concepts threaten the existing power structure and their reliance on it for authority in the student-teacher relationship. In the words of two anti-racism advocates, “Racism has to do with the protection of privilege – people holding on to things, to their traditions, to their status, to the opportunity for economic advancement” (Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003, pp. 39-40).

It is vital to anti-racism education that the parties be open to self-interrogation and an honest appraisal of their biases as “a fundamental underpinning of successful anti-racism teaching” (Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003, p. 163). Examining Whiteness is one example of self-interrogation. Through the self-interrogation process, White educators will be encouraged to recognize first that the problem of racism needs to be addressed. Once this occurs, the White educators can then determine the role they will play in working toward positive outcomes. There is always the possibility that some will choose to like their power and authority, regardless of whether it is based unfairly on age, gender, or race.

Although fraught with potential discomfort and controversy, the process of creating safe spaces to explore these issues is important. My study on the perspectives of

White college faculty about Whiteness may contribute to further discussion within my own institution and possibly be of interest to others engaged in processes exploring similar struggles with racism.

Definition of Terms

The following glossary is offered to explain some of the common terms being used in a discussion on racism. For the purposes of this study these definitions will be used in order to have some common understanding of terminology.

Stereotype

“A false or generalized conception of a group of people that results in an unconscious or conscious categorization of each member of that group, without regard for individual differences” (Henry & Tator, 2006, p.352).

Oppression

“The domination of certain individuals or groups by others through the use of physical, psychological, social, cultural, or economic force” (Henry & Tator, 2006, p.351).

Marginal

“The status of groups who do not have full and equal access to the social, economic, cultural, and political institutions of society” (Henry & Tator, 2006, p.351).

Racism

“Everyday racism involves the many and sometimes small ways in which racism is experienced by people of colour in their interactions with the dominant White group. It expresses itself in glances, gestures, forms of speech, and physical movements.

Sometimes it is not even consciously experienced by its perpetrators, but it is immediately and painfully felt by its victims” (Henry & Tator, 2006, p.54).

Systemic racism

“Racism that consists of policies and practices, entrenched in established institutions, that result in the exclusion or advancement of specific groups of people” (Henry & Tator, 2006, p.352).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Anti-oppressive Theories of Research

I conducted my research utilizing a qualitative approach. For the purposes of this study, my working definition of qualitative research is taken from Bogdan and Biklen (2003): “[It is] an approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subject’s point of view” (p. 261). This approach was the most appropriate, given that the participants’ responses and perspectives were central for this study.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) refer to the importance of researchers “being aware of their theoretical base [and to] use it to help collect and analyze data” (p. 22). In consideration of this statement, I researched various theories before choosing one that would best frame my research. Eventually, I found concepts and ideas presented in a collection of writings that helped to establish the approach within which I conducted my research.

Brown and Strega (2005) argue that social justice is a necessary research outcome, not merely part of the research process. These researchers offered examples of alternative approaches to research that are especially helpful when working with participants who are marginalized because of colour, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.

This theoretical commitment to social justice and working with marginalized participants was aligned with my goals in this study, but I felt uncertain about an appropriate fit of the methodology, knowing that my participant group was comprised of

privileged White people, the opposite of the “marginalized.” I contacted Leslie Brown, one of the editors of the 2005 book, *Research as Resistance*, and expressed my desire and my concerns. She was very encouraging and explained that the book stressed the importance of centering difference. Because this is often a new experience for people who do not consider themselves marginalized, she argued that an exploration of Whiteness would be a meaningful experience for the participants in my study. She also explained that the book is about doing liberatory research, and on that basis alone, I should consider it useful and worthwhile.

I chose a framework for my study that could best be described as anti-racist, activist, and committed to social justice. My intention was to conduct research in a respectful manner that encouraged and supported the White participants to voice their thoughts and opinions. Through their participation in my study, there was the potential for the individuals to realize and acknowledge their own biases, assumptions, and prejudices, and to think about changing these behaviours and perceptions.

I was further encouraged by a message in Brown and Strega’s (2005) book to the newborn researcher. They contended that research can be “emancipating, community building, a catalyst for social change, and a starting point for some serious self discovery” (p. 257), even for the novice researcher. Because anti-oppressive research is emergent, they suggest that anti-oppressive research “requires an attitude that accepts ambivalence and uncertainty” (p. 263) and that we need to “create spaces for ourselves and others who are commonly excluded from the creation of knowledge” (p. 263). They proposed that anti-oppressive research heightens the need to build critical thinking skills, listen carefully, and analyze relationships of power. Researchers can then go forward with

identifying and problematizing assumptions, ways of thinking, and actions that have had a harmful effect on those who are marginalized.

Framing my study from within the principles of anti-oppressive research, it is important to stress the foundational idea that knowledge is socially constructed. In doing so, I followed Brown and Strega's (2005) argument that "recognizing that knowledge is socially constructed means understanding that knowledge doesn't exist 'out there' but is embedded in people and the power relations between us" (p. 261). Knowledge is political because it is constructed through power relations that place the power of knowledge in the hands of the elite and the privileged. This concept was integral to my study as it underpinned an understanding of how Whites (and I as the researcher) have come to own and expect power and privilege in society.

Recognizing oppression when it happens to others or ourselves is vital to the study of Whiteness. It is important to understand and acknowledge that we may be responsible for creating or sustaining oppression over others if we do not speak out and try to stop it. I suspect that for the most part, the participants in my study view themselves as well-meaning people, that is, as "White, middle-class, heterosexual and able-bodied people" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 258). I believe the challenge for White people is to recognize personal privilege and recognize the role and responsibility of educators in changing the power dynamics of the classroom.

Anti-oppressive research is a search "for meaning, for understanding, for the power to change" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 261). A White teacher who arrives at a new understanding of her own (assumed) position of power and privilege can present this knowledge in a classroom and potentially create change within other individuals,

including other faculty and students. My commitment to social change research hinges on the possibility of positive change and growth occurring for some of the participants as a result of this study.

Anti-oppressive Research Design

In anti-oppressive research design, the significance of the relationship between the researcher and the participant(s) is central (Smith, 1999). Smith argued that the very act of asking a question is research and situates the researcher as an outsider.

Recognizing this, I knew that it was important for me to plan how I would interact with the participants in my study. I did not want to merely direct questions to the participants as if I had no opinions myself. Thus, I established a more dialogical arrangement whereby a conversation occurred, facilitating the free exchange of information among all participants, including myself.

Smith (1999) poses questions that may be asked of a White researcher when planning data collection in an Indigenous community. Even though I was not planning to conduct a study with Indigenous peoples I wanted to keep these questions in mind when planning my data collection. Smith suggested that the researcher design research thinking about the following:

Ways a research topic is produced, who is involved in shaping the topic, who will benefit from it, who has designed its questions and framed its scope, and whose interests are being served (and not being served) by the study of this question.
(p. 10)

In general, the overarching research question that I presented the participants at the first focus group meeting was, “What does Whiteness mean to you?” This question took us in many directions through subsequent questions or responses by the participants: why, or why not, is White a skin colour, as is Black? Why have I not ever considered my

Whiteness as part of my identity? How does your Whiteness position you personally? How do you think your Whiteness positions you professionally? Where does ethnicity come into the discussion?

Keeping these questions in mind, I decided I would discuss the research questions with the participants during the first meeting and before the more formal process of data collection had begun. I would encourage the participants' input into changing the questions or including new ones. As well, I would give the participants some background information on how I chose the topic and research questions, so there was an opportunity for explanation or clarification. This process set the foundation for building a relationship of reciprocity between the participants and the researcher. I chose to use focus groups instead of individual interviews for a number of reasons. First, I did not want to be the lone researcher hearing participants' insights and therefore the only one who had access to the knowledge generated. Second, I thought that participants could generate knowledge as a group. This approach, to me, was more participatory and thus more in tune with anti-oppressive research.

Recruitment of Participants

Before recruiting any participants, I first met with the administrators at the college who are responsible for granting permission to conduct research in their facility. I expressed my wish to recruit participants from the college as well as secure a private room for an interview session with the participants. At this meeting, I described my research topic as well as the proposed method of data collection. The college administrators agreed to support the study once it was approved by Lakehead University.

Formal ethical approval for this study was sought and granted through the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board.

Once I gained ethical approval from Lakehead University, I began the process of recruiting participants for this study. I returned to the college and submitted a copy of my proposed letter of invitation to potential participants (see Appendix A) for review by senior administrators at the college. Subsequent to receiving approval for this letter, I was asked to submit the letter of invitation to the administration office at the college for mailing out. This process would ensure the participants' confidentiality because I could not be given a faculty personal address list. My responsibility was to put copies of the letter in stamped, sealed envelopes, and the college would place the address labels on the envelopes. This arrangement had been previously agreed to at a meeting with the president of the college and a senior administrator.

The letter of invitation was mailed to two groups of faculty, namely, those who had been employed as faculty at the college for less than 5 years and those who had been employed as faculty at the college for 15 years or more. This was the criterion to determine who would receive a letter. There was no process to determine who was White. The decision to divide the group in this manner had also been previously discussed at a meeting with a senior administrator and the president of the college. The rationale for this decision was to explore whether or not there would be any difference in the responses between the two groups. For example, would the more senior faculty have different views about Whiteness than the newer faculty? However, this was not discussed at length and was not viewed as critical to the study. If there were more faculty represented in the 15 years or more group it would not be a problem.

The letter of invitation was mailed out from the college. I was responsible for bringing the letters in sealed, stamped envelopes to the college where address labels were then put on the envelopes and the letters mailed. Within a week, some of the recipients began to raise concerns with other faculty, the president, and senior administrators. These concerns also reached members of the community outside the college. I was not contacted directly by anyone who had concerns about my letter; therefore, the issues I outline here were reported to me secondhand, although I had the opportunity to listen to one telephone message that was left on my thesis supervisor's answering machine.

Concerns reported by faculty were diverse and numerous:

1. I should not have had access to the college faculty personal address list because that was a breach of confidentiality.
2. How did I choose who would receive the letter of invitation? Did I choose people whom I believed to be racist?
3. My study was going to be used to develop a new course that would help keep the department that delivers Aboriginal programs alive because this department was viewed as failing. This department of the college is referred to as a "college within a college."
4. I should have contacted the potential recipients of my letter first to ask if they wanted to receive my invitation to participate.
5. Fear that as a colleague, I would report any participants whom I believed to be racist.
6. Fear that the participants or group members might judge each other.

The caller who left the message identified himself as a faculty member at the college and a recipient of my letter of invitation. In his message, he said, "It's all about Whiteness."

My interpretation, and [that of] several others, is this is a racist letter. What's Whiteness got to do with anything? We do what we do. [It] has nothing to do with colour.”

Because of these concerns, I was asked by a senior administrator if I would be willing to attend an information session for faculty at the college. I consented to this request and an e-mail was sent by a senior administrator inviting faculty to this information session, which would allow faculty the opportunity to hear more about my study and to ask me questions directly. Seven people attended this meeting; hopefully, those who attended received clarification and were able to pass the information to their colleagues. I was also invited to and subsequently attended a meeting with a group of senior managers at the college to discuss my study and answer questions.

Despite these concerns, 10 faculty members contacted me and volunteered to be in the study. Two focus groups were formed from these 10 faculty who responded; their length of employment at the college was not a factor. The participants and the president of the college each received cover letters (see Appendices B and C) that outlined the research topic and the purpose of the study. The cover letters also noted the voluntary basis of their participation in the study and acknowledged their ability to withdraw at any time. The participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D). I also had the president of the college sign a release form (see Appendix E).

All data collected during the study was viewed only by me, the participants, and the person transcribing the audiotapes. All data collected during the study will be securely stored at Lakehead University for 7 years. Identifying information such as the name of the college and the participants will not be revealed in any published materials. The participants' identities remained confidential at all times, as did the identity of the

college. The participants were not identified by name or by any means that may have compromised their anonymity.

Study Sample

The study sample comprised 11 full-time White faculty including myself as the researcher-participant (out of a possible 145 full-time faculty) at the community college. Nine (82%) participants were female, and 2 (18%) were male. I should clarify that I included myself in the total count of participants in the study, and I also counted myself in the total participants for each focus group. When I broke down the gender composition of each focus group, I included myself in each focus group. Nine (82%) of the 11 participants were faculty employed by the college for 15 years or more; the other 2 (18%) participants were faculty employed by the college for less than 5 years. The pseudonyms used to identify the participants were not indicative of the genders of the participants in order to ensure confidentiality.

The letter of invitation was sent to two groups of faculty, namely, those with less than 5 years of experience at the college and those with 15 or more years of experience at the college. By choosing the participants according to years of experience at the college, originally I had thought there might be an opportunity to determine whether or not there was a difference in their responses: Perhaps more senior faculty members might have views different from those of “newer” faculty. Because most of the participants were from the older group, it was not feasible to make this comparison. I could not explain why more faculty from the older group came forward and volunteered to participate. Any attempt to explain this would be speculation and I did not address this in the study.

The participants were separated into two focus groups, namely, one comprised of 7 people, including myself, and one comprised of 5 people, including myself. The groups were formed according to the order in which participants contacted me to indicate their interest in being part of the study. For example, the first 6 people who responded formed the first group. Group A had 1 male participant and 6 females, including myself; Group B had 1 male and 4 females, including myself. The gender representation was determined by whoever responded to the letter of invitation. There was no design/sampling mechanism to increase the male representation as that was not a concern of college administrators, and I decided it was easier and perhaps more productive to proceed with the existing keen volunteers.

Researcher's Role

I was an active participant in each group, but primarily responsible for coordinating and facilitating the sessions. I arranged the meeting space and facilitated the beginning of each session. During the focus group sessions, I took responsibility for signaling the beginning of the session and initiating the discussion. The study into my participants' emerging perspectives on Whiteness would not benefit from me dominating the sessions so I spoke consciously and only if there was a lull in the conversation.

When I first set out to arrange a meeting space, I knew that probably the most convenient place would be at the college. I set out to coordinate meeting times that would not interfere with teaching schedules, and because the times chosen by the participants typically were during the workday, it was easier for us to meet at the workplace. I contacted the person at the college who is responsible for scheduling rooms, and she booked a room for us. I wanted a room that would be comfortable and create an

atmosphere conducive to conversation. I also brought juice, water, and some fruit to the sessions to help everyone relax and to revive the instructors at the end of their workday.

Research Procedures

I had three meetings with each of the focus groups: the first two meetings were each approximately 1.5 hours long and the third meeting approximately 1 hour. In one group, there was at least a 7-day gap between each meeting; for the other, there was one break of approximately 4 weeks due to a labour strike by faculty and my absence from the area. The break between focus group meetings proved to be helpful as a time of reflection. I negotiated the meeting times with the participants and was flexible about the arrangements in order for all the participants to understand the importance of considering everyone's special circumstances.

During the first meeting, I reiterated the purpose, procedures, and ethical issues in this study. I presented the cover letters and the consent forms for the participants to read and sign. I made certain that the participants were aware that the meetings would be audiotaped. I outlined the plan for the three meetings, including time frames; however, I emphasized that the plan could be changed in order to reach a consensus. I advised the participants of my plan to offer my personal thoughts concerning my own White identity. Once these tasks were completed, I began the discussion with the overarching question, "What is Whiteness?"

The second meeting built on issues raised during the first discussion as well as any thoughts that the participants had had since the first meeting. The third meeting provided an opportunity to review the transcripts from the first two meetings.

The conversations from the focus group meetings were audiotaped and transcribed. To determine the accuracy of the findings from the perspective of the participants, I undertook a process of “member checking” (Creswell, 2003) by having the participants privately review the transcripts. At this time, the participants had the opportunity to request any changes, including adding or deleting commentary. This was also an opportunity to debrief the research process and discuss any potential ideas for future work in the college. A face-to-face meeting was held with one focus group; most of the second focus group had already left for summer vacation, so transcripts were distributed by e-mail or regular postal mail, and these participants gave their feedback via e-mail.

The meetings with the participants were audiotaped on two tape recorders, one for backup in case of technical problems. These tapes were then transcribed by someone I hired who agreed to maintain confidentiality. At the end of each meeting, I also wrote field notes on the physical setting of the meeting: I made observations on behaviours or emotional reactions that occurred during the meetings, body language, interactions between and among the participants, and reactions to me as the researcher and a co-participant. I also wrote comments or questions that I may have wanted to bring back to the participants for further discussion. These field notes were considered part of the data collection.

Data Analysis

Once the participants approved the transcripts, I read through them at least twice before coding the data. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) outlined a method for analyzing what they referred to as “free-flowing text” (p. 775). Ryan and Bernard (2000) suggested that

two types of analysis can be used in this situation. In the first method, larger pieces of text are used to discover meaning. In the second method, the text is separated into its most meaningful component: words. One technique used for word analysis was referred to as “word count” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 776), which could be used to bring out patterns of ideas within the text from the field notes and transcripts. For example, this technique would be helpful for determining patterns such as female participants using certain words more than the male participants.

I began with a word analysis by seeking out words that corresponded to my research question. I then moved to a text analysis to identify themes or concepts that emerged from the data and subsequently found to be connected to concepts from the literature review. The themes or ideas were represented throughout the data and showed some pattern or repetition, indicating that it had been expressed consistently by more than one participant. Once I identified the themes, I developed a coding system to name and categorize them.

To keep the data organized, I named each focus group and numbered the session. In this way, I was able to track the groups and sessions and could determine any differences or similarities. For example, my notes indicated a quote came from “A. 2 p. 3,” meaning focus group A, session 2, and page 3.

Because 9 (82%) of the participants fit the category of 15 to 20 years of teaching experience at the college, and because there were only 2 male participants, comparative analysis was not appropriate. Exceptions were that 1 male participant made some comments specifically about his maleness, and there was some brief reference to being older and having less patience for dealing with issues.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this research study was that I am a member of the faculty at the college in this study. This may have initially created some tension within the focus groups because I could have been seen as an insider there to judge my colleagues. On the other hand, it could have been seen as a benefit because I was familiar with the context.

Another limitation that may have emerged as the study progressed was discomfort with the topic. Even though the participants had consented to participate in the study, they might have become uncomfortable because the discussion was about their own personal experiences. There was the potential for a sense of defensiveness because some of the participants might feel they were being accused of racism. I made every effort to be sensitive to this possibility and worked to create a safe space for open discussion. Because concerns had been raised about my letter of invitation, tension had been created among the faculty that may have deterred some people from volunteering to participate in the focus groups.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

In both focus groups, the participants were curious about the topic of Whiteness, and they engaged in posing the questions and adding thoughtful comments to each other and to the follow-up sessions. As the participants were White, I assume that they may have been more comfortable exploring this topic with a White researcher. Had I been a person of colour, the results could have been different with participants being less frank. In addition, the participants showed a willingness to consider, or respectfully challenge, responses from other participants when they differed from their own opinions. Some of the participants commented that Whiteness was not something they had consciously thought about before.

Some, if not all, of the participants began thinking about Whiteness after and outside of the first focus group sessions because at least two participants brought additional articles or descriptions of events to their respective group sessions for discussion. For example, 2 participants returned to their second sessions with reports on discussions they had had about Whiteness while they were in a social setting with friends. One more participant declared she felt an increased awareness of events or conversations relating to Whiteness.

The climate of the groups was one of general acceptance of each others' thoughts and opinions. During one session, a participant spoke openly that her opinions did not always seem to mesh with those of other group participants. I observed that she seemed comfortable disclosing that information to her group, and I felt that it was an indication that she was not worried about being singled out. Indeed, it seemed that in both focus

groups, there was a willingness to try to respect all views and to discuss ideas in an analytical manner.

This chapter discusses the six themes that emerged from the analysis of the transcripts of the focus group sessions: (a) colour prevails- -right/White way; (b) privilege with a small 'p'; (c) ethnicity and colour; (d) sameness- -be like 'us'; (e) immigrant syndrome; and (f) expectations upon the education system. Also included in this chapter are the observations and insights derived from my field notes and personal journal. Two critical events relevant to the topic under study are also included. The first event, which came up in one focus group session, refers to administrative restructuring at the college. The second describes an action taken by 2 participants from one of the focus groups.

Focus Group Themes

To describe each theme, I begin with quotes from the participants. Since this study is focused upon the participants, I have relied on the participants' own words to present the themes. I respect the participants for the following costs they were willing to endure: they volunteered their time, they were willing to explore a topic that had sparked discussion within their work environment, they were willing to tolerate their co-workers' questions and skepticism as to the appropriateness of the topic, and they gave the topic serious thought and offered insightful commentary. Foregrounding their voices was my opportunity to demonstrate my respect for their words and reciprocate their kindness.

Some of the quotes taken from the transcripts are written in dialogue form. At times, I chose to do this because I did not want to break apart the conversation as I

thought the statements built on one another and I wanted to convey this flow of ideas to the reader.

Colour Prevails – The Right/White Way

To describe the first theme, I would like to share this exchange between 2 of the participants. Pat stated, “We would like to be able to live in this world without paying attention to colour but...no matter what, when you walk in the room ...[colour matters]” Sandy added, “In an effort to proclaim not being a racist, some White people suggest that they do not ‘see’ colour. Colour matters.” (A.1 p. 4)

This exchange led to further discussion of White people and skin colour. Chris stated, “This is the first time in my life that anybody has ever asked me to think about the colour of my skin, and I have always prided myself in the fact that I don’t think about the colour of my skin or anybody else’s colour” (A.1 p. 6).

Kathleen added, “Part of our Whiteness is that we want to think that we treat everybody the same. And what is the same? The same is as us, as White people” (A.1 p. 13).

When discussing Whiteness, a common reference point came up in both focus groups, that is, how skin colour influences first impressions and judgment of people. For example, a participant disclosed that she was walking down the street in an area of a city where her skin colour was in the minority. At that instant of being a minority, she realized that she could easily be judged based on a stereotype associated with her skin colour. Another participant commented that even though people of colour could accomplish certain things in their lives, those accomplishments would still be compared to and evaluated against the values and standards of Whites. This group realized that skin

accomplish certain things in their lives, those accomplishments would still be compared to and evaluated against the values and standards of Whites. This group realized that skin colour might still impede full acceptance in the White world. One focus group called this idea of doing things the “right/White way” as those White standards used to judge success. Some of the measurements of achievement in the White world may include a high level of education, high socioeconomic status, or a job of great importance.

One participant described a situation in which he was in a conversation with an Aboriginal person. At one point, the Aboriginal person said to him, “My older brother is studying for his Master’s degree in Europe right now.” This participant commented that he reacted to this comment in a different way “than if it was a White guy telling me that his older brother was in Europe studying.” The participant acknowledged that his reaction to this comment was probably racist because he realized that he was surprised that an Aboriginal person could be completing graduate studies in Europe, whereas he would not have been surprised if it had been a White person (B.1 p. 7).

Both focus groups discussed the assumption that there is a desire for many people to achieve the White dream or do things the right/White way. I shared a story with the focus groups about a conversation I had had with a friend who had immigrated to Canada from a country with a very different language, culture, and political system. We were discussing the topic of Whiteness, and as he thought about what I was saying, he began to recall certain things in his upbringing that fit into this notion of doing things right or White. Reflecting on his childhood, he recalled situations when adults would give him advice and tell him to “do it the White way,” suggesting an implicit standard relating to White society to which he should aspire or acquiesce.

As a group, we explored our understandings of how skin colour matters, and we thought about a reference point in our personal lives when we first recognized or felt we were, in fact, White. We noted that our sense of insecurity in relation to skin colour had occurred when we were in a situation where Whites were in the minority. One participant shared her experience of feeling a sense of “me and everybody else”:

I don't know what being White means to me except that the only two instances that come to mind for me, where I became aware of my Whiteness were both positions where I felt insecure in my Whiteness. One was the first time I walked through Chinatown in Toronto and the other was when I got lost in Orlando, Florida, and suddenly the realization that I was White was in opposition to everybody else and that made me feel insecure. (A.1 p. 6)

As a group, we noted that this participant's experience could help White people understand how a person of colour feels when living in a White-dominant society, and how easily people can lose their sense of security and be stereotyped according to their skin colour.

The idea of identifying White people as also being people of colour was explored through one participant's reflection on the capitalization of “W” of the word “White”:

One thing that struck me... is the capital ‘W’ on Whiteness and generally when you see it written it has a small ‘w’. [When with a small ‘w’], it has a sense that it's really not the same kind of identity as Black or Aboriginal or Inuit... It's so naturalized; it's a common noun... Even visually, as a word, it doesn't look the same, doesn't get written the same. (A.1 p. 4)

Another participant asserted that one's identity is influenced predominantly through skin colour:

Although there are other factors used to define oneself, it really is the White first that separates in many ways and has more significance in separating out what is important in your relationship to others. I know when I talk about this with other people, they kind of go, “We're always categorizing people and things you know, sex, race, why is Whiteness any different?” But I think it is different, if it is the most dominant thing, if it is the first thing. (A.1 p. 7)

Evidence of how seldom these White people thought about their skin colour was reflected in stories of firsthand experiences related by 2 of the participants that described behaviour they witnessed that showed them how much colour matters. In one situation, the participant recalled a childhood incident. She and her brother were on a summer trip with their family and travelled to Moose Factory, an Aboriginal community in northern Ontario, Canada. While in the community, they went to a store owned by White people and were mistaken for Aboriginal children because both were tanned and had dark hair.

The participant tells her story:

The clerk asked us to leave, that it was busy and she couldn't keep an eye on us and manage the tourists, and could we just go home with our father? And she pointed to this really, quite elderly Aboriginal man, who was just kind of leaning against the door. And so, in that moment, we said, "He's not our dad, *he's* our dad," and my dad was just walking in the door, a very White-looking man. And she completely turned the whole situation around and was so apologetic and went over to my dad and was saying, "So sorry that I was telling your kids to go." That was the first time I was aware of how, even in that little instance, what I might feel like to be walking through the world with an Aboriginal body and the kind of judgment that goes along with that. (A.1 p. 10)

The second story was about crossing the border into the United States. This participant and her husband cross the border on a regular basis, and she described a different experience she had when travelling with a friend rather than her husband:

This one time, about a year and a half ago, an Aboriginal male friend and I took my vehicle and crossed the border, and that was the one and only time that we were stopped at the American border and asked to please come in. And he was grilled about who he was, what kind of a job he had, where we were going, why we were going. The one and only time. (A.1 p. 10)

Other key points related to this theme included how the participants realized that part of their Whiteness is believing that if they treat everyone the same or equally, that is, they are being fair. Following more discussion and reflection, the participants were able to recall experiences in their lives that signified how much skin colour matters and how it

frames the reactions of White people toward people of colour. For example, one participant recalled hearing an Aboriginal person say that when she walks into a room, she is seen as Aboriginal first; the participant realized that when she walks into a room, she is confident that she is not thought of as White, but “as just a person” (A.1 p. 9).

Privilege with a Small ‘p’

The participants began to critically examine the meaning of Whiteness through their personal experiences, and more and more, these personal experiences provided evidence about how much skin colour matters. They began to realize the many privileges they live with, privileges based on their skin colour.

Julia stated, “The greatest privilege about White privilege is that you don’t have to think about it” (A.1 p. 5). Kelly added, “[White privileges are] privileges with a small ‘p’; they’re things that we don’t think about because they’re taken for granted, they’re automatically just a part of our world” (A.1 p. 5).

For the most part, the participants in the two focus groups understood White privilege. In fact, one participant cited a quote from an article (McIntosh, 1995) to share with the group and to generate discussion: The article lists some of the privileges that are taken for granted by Whites:

I can be pretty sure that my neighbours will be neutrally pleasant to me; I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race; I can go into a music shop and count on finding music of my race being represented; into the supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions; I’m never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group. (A.2 p. 9)

The participant who brought this article to the focus group session explained to the other members, “This is a White academic who kind of starts investigating her Whiteness and comes up with this list of twenty-six kinds of privileges that she knows and she starts

thinking about it” (A.2 p. 9). After citing some examples from the article, this participant related an experience told to her by one of her students:

I have a student right now who’s Ethiopian, and she’s had to shave her head because nobody [in the city where she lives] knows how to cut Black hair because there’s so few Black people and so there’s no hairdressers who actually understand the texture, the curl, or whatever the technical requirements are for [cutting] Black hair. So now she is bald. (A.2 p. 9)

Another participant made the following comment:

When was the last time, as White people, we were deprived of renting an apartment or we were stopped by the police because we were White and driving a fancy car or we were followed around in a store when we were buying something? When was the last time as White people? Would that ever happen to us as White people in Canada, I mean, honestly? No. (A.2 p. 14)

The group began to discuss various types of privileges and explored the idea of what they called privileges with a small “p.” The rationale for stating small “p” was not to suggest that White privilege is about minor privilege. Rather, the point was that all White privilege(s) are important but that Whites do not understand the impact that White privilege(s) have on persons who are not White. Thus, Whites perhaps misconstrue these privileges as small or ordinary.

One of the primary insights of one of the focus groups was that the greatest White privilege is that White people do not have to think about their Whiteness or even notice its existence. One participant commented:

It’s not necessarily the big gap, although I think there is a big gap of power that’s associated with Whiteness, but it is recognizing that in that day-to-day interaction that those are the privileges we’re talking about when we talk about privilege, privilege of not having to think about it. (A.1 p. 5)

A male participant from this focus group described his understanding of the added privilege derived through gender and sexuality. This participant had been given the

opportunity to learn about feminist philosophy in his postsecondary studies, and this occasion had helped him to reflect on his own privilege. Through these studies, he learned that as a White heterosexual male, he has the most privilege of all:

Oh, I am a White guy, and I've never had to prove myself. When I stand in front of a classroom, no one questions that I know what I'm doing. I have to prove that I *don't* know what I'm doing. Where I think the reverse is true, perhaps, for a person of colour and who's up in front of the classroom, you gotta prove you're competent. I don't have to prove anything. (B.1 p. 10)

He continued:

[I] started off really ahead of the game, and people say, "What are you talking about?" That's how I used to introduce discussions in class about sociology and how we get to where we are and the benefits that we reap, but I've had much more than my share. I can choose to be in the struggle or not, because I *can* choose. (B.1 p. 10)

Also reflecting on learning to recognize one's own privileges, another participant spoke of watching the videotapes of Jane Elliott. She described them as life altering in that they helped her see her Whiteness and her privilege:

I really had to rethink how I really feel about me and racism, just because so many of the things about our Whiteness we take for granted... I think it's such a new awareness to think about those things that it changes your life when you realize how White you are... I don't think we really realize sometimes the power that we have or you don't recognize it in those terms. I mean, certainly, I think you recognize you have power as a teacher, you have power as a parent, perhaps, or you have power within your family structure. But I don't think that as a White person, I walked around thinking that I really had this tremendous power, until I started listening and preparing for some lectures that I was doing. (A.1 p. 5)

She continued:

I really do see that, very much, Whiteness comes first, and it's very powerful. So even though I lack power in some areas of my life, I'm still a White woman, and I can see clearly that that gives me more power than I would have otherwise. So, I think my Whiteness is really important to my, I wouldn't have said it was important to my overall self-esteem, but after watching those videos, yeah, life is easier for me because of who I am and where I work. (A.1 p. 5)

As part of this discussion, one participant explored the notion that somehow, it seems easier to think about oppression based on gender rather than oppression based on race:

I think I became more conscious of my, sort of, my position as a woman more easily than as a White person. I could identify there was sort of a women's movement, there was the need to fight for equality, there was the need to get rid of major discrimination that was happening between men and women. That was something I could kind of focus my attention on and so I would say, "Well, it's not White that I am primarily." I identify myself first as a woman, and then maybe as a Canadian, and then maybe as a White person, and then maybe as a daughter, sister, partner, whatever, you could go down the row. I know it's difficult to say what's White, what privilege do I have as a White person compared to somebody else who's not White, because I'm all these other things as well, but I think maybe for the sake of this, sort of getting to the heart of Whiteness, you have to kind of take away or sort of bracket economics and gender. (A.2 p. 8)

During the second session for one focus group, the participants suggested that "White does sort of rise to the top as the thing that has given us, all of us, more privilege than anything else and would give other people less privilege than anything else" (A.2 p. 8). It was thought that White people generally are comfortable speaking about inequalities such as sexual orientation or able-bodiedness, as long as it is not about skin colour. One of the groups wondered if this was so because speaking about inequality based on skin colour may lead to White people having to consider their own attitudes and behaviour, which could precipitate feelings of resentment or guilt.

The discussion about White privilege(s) allowed the participants from both focus groups to reflect on the privileges they have inside the college because of their skin colour. The McIntosh (1995) article initiated a discussion about White privileges and examples of what would seem to be ordinary actions for Whites because they take them for granted.

Privilege in relation to gender was also explored through one male participant's disclosure and reflections of his experiences. Another participant explored the thought that Whites generally and easily identify themselves through their different roles, such as parent or teacher, but they do not consider their position in society related to their skin colour. Further to this observation was the comment that White people seem to be comfortable discussing inequalities, as long as it is not about skin colour.

Ethnicity and Colour

One of the focus groups explored ethnicity as part of White privilege and questioned where that fit into the discussion on Whiteness. This questioning prompted new dialogue and an exploration of the relationship between skin colour and ethnicity. It led this focus group to speculate on discrimination based on ethnic background, as described in this section. Julia speculated about the ease with which White people can speak about their ethnicity, but not skin colour:

[I] wonder if some of us camouflage our thoughts about Whiteness? Because to talk about Whiteness, somehow that's almost like taboo, but we camouflage it by talking about ethnic background. Like I will talk about my French and my Italian heritage, well, that's White. But I'll talk about that with pride and great whatever, but yet, it's the same thing, I mean, the bottom line is I'm just using other words. But somehow, Whiteness, when we say it, has a negative connotation. (A.1 p. 7)

The discussions within both focus groups explored the idea of ethnicity, particularly in relation to the geographical area in which the study took place. The suggestion was that the geographical area had a less diverse population than other parts of Canada. The idea of diversity may have begun in reference to ethnic groups but seemed to be more about people of colour. Some participants felt that the community in which the study took place does not face the same challenges of having a more diverse population such as larger cities like Toronto. Within this discussion it would seem the

remarks about diversity were more in reference to skin colour rather than ethnicity because the groups were exploring the idea that since Toronto had a large population of people of colour, they had become more accustomed to living within a population that was not predominantly White.

The geographical area in which this study took place is, in fact, home to many immigrants as well as people of colour. Since the only people in Canada who are *not* immigrants are the Aboriginal people, and there are Aboriginal people living within the geographical area of this study then indeed there are both people of colour and ethnic groups living within the area where this study took place. However, for the most part, the immigrants living in the area originated from European countries and generally have lighter skin colour.

The participants described how there is a feeling of security or a “comfort zone” for Whites living in a city where they are the dominant skin color. The participants referred to this as a sense of being insulated from the challenges of living in larger cities where the population represents larger numbers of people of colour and ethnic groups.

The importance of contemplating one’s ethnic background and how it has sometimes led to discriminatory treatment by Whites was discussed by one focus group. This story prompted a discussion about the treatment by White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASP) towards persons from ethnic groups such as Italian. One participant’s story described the inability of a family member to advance in his job because of his ethnicity (Italian):

For years and years and years, it was just a given that certain apprentice jobs for the trades, for the electrician, the millwrights, whatever, would come up every year, and every year it never failed, never would an Italian get one of those positions. Now they’re White, they’re all White, but it always went to the non-

ethnic people. Each year, he'd apply, hoping that would happen, but it didn't happen, but that day came and gone, but, oh well, I'll just keep on working. (A.2 p. 12)

The participants began to delve deeply into the relationship between ethnicity and Whiteness. Building on the anecdote of the Italian family member, we wondered if he was, or was not, White. This led to the following exchange:

Chris stated:

Where does ethnic background come into Whiteness? Like, I consider myself White, but if I was a first generation from Italy, would I consider myself White? Did my grandparents, who were immigrants, consider themselves White? So, it kind of gets back to your question of Whiteness. Is this [a] real general thing, like, who is White and what is White? Or is it more related to a definition of us as Western culture as opposed to skin colour? (A.1 p. 5)

Kelly stated:

You can be just the littlest bit Black, and you're Black, even though most of your ancestry is some kind of Western European White. But the least tint of Blackness in your skin, and you're identified as a Black person, whereas we can be a completely mixed, whatever, Western European background, Ukrainian, Italian, French and it stays White, it continues to be reflected socially as White. (A.1 p. 4)

Chris responded:

I think it's social, and I think it's still material. There's still a sameness visually to what a Western person looks like, as complicated as they might be, it still continues to be White skin, unless there's so little Black ancestry that you can pass. But I think very few people actually get to pass, whereas we pass all the time. (A.1 p. 5)

This exchange led to more reflection and a discussion about whether or not there is more acceptance of some cultures or ethnic groups today, but not others. For example, Erin stated:

We discriminate every day, we discriminate all the time. And the question here is, is there something that now in my generation, when I look at you or you or you, I don't see Italian, I don't see whatever, I don't see Ukrainian because we've gotten away from that, we've made some progress, I would say. And our next challenge is that, now that we've made some progress with ethnic groups

where there was power imbalance and there was, the original colonists, the immigrants that came, whatever, have we made the same kind of progress when it comes to colour? And I would say we have not. I would say that there's still barriers that we don't acknowledge for people who are of colour or significantly different than the makeup of the people in the room. And to say it doesn't exist and to say that we can't see it and to say that, well, everybody can work hard, yes everybody can work hard but some people have to work harder to get to where they are. (A.2 p. 13)

The discussion about ethnicity and colour challenged the participants to consider how some European immigrants are not considered White. One participant cited an example of an incident when she believed that a family member was treated poorly because of his ethnicity. The participant related the story of her uncle being passed over consistently for a work promotion because he was Italian. The participants speculated that new immigrants to Canada used to be discriminated against and treated as outsiders to mainstream White society. One participant reflected on the possibility that second- or third-generation children of immigrants to Canada may not experience discrimination based on ethnicity and that now we need to move forward and do the same with skin colour.

Sameness - Be like 'Us'

This section focuses on the participants' discussion about the desire of Whites to have non-Whites be "normal," that is, conform to White traditions. The participants in one of the focus groups explored their role in assisting students who have special needs based on religious practices. For example, students who practice a religion that requires them to pray at certain times of the day may need a private space to do so. Requests of this nature are sometimes challenged by teachers who believe that the academic institution is not responsible for accommodating this type of request. A participant

explained that it is easier sometimes to just wish students could conform to the White institution and not deviate from the norm.

A participant described two situations she encountered with students that required her to make some special arrangements: One student needed a special room to pray in, and another student who would be missing more than a day of classes because of a death in the family. Jordan described how she handled these requests and what her thoughts were at the time:

It was all inconvenient for me, as a White gal, to arrange for these things, but you do it all with a smile on your face and say, “Absolutely, I can work this out, I think it’s great,” but on the other hand, [I think] it would be way more convenient if you just go to church on Sunday like everybody else, or [as in the case of the second student] come home right after a funeral, skip the lunch, and get back to class. I recognized those things about me that I am definitely accommodating because I absolutely believe it’s the right thing to do, but it would be more convenient a lot of times if they [the students] would just be, you know, if everybody that’s in conflict with me would just come over to my side. (A.2 p. 2)

The participants in both focus groups were quite vocal about the education system, expressing the belief that it does not work well for all students, especially students who have special needs. Sometimes, there can be resistance by teachers or administration to a student need that is based on culture. The expectation is that the student should conform to mainstream practices:

Accommodating special needs of students has a strong undercurrent of conformity and the necessity of having students be like us – the challenge is determining who the “us” is; within our education system, are we conditioned in the Western sort of Judeo-Christian kind of being? (A.2 p. 2)

As a follow-up to this discussion about conformity, one of the participants came to a focus group session with a story that had just appeared in the Canadian news. It concerned a high school student whose religion required him to wear a kirpan, a Sikh ceremonial dagger; the high school that he was attending perceived the kirpan to be a

weapon and would not allow him to wear it. The student sued and won the right to wear his kirpan to school. This story prompted a discussion within one focus group about accepting “other” practices in school. One participant commented, “The measuring stick of what is acceptable is grounded in Western European tradition and practices, and so now we suggest that being Canadian means following those ways” (A.2 p. 2).

Most of the participants from both focus groups agreed that there seems to be a related belief within White society that everybody has equal opportunities and that there is a level playing field. One participant related a story about a teacher who was asked by a student if it would be possible to place a specific textbook on reserve at the library because this student could not afford the book. The teacher refused to do so and stated, “If I do this for this student, then I’m giving her [an economic] privilege that I’m not giving to my other students.” After sharing the teacher’s response, the participant remarked:

There’s a White mindset that says we don’t see difference... [But] there is a difference here. This is a person who doesn’t have book money, and you have an ability to help that person by doing A or B, but you won’t do that because you have to treat everybody the same. I think that “sameness thing” gets us into a lot of trouble because it doesn’t acknowledge that there’s not an equal playing field. (A.1 p. 14)

Another participant responded, “It’s not always about the sameness; it’s doing what’s right” (A.1 p. 14). This participant added that she had heard the same teacher ask, “Don’t those [Aboriginal] people get book money?” (A.1 p. 24). Some of the focus group participants then questioned who *those people* are, and one commented:

These are the things that are said, though, and done all the time, and we don’t give a lot of thought to it because we don’t have to. We’re not *those people*, [that] kind of thing. So we don’t live our lives, really hearing those comments, we hear them but we don’t have to really pay too much attention to them. (A.1 p. 14)

Following this story, a discussion ensued about the common misunderstanding of and disregard for the history of Aboriginal people. As one participant said, “We tend to think of who we are as having started with the Europeans arriving here. We forget that there was a culture here before that and that they matter. And so all the laws that have been set, how valid are they, really?” (A.2 p. 3). As part of this discussion, the participants explored the expectation that people immigrating to Canada will conform to a White lifestyle. For example, regarding the young man who wanted to wear his kirpan, some people would say now that he is in Canada, he must follow “our” rules, one of which means that he must give up wearing his kirpan. So, the dilemma for the participants became the following:

All of us are transplants...But it was the phrase, you know, people coming to this country abiding by our rules...that’s what I challenge. What are our rules? Who is the “our”? The “our” is [an] assumption of us as White people, Christian, mainstream. (A.2 p. 3)

To summarize, the idea of conformity and following the rules of mainstream society began to unravel and challenged the participants to again reflect more on their Whiteness. They understood that Whites are themselves immigrants in Canada, yet there is an expectation that newer immigrants should conform to the “Canadian” way. As the participants continued along this discussion, more points were raised regarding immigrants. They are addressed in the next section.

Immigrant Syndrome

The notion of equal opportunity emerged again within the discussion about immigrants. This is an attitude that I refer to as the immigrant syndrome based on the belief that everyone has equal opportunities in Canada and that everyone can achieve the same level of success by being determined and working hard. One participant stated:

I think that what the immigrant doesn't recognize is that until very recently, 1970s, well into my life, we had a system in this country that dealt with [Aboriginal] people that was racist, that denied rights, that denied privileges, that denied opportunity for [an Aboriginal] person to come and start with nothing and build things. It was denied; you couldn't own property. If you had a business on a reserve, the Department of Indian Affairs took any profits and gave it back to you. So to me, that argument of difference in that sense "we came, we did everything, we had nothing" but you had opportunity, and you didn't have laws that restricted what you did. (A.2 pp. 6-7)

The immigrant syndrome relies on the belief that it is simply up to the individual to decide what he or she wants and then get it. Part of this belief relates to the experience of many early immigrants, who came to Canada with very few resources, worked hard, and eventually succeeded in their personal and professional lives. Some Canadians wonder why Aboriginal people do not do the same. One participant commented:

I think people have a choice. I think people have more of a choice than we let on or people let on.... My grandparents lived through the Depression... My grandparents, they had nothing, and they made their life from absolutely nothing, and my parents took it a little step further, and I did the same. I think people can change if they're not happy with it. Certainly, you can't change your colour by looking in the mirror, but that's the same as I can't change the size of my bone structure or the fact that I get a rash in certain places. I mean, there's certain body things, physical things, that you can't change, but there are other things that you can change. So, it may mean moving somewhere else and starting new to get out of a situation that you're not happy with or feel isn't working. I think that can happen. (A.1 p. 12)

As this participant stated, the immigrants who came to Canada and survived without many resources will often ask why Aboriginal people are not able to succeed the way they did. Furthermore, there was a belief that Aboriginal people receive financial benefits unavailable to others, yet they still seem to struggle. One participant repeated comments that she has often heard:

We came to this country and we worked hard, and we built this, and we didn't have the language, and we did this, and we did this, so why can't they [Aboriginal people]? And why are they [Aboriginal people] getting all these special

treatments? We struggled, we struggled, we struggled; how come they can't? (A.2 p. 6)

As this discussion continued, another participant added:

It's probably true that people don't understand why immigrants and Aboriginal people are different or how our history has contributed to that, because we didn't learn that stuff. I think knowledge is so powerful, like really basic knowledge, and I've seen that because I've taught trans-cultural courses. I've had people, Native, non-Native people come up to me and say, "Why didn't anybody ever tell us this before, like, this changes my whole perception," and it changes perceptions often for Aboriginal people too because they don't know it either. (A.2 p. 23)

Both focus groups referred to what is perceived as special treatment for Aboriginal people in Canada. I insert the following dialogue between 2 of the participants to offer a sense of this perception. The discussion reflected the impression that Aboriginal people are constantly given handouts and somehow do not have to work for a living, and that they are not expected to work hard or follow employment opportunities, even if it means leaving home and relocating their families:

Pat said, "I've read articles where people have actually used the word resentment because they've ... struggled or worked hard and it's not given to them on a silver platter or handed out to them."

Julia responded:

Is the reserve thing the right thing to do? If there's no employment there, if there's no industry, no mill, no mine, then why stay there? I grew up that if there's no work you move to where the work was.... I was used to that, moving from community to community, you move where the work is. Well, work isn't gonna be in a reserve, and if there is, when it's gone, people have to move, to live. I think there's resentment out there, we can say there's not here [within this group discussion] and that kind of thing but on the other hand, that hand-out theory [exists out there]. (A.2 p. 16)

Annie responded:

You [immigrants] had the support of culture, of a White culture that helped you. [For example] you're coming from a White culture in Germany; you're

transplanting yourself with all the values. Maybe you don't have the language and so on and maybe there are miniscule differences, but essentially, you're coming to the same culture in terms of support, in terms of worldview, in terms of Christian philosophy. You have all of that, as a support structure and Aboriginal people don't have that. (A.2 pp. 16-17)

The discussion on handouts or special treatment for Aboriginal people continued.

Some of the participants argued that resentment toward so-called handouts or special treatment was largely due to a lack of knowledge about the history of Aboriginal people in Canada. The participants speculated on how many White Canadians are misinformed about the legal status of Aboriginal people in Canada and easily fall into believing that Aboriginal people get more government assistance than White Canadians.

One participant described a work environment where the staff perception about the benefits that Aboriginal people receive played out in the quality of services offered to their Aboriginal clientele. She mentioned that in a particular hospital emergency department, the Aboriginal patients are treated differently. She stated that on certain days each month, the staff believe that there will be a number of Aboriginal people requiring treatment at the hospital for intoxication. Apparently, some staff believe that Aboriginal people receive "welfare for life" (A.2 p. 17) and that on this particular day of the month, they get their money and then go out and drink. The Aboriginal patients who then arrive at this hospital emergency department are put in a separate hallway designated as "Hallway B" (A.2 p. 17). Apparently, some staff will purposely try to avoid working shifts during that time of the month.

It is obvious some staff resent these patients, but one could ask if the resentment is based on frustration with the patients' intoxication or the belief that Aboriginal people get more than White Canadians. One participant asked:

So, we can acknowledge that there are a lot of Aboriginal people who have drinking problems. We know that socially, we can look at the statistics, that's not a big surprise to me. What I would like to say, though, is how does knowing that [information] then affect how the next Native person who happens to walk into Emerg[ency] on that night is handled? What's the first thought that goes through people's face, through their heads? (A.2 p. 20)

To summarize, it was felt that many Whites are misinformed about the history and the legal position of Aboriginal people in Canada. As a result, Whites have false perceptions of the life experiences of Aboriginal people. Many Whites insist that if Aboriginal people just work hard, success will come. Furthermore, many Whites have expressed a deep-seated resentment toward Aboriginal people based on the perception that Aboriginal people receive special financial treatment and do not have to work for it.

Expectations of the Education System

Eventually, the discussion about the immigrant experience and the Aboriginal experience became a discussion about the education system and how students who have any special needs can be easily lost or disregarded. Sandy shared her experience teaching at the college:

I only have 3 hours to teach this stuff, and I've got to teach it status quo. Which makes it very, very difficult for students who come in under different kinds of backgrounds. You know, they come from a small reserve up North, ... they have a problem with assimilation into the classroom, the expectation is that they will assimilate, without any discussion being around that, it's just an expectation... I think it's just a case that maybe we don't know how to accommodate so it's just easier to go with the status quo. (B.1 p. 6)

The participants in both focus groups confirmed that the education system, including the college system within which they worked, wants students to conform to its policies and procedures; there is little tolerance for difference such as culture, learning disability, or learning style. Furthermore, both focus groups agreed that the [education]

system and teachers need to consider individual students' needs and realize that not all students come to class with the same resources and abilities. Consider this exchange:

Kathleen stated:

We're not accepting of differences. We're not accepting of the fact that people don't have phones and that people don't live twenty miles away or they've grown up in a culture, White or any other culture, where the family values are different than what my family values are. And the lesson to be learned here is to be accepting of those differences, you don't necessarily have to agree with them, just be accepting of them... I think that's what's not taught, that we allow our value systems to come into play and those tend to dominate how we think, how we act, how we operate, how we interact with others, rather than just accepting that it's okay to have differences. (B.1 p. 15)

Josh added:

That's the culture we're operating from, that's the dominant culture the majority of the culture, and we have to step back from that. We have to step back and say it's different, it's not right, it's different for them. And they're [the Aboriginal students] trying to be accepting of how different [everything] is. And I just think we need to show the same kind of respect in return. (B.1 p. 16)

One participant described an incident that demonstrated how a teacher used a stereotype about a particular culture to predetermine the academic ability of some students. The participant told the focus group that a colleague informed him one day that he should not expect too much from certain students in his class. This colleague went on to say that the students in question, who were from one of the islands in the Caribbean, had "no work ethic." The participant was told, "They'll never make it up here in our field because they don't have a work ethic. Maybe if they went back home, wherever home was, they'd be okay, but not up here" (A.2 p. 11). Another participant responded to this story by pointing out that the attitude and stereotyping shown by that teacher would probably prevent the students from succeeding. Certainly, these students could not expect

to receive any assistance or support from this teacher, who had already dismissed their ability to succeed academically (A.2 p. 11).

In the discussion about accommodating students with special needs, one participant expressed a concern about reverse discrimination. She described not wanting to be seen as a White teacher offering special treatment to an Aboriginal student and leaving out a White student, that making special concessions to an Aboriginal student could be seen as discriminatory toward a White student, particularly if the same arrangements were not known or extended to a White student.

Further to this discussion the idea of sameness or treating everybody the same was examined through the various institutional processes that require students to conform to a White education system. The process of assessing and evaluating students was one example. The comments of one participant suggested that she is struggling with the issue of colour (e.g., the erroneous perception that colour identified a student as someone with special needs) and feels that it interferes with what she needs to do as the teacher:

As an educator, as somebody in a school where we have to apply standardized competency, you [the students] have to learn these competencies and demonstrate these competencies for me to say that “you got the stamp,” you know. For me, race complicates it, and my understanding sometimes makes it more difficult. (B.2 p. 26)

Pat added:

Or learning style, learning style complicates it. Testing styles complicates it... .If you don't fit as a learner, right into that perfect little spot in the classroom, you're over here a bit or over here a bit, trouble from kindergarten up. (B.2 p. 27)

The discussion then moved from the inability of the education system to accommodate students with special needs to a more general discourse about the attempts of the college under study to address special needs related to diversity, and specifically

the needs of Aboriginal students. One participant pointed out that the education system and its teachers are representative of the dominant culture in Canada, namely, the White culture. She talked about how difficult it must be for an Aboriginal student to enter a classroom where there is a White teacher and be expected to adjust to the ways of the White institution. Another participant pointed out that within the college where this study was done, most of the teachers who are White may not be willing to challenge themselves to consider a different way of doing their work. She asked, "How many people do we have on faculty who are non-White? Do we have 10 [out of 145]? I don't think so" (B.1 p. 16).

Both focus groups believed that the college is attempting to address issues of diversity. They supported the proactive approach of the college in having most programs include curriculum on human diversity. However, the participants noted that this decision by administration had not always been supported by faculty. One participant commented on some of the reactions she has heard from faculty who do not believe it is necessary to develop full courses on human diversity issues:

You know, as you talk about that [the need to have course content that is culturally sensitive] with more and more people, there's a real reaction, "What do you mean, I have to put in a whole course, what are you talking about? Putting in a whole course!" (A.2 p. 21)

Apparently, some faculty believe that courses on human diversity are not relevant to certain areas of study and should not be required. The concern was that class time for the delivery of what they consider the core content will be diminished in order to deliver courses on human diversity. As one participant stated, "The resistance [by faculty] to change is phenomenal" (A.2 p. 24).

This resistance was the reason why one participant emphasized how important it is for college administration and faculty to have a full commitment to the inclusion of courses on human diversity in all programs. One participant commented that courses on human diversity issues should be taken seriously, not developed merely at a superficial level. Otherwise, this initiative could be construed as serving an administrative need to demonstrate that efforts are being made to address issues around racism. One participant commented:

It has to be bought into by everybody... . You have to fully understand and believe in it yourself and say, "Okay, I get it and that's the message I then give in the classroom." Because what often happens is, the [diversity] courses are out there, and you guys in tech have to also take them because [the courses] are in the curriculum. Coordinators are told, "Just go do it, they're [administration] making us do it." People don't have the understanding of why it's important, and [why] we have to have that base level of learning in the institution. How do you get people at our level as professionals to say I want, or I need, or I should have this in order to make me a better teacher. (A.2 p. 24)

Another participant spoke about her belief that human diversity courses should be integrated into all programs:

It [diversity] has to be woven throughout other things. When I teach journalism, I can't just talk about how to write news; I have to talk about it from a transcultural perspective. What if you're going into [an Aboriginal community] to do a story, like, after [a plane] crash, how do you approach that community? And how is that different from a plane crash here in [a nearby town]? There's a big difference as a journalist in the way you would approach that story. There are things you would have to do in that community you wouldn't have to think about here. (A.2 p. 26)

As this discussion progressed, one participant expressed the concern that faculty who are teaching human diversity courses should be prepared properly:

Do we want a course put in that's maybe just going to be taught by part-time [instructors] or not have a lot of investment put into it too, and just put it in for the sake of saying, "Okay, now we're going to cover Aboriginal content, here's a course." I think if that's going to happen, we need a fair bit of thought put into it, that it's not just, sort of, on a piece of paper saying we're doing it so we look good. (A.2 p. 22)

Another participant concurred, noting, “It is presumptuous to believe that all teachers are well versed in issues of diversity. How do you know that the person you’ve given that subject outline to is not a racist?” (B.2 p. 23)

The discussion within one focus group turned to the reality that some students question the relevance of courses on human diversity issues within their respective programs. They described how these students can be disruptive in class; one participant suggested that teachers sometimes need support in handling these classroom situations. One participant described how she handled a class where some students were resistant to the content she was teaching. She made the decision to confront the students and explained what she told her class:

This is what this class is about, and if you do not do this, or if you are not interested, you can get up and leave right now. If you open your mouth and disrespect other people as they are speaking, I will not even name you, I will point, and you will be out of here, and the only way you get back in here is if you go and tell your coordinator and you apologize to the rest of the class. (B.2 p. 17)

This participant went on to say that she had some students approach her afterward to say, “I’m so glad you did that because it’s been horrendous for us” (B.2 p. 17).

Another participant who had already taught a course that included topics related to human diversity issues expressed her frustration with some of the students in the class:

I was appalled and taken aback by the prejudices and racism [among the students] and just the negativity towards, well, specifically towards the Native culture. And I couldn’t believe that I was hearing this, this kind of stuff, and I’m trying to provide information so that they could make informed choices at that point in time. I mean, maybe I got through to one or two, which is a start, and I’m not minimizing that, but I tell you that 50% of them [the students] or more, that were non-Native, walked out of that class, no more diverse or no more accepting of diversity when they [first arrived].” (B.2 p. 6)

This participant's comments prompted a discussion about the need to prepare teachers for a range of reactions in the classroom when presenting topics on human diversity.

Discussions about Whiteness and other human diversity issues may result in unexpected responses by the students, and misunderstandings could lead to missed opportunities for the teacher.

To summarize this section, the discussion about human diversity revealed some interesting situations that the participants had experienced. Overall, both focus groups felt it important to bring these issues into the classroom; however, they were quite clear that it should be done in a meaningful and thoughtful manner, and with good intent. In addition, the group agreed that it would be important to have a teacher who is committed and knowledgeable about the issues, and that he or she have the appropriate institutional support.

Institutional Issues

Approximately one year before I began my research, the college began a process of administrative restructuring. I chose to write about this process because it was discussed in the focus group. Within this college, there has been a separate department that focuses on Aboriginal programs. To preserve anonymity, I will refer to this area as a "college within a college." A year ago, an administrative change began whereby this college within a college was joined with another department in the main college. An Aboriginal woman became the dean of this newly created college.

As in any workplace, when a major change or shift occurs, there can be resistance from the employees. The changes that took place were discussed in one of the focus groups. One participant stated:

I think ... the whole role of this [college within a college] is ... totally misunderstood and minimized in this college and, in fact, resented. And one of the things... that I really think, as Academic Council, we need to explore...who is [this college within a college] and why it is important. [Then] not only why [this college within a college] is important, but why [this college within a college] is considered a leader in terms of education in this country. When I go elsewhere, I hear about it, but here, it's a hard sell. [This college within a college] is a hard sell within our own college; why is that? We, as educators, we should be understanding why [this college within a college] exists, what it means in the big picture and so on. Is that [misunderstanding and resistance] the by-product of Whiteness? I know there's resentment and there's misunderstanding and it's bigger than just Aboriginal courses, it's a whole philosophy that we have to get our head around. (A.2 pp. 22-23)

Another participant added, "There isn't buy-in at all different levels, and there isn't knowledge at all levels....This is when a lot of resentment happens, when things are just thrown out (the participant was referring to introducing something new – not 'throwing out' in the literal sense) without the in-depth discussion and without the in-depth knowledge" (A.2 p. 23).

The dialogue below between 3 focus group participants described an alternative for gaining and showing support for this new college. They suggested that the administration should organize a forum for further discussion.

Kelly stated, "I think leadership is important, whether that's leadership at Academic Council level or at all levels. The resentment against [this college within a college] is the white elephant on the table in this institution" (A.2 p. 24).

Pat said, "Why don't we put that elephant on the table? (A.2 p. 24)

Sandy responded, "Instead of pretending that everybody gets it" (A.2 p. 24).

This exchange facilitated an analysis of how the participants viewed their workplace environment. They realized some of the comments they had heard from colleagues were being spoken through Whiteness. One observation was that resentment

had built up about these administrative changes, but what emerged from this discussion was the realization that resentment among faculty towards the style of administration existed prior to the new “college within a college” changes.

Individual Impacts

The focus groups provided a forum for discussion that one participant acknowledged was beneficial on personal and professional levels. She expressed her gratitude for being able to participate in the discussions in her focus group. Another positive impact of this study was an action initiated by 2 of the participants from one of the focus groups. Without my involvement or knowledge, 2 of the participants arranged to meet and further discuss their experiences in the focus groups and consider possible ways to follow up on this study. They both felt that the discussion they had had within their focus group could be beneficial to others and should be made available to other interested persons.

After they had arranged to meet, they invited me to join them. At first, I debated whether I should attend because I was not sure if it was appropriate, given that it was not part of my original research plan. My inexperience in the academic process of thesis writing was nagging. In the end, though, I could not imagine why I should not participate. I attended, but I decided that I would let these people take the lead. I did not want to interfere with their initiative, but I certainly wanted to support it.

To begin, one of the participants expressed her gratitude for having had the opportunity to participate in my research. She found the discussions helpful on personal and professional levels. She also expressed her surprise at the reaction that some faculty had to my study. She was dismayed by the negative reaction from some faculty to my

letter of invitation to participate. She described an incident when she was having a conversation with some co-workers who were complaining about the letter. They asked her if she agreed with what I was doing. She responded by saying that it had nothing to do with agreeing; she wanted to know more about the research and had decided to volunteer to participate. She also suggested that they do the same. Throughout lunch, she repeatedly expressed shock at the negative reaction of some faculty.

Eventually, we spoke about what could be done to build on this research foundation. There was a suggestion that a discussion, similar to what happened in the focus groups, take place on a larger scale. We wondered if this process could be framed as a professional development workshop. Other ideas included forming a committee from the two focus groups to act as a think tank to take the discussion further, possibly even taking the discussion of Whiteness to the college's Diversity Committee, a subcommittee of Academic Council.

I know that I have grown in my learning since first setting out on this thesis journey. I also believe that this growth is miniscule compared to what is left to learn. However, the opportunity to continue learning and growing as a person is part of the richness of life. I have made a personal commitment to continue my learning about Whiteness and to continue living in a way that I believe to be socially astute and responsible.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction to the Analysis

Because I had reviewed some of the academic literature before collecting my research data, I was anxious to determine if the focus group discussions would reveal themes that resonated with this literature. Within the academic literature on Whiteness, I found readings that reinforced new insights that encouraged me to reconsider my own thinking. I also found literature that validated some of the views and opinions I had encountered personally and professionally. For example, the discussion around white privilege was important in providing me with the opportunity to be more “tuned in”. The literature was important for providing clarity around situations I may not have paid attention to because of my Whiteness. Again I realized through the literature that I wondered if I had not been responsive to some situations and not recognized racism because of my Whiteness.

As I reviewed the themes identified in the previous chapter, I realized how interconnected they were. Indeed, I sometimes had difficulty separating the participants’ comments into different themes. I chose to place the story of the family member who was consistently disregarded for a work promotion, seemingly because of his Italian ethnicity, within the theme of ethnicity. However, the discussions that built on this story also brought out ideas relevant to the discussion about the immigrant experience and White privilege(s).

Colour Prevails

This theme addressed the significance of skin colour and its impact on every aspect of life for a person of colour. I chose to present this as the opening theme because

it came out of initial questioning about the meaning of Whiteness and underlaid further discussions pertaining to Whiteness. Kivel (2002) wrote about the exclusion of people of colour from a White, mainstream society that everyone else is expected to adapt to:

Our belief in the importance of integration is based on the assumption that there is one mainstream, normal set of (White) values, practices, and procedures that other people can learn and adapt. We assume that people of color want to be included in the mainstream. (p. 234)

In the early stages of the discussion about Whiteness, one participant raised the notion of being blind to colour. She mentioned that she prides herself on not thinking about skin colour, be it hers or anyone else's. Kendall (2006), however, argued that "treating different people as though they were the same is not a terribly good strategy even if it were possible because people are different from one another and need different things" (p. 28). Kendall further asserted, "Systematically, those of us who are white [*sic*] and those who are of color are rarely treated "the same" (p. 29).

As McIntosh (1995), a White woman, explained:

I could measure up to the cultural standards and take advantage of the many options I saw around me to make what the culture would call a success of my life. My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make. I could think of myself as "belonging" in major ways and of making social systems work for me. (p. 77)

Ignoring skin colour, as many Whites tend to do, is not helpful. Kendall (2006) stated, "I think it is used to obscure what is really going on. If we aren't forced to deal with color--ours or others'--we can pretend that we don't live in a society totally stratified by race" (p. 51).

The discussion within Focus Group A addressed the notion of doing things the right/White way. Typically, this was a reflection of dominant Western thinking about the importance of pursuing formal education and certain careers in an effort to achieve a

level of financial success that allows for a comfortable lifestyle. A challenge arises when a person of colour who wants to achieve the same type or level of success as a White person by following this path discovers that his or her skin colour may preclude opportunities.

Henry et al. (1995) discussed the difficulty experienced by university graduates who are people of colour. Some of the challenges faced by racial minority and Aboriginal graduates include difficulty in obtaining employment after graduation. Henry et al. described a situation in Eastern Canada in which it took Acadian and Black graduates several more weeks to find their first jobs, and Blacks had to apply to many more employers and undertake many more interviews to get a job offer.

Privilege

One focus group session opened with a discussion about White privilege(s) that was prompted by one participant who brought in McIntosh's (1995) article describing many of the privileges enjoyed by Whites for review by the other group participants. This participant also described an event she experienced that clearly demonstrated some of the points in the article. She talked about a student from Ethiopia who could not get a proper haircut in the city where she was living because she could not find a hair stylist who had experience cutting hair of her texture and curl. This student's experience demonstrated how something as ordinary as getting a haircut turned out to be a White privilege.

McIntosh made the following comments about White privilege:

I have come to see white [*sic*] privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that 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, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks. (p. 71)

As a White person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage. (p. 70)

Further to this discussion about privilege, one male participant addressed gender privilege for White males. He acknowledged the additional privileges that he experiences because of his gender and his colour. He disclosed that as a teacher, he knows that he does not have to prove himself and cited that when he is in a classroom, no one questions his ability. He suggested that a person of colour would have to prove her competency. His admission was refreshing, considering that many White men do not realize or appreciate the privileges they have. As McIntosh (1995) explained, “Whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege” (p. 71).

The interconnections between and among various privileges are important to ponder, according to Kendall (2006), who wrote about “socially constructed elements of identity” (p. 88). She discussed the attainment of privilege through measurement on a scale of benefits. For example, she noted that “since I’m white, I receive the privileges that come with whiteness; people of color don’t receive unearned racial benefits. Because I’m a woman and a lesbian, I get neither gender nor sexual orientation benefits” (p. 88). She also commented that “part of what we need to consider is where we fall on each privilege/nonprivilege scale and what unearned benefits we receive” (p. 88).

Ethnicity and Colour

One focus group explored how ethnicity has led to discriminatory treatment for some people. One participant wondered where ethnicity fits into a discussion about Whiteness. The story of one participant’s family member who was not promoted within

his workplace was cited as an example of discrimination based on ethnicity. The question was whether he was disregarded because he spoke with an accent or because he had darker skin.

This story prompted discussion about who is considered White. Kivel (2002) mentioned that we have “factors that influence our lives, such as our ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class.... Even when we’re talking about these elements of our lives, we must keep whiteness on stage with us because it influences each of the other factors” (p. 9). He suggested that any discomfort in being White may come from “our own family’s ethnic and class background and its complex relationship to whiteness” (p. 9). Within this discussion of ethnicity and colour, he asked:

Was your ethnic or cultural group ever considered not white?” and “when they arrived in the United States and Canada, what did members of your family have to do to be accepted as white? What did they have to give up? (p. 9)

When we think about the participant’s story about her family member and the discrimination he experienced based on his ethnicity, it is valuable to look at some of Canada’s policies on immigration. Henry and Tator (2006) explained that the Immigration Act of 1910 gave immigration officials such wide discretion, they could exclude prospective immigrants based on race or ethnic origin. They asserted, “Differential treatment based on race and ethnicity was firmly established as government policy. A list of preferred and non-preferred countries was established” (p. 75). This list indicated that applicants from the United Kingdom and the United States were preferred, followed by immigrants from northern and western Europe. By the late 19th century, the federal government encouraged “White immigrants to settle and farm the vast areas of the country.... As a result, most immigrants came from Britain and the United States”

(Henry & Tator, 2006, p. 74). This statement helps to explain how colour and ethnicity played out in Canada's early immigration policy.

Immigrant Syndrome

In the discussion about discrimination and ethnicity, the participant whose uncle was not promoted reported that he kept working harder in the hope that he would finally be promoted. He believed that through hard work, he would eventually achieve a deserved job promotion, regardless of his ethnicity. This discussion led to questions about the relative success of Aboriginal people in Canada. Some participants wondered why Aboriginal people are not as successful as immigrants who have come to Canada with few monetary or social networking resources.

One participant pointed out that the government of Canada, as a colonizer of Aboriginal people, limited opportunities for them while offering some opportunities to immigrants. Henry et al. (1995) stated that one cannot compare the experiences of immigrants to those of Aboriginal people. They explained that European involvement in Canada began in the 17th century when French and English explorers came to exploit the fur trade, establish military posts and pursue the development of agriculture. In the first years of European settlement, the relationship between the settlers and the Aboriginal people of Canada was considered harmonious and cooperative; however, as the fur trade declined "and Aboriginal peoples were no longer required as sources of labour, patterns of exclusion begin to emerge" (Henry et al., 1995, p. 60). The new relationship that emerged was based on discrimination and exploitation. Henry et al. explained that Aboriginal peoples were displaced from the land that formed the basis of their culture,

way of life, and livelihood. They were relocated to reserves in order to provide land for the newly arrived settlers from Europe and the United States.

Kendall (2006) described a similar situation in the United States and explained that the experience of White Europeans coming to the United States cannot be considered analogous to that of persons of colour, such as African Americans:

When the white [*sic*] ethnic immigrants arrived, many were treated horribly, called nasty names- -polak, dago, wop, bohunk, kike- -and discriminated against in housing and work. Irish, Italians, and Eastern European Jews were all depicted as other than white; in the end, they were allowed to become part of the white club; they worked hard, and many were financially successful. There are, however, differences in how and why people came to America, and these differences had enormous consequences. The Europeans, for the most part, chose to come. Africans who were brought here as slaves had no choice. European immigrants were steered into a different category of jobs than those available to African Americans. Not only did white people come into this country differently, but they had very different experiences after they arrived. The situations are not analogous. (p. 93)

Kendall argued that the immigrant syndrome identified by the study participants is highly problematic and directly related to Whiteness:

Some white [*sic*] people see themselves primarily as members of ethnic groups that have been oppressed in this country (Italian, Irish, Polish, Jewish) and question why race should matter. There is an unspoken belief that ‘If we can make it, you can. It just takes a little hard work. (p. 93)

Expectations of the Education System

Both focus groups asserted that the education system does not meet the needs of a diverse student population. One participant spoke of how she challenged her own thinking when presented with student situations that required special consideration based on religion and culture. She had been willing to accommodate the students’ requests but admitted she also thought about how much easier it would have been if these students had

conformed to White mainstream convention, until she realized what she was expecting them to be like.

Some of the issues raised in the discussion about the education system included the lack of teachers of colour, a paucity of courses on diversity, and teachers who are not informed and prepared to teach culturally and racially diverse students. The education system was described by Kivel (2002) as including “teachers, curricula, school buildings, safety to learn, and many other factors” (p. 204), but not responding to the needs of students of colour through “the lack of teachers of colour, the dominance of white curricula, lack of persons of colour in positions of authority” (p. 204). Kivel also suggested:

Many white teachers carry with them some of the subtle and not-so-subtle biases against people of color [and that] white people display subtle discriminatory behavior in their reactions to people of color. This behavior might include: less assistance, greater aggression, overt friendliness coupled with covert rejection, and avoidance. (p. 204)

Unfortunately, White teachers often are not aware of their prejudices. One participant mentioned a colleague who had low expectations of certain students based on their race and cultural background. By carrying his biases and prejudices into the classroom, this teacher will not engender the success of these students. Kivel (2002) asserted that “white [*sic*] teachers, like all white people, also have racial assumptions and prejudices that they bring to the classroom. These assumptions affect what they teach, how they teach it, and how they interact with students” (p. 204).

Gay (2002) focused on the improvement of school success for ethnically diverse students when there is “culturally responsive teaching” and provisions for teachers to be equipped with the “knowledge, attitudes, and skills to do this” (p. 106). Gay proposed

that when “academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly” (p. 106). One participant spoke about the need for faculty to become more knowledgeable about issues of diversity. Gay explained that “many teachers are inadequately prepared to teach ethnically diverse students” (p. 106), arguing that “explicit knowledge about cultural diversity is imperative to meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students” (p. 107). Kehoe (1984) commented, “It is a fact rarely accepted that there is less wrong with the learner than with the process and institutions by which the learner is taught” (p. 64). It would seem that the challenge for an education system is to address the needs that students may present.

Process

Based on my review of the literature, I had anticipated that some people at the college would be upset with my study on Whiteness. What I did not expect was the extent of their reactions. Some of the recipients of the invitation letter suggested that the letter itself was reverse discrimination. I was confused by the action, or inaction, taken by the people who were angry with the tone of the letter. They chose not to contact me directly, even though detailed contact information was included in the letter. Instead, they took their concerns and questions to senior college administrators and had discussions among themselves. If the most serious concern was an alleged breach of confidentiality, it could have been clarified by one telephone call or an e-mail. The low attendance at an information meeting that had been arranged for faculty to meet with me and have their questions and concerns addressed was disappointing.

I believe that the angry reactions to my study were directly related to the issue of Whiteness. Kivel (2002) described White people's reactions to the topic of Whiteness:

Most of us don't want to be white because it opens us to charges of being racist and brings up feelings of guilt, shame, embarrassment, and hopelessness. Saying 'I am white' may make us feel either guilty of being racist or traitorous toward other whites. We don't want to be labeled or stereotyped (p. 8).

Kivel also explain that denying Whiteness makes it invisible, so "to change this, we must take whiteness itself and hold it up to the light and see that it is a color too" (p. 9).

I appreciate the people who came forward to participate in the focus groups. They offered their thoughts and reflections on the topic, and some of them even began to visualize how beneficial it would be to continue the discussion on Whiteness and further explore the possibility of developing curriculum that would address Whiteness. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the efforts of the 2 participants who made time outside of their focus group to meet and explore ideas on how they could promote more learning about Whiteness within their workplace. Their actions were inspiring and hopeful.

As I came to write this conclusion, I thought that the following commentary from the transcripts was an insightful way to end this investigation. This quote not only concludes but also serves as the beginning for more discussion:

My students often say to me, "How come we don't have the discussion about what is means to be White?" ... But we don't. We talk about racism, but we don't talk about White privilege or what goes with that. And until we do, we're often operating out of assumptions or stereotypes, and we don't realize that, we don't realize we're being offensive, we don't realize we're walking down the hall saying 'those **** Indians, you know: Like, I'm not a racist. If you asked anyone, who would put up their hand and say they're racist? Until you actually come up against that. (B.2 p. 20)

This research was but a starting point. We all know that racism exists in society at large, as well within the confines of this postsecondary setting, and that it is hurtful and

devastating. More must be done to end racism. As Kivel (2002) noted, those of us who are White must take responsibility, and “the first step is for us to talk together, as white [*sic*] people” (p.4) on this journey to end racism.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations were made in the focus group discussions. They are listed in this section. All are specific to the college where the study took place:

1. There should be a preparation process for faculty who are teaching diversity courses.
2. When assigning courses with content on diversity issues, administrators should consider the experience and background of faculty; if need be, they should offer professional development in the form of training workshops that thoroughly examine Whiteness and diversity issues.
3. All faculty should engage in a discussion of Whiteness to better prepare them to deal with issues of diversity in their classes that may help build relationships with students of colour. These discussions could be offered as professional development sessions. These discussions of Whiteness may even be expanded to include all staff and students. One forum for this learning could be think-tank sessions with staff and students. The diversity committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Council, could initiate and take responsibility for determining the best way to facilitate this process.
4. A specific course on Whiteness could be offered in all programs. Following the delivery of this course, it should be evaluated to determine the direction for further curriculum development.

5. The college should declare itself an institution that is actively involved in addressing issues of racism and, through a well-constructed media campaign, create an environment that speaks of racial equality.

Concluding Reflections

Over the past 2 years, I kept a journal and an electronic log, with the intention of documenting all racially based comments spoken to me in common everyday conversations. In addition, I thought that I would document stories in the media that refer to race. I soon discovered that this task was onerous, so I stopped after only one week when I realized that the comments and stories were too numerous to document.

In the introduction to this thesis, I was forthright about my initial lack of knowledge about my topic. As I began my research and spoke with some friends about my topic, I quickly became aware of how little I know about [my] Whiteness. I recalled two conversations with friends that triggered a realization of my Whiteness. Previously, I had never considered what stereotypes people of colour might have about Whites. I had to laugh at myself because this clearly exemplified my Whiteness, as if Whites are perfect and could not be stereotyped. The conversations took place on two separate occasions with women of colour, one from an Aboriginal family in Canada, and the other from a country outside of North America. In both instances, the women shared stories about advice they had received from their parents on how to choose a boyfriend or a husband. In both cases, the parents had warned their daughters not to choose a White boy because Whites are dirty, dishonest, full of disease, and cannot be trusted. I was enlightened by these conversations because it seemed to me that White people typically

referred to “others” as the ones who are dirty and full of disease. Again, through my Whiteness I had never considered Whites as being categorized in this way.

Upon further exploration of a stereotype that describes Whites, I was drawn to a discussion by hooks (1992). She described her early stereotype of Whites as “terrorists, especially those who dared to enter that segregated space of blackness” (p. 170). She explained that as a child, she did not know any White people because they were rarely seen in her neighbourhood. She wrote about the “official” White man, that is, the man who came to her neighbourhood “to sell products, Bibles and insurance. They terrorized by economic exploitation” (p. 170). I was moved to further introspection through these words by hooks:

What did I see in the gazes of those white [*sic*] men who crossed our thresholds that made me afraid, that made black [*sic*] children unable to speak? Did they understand at all how strange their whiteness appeared in our living rooms, how threatening? Did they journey across the tracks with the same “adventurous” spirit that other white men carried to Africa, Asia, to those mysterious places they would one day call the “third world?” Did they come to our houses to meet the other face-to-face and enact the colonizer role, dominating us on our own turf? (p. 170)

The process of writing this thesis had an impact on me personally and professionally. Reading through the research literature, having conversations with friends, and listening to stories from students affected me in different ways. Sometimes, I feel that my understanding of Whiteness has become clearer yet more complicated. Once I began to examine Whiteness, I realized how many layers of issues and situations need to be considered. I know that there will never be a clear solution to the challenges of racism.

At times, I find myself becoming frustrated and impatient when I witness behaviour or hear comments that I know are racist but which the persons responsible

deny being racist. I continue to have the opportunity to talk openly with Whites and non-Whites about racism, and, thus, so I continue my learning any my search for answers within my professional and personal life outside of the formal academic process.

REFERENCES

- Banks, J. A., & Lynch, J. (1986). *Multicultural education in western societies*. New York: Praeger.
- Blackwell, J. C., Smith, M., & Sorenson, J. S. (2003). *Culture of prejudice arguments in critical social science*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Brown, L. A., & Strega, S. (2005). *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Carr, P. R., & Klassen, T. R. (1997). Different perceptions of race in education: Racial minority and white teachers [Electronic version]. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 22(1), 67-81.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dei, G. J. S. (1996). *Anti-racism education: Theory and practice*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Elliott, J. (1996). *Blue eyed*. [Video]. Denkmal Film production. Toronto: Visual Education Centre [distributor].
- Fine, M. (1994). Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 70-82). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 106-116.
- Haluza-Delay, R. (2002). *A community of acceptance: Respect for Thunder Bay's diversity*. Thunder Bay: Diversity Thunder Bay.
- Henry, F., & Tator, C. (2006). *The colour of democracy: Racism in Canadian society* (3rd ed.). Toronto: Thomson Nelson.

- Henry, F., Tator, C., Mattis, W., & Rees, T. (1995). *The colour of democracy: Racism in Canadian society*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace.
- Hill, B. H. (1995). *Shaking the rattle: Healing the trauma of colonization*. Hagersville: Shadyhat Books.
- hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
- Johnson, L. (2002). My eyes have been opened: White teachers and racial awareness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 153-167.
- Kehoe, J. (1984). *A handbook for enhancing the multicultural climate of the school*. Vancouver: WEDG.
- Kendall, F. E. (2006). *Understanding white privilege*. New York: Routledge.
- King, J. E. (1991). Dysconscious racism: Ideology, identity, and the miseducation of teachers. *Journal of Negro Education*, 60(2), 133-146.
- Kivel, P. (2002). *Uprooting racism: How white people can work for racial justice* (Rev. ed.). Gabriola Island, BC: New Society.
- Manglitz, E. (2003). Challenging white privilege in adult education: A critical review of the literature. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 53(2), 119-134.
- McIntosh, P. (1995). White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies. In M. Anderson & P. Collins (Eds.), *Race, class and gender: An anthology* (2nd ed., pp. 76-87). Belmont, CA: Woodsworth.
- McIntyre, A. (1997). *Making meaning of whiteness: Exploring racial identity with white teachers*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (1995). *For the love of learning*. Retrieved January 10, 2006, from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/abcs/rcom/full/volume4/chapter16.html>
- Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2000). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 769-802). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press.

Solomon, R. P., & Levine-Rasky, C. (2003). *Teaching for equity and diversity: Research to practice*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Taylor, D. H. (2005). *Me funny*. Vancouver, BC: Douglas & McIntyre.

APPENDIX A: INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Potential Participant,

Currently I am completing my second year in the Masters of Education program at Lakehead University. As part of the requirements for successfully completing the Masters degree, I am proposing to write a thesis based on a research study that would be completed with White faculty.

The study is entitled “Making Meaning of Whiteness: White Community College Faculty Perspectives”. The topic of Whiteness is not regularly discussed amongst White people and so the intention of this study is to create an opportunity for dialogue and sharing of ideas and perspectives in regards to Whiteness. Even though I am the researcher, I intend to participate in the study and will also offer my insights and thoughts. Discussion of Whiteness can be controversial and lead to a range of emotional responses, but I will conduct discussions in a respectful manner with the desired outcome being one of the group creating new knowledge and understanding about Whiteness.

Participants in this study will be asked to meet on three occasions in a focus group. Each meeting could last up to two hours. The times of the meetings will be arranged outside of teaching schedules. The anticipated start time to begin this study is within the next month. Participants will be required to sign a consent form that clarifies information such as confidentiality, voluntary participation, and storage of information.

The study is designed for twelve White volunteers who are full-time faculty. If you are willing to participate in this study, you may contact me at this email address: xxxxxxxx@lakeheadu.ca. Alternatively, if you wish to speak to me more about the study you may call me at xxx-xxxx. If you have any questions regarding the study my thesis supervisor is Connie Russell, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University; she can be reached by email (xxxxxxx@lakeheadu.ca) or phone (xxx-xxxx).

Thank you.

Frances Trowsse

Faculty

APPENDIX B: COVER LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS

Dear

I would like to invite you to participate in a study entitled “Making Meaning of Whiteness: White Community College Faculty Perspectives” that I am conducting as part of the requirements for completing a Masters in Education from Lakehead University. The topic for the study is whiteness and starts from the notion that few white people have had the opportunity to explore the meaning of whiteness and gain some understanding of how it positions white people in their personal and professional life.

The participants for this study will be organized into two focus groups; each group will have six members made up of white female and male faculty from the college. The focus groups will each meet three times at a pre-arranged location. The meeting times will be arranged in a way that will not disrupt teaching schedules. The researcher will consult with the participants in order to choose appropriate meeting times.

During the meeting times the researcher will come prepared with questions for discussion. The anticipated length of time for completion of each of the focus groups meetings is one and half to two hours. The focus group meetings will be audio taped and transcribed. The information provided by the participants will be shared only amongst the researcher and the participants and will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. Identifying information, such as participants' names, will not be revealed in any published materials.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and therefore you may withdraw at any time. As well, there is no apparent risk of physical or psychological harm through your participation in this study.

I appreciate your willingness to take the time to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me at 807-683-7061 or email me at xxxxxxxx@lakeheadu.ca. You may also contact the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board at xxx-xxxx. My thesis supervisor is Connie Russell, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University; she can be reached by email (xxxxxxx@lakeheadu.ca) or phone (xxx-xxxx).

Thank you.

Frances Trowsse

APPENDIX C: COVER LETTER FOR COLLEGE

Dear President

I would like to request the participation in a study entitled “Making Meaning of Whiteness: White Community College Faculty Perspectives”. This study will be conducted as part of the requirements for completion of my Masters in Education from Lakehead University. I anticipate beginning this study within the next month.

The purpose of the study is to explore the meaning of Whiteness with a group of White faculty. Whiteness is a socially constructed phenomenon that maintains a racial hierarchy. Whiteness is not regularly discussed so there may be a lack of understanding as well as some discomfort in addressing the concept. However, my intention is to approach this study in a respectful and thoughtful manner. I will work to create an opportunity for participants to critically examine what Whiteness means and how it impacts participants professionally particularly as educators of students of colour. I anticipate that this discussion will allow participants to gain new knowledge of the topic.

The study will involve a group of 12 White participants selected from the faculty. The intention is to form two focus groups, each composed of six participants. There is no set number of participants from each gender.

With the permission of the college, recruitment of participants will occur through a mass email to all faculty from all departments. In the event that too many people respond then selection will be on a first-come first-serve basis; if there are not enough

respondents, then a second email may be sent or the study may be completed with only one focus group.

The focus groups will be asked to meet three times; meetings will be arranged around teaching schedules so there should be no disruption of work. The location of these meetings will be arranged closer to the time of the meetings.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time. It is hoped that this study will support and complement existing discussions within the college in regards to racism and anti-racism education.

All information collected during the study will be shared only with the researcher and the participants and will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. Identifying information such as the name of the college and the participants will not be revealed in any published materials. A copy of the thesis will be made available to the college.

If you wish to give permission for this study to take place please sign the attached form. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact myself, or the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board at the numbers listed below.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter. Frances Trowsse

xxx-xxxx

xxxxxxxx@lakeheadu.ca

Lakehead University Research Ethics Board

xxx-xxxx

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

My signature on this sheet indicates that I agree to participate in a study by Frances Trowsse, entitled “Making Meaning of Whiteness: White Community College Faculty Perspectives” and it indicates I understand the following:

I have received explanations about the nature of the study, its purpose, and procedures

I am a volunteer and can withdraw at any time from the study

There is no apparent risk of physical or psychological harm

The data I provide will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years

There will be consultation with the researcher in regards to reviewing the data once it has been transcribed

A final copy of the study will be located at the college where I can access it

I will not be named, or identified in any way in any materials published as a result of this Study

As a participant I will not name or identify other participants in this Study

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM FOR COLLEGE

I _____ have read and understood the covering letter for the study entitled, “Making Meaning of Whiteness: White Community College Faculty Perspectives”, and I agree to have this study take place at Confederation College. I understand and agree to the following:

Participants will be recruited from college faculty utilizing the college email distribution system for faculty. Focus groups may meet within a pre-arranged space at the college. Meeting times for the focus groups will be arranged in a manner that will not interfere with teaching schedules. Information collected during the study will be shared only amongst the participants and researcher and will be safely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. Anonymity for the participants and the college will be assured. Participation will be voluntary and any participant and the college can withdraw at any time. There is not any anticipated risk as a result of participating in this study.

Signature

Date