TEACHERS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF

RACISM AND ANTI-RACISM

IN THE SCHOOL


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By

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**ABSTRACT**

Race and racism inform our subjective realities and structure unequal material relations in contemporary society. While researchers have developed substantive theories to explain racism as systemically pervading institutions within society and permeating our consciousness, studies must also examine how people with privilege deny or admit the existence of racism within their institutions in different environments. Studies of how educators understand racism have been emerging; however, there remains a paucity of scholarship addressing this topic in the Canadian Prairies. In this thesis I use discourse analysis to investigate how prairie teachers negotiated the troubling topic of racism in their schools. The data was collected through open-ended surveys and focus-groups exploring teachers' understanding of racism and anti-racism within two mid-sized prairie city high schools. First, exploring survey responses, I use text-based discursive analysis techniques to analyze how participants minimize the unsettling presence of racism in the school. In their responses, teachers used techniques of individualization, blaming the victim, displacement, and situating racism as a student problem to avoid implicating themselves or their school within racism. Teachers preserved the colour-blind image of education, maintaining the benevolence of the educational institution and its employees. However, different images of education emerged from focus-group discussions with educators interested in exploring anti-racism in the school. Focus group participants shifted from minimizing racism to problematizing privilege and power within the building. Multicultural, psychological, and institutional approaches to anti-racism emerged, emphasizing the need to engage individuals, cultures, and institutional structures. Exploring how teachers articulated different versions of the school environment, the identities of students, and their own identities within and between these different anti-racist discourses exposed how versions of each approach could be constructed to situate racism as external to education, and how critical conceptualizations of the school opened opportunities for individual, cultural, and institutional change within education. This research develops the understanding of race in the Canadian Prairies, discourse analysis within geography, anti-racist education, the geography of how teachers situate racism, and how teachers construct the relationship between school, teacher identity, and racism.

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**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE**

Race is a construction that informs our subjective realities and structures unequal material relations in contemporary society. Theorizing on race has been dominated traditionally by a preoccupation with the Other: the Black, the immigrant, the Aboriginal[1] (Bonnett, 1997); however, there is been an increasing move to critically assess the social construction and normalization of racial domination, both in terms of privilege and disadvantage (Bonnett, 1999; Frankenberg, 1993; Jackson & Penrose, 1993). As bell hooks (1990) argues, researchers must study those possessing privilege and power, those possessing whiteness,[2] to understand the silencing and denial that make institutional racism so difficult to name.

In this thesis I investigate how teachers negotiated the troubling topic of racism in the school. The data for this research was collected jointly with Sheelah, a Masters student in education. We used open-ended surveys and focus-groups to elicit discourse on

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[1] Although I often defer to the terminology of the text under discussion, when there are not issues of narrative fidelity I refer to the marginalized original inhabitants of this land as Aboriginal people. There are a number of advantages to doing so. Aboriginality is the language of the Constitution of Canada, and the most inclusive term, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. It is a term with broad usage, and less entanglement with racist constructions and definitional ambiguities than Indian or Native. Indian is a common derogatory term applied broadly to Aboriginal people, a name some Aboriginal people have taken on for themselves, and a narrow category of First Nations people legally defined by the *Indian Act* to hold Status as an Indian for the purposes of that Act. The term Native suffers from a stark problem of definitional expansiveness: in addition to Aboriginal people many other people born in Canada consider themselves native to Canada. While internationally the idea of Indigeniety has gained greater currency, within Canada the term remains less common in popular discourse. However, the notion of Aboriginality remains problematic. First, it continues to name Canada's original people in the language of the colonizer. Second, people often assume a taken-for-granted transparency to Aboriginal people as a racially distinct group; however, Aboriginal people constitute a diverse category of people. It is those Aboriginal people marked by differences in the colour of the skin and the conditions of their lives from the white middle-class norm that are often the greatest targets of racism.

[2] As a racial category, whiteness is a construct without definitional finality. Although whiteness is laden with meaning, its content and boundaries have shifted through different historic and geographic contexts (Bonnett, 2000b; Roediger, 1991, 2005). It is best understood as a part of elaborate racial formations working through history and continuing to be reconstituted in contemporary social relations (Omi & Winant, 1998). I have chosen to refer to the dominant within these racial formations as white. While there are a number of other terms that could also work – Caucasian, Euro-Canadian, or crackers – I prefer the simplicity of whiteness as it most closely accords to the language and constructions people use in everyday life. Whiteness represents that which is considered racially normative (Frankenberg, 1993). Many researchers regularly contrast the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. When referring to their studies I will adopt their language as it is specific to their study populations. I, however, dislike the term non-Aboriginal. It serves to define purely through negation and fails to name the dominant racial categories. While the settler population of non-Aboriginal people contains whites and racially marginalized people, these complexities are obscured by blanket terms like non-Aboriginal erasing the presence of visible minorities. Whites are the unhyphenated Americans or Canadians. Following the approach of many scholars within critical race theory, I shall speak of whiteness and name its implicit reference as the assumed norm.

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the nature of racism within two mid-sized prairie city high schools. First, exploring survey responses, I use text-based discursive analysis techniques to analyze how participants minimize the unsettling presence of racism in the school, maintaining the benevolence of the educational institution and its employees. Then analyzing the focus-group transcripts, I explore how educators shift in the critical dialogic environment between minimizing racism and problematizing privilege and power within the building.

Understanding how school teachers construct racial problems, and how they can successfully renegotiate problematic constructions, remains vital in the effort to create inclusive schools. While deficiency theories explain differences in school achievement as a product of parent involvement or community dynamics (for instance, Desimone, 1999; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn & Smith, 1998), the racialized gap in student achievement cannot be reduced to economic differences and resources and familial culture, and is significantly shaped by micropolitical mechanisms within the school such as systemic bias in teacher and institutional evaluation (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). But while much discourse in education has focused on how issues of marginalized students' culture and community impact their success, this research study flips the gaze, studying not marginalized students and their communities but the school and educators. Rather than conceptualizing marginalized students as the problem, it is necessary to examine the gaps within schools that fail to provide sufficient resources and employ inclusive, critical pedagogies to support all students' development as members of society (Hytten & Adkins, 2001). Despite the significant, and rising, diversity of the student population, the racial composition of the Canadian teaching force remains predominantly white (Carr and Klassen, 1997). Exploring how primarily white educators understand racism and anti-racism in the school provides a valuable site to derive critical understandings of the racialized spaces of educators. Particular constructions of place operate in discourses to legitimate particular social relations. Examining teachers' constructions of racism in the school provides important information regarding the current discursive barriers and blocks to recognizing racism, while exploring constructions of anti-racism demonstrates other versions of the school that open opportunities for change at the individual, cultural, and institutional level.

*Locating Myself*

My teaching experience has been brief, but my schooling in race life-long. I grew up in a small town in northern British Columbia. There was then, as there remains now, significant racial tension between white settlers and the area's original Aboriginal inhabitants. My ethnic background is mixed European, mostly Irish. I belonged to the community of white settlers. In fact, my grandfather built some of the earlier homes in the town. As a child I assumed my experiences to be normative and believed that I did not hold a particular cognizance in regard to race. However, my memory contains a fickle assortment of fragments that betray my claims to ignorance and innocence. One summer, I spent several weeks away from my family living in the woods as part of a hunting and guiding operation. Among my sparse memories of the trip, I remember gutting fish, being bitten by a rodent, and lying awake late at night discussing what it was like to fight an Indian. Amongst my family, the racism was more muted. My father was an accountant who regularly worked with reserve communities. In recognition of his work, he has been granted a name at a feast.[3] But from the various times I accompanied him onto First Nations reserves, I hold no lingering memory of an abiding connection with the reserve residents. Instead I remember a strange fascination with the almost other-worldly activities of totem carvers. I may have visited reserves but I neither belonged nor understood the world there.

In school, I also struggled with (not) belonging. Beset first by learning difficulties then beleaguered by behavioural troubles, I struggled through elementary school. At eleven, after my father left to live with his mistress, my mother entreated me to become the man of the house in his absence. Unfortunately, our prior patriarch, my model of masculinity, may have over-emphasized the importance of anger. And anger proved an emotion that I was only too able to express. I fought at home and at school – and met repeated, although futile, censure. Often isolated at school, I developed extensive but superficial relationships with an extended family network, a meager compensation for problem children as they are pawned among many family and friends' homes. Throughout I remained an irregular appendage to the student body, regularly out of

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[3] Such solemn occasions are not without their sardonic humour; translated to English his name is 'he who holds the copper.'

school as a result of first suspension then lackluster attendance. Teachers and guardians informed me of my worth, or lack thereof. At sixteen, following my step-mother's banishment from her home, I moved out on my own; my attendance suffered a yet further decline.

However, amidst all these absences my mother ensured I would still receive an education befitting my white middle-class standing. Claiming the entitlements due members of white middle-class, my mother insistently interjected in the educational apparatus. Despite my behaviour, she always ensured that there was a place for me at school, maintaining that expulsion was beyond the pale. The institutional and administrative environment, although not always ideal, never barred me from completing my education. Without the privileges of class and race, my mother and I may have found the school far less remitting place. Educational inequities remain evident in the elevated rates of suspension and lagging student retention rates of marginalized students (Bowker, 1993; Siggner & Costa, 2005). I graduated with the assumption of post-secondary potential, particularly from my mother. She ensured her children post-secondary opportunities including post-secondary education provisions in the divorce. My father to his credit did fulfill his obligations with regard to monetary support for post-secondary education. I flourished in the post-secondary environment, displaying an aptitude never present through years of high school mediocrity.

Throughout my schooling I benefited from the belief of some faculty, support that not all students may find. While I endured the inhospitable climate produced by certain faculty, committed educators pressed upon me my potential (as well as noting my flagging attendance and lagging efforts). These teachers did not dismiss my abilities and welcomed and encouraged my attendance in their classes. Such interactions maintained that there was a space in the school for me, and buttressed me against the assault of more critical and less forgiving faculty. These interactions often do not occur in the same way for students of more marginalized backgrounds. Educational anthropology has demonstrated that teachers' extensions of support are often motivated by processes of identification that they may not even be entirely aware of (Spindler & Spindler, 1988). Research indicates that teacher attitudes, communications styles, and behaviours

influence student success and may contribute to the racial disparities in North American education (Bowker, 1993; Farkas, 2003; Kailin, 1999; Ledlow; 1992).

When I recently entered teaching, returning to my community of origin in a position of respectable (if meager) authority, I intended to create an inclusive educational paradigm. Teaching geography at a small community college, I attempted to engage students with important issues in human geography to equip them with a critical understanding of their place within the social and natural environment. Recognizing that students enter the classroom from myriad backgrounds with varied experiences and knowledge sets, I attempted to create a space for those differences within the classroom. In addition to traditional written assignments, I accorded significant weight to alternate ways to expressing knowledge, such as class presentations and photo assignments. I hoped this would draw on diverse skill sets, displacing some of the excessive weight placed on written texts in conventional education. Rather than privileging the regurgitation of minutia that I deemed of value, I used essay exams. Providing students with the questions beforehand, I challenged students to demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge but also opened the opportunity for students to insert their own knowledge of the social and natural environment into their answers.

But I discovered the inclusive classroom can be quite illusive. The aspirations of multicultural education often privilege classroom diversity as an educational resource. But there remain serious questions about the exploitation of such resources. Privileging marginalized voices often asks marginalized students to expose their stories before the interrogating ears of white students (Thompson, 2003). In predominantly white classes, marginalized students are too regularly expected to speak for their race – something not requested of white students. And the occasional pressure to perform their difference fails to attend to some of the most significant needs of marginalized students. Normative institutional assumptions about students often function to systemically produce disadvantage with difference. When difference is construed as the possession of individuals rather than the product of cultural and social systems, teachers often risk casting the problem as belonging to the student as opposed to the institution.

This became painfully obvious to me in my first semester of teaching. Several students struggled with basic prerequisite writing skills, and one Aboriginal student

expressed significant frustration with my (unfair) marking. Even as teachers incorporate increased multicultural content, basic capacities in reading and writing often function as gatekeepers to greater educational success. Marking students abstracted from their social context, I regularly privileged those with the greatest historic access to educational resources. Students do not enter the classroom *tabula rasa*, but with diverse skill sets. These abilities are not formed as a simple product of individual effort or aptitude, but also as a result of complex social processes. While Aboriginal students continue to have lower educational outcomes, this results not from some inborn inferiority but lesser access to the social and economic resources that aid white students' success. However as I began to talk to some of my peers about the difficulties of marking, they issued immediate censure. They asserted that it was vital to treat every student the same; it would simply be unfair to consider historical circumstances. These peers also advised me to remain inflexible with deadlines as I needed to prepare them for the real world.[4] According to such educators, students' problems belonged to students, and introducing flexibility to recognize different student needs would be unfair.

Fortunately despite certain cultural orthodoxies among some teachers, educational institutions have introduced flexibility; unfortunately, educational inequity remains a reality for marginalized students. Institutions, including the college at which I worked and the university I attended, have introduced services to support students, including services relevant the particular needs of Aboriginal, immigrant, and disabled students. I could recommend that struggling students take advantage of additional college programming to aid students with basic writing skills, which I did. And I could renegotiate due-dates, which I also did. But ultimately students that submitted lower quality work received lower grades, even if I suspected that it represented a greater amount of work than the average student's assignment. Similarly, I capped extensions to timelines that I decided were reasonable. And I found myself complaining about the students that caused me problems. Although a problem may have originated with

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[4] I must also credit other educators at the same institution for disabusing me of such illusions as the real world. After these initial conversations on inflexibility, I began to wonder whether I was inadequately preparing students for the world and queried others as to the possible harm of a soft approach. It was the challenge by another faculty member, asserting that a thorough investigation of either her or my existence would dispel any notion that we truly existed in a world of inflexible deadlines, which brought me to question the myth of the real world.

instructor expectations or institutional disadvantage, the problem became evident with that student. In every interaction it was simpler to cast the problem as belonging to the student as opposed to the structure of the class, school, and society. Thus, I regularly minimized the institutional aspect of racism, blaming marginalized students while ignoring how they are systemically produced. It was discomforting to overly critique an institution that I was part of and had to exist within. It simply seemed impractical to problematize institutional power and privilege in every interaction, particularly as a sessional lacking power (and time) to reconstruct the class, school, and society. Although in some instances I tried to accommodate students, many times I simply justified inaction.

Negotiating between accommodating students and maintaining boundaries, I consistently struggled to maintain my image as a just educator within a fair school. This involved weaving narratives of even and equal treatment together with paternalistic tales of aiding the Other. In both sets of stories, white privilege remained invisible beneath its presumed normativity. Peggy McIntosh (1998) unveils that white people assume their entitlement to privilege and power within society while simultaneously assuming the universality of their experience of the world. Absent an institutional understanding of racism, efforts to accommodate difference seem patently unequal. Racist and colonial discourses rationalize inequality as a product of the inferiority of the Other. In this construction, teachers are but the impartial arbitrators of student achievement or the beneficent aides to underprivileged students. Both the impartial arbitrator and the benevolent saviour are positions that allow educators to continue to maintain their identity as respectable while securing their status as privileged (Schick, 2000, 2002). But I am not pure. Systems of privilege and penalty encompass everyone in society. I benefit from systems of privilege that disadvantage others, as much as I may intellectually oppose this form of social organization.

However, as society produces people, the converse is also true: people produce society. We cannot escape the social organization of power in society, but we can act to reconfigure it. But before the healing can begin, the poison must first be exposed. We must expose not just racism but also the systems of denial that bar its naming and how these may be transcended. A consistent feature of prevalent constructions of racism is

that they function to minimize or deny the reality of institutional racism. Racism is contained to individuals, to other times and other places, and to other peoples. Interrogating the discursive minimization of racism exposes the logic of denial that blocks change, while exploring conceptualizations of anti-racism underlines both how strategies can follow the absolving contours of racism as elsewhere and open previously closed territories for change within ourselves and our institutions. Understanding the implications of particular constructions of racism and anti-racism are important avenues to expand our understanding and expose new directions for research and education in pursuit of a more inclusive school.

I provide this autobiography as a way to foreground the central tension at the core of this thesis between minimizing and recognizing racism. I hold no simple prognosis on how pedagogy should be practiced; but to create more inclusive – indeed anti-oppressive – schools, educators must explore the systems of privilege and power that undergird the institution and also their own identity. Through the social practices of schooling, teachers inscribe their identities as well as the meaning of the school environment. Conversely, as part of the school, teachers derive their identity in part through reference to the meanings associated with places such as the school building and the classroom. A challenge to the school is often a challenge to the teacher. The discursive minimization of racism in the school protects the sanctity of the institution and its staff. Conversely, the acknowledgement of institutional racism troubles not just the institution but also its faculty. Thus, *conscientization* to institutional racism remains a task fraught with difficulties. In this thesis, I explore: first, how educators discursively minimize racism, and, second, how teachers negotiate between absolving and critical conceptions of identity and place as they converse about anti-racism.

*Thesis Map*

I have organized this thesis into six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, chapter two reviews the literature and chapter three outlines my research methodology and methods. The data analysis is divided into two chapters. Chapter four, the first data analysis chapter, focuses on the surveys exploring how teachers discursively minimized the image of racism in the school. The second analysis chapter, chapter five, addresses

the focus group sessions, examining how participants shift between constructing racism as internal and external to the school through the dialogic process of conceptualizing anti-racist education. While the chapter on minimization focuses on how teachers construct racism to avoid the implication of themselves or their school in it, the focus group discussion carries us in the opposite direction, exploring the processes that are involved in renegotiating identity and place as teachers recognize racism as institutionally imbricated within both the institution and their teaching practice. The sixth and final chapter concludes the thesis by briefly summarizing the significant contributions of this research and hinting towards future research directions.

As change is a dynamic process, we need to construct uncomfortable unfinished identities and stories (Thompson, 2003). In this thesis, I delineate the blockade of discursive minimization and sketch the outline of critical rearticulations of the school environment and teaching practices to chart our current thresholds. As bell hooks (1992) describes, to move beyond our current impasse, we must create new travel narratives, from a position critical of the bourgeois tours of old, seeking not to discover new places but rediscover ourselves and our geography. This travel is less about physical movement than about reinhabiting our current geographies and histories. We need to trouble the notions of where we are and where we come from. These journeys require traversing – indeed living within – an uncanny terrain both familiar and unfamiliar, settled and unsettled (Gelder & Jacobs, 1998). On this haunted terrain, we can begin the collective process of redefining place and identity as part of the necessary task to reconstruct truly inclusive schools.

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past three decades, geographic approaches to the study of race and space have been radically reformulated in accordance with shifts both in the discipline and in how race is theorized. While traditional approaches privileged quantitative spatial analysis as the legitimate fields and methods for geographic inquiries into race, the introduction of social constructivist paradigms has radically reconstituted the range and theoretical depth of geography's contribution to the understanding of the racialization process (Bonnett, 1999). Moving beyond specialized topics, such as the enumeration of racial patterns in residence and work, recent work has come to embrace interdisciplinarity and recognize the spatial contingency of racialized discourse. Constructions of race are at once spatialized and spatializing, both given meaning by and giving meaning to local spatial contexts. Within social/cultural geography, theorists and researchers have engaged the ideological and discursive spatialities of race, examining: the historical construction of racialized nations as social and spatial entities (Brodkin, 1999); racialized social and spatial epistemologies (Dwyer, 2000); the contemporary marking and maintenance of national borders and racial boundaries (Hubbard, 2005; Yuval-Davis, Anthias & Kofman, 2005); the whiteness of the green movement (DeLuca & Demo, 2001); environmental racism in development (Pulido, 2000); the creation and maintenance of white city spaces and then suburbs (Duncan & Duncan, 2004; Hirsch, 2000); and the marketing of smaller isolated communities as safe white communities (Aguiar, Tomic & Trumper, 2005). But most relevant to my project is the recent work of some social psychologists interrogating the discursive construction of racialized spaces such as the beach and the nation (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Durrheim & Dixon, 2001; Taylor & Wetherell, 1999; Wallwork & Dixon, 2004). These theorists focus on empirical, nuanced studies of how places are constructed in text and talk; however, their particular methods and insights as yet remain largely outside the discipline of geography. This underdeveloped stream of theorizing and empirically examining the spatiality of discourse remains a significant gap in contemporary geographic understandings.

I draw upon interconnected bodies of literature to frame teachers' constructions of racism in the schools, namely those addressing: race, racism, the discursive denial of racism, space and place in discourse, and race in education. The first section reviews how

critical race theories have theorized race, exploring the pervasive and systemic nature of racialization in co-constructing dominance and marginalization. This is followed by an outline of how racism has been defined in the critical race literature. The work of discourse analysts in the third section highlights how dominant discourses about race deny rather than critically conceptualize racism. The fourth section examines the contribution of geographic theorists, locating how social constructions rely upon and produce particular notions of place and space. A review of research in anti-racist education constitutes the final section, focusing on, first, the role of teachers in the classroom, and, second, the potential of anti-racist education with predominantly white populations. Combining these bodies of literature provides an important lens with which to approach teachers' constructions of racism and anti-racism in the school, examining the ways categories of race and place are used in discourse to construct and deny particular versions of events and social relations.

### *Race*

Although evolutionary scientists now discuss genetic differences between populations instead of races, race remains an important element of scholarly inquiry. Race[5] matters as it is a powerful idea that continues to distinguish and disadvantage groups of people (West, 1994). Race is a social construct but one of some material significance. Race matters, as it functions as a framework for explaining human differences that serve to justify the marginalization of those racialized as Other and to institutionalize white dominance (Fleras & Elliott, 2003). Thus, rather than using race as an analytic construct, the constitution of race and racism must be analyzed.

Critical race theory provides a fruitful basis for initiating an interrogation of race and racism. Although no definitive boundaries can be firmly established around critical

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[5] While originally people used races to demarcate different stocks of people or lineages, by the late eighteenth century there was a shift in the meaning of race as it took on increasing biological connotations (Satzewich, 1998). Race became an externally imposed label cast upon supposedly distinct subgroups, justifying their domination. Never a discrete biological category beyond the falsifying lens of ideology, race is often now often reframed as a category of cultural difference. Thus, different racial/cultural groups are believed to have different sets of values, affecting group members' psychological composition, and producing racial differences in aptitudes and abilities (Li, 1999). However, this notion of cultural difference fails to account for the role of power and racialization in the construction of difference, in effect naturalizing race as a cultural production of racialized communities as opposed to a cultural imagination of dominant groups.

race theory, it can be understood as a body of interrelated literature built upon a common desire to unmask the significance of race within Western society and challenge the resulting current relations of exclusion and oppression. Critical race theory exposes the nature of race as a powerful social construct used to allocate and deny access to and control over resources in society. Racialization is the process of crafting a powerful fiction of race, an imagination that becomes embodied in the world, materially privileging and penalizing different players while ideologically justifying the game. This section will highlight the contribution of critical race theory to understanding race and racialization.

Categories of race are foundational to how people understand and describe the world. These categories have been theorized as operating within co-constructed binaries of Self/Other, white/Black, white/Aboriginal. The creation of these binaries cannot be read as neutral or benign, as such a reading would efface the powerful and problematic nature of power at work in the construction of Self and Other. Categories of race have been used to stereotype and standardize constructions of difference, and, in turn, to construct superiority and inferiority (Omi & Winant, 1998). Erika Apfelbaum (1999) argues that dominant groups construct mythologies distinguishing groups, establishing the normalcy of their strengths. Thus, whiteness operates as the centre against which non-white identities are marked and racialized as Other (Dyer, 1988; Frankenberg, 1993). Five centuries of studying, classifying, and ordering humanity within an imperial context have given rise to powerful ideas of race (Willinsky, 1998). Powerful groups portray themselves as the normal standard, while casting peripheral groups as lesser, inadequate, and abnormal. It is through this process of dehumanizing the Other that the dominant, in legitimating the exploitation of the marginalized, also come to know themselves as superior and good in contrast to the degenerate Other. It is through reference to the Other that the Self gains meaning; likewise the meaning of the Other is known through recourse to the Self (Derrida, 1981).

Therefore a vital aspect of the study of the discursive constitution of race is the construction of Self and Other, figuring and naturalizing dominance. As Edward Said (1979) recognizes, constructing the Other is a relational process that constructs an imaginative geography of Self and Other that spatially organizes distinctions that work to

maintain group hierarchies. Said (1979: 7, italics in original), in his formidable *Orientalism*, argues

> Orientalism is never far from … the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying 'us' Europeans as against all 'those' non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures. … In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.

Said's methodology in examining the West's intellectual authority over the Orient is to study the production of 'truths' in the Orientalist discourse. Said examines how an author figure occupies different but always superior positions *vis-à-vis* the Oriental Other, reconstructing Orientalism to fit their context, and how these various discursive acts contribute to the construction of an array of available discursive resources and subject positions for future authors. Similarly, in myriad scripts, white social actors perform a whole series of potential relationships with their racial Other, almost always without conceding the position of dominance (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Many of the formative studies of racialization focus on contemporary and historical American race relations. The construction of racial identities in colonial America resulted in the formation "of a specific racial identity not only of the slaves but also for the European settler as well" (Omi & Winant, 1998: 18). Indeed racial hierarchies represent interdependent relations between power-differentiated people, and the status of superiority depends on the existence of a lesser Other. Within Western colonial-capitalist discourse, darkness is used routinely to describe dirt, disease, criminality, and moral depravity, and it is associated with the bodies and spaces of the racial Other (Cresswell, 1996; Sibley, 1995). Darkness, a potent marker of social difference, signals the image of a depraved and threatening Otherness. In contrast, whiteness is associated with purity and goodness, light and safety. The association of whiteness with order, rationality, and rigidity are qualities highlighted through contrast with the disorder, irrationality, and looseness of the racial Other (Dyer, 1997). As Toni Morrison (1992: 38) writes, "we should not be surprised that the Enlightenment could accommodate slavery; we should be surprised if it had not. The concept of freedom did not emerge in a vacuum. Nothing highlighted freedom – if it did not in fact create it – like

slavery." Morrison (1992: 52) goes on to argue that the representation of the African Other: "is the vehicle by which the [white] American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny."

In the Canadian Prairies the foil for whiteness is not Blackness but Aboriginality. Aboriginality exists as a myriad series of cultural constructs and identities. Aboriginal identities are informed by the experience of belonging to one of the many communities of original inhabitants of Canada, marginalized within their own lands by racism and colonialism (Adams, 1999). Through the processes of colonialism, Aboriginal groups were racialized as Other, as inferior, as primitive; simultaneously the superior, civilized, white (male) settler was co-produced, and his reign legitimated and naturalized (Berkhoffer, 1979; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). In Canada, the racialization of diverse First Nations into the unitary category of Indian through the *Indian Act* facilitated the control, regulation and containment of many Aboriginal peoples. However, as the government held certain roles and responsibilities with regard to those defined as Indians, it served and continues to serve government interests to maintain a narrow definition in regard to who is legally an Indian. Métis people were unrecognized as Aboriginal peoples (at least until 1982) while simultaneously denied full participation within the dominant white society. Those classified as non-status Indians were marked as not Indian for the purposes of government support while socially identified and excluded as non-white (Frideres & Gadacz, 2001). Through federal laws and policies, unequal application of the law, and social and economic exclusion, Aboriginal people were systematically stripped of their rights and confined to the margins of society (Adams, 1999; Cardinal, 1969; Lawrence, 2003; Monture-Angus, 1995). This exclusion opened the territories on which the (white) nation of Canada was built (Ng, 1993).

As a social invention, race is also constantly the subject of reinvention and reconstruction. Thus, cultural contestation and redefinition remain a mainstay of racial politics. As the meaning of race is constantly emerging, continuously reinforced, justified, rationalized, silenced, as well as contradicted and problematized, multiple and shifting meanings of race exist. Strategies of racial domination and resistance employ flexible and

shifting articulations of race based on denigration, reclamation, and cooptation. The term nigger, for instance, emerged in the early nineteenth century as a pejorative employed to convey contempt towards Blacks as an inferior race (Kennedy, 2002). However, Black people have long contentiously reclaimed the term, using it to satirize racist whites in folk humour, and to subvert and defy their subjugation as inferior. In hip hop, nigga has been reclaimed as term of endearment, and as a political refusal to abide by dominant constructions of value in a racist society (Kennedy, 2002). However, this cultural battle has not occurred without criticism or cooptation. Some, such as Bill Cosby, have criticized this approach as only retrenching racist stereotypes (Kennedy, 2002). In line with these criticisms, some white people have interpreted these reclamations as evidence of the degeneracy of marginalized populations, solidifying notions of Blackness as Other and deviant. While Robert Berkhoffer (1979) has explored the cultural production of white man's Indian, much work remains to be done on the reclamation and contestation of concepts of Indianness and savagery.  Research into the contemporary cultural politics of Aboriginality as a contested marker of identity requires further elaboration, particularly in regions where Aboriginal people are marked as the predominant Other.

Race continues to be a powerful, if variable, social construct used to distribute power in society. Racial constructs serve to define both the powerful and the marginalized. It remains necessary to examine race as historically and geographically contingent, as race has different meanings for different people in different times and places (Bonnett, 2000b). Constructions and experiences of race vary according to geography as well as gender, class, sexuality, and ability (Collins, 1990; Grant, 1993; Haraway, 1991). Racialization continues to operate within myriad contexts, drawing upon a mix of global and local narratives to construct dominant and subjugated identities. Racialization is a process that embodies racial imaginations in the relations of specific social and geographic locations, constituting experiences of both privilege and disadvantage. The salient question remains how we understand the not simply racialized populations but their relation to and marginalization by dominant society in different contexts. Noting the normalization of racial inequality foregrounds the necessity of investigating how we understand not just race but also racism.

*Racism*

Racism persists in Canada. A thorough investigation of systemic features of Canadian society exposes the tenaciousness of racial inequalities. It is evident as much in the under-representation of racially marginalized populations in positions of authority as in racially motivated violence (Fleras & Elliott, 2003). From stereotyping to harassment, racially marginalized communities continue to experience patterns of racial discrimination from the personal to the policy levels (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 2000). Racially marginalized populations continue to be politely denied equitable access to housing, employment, social services, and most relevant to the topic of my study, education. Racism is endemic, present in individual acts, cultures, and institutional policies.

At its most fundamental level, racism is about power. While typically racism is constructed as related to individual actions motivated by prejudice or hatred, racism also operates through a much broader set of social processes and institutional practices that have become so normalized as to be invisible, at least to those of us who benefit from them (Fleras & Elliott, 2003). Racism is not merely something done by a few abherant racists; it is a socio-cultural system that systemically produces advantage and disadvantage on the basis of constructed differences (Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1990). Racism refers to the power that allows one group to dominate or control another, and refers to any type of exploitation or exclusion that secures privilege at the expense of those racialized as Other, whether or not it could be deemed intentional. Racism is not merely about difference, but how these differences operate to exploit or exclude the Other on the basis of race. Defining racism as power focuses attention on the primacy of structures, ideologies, and practices in the racialized distribution of resources and responsibilities in society (Fleras & Elliott, 2003). This power is expressed at the level of dominant/marginalized interaction, buttressed by a coherent system of ideas and ideals, and embedded within institutional frameworks. These three interrelated aspects to racism can be defined as individual racism, cultural racism, and institutional racism.

Individual racism, racism in interpersonal interactions, is the most widely recognized aspect of racism. Individual racism involves both the attitudes held by an individual and the behaviours prompted by those attitudes. Individual racism can be both

hateful and polite. Hateful racism is often depicted in the figure of the Ku Klux Klan (which despite its commonsense association with the American south was a significant feature of the Canadian west in the 1920s and 1930s) (Fleras & Elliott, 2003). More recently groups of the far-right have overtly proffered rhetorics of racial hatred (Kinsella, 1994). However very few people tolerate such overt expressions of racism, and racist attitudes are now increasingly camouflaged (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Polite racism disguises dislike or distain for the racialized Other in far more subtle remarks and patterns of interaction, which nonetheless effectively encode the inferiority and out-of-place status of the racialized Other. Polite racism often manifests in euphemistic language, speaking of them and those people (Fleras & Elliott, 2003). Also as overt racism runs counter to prevailing Canadian values, many people may choose not to voice their opinions, instead expressing their racism through discriminatory acts (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 2000). While polite racism may seem more civilized it still perpetuates prevailing patterns of social control, justifying the exploitation and exclusion of those racialized as Other.

Cultural racism is strongly interconnected with other forms of racism, and difficult to isolate because it is deeply embedded within the Canadian value system. Culture refers to the patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that endow significance upon social life. Culture encompasses the art and literature, lifestyles, values, and traditions of a people. Cultural racism consists of the network of beliefs and values that encourage and justify racism and inequality (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 2000). It is reflected in everyday language and interactions (Essed, 1990). Within the colonial context, specific white cultural traditions operate as the standard for measuring the worth of all being. Cultural racism is embedded in cultural constructions of normative whiteness that demonize and pathologize marginalized communities, evident in the media and arts. For instance, the discourse surrounding fetal alcohol spectrum disorder blames Aboriginal mothers' lifestyle choices for the troubled conditions of many Aboriginal youth. These families are thus blamed for producing their own conditions. Most often absent from these discussions is a consideration of the marginalized circumstances and histories of abuse facing many Aboriginal families – and how the Canadian government's policies have perpetuated this marginalization. Forgotten is how the circumstances and

histories of marginalization contribute not only to substance abuse but also social exclusion that isolates parents and children from the networks of support they need, particularly in cases where there may be learning difficulties. Instead the object of critique becomes the cultural difference and depravity of the Aboriginal Other. Beyond individual prejudice, cultural racism is constituted through governing epistemes that people are socialized into from birth within a deeply racialized society.

Institutional racism refers to the process by which organizational policies, practices, and procedures privilege whiteness and discriminate against those racialized as Other (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 2000). Institutional racism refers to the rules, procedures, practices, and institutional norms that have the intent (systematic) or effect (systemic) of excluding or exploiting racially marginalized people (Fleras & Elliott, 2003). Systematic racism, institutional policies designed with the intent of producing inequality, flourished in segregationist and assimilationist policies of the past, such as the pass system on reserve or the residential school system. But this overt discrimination is neither culturally nor legally palatable in Canada today, and few organizations would admit to implementing policies designed to disadvantage racially marginalized populations. However, institutional racism continues to systemically perpetuate inequality, with or without directed intent. Systemic racism is entrenched within the structure, norms, and procedures of social institutions (Fleras & Elliott, 2003). Institutions are systemically racist when they ignore how organizational practices and structures reflect and reinforce white experiences as normative. While universally applied rules seem ostensibly colour-blind, they often have the real impact of privileging those whose experiences match underlying constructions of normativity. The unquestioned specificity and exclusivity of institutional constructions of normativity further marginalize those who originate from a distinct background, requiring different treatment because of cultural differences or social disadvantage. Systemic racism also emerges as a result of well-intentioned policies that are based on faulty assumptions that fail to accord with the realities of marginalized populations. Racism persists as a consequence of these assumptions, even if the results are unintended. Even if the actors within the institution do not espouse prejudice towards others, the institutional norms and assumptions can perpetuate racism. Systemic racism is rarely identified by those who benefit from it

(Fleras & Elliott, 2003). Systemic racism remains beyond people's everyday consciousness, disguised by universal standards, taken-for-granted as normal, and veiled as equality.

While these theoretical articulations of racism as encompassing the individual, cultural, and institutional have been well-mapped, work remains to explore how popular understandings contrast and connect with the current intellectual understandings. How do we work to bridge the gap between critical intellectual paradigms and the understanding held by practitioners in social services, healthcare, or education? Discourse analysts can meaningfully interrogate both how many white Canadians construct race and racism to evade responsibility and blame others, and how pedagogic dialogues rhetorically negotiate absolving and critical constructions of racism. These insights will further contribute to understanding the barriers that hinder and the negotiations that foster a common recognition of the breadth of racism.

### Discourse and the Denial of Racism

Discourses endow meaning to the world. Foucault (1980) conceived discourses as institutionalized forms of thought: consisting of the vocabulary, expressions, and systems of argument and meaning necessary to communicate. Thus, for Foucault, overarching discourses in society functioned to circumscribe what could be said or thought. Discourses structured people's very subjectivity. However, discourse is also produced by human subjects who endow meaning to the world in their speech and writing. Discourses are thus performative, and should be rightly considered a form of social action. According to Wetherell and Potter (1992) a satisfactory account of discourse must examine the discursive specification of reality – how subjects are formed, how the social world is known and categorized, how material interests and the natures of relevant objects are determined. Researchers must study the discursive actions of justification, rationalization, categorization, attribution, naming, blaming, and identifying, as these discursive actions serve to institute, ossify, and also alter society. In their revolutionary study of white discourse around Maori in New Zealand, Wetherell and Potter (1992) convincingly argue that racial categories serve as vital discursive resources used by

speakers and writers. They note human actors often follow established arguments, or discursive repertoires, in justifying or denying racial inequalities.

Empirical discursive studies of racism have uncovered significant nuances in how people use and rely on categories of race in discourse. Following Schegloff's (1997) instruction to focus on what speakers say, theorists such as West and Fenstermaker (2002) have interrogated how race, gender, and class are verbally articulated. However, Billig (1999) has challenged the incomplete nature of such an approach, as context and power do not only matter or function as spoken. Rather speakers perform identity and power in what they assume and leave unsaid, how they interact and how they position themselves. Such an approach is vital in the Canadian context, were race is often veiled beneath a projected colour-blindness (Backhouse, 1999). Following this critical line of inquiry, a key focus in the discourse analysis of race has been interrogating how privileged white speakers deploy discursive resources to justify their advantage and deny systemic inequalities.

Dominant constructions operate to deny or minimize the image of racism within mainstream society. A combination of denial and minimization constitutes the central and controlling rhetorical strategy in constructions of racism, and is the resultant action of various discursive avenues and techniques that scholars have studied (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 2000). Through techniques of denial, containment, and minimization, racism is constructed to simply not exist in present-day Canada, or if it exists, it is an aberration within, not a defining characteristic of, contemporary society (Montgomery, 2005). Thus despite the evidence of racial discrimination in the lives of the racially marginalized, there is an abiding refusal to accept the reality of racism. Racism is reduced to an irrational and individual problem, erasing the racialization of the institutional fabric of our society. Narratives of Canada as a liberal democracy function to maintain a national innocence and dispel the possibility of racism within the state.

One of the prevalent claims is that Canada constitutes a colour-blind meritocracy. Colour-blindness is a powerful and appealing liberal construct, which white people use to claim the irrelevance of race. Racial constructions have become so normalized as to be invisible, ideologically empowering the seemingly plausible deniability of the import to race. But this is an ontological fiction. Claiming colour-blindness evades recognizing and

engaging with the systems of power that racialization has produced (Frankenberg, 1993; Olsson, 1996). Belief in meritocracy is premised on the false belief that we exist in a colour-blind society of equal opportunity. The idea of meritocracy serves to justify any inequalities that do exist on the basis of personal merit. As everyone is construed to begin at the same place, those with advantage are constructed as accruing it as a result of their hard work or individual skill. This construction ignores how racialization endows power and privilege to those racialized as white (St. Denis & Schick, 2003). Claiming equal opportunity exists denies the existence of cultural and institutional power, and thus denies the need to redistribute power (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 2000).

Meritocracy not only positions advantage as deserved, but also casts responsibility for inequities as emanating from a cultural deficiency of the marginalized, in effect blaming the victim. Thus, rather than situating people within a system of produced advantage and disadvantage, certain people and communities are construed as causing their own marginalization, through their lack of motivation or ability to participate fully in society (St. Denis, 2004). Lack of success is then evidence of low character, morals, and intelligence of racialized communities, retrenching old racist stereotypes. The marginalization resulting from decades of dispossession, exclusion, and exploitation are explained away as the simple result of some cultural failure on the part of marginalized communities (Larocque, 1991). The marginalized Other is conceived as failing to adequately adapt traditional cultural values to fit Canadian society, whether by recalcitrantly refusing to assimilate or by abandoning traditional culture and thus becoming deficient.

Those holding racial privilege now often rhetorically construct racism as reversed under policies, such as affirmative action, that seem to privilege or provide special consideration for the circumstances of marginalized populations (Dei, Karumchery-Luik & Karumchery, 2004). The marginalized are portrayed as aggressors while those possessing whiteness are positioned as under attack. Hiring schemes that attempt to address the grievous under-representation of marginalized groups among esteemed professions are portrayed as an affront to equality. Ignoring the systems of privilege that benefit and aid their success, aspiring white professionals convey affirmative action as bestowing unfair advantages on marginalized candidates. Thus, the uppity Other is

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inveighed as the problem, drawing unfairly upon history to attempt to gain preferable treatment. Institutional power is erased, and rather than resisting systems of racialization that deny them full humanity and equal opportunity, the marginalized seem to be leveraging unfair advantage. Without an analysis of power, marginalized populations' attempts to insert race into the discussion are viewed as simply a reversal of racial logic, 'playing the race card'[6] to curry favour.

To better understand the systems of denial that prevent addressing racism, we need to study how white people construct racism in relation to their own identity and place in society. Further exploration should place these discourses, examining what discourses are used in particular contexts, as well as studying how place is constructed and used in different discourses. Serious examination is required to determine the implications of socio-spatial constructions of racism and how they may be reconceived to open broader spaces within our institutions for change.

### *Discourse, Space, and Place*

Consistent efforts to veil the role of systemic racism in society contribute to constructing spaces of innocence and deviance, which become important symbolic resources in our efforts to perform our identity and claim space (Razack, 2002). Although popular constructions portray space as empty and abstract, space is intimately involved in, and in fact co-constituted with, social life (Massey, 2005). While it is incontrovertible that the social world exists in space – that boundless three-dimensional extent in which objects and events occur – one must also acknowledge that space is not an unchanging box. Rather than an inert container, Henri Lefebvre (1991) theorized social space as the product of social relations. Spatiality is thus a social problematic. Soja clarifies that spatiality specifically refers "to socially produced space, the created forms and relations of a broadly defined human geography" (quoted in Johnston, Gregory & Smith, 2000: 780). Although not all space is socially produced, all spatiality is. Spatialities are both the medium and the outcome of situated human agency and systems of social practices. Spatialities are at once media in which knowledge, discourse, and identity exist and

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[6] Playing the race card is an idiomatic phrase, referring to a person unnecessarily bringing the issue of race or racism into a debate so as to obfuscate the matter and gain an advantage. It is a metaphorical reference to card games, such as bridge, in which a player may play a trump card to automatically prevail over others.

derive meaning, as well as themselves constructions subject to the mediating cultural deployments of these very same knowledges, discourses, and identities (Mitchell, 1994).

Within space, places denote particular locations. In this way, places are part of spatialities, and are similarly constitutive of and constituted by social relations (Massey, 2005). Space is organized into places, bounded settings in which social relations and identity are constituted. For instance, a school setting frames the activities and identities of those within it. Creswell (1996) argues that organization of places is ideological in the sense that it constrains practices in the interests of maintaining established hierarchies. Attempting to define a place requires recourse to that which is not that place, thus the notion of in-place is secured through recourse to the constitution of out-of-place. The commonsense organization of space into places codifies what behaviours are expected in which places, and where different people belong (Cresswell, 1996).

Jackson and Penrose (1993) expose the racialization of place, exclusion and spatial oppression. They argue that place contextualizes the construction of race generating geographically specific ideologies of racism. Focusing on the construction of nation, they compile a series of essays that interrogate how the apparent naturalness of race blends with the apparent naturalness of rootedness in place, resulting in a powerful basis for identity politics. They further demonstrate how the spurious basis for the legitimacy of race and the racialized organization of space can be exposed by deconstructing its naturalized links to place.

Geographers need to explore how discourses construct and use notions of space. According to Lefebvre (1991: 183), people make sense of the complexity of the social world through ascribing a simple "transparency" or readability to the world. Essentialist or universalist notions of constructed categories such as gender and race produce and depend on transparent space (Blunt & Rose, 1994). Markers such as skin colour and dress serve as signs with which to demarcate bodies as belonging to the realms of order or disorder. This transparency cast onto space relies upon and reproduces notions of the naturalness of racial constructions. While the intermixing of populations poses a disruptive challenge to this ordering of bodies, blurring the racial lines in a liminal space that traverses the boundaries, the assumption of transparency silences liminality, maintaining the notion of race as a clearly bounded and defined attribute. Assuming a

transparency to racialized bodies and places allows the simple designation of people into distinct racial categories, where they can be easily judged as either: civilized or primitive, industrious or lazy, law-abiding or criminal. Drawing upon psychoanalytic theories, Sibley (1995) asserts that boundaries are formed and delineated to protect but also define the self. Thus, the meaning of particular bodies and places are produced through their relationship to other bodies and places (Richardson & Jensen, 2003). For example, with the circumscription of marginalized populations to increasingly desolate city cores, the suburban landscape began to figure as the place of respectability. Distanced from industry and urban slums and proximate to places of leisure and consumption, the suburban space became the locus of respectable white desire, while suburbanites cast inner city sites as bleak and degenerate places (Goldberg, 1993). A place is bound to its Other in these systems of meaning precisely because no entity can exist in isolation.

Cresswell (1996) argues the governing spatial schema, exposed through the policing of transgression, constitutes particular places for certain people and activities. At scales such as that of the body, neighbourhood, and nation, we constitute and intersect identities. For example, white speakers often conceive certain kinds of bodies (Aboriginal) to engage in certain practices (crime) and belong to certain kinds of neighbourhoods (impoverished) and not others (those neighbourhoods occupied by middle-class, white bodies). Through the commonsense bounding of the meaning of places and bodies, the order of a place can easily be surveyed and out-of-place activities or bodies readily highlighted and targeted for their transgression of the spatial order (Cresswell, 1996). Challenging currently dominant forms of racial configuration implies, indeed necessitates, challenging predominant ways in which space and place are currently constructed.

Spatialities are never rigid, constantly contested and changing. The relations within and in connection to a place contribute to the meaning of that location. Thus, the particular experiences and events in a school, as well as its associations with other institutions, contribute to what the school as a place means. Of course individuals' vary in their narrations of and the significance they attach to versions of events, experiences, and associations. The meanings of a place can be, and indeed are, multiple (Massey, 2005). These different versions circulate, contesting as well as co-existing with each other in

constituting the dynamic spaces of place. Thus a place is never complete, but always in the process of rearticulation (Massey, 2005).

Analytic investigations of discourse demonstrate the value of a nuanced examination of how people articulate and use categories of race and place in constructing versions of reality. Dixon and Durrheim (2000: 33) suggest the discursive resource of place, "the grounds of identity [functions] in a double sense: first, as a sense of belonging; and second as a rhetorical warrant through which particular social practices and relations are legitimated." As a discursive resource, constructions of place are used in the performance of a range of discursive actions, including blaming, justifying, derogating, and excluding. Through placing themselves, people often claim territorial entitlements or affirm socio-spatial ideals. This is achieved by speakers situating their identity in association with a version of the racialized characteristics and connotations of a site. For instance, white South Africans constructed the beach as a belonging to whites, and as a place in which Blacks do not belong (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Durrheim & Dixon, 2001). In another study, Wallwork and Dixon (2004) explicated how the imagined associations of Britishness laid claim to the white nation. Taylor and Wetherell (1999) examined, first, how a romanticized image of childhood New Zealand functioned in the identity productions of New Zealanders abroad, and, second, how Maori land claims were dismissed through recasting history into different frames. Finally, Carol Schick (2002) explored how education students' talk associated themselves with discourses about the university as a site of higher learning to secure their own whiteness by constituting themselves as knowledgeable and innocent. These studies have recognized the construction of entitlement and denial of racism as culturally and geographically variant, relying on specific local construction. Researchers need to explore how people's articulation and discursive use of categories of race and place function to create particular constructions of the world and localized spaces.

### *Race and Education*

School exists as a significant site of cultural dissemination. As such it is a site of both the articulation of dominant constructions that reify inequality, and a particularly important site of resistance to dominant constructions (Sleeter, 1996). However, few

teachers receive training that would enable them to understand or analyze racial oppression. Research conducted by Carr and Klassen (1997) indicates that critical race awareness among white teachers is substantially lower than that of racially marginalized teachers, and, sadly, most teachers remain white, whether in racially diverse or homogenous classrooms.  If school outcomes are racially inequitable, what role are white teachers playing in this? How do teachers position themselves, and how do they understand racism? And equally important, how can anti-racist, anti-oppressive narratives be supported among white school staff? How can anti-racist teacher education build alternative understandings of the school environment?

While it is acknowledged that Aboriginal students are widely over-represented among school drop-outs, the explanations put forward for this phenomenon remain troubling. Verna St. Denis (2004) has critiqued the preponderance of variants of deficiency theory. While following assimilationist models of Aboriginal education, the government proclaimed deficient Aboriginal culture as the major barrier to Aboriginal educational success. More recently the shift in emphasis has placed lack of Aboriginal culture and language as the reason for Aboriginal failure. This has left the blame for racist exclusions again at the door of Aboriginal people. According to St. Denis both these models place undue emphasis on Aboriginality, there being too much or too little of it, rather than addressing issues of exclusion and racism, of privilege and white dominance, in the school. Cultural discontinuity, where differences between the home and school cultures hinder marginalized students' learning, is unable to account for the significant numbers of Native American drop-outs (Bowker, 1992, 1993; Ledlow, 1992). Similarly, studies of other racially marginalized populations in America have indicated that students' relationships to their school environments mediate school success (Eamon, 2005). Therefore, we need to shift our emphasis onto how we understand school dynamics not just outside influences.

Shifting the focus to teachers, the central authority in the classroom, has substantial implications for how we understand school culture, as well as where we identify opportunities to intervene and build a more inclusive school environment. Few studies have examined the role of teachers within the school in regards to race, particularly within Canada. However, American research has highlighted the significant

role of teachers in, often unknowingly, reproducing inequity. Teachers are prone to privilege students from backgrounds with which they identify (Spindler & Spindler, 1988). Furthermore, teachers' lack of care towards American Indian students has been repeatedly cited as a contributing factor to their high drop-out rates (Bowker, 1992, 1993; Reyhner, 1992). Teacher behaviours, communications styles, and attitudes towards students impact student success. Ardy Bowker's (1993: 279) research on female Native American students revealed: "Just as uncaring insensitive teachers were a significant factor in whether a girl dropped out of school, caring, sensitive teachers were a factor in keeping girls in school." While the Native Americans Bowker (1993) researched asserted that education is necessary for the survival of their people, they spoke in overwhelmingly negative terms of school experiences that left students feeling alienated. Racial disparity in the treatment of students was noted even by white students, who stated that they often received preferential treatment to marginalized students (Kailin, 1998). Thus, there is an urgent need to build a critical awareness of race with white teachers.

Canadian research by Carr and Klassen (1997) has indicated the majority of white teachers deny the reality of racism. This contrasts with the views of most people of colour, who recognized the insidious role racism played in their educational and social lives. These strategies of denial and presumptions of irrelevance are perhaps strongest in schools serving predominantly white students. It is in these overwhelmingly white schools, where it is assumed only a few marginalized students will be hurt by racism, that it is most difficult to address issues of race (Gaine, 2000; Lewis, 2001). While white students develop racial identities and construct notions of the Other in every school environment, this process is assumed to be docile in white areas – as though these schools were somehow isolated from our broader multi-racial communities and nations.

A major goal of multicultural education is to reform the school to enable students from diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds to experience educational equality (Banks, 1993). Multicultural education aims to promote sensitivity to ethno-cultural differences, support students transcending cultural barriers to education, and promote interchange between people perceived as different (James, 2005). Despite the recognition of the need for institutional changes, including changes in school policies and regulations, the curriculum, teaching styles, the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and administrators,

and the culture of the school, most often multiculturalism is reduced to a form of mild curriculum reform (Banks, 1993). While diversity is often deployed as a positive resource enriching society, increasing the breadth of our cultural palate, dominant (white) cultural norms and institutions still determine what differences are tolerable. Despite the benefits of culinary multiculturalism, there remain ceilings to tolerance of difference. In multicultural education, language and customs, food and costume, become the object of learning (Dion, 2005). These discourses set the culture of Aboriginal people as distinct, and culture comes to stand for race as an attribute of the Other (Bonnett, 2000a). Within the discourse of multiculturalism, marginalized students' differences are often situated in their cultures rather than in any societal or institutional inequities. As Dion (2005: 36) argues, "Teachers and students interested in appreciating difference are not required to confront the significance of colonization." To effectively address the limitations of multicultural education, educators must recognize students' differences in relation to structural inequities based on race and racism, which privilege some while disadvantaging others (Dei, Karumchery & Karumchery-Luik, 2004).

Anti-racist education seeks to establish the salience of race in understanding the activity and organization of the school, as well as teacher identity. George Sefa Dei (1996) articulates several principles of anti-racist education. Educators must recognize the importance of race, in conjunction with other forms of social oppression, producing disadvantage and also advantage. Educators must realize that students possess racial identities and the school has not traditionally been a racially neutral site. He says there is a pedagogic need to confront difference, to not assume problems originate in the home, and to understand student issues within the complexity of their circumstances. However, Alastair Bonnett's (2000a) investigations into anti-racist educational practice unveil an inclination towards psychological approaches that simply attempt to engage with individual's beliefs and not cultures or structures.

Anti-racist teacher education has sought to redefine teacher identity in several as yet unresolved ways. Many writers have evoked the classroom as a potential site for the creation of a responsible whiteness (Giroux, 1997, 1998; Helms, 1992; Rodriguez, 1998; Tatum, 1994; Warren, 2001). But other writers have critiqued how whites enact a type of absolution through participation in multicultural or anti-racist learning, allowing them the

safety of disconnecting from the systems of racialization by performing acceptance of the Other (Jones, 1999; Roman, 1997; Thompson, 2003). The most difficult barrier to surmount rests with the looming reticence of white teachers to recognize their role in the domination of the racial Other. Feelings of guilt and denial often obfuscate or cloud an understanding of how race, class, and gender operate in the classroom. Theorists such as Thompson (2002) and Jones (1999) emphasize the necessity of foregoing an innocent and untroubled white identity. Rather they support a constantly evolving process of identity re-articulation as white teachers continually untangle themselves from the ever-present systems of social privilege.

There is a significant need to develop understandings and techniques for engaging racism as constituted within its local context. Educational theorizing often seems plagued by problematic essentialism and universalism, and the work in multicultural and anti-racist education tends to reflect reified, monolithic constructions of race, particularly whiteness (Bonnett, 1996). There is relatively little work regarding white anti-racism in Canada. Sheila Wilmot's (2005) recent book does expose some of the crucial work of white anti-racists. However, she privileges the core metropolitan cities within Canada of Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto, and does not emphasize education. There remain but scant resources that address anti-racist education with teachers on the Canadian Prairies, aside from that of Carol Schick and Verna St. Denis (Schick, 2000, 2002; Schick & St. Denis 2005; St. Denis & Schick, 2003) on pre-service teacher education. Studies need to examine how practicing teachers understand and construct racism and anti-racism. Through examining how prairie teachers construct their school and their own identities in relation to racism, and how different versions of anti-racism challenge or reinforce these constructions, a richer understanding of the processes of anti-racist engagement can be garnered.

### Conclusion

Recognizing the resilience of race and racism, there is a necessity for researchers to interrogate the systems of understanding that continue to justify and deny racial inequalities, and how these can be effectively challenged. Although numerous studies have begun to explore how people with privilege deny or justify inequity, studies need to

address how these discourses operate in different places. There remains a paucity of scholarship addressing race and racism in the Canadian Prairies. Distinct from metropolitan centres where whiteness is constructed against the Black and the immigrant Other, the Prairies exhibit a racial imaginary built between notions of whiteness and Aboriginality. Some work from Australia and New Zealand has examined how whites speak of stereotyped racial differences, such as cultural backwardness, while simultaneously seeking to erase historical dispossessions and appealing to notions of sameness to dispel Aboriginal claims from unsettling of the territory beneath the (white) nation (Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Augoustinos, Tuffin & Rapley, 1999; Taylor & Wetherell, 1999). While this work is informative, Canadian research needs to examine its applicability here. Harding (2006) has recently published an analysis of media discourse about Aboriginal peoples in Canada, but research gaps remain on other genres of discourse. Discourse analysts still need to address how white places are constructed as colour-blind and racial problems cast as belonging to the Aboriginal Other, and how such constructions may be disrupted, through text and talk in the Canadian prairie context.

While there have been some investigations of how teachers understand racism, little of this work has been conducted in Canada. Text-based discourse analysis offers a particularly valuable method for interrogating teachers' construction of the educational environment. In their literature review, Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, and Joseph (2005) indicate there has been significant work done by discourse analysts regarding education. However, they note that predominantly this research has focused on students' interactions rather than studying teachers, and gender to the neglect of race. There is a tremendous opportunity to expand the body of work using discourse analysis to understand racism, particularly how teachers construct racism. Studies examining anti-racist classroom dialogue tend to avoid examining comments in the context of a conversation. For example, Hytten & Warren (2003) generate broad problematic categories of white discourse, but not how these claims function in the specific conversation. Further research needs to engage constructions in the context of dialogue, examining the constructions that speakers are deploying from larger social discourses, and how these are manipulated, undermined, and reinforced, as well as how critical constructions of racism are developed and derailed in anti-racist dialogues. Studies need

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to examine how people with privilege and power both deny and problematize racial inequality. Studies also need to examine the role of place, particularly the school environment, in these constructions.

Finally, the discipline of geography can greatly develop through a greater engagement and exchange with the work of discourse analysts. Geographers have contributed powerful insights into the understanding of space and place, ideas that have aided discourse analysts such as John Dixon and Kevin Durrheim (2000), and Stephanie Taylor and Margaret Wetherell (1999). However, developing a precise analysis of how place is framed or constituted, and how this contributes the construction of particular identities and versions of events, can contribute both to the theoretical understandings and analytical tools of geographers. Serious examination is required to determine the role of spatial constructions in the denial and justification of racism, as well as to understand how these constructions may be reconceived to open broader spaces within our institutions for change.

# CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In our study we used surveys and focus groups to explore how teachers understand racism and anti-racism. In this chapter, I outline the research methodology and methods that guided our research. Statistical data from secondary sources serves to contextualize the research setting. This context is complemented by positioning Sheelah and myself as researchers. Then outlining the data collection process, I describe the survey collection, the reporting of the results of these surveys at professional development presentations, and the organization of focus groups within the schools. Finally, I introduce the discourse analysis techniques that I will employ to analyze the data. This chapter serves to methodologically frame our study within the field of qualitative research into prairie race relations, and outlines the particular modus operandi of our research.

## *Research Setting*

We conducted this research within both a suburban and inner city school in one of Canada's smaller principal metropolitan areas, a mid-sized prairie city of less than a million people. For purposes of anonymity I shall avoid referring to the city directly, and refer to the suburban and inner city schools, respectively, as "Sunnydale" and "Central." Sunnydale hosts only a handful of Aboriginal students, and is considered a high achievement or academic setting. In contrast, approximately 30 percent of the students at Central are Aboriginal, and the school has been working to develop programming to meet the inner city community's needs. These two schools constitute distinct but related places within the prairie city, and provide nodes to access different and similar discourses circulating among teachers in predominantly white as well as racially diverse settings. This provides insights to the broader discourses that function to recognize and deny racism, and the geographic uniqueness of how they operate within specific school settings in the Prairies. To situate these schools, I begin by mapping the social and geographic context in which they exist in terms of the racial and economic dynamics and segregation of prairie cities, as well as exploring the circumstances of Aboriginal people within education.

Aboriginal people constitute the largest racially marginalized population in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The prairie provinces, particularly Saskatchewan and Manitoba, have higher Aboriginal populations than other areas of Canada. "Of all the provinces, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have the largest shares of their populations comprised of Aboriginal people (both 14%)" (O'Donnell & Ballardin, 2006: 43). Aboriginal people make up 9.1 percent of the population of Saskatoon, and 8.4 percent and 8.3 percent of Winnipeg and Regina respectively (Statistics Canada, 2003: 23). These are the highest proportions of Aboriginal people of any of the census metropolitan areas in Canada. Furthermore, the population of Aboriginal youth in these provinces is growing rapidly. From 1996 to 2001, the Aboriginal population grew by 17 percent in both provinces, a stark contrast to the total population, which had less than 1 percent growth in Manitoba and just over a 1 percent decrease in Saskatchewan (O'Donnell & Ballardin, 2006: 43, 55). "At the national level, 33.2% of the Aboriginal population was 0 to 14 years of age in 2001, and 17.3% was aged 15 to 24" (Siggner & Costa, 2005: 16). Thus, half the Aboriginal population is under 25, compared to roughly one-third of the non-Aboriginal population. In 2001, Aboriginal children under age 15 accounted for 14 percent to over 16 percent of all children in Winnipeg, Regina and Saskatoon (Siggner & Costa, 2005: 16).

Although Aboriginal people are dispersed throughout prairie cities, there is a significant concentration of Aboriginal people in deprived neighbourhoods. The income gap between richer and poorer neighbourhoods widened in most Canadian census metropolitan areas between 1980 and 2000, and the composition of low-income neighbourhoods continued to shift towards Aboriginal people. In 2001, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Regina all had one or more centrally located neighbourhoods where 80 percent or more Aboriginal residents had incomes below Statistics Canada's low-income cut off line (Peters & Starchenko, 2004). In a national study of income segregation in the 1990s, it was in these prairie cities where particularly high degrees of income segregation by neighbourhood were present, with Winnipeg garnering the title for "the most segregated metropolitan area" in 1991 (Ross, Houle, Dunn & Aye, 2004: 438). In 2001, while only 4.4 percent of all metropolitan residents lived in low-income neighbourhoods (where more than 40 percent of residents lived below low-income cut-offs), 11.7 percent

of Aboriginal people lived in low-income neighbourhoods, as did 9.7 percent of recent immigrants (Heisz & McLeod, 2004: 69). In Regina, while 8.6 percent of the population lived in a low-income neighbourhood, 31.7 percent of the Aboriginal population lived in a low-income neighbourhood (Heisz & McLeod, 2004: 68). In Winnipeg, Aboriginal people constituted 30.8 percent of residents of low-income neighbourhoods in 2001, an increase from 24.5 percent only five year earlier, and in Saskatoon, Aboriginal people increased their share in Saskatoon's low-income neighbourhoods from 26.3 percent to 33.1 percent over the same period (Heisz & McLeod, 2004: 68). This is significant as research has indicated that youths who reside in better quality neighbourhoods tend to perform better academically than youths who live in resource-poor neighborhoods (Ainsworth, 2002).

Racial and income segregation present significant challenges for residents of low-income neighbourhoods. Suicide attempts among the residents of Saskatoon's poorest neighbourhoods were 3.75 times more likely than the rest of the city and 15.58 times more likely than affluent neighbourhoods (Lemstra, Neudorf, & Opondo, 2006: 437). Teen births in these low-income neighbourhoods were also 4.21 and 16.49 times more likely than the rest of the city and affluent areas, respectively (Lemstra, Neudorf, & Opondo, 2006: 438). This is significant as the main reason Aboriginal female youth cited for dropping out of high school was pregnancy or looking after children (cited by 25 percent) (Siggner & Costa, 2005: 18). In Regina, crime rates were higher in the inner city. The areas with the highest violent crime rate in Regina also had a greater percentage of Aboriginal residents (21 percent compared to 6 percent in the lower crime rate areas) (Wallace, Wisener & Collins, 2006: 18). Aboriginal people's rates of violent victimization were three times higher than non-Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal women were particularly at risk, as they were 3.5 times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be the victim of a violent incident (Wallace, Wisener & Collins, 2006: 24). The lived and imagined experiences of inner city low-income neighbourhoods contributed to spatial variances in the stories circulated by students and teachers, and contributed to the stigmatization of the inner city by suburbanites.

Although Aboriginal people have been making gains in education, a significant, and in some cases widening, gap remains. In 1996, 52 percent of the national Aboriginal

population aged 20 to 24 living in non-reserve areas had not completed high school; by 2001, "this proportion had dropped to 48%" (Turcotte & Zhao, 2004: 12). In contrast, in 2001, only 26 percent of the general population aged 20 to 24 had not completed secondary school. In Winnipeg, Regina, and Saskatoon, there have been significant increases in school completion amongst both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population (Table 3.1). In Winnipeg and Regina there were substantial declines in the proportion of Aboriginal youth without high school completion, diminishing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal completion. In Saskatoon the declines were more modest, and in the case of Aboriginal males the gap actually increased. In 2001, Aboriginal youth aged 20-24 remained less likely to have completed high school than non-Aboriginal youth.

Table 3.1: Proportion of the total Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population aged 20-24 who are not attending school and who have *less than high school education*, by gender, in selected cities, 1981 and 2001

|  | Aboriginal | | | | Non-Aboriginal | | | |
|  | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | |
|  | 1981 | 2001 | 1981 | 2001 | 1981 | 2001 | 1981 | 2001 |
| Winnipeg | 65.5% | 37.3% | 62.4% | 32.4% | 31.0% | 16.0% | 26.7% | 10.3% |
| Regina | 52.5% | 27.2% | 67.2% | 34.3% | 31.4% | 14.5% | 27.1% | 7.9% |
| Saskatoon | 55.2% | 42.9% | 57.6% | 30.0% | 32.2% | 15.4% | 22.8% | 10.3% |

(Source: Siggner & Costa, 2005: 27, italics in original)

There is also a gap between the proportion of Aboriginal students and Aboriginal educators in prairie schools. Only 22 percent of Aboriginal people over 15 in Manitoba, and 28 percent in Saskatchewan, had an Aboriginal teacher or teacher aide in elementary or high school (O'Donnell & Ballardin, 2006: 47, 59). In 1992, 2.7 percent of the staff at Regina Catholic Schools, and 3.6 percent of the staff at Saskatoon Public Schools were Aboriginal, in contrast, 9.1 percent and 10.0 percent of their respective student bodies that were Aboriginal (McNinch, 1994: 11). In 1993, with Aboriginal students constituting 9.0 percent of their student body, only 2.9 percent of the staff members at Saskatoon Catholic schools were Aboriginal (McNinch, 1994: 11). In 1999-2000, in Winnipeg's inner city School Division No. 1, 5.6 percent of teachers were Aboriginal in contrast to an estimated 25 percent of its students (Silver, Mallett, Greene & Simard, 2002: 42). A study by Silver, Mallett, Green and Simard (2002) of Aboriginal high school students and drop-outs in inner city Winnipeg indicated that Aboriginal students did not relate well or feel

understood by their teachers. Less than half (46.7 percent) of Aboriginal students, and only one in four female students, responded positively when asked to describe how Aboriginal students got along with teachers (Silver, Mallett, Greene & Simard, 2002: 17). Similarly, less than half of the students (44.4 percent) believed teachers at their school understood Aboriginal students. Vast majorities of both Aboriginal students (95.6 percent) and drop-outs (92.0 percent) asserted that there should be more Aboriginal teachers (Silver, Mallett, Greene & Simard, 2002: 19-20).

This demographic data evidences inequalities that characterize the structure of prairie cities and schools. While Aboriginal people have been increasingly re-entering the urban environment [7] , significant inequalities continue to characterize their urban experience. Within education, there remain significant questions about who educators are and how they understand themselves, their students, and society. As we attempt to renegotiate relationships between Aboriginal peoples and settlers of this land, education represents one crucial site to interrogate how teachers understand the relationship between racism and schooling.

*Research Design and Data Collection*

To explore how teachers discursively construct racism and anti-racism, our primary data was collected through an open-ended survey and focus group discussions. At each school, surveys asked teachers to describe their perceptions of racism in their schools. Then we presented the preliminary results of the survey to the staff as a professional development exercise, before concluding the research with focus groups designed to explore the meaning of anti-racist education. This research project thus simultaneously solicited information and sought to craft pedagogic opportunities to expand teacher knowledge in the areas of racism and anti-racism.

All the high school teachers from the two participating schools were invited to participate in the study with assurances that their anonymity would be protected. Each staff member from the schools choosing to participate was given a consent form

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[7] Although cities were built upon Aboriginal territories, and some Aboriginal people have regularly maintained a presence in cities, government policies and regulations historically confined Aboriginal people outside urban settings. While between 1901 and 1951 the percentage of Aboriginal people living in urban areas only increased from 5.1 to 6.7, in recent decades there has been a sizable movement of Aboriginal people with almost half of Canada's Aboriginal people living in cities by 2001 (Peters, 2005).

regarding their participation in the survey and focus group session. To protect the anonymity of participants, survey responses were assigned reference numbers and stored separately from consent forms. Focus group participants' identities were concealed through the use of the pseudonyms of their choice: Archie, Jughead, [8] Betty, and Veronica. Respondents were not asked to self-identify in terms of race. Because of the limited number of Aboriginal teachers and teachers of colour in the teacher population, racial identification would unfortunately have jeopardized participant anonymity. However, because the numbers of racially marginalized teachers were so small, we can safely assume that the majority of respondents were, in fact, white.

As participation was voluntary, the participants were those teachers with the greatest interest, and do not necessarily represent the larger population. Survey participation consisted of a significant portion of the staff body, recruited through general staff meetings. Participating staff members were given the option of either returning the survey to researchers that day or submitting them to a box in the main office within a week. From a teacher population between these two schools of approximately 175 faculty, 95 teachers (69 from Central and 26 from Sunnydale) participated in the survey.

Following the work of Kailin (1999), the survey (Appendix A) solicited teachers' perceptions of racism, consisting of three open-ended questions to explore how teachers described racism in the school. The first question asked respondents to describe any incidents of racism that they had experienced, witnessed, or heard about in the school. The second question asked participants how they responded. The final question asked what their thoughts were upon further reflection.

Preliminary thematic analysis of the survey responses was presented back to the teachers on a professional development day. The survey data supported the conclusion that Canadian prairie race relations were dominated by the tension between Aboriginal and white people. In the surveys collected from the two schools, in 68 of the 95 surveys teachers described incidents of racism involving Aboriginal people. The preliminary analysis of the data suggested that both schools had a racially hostile or antagonist climate, particularly for Aboriginal people. Within the prairie context, teachers conveyed

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[8] Jughead elected to gender-bend her pseudonym; however, as her gender identification within the dialogue was as a female I will refer to Jughead as a female teacher.

Aboriginal people as the ultimate Other, and framed the issue of racism as an Aboriginal/white issue, or frequently as an Aboriginal problem. Even at a suburban school with only a handful of Aboriginal students, in 21 of the 26 surveys teachers described incidents of racism involving Aboriginal people. As Gaine (2000) indicated, racism's existence was not dependent on the presence of the Other. In a further 23 surveys, 20 of which were collected from the inner city school, teachers presented stories about Aboriginal students 'pulling the race card' or claiming to be the victims of racism. Aboriginal people were presented as the prevalent victims of racism, although teachers also storied other victims including immigrants, Blacks, Jews, and white people. Whiteness was often the assumed norm, and thus usually unspoken. This preliminary analysis of the discursive processes of racial identification highlights the regularization of both whiteness as normative in positions of dominance and Aboriginality as constituting the position of the racial Other within the Canadian prairie context.

Following the presentation of survey results, Sheelah and I distributed letters to all staff members inviting them to participate in focus group discussions on the topic of anti-racism. Each focus group occurred over the lunch hour in a small school meeting room. The focus groups represented a commitment of personal time, and although they were open to all teachers within each school, only a few teachers with a high level of interest participated. While only one session was conducted with the single participant in suburban Sunnydale, the four participants at the inner city school indicated a desire to continue the conversations and met for three one hour sessions. All of the participants self-identified themselves as white teachers in the focus group discussion, and all of them indicated that they had several years of teaching experience. Like most focus group research, our aim was not to achieve statistical representativeness (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). Instead we sought to purposively engage with a smaller group structured by a common interest in exploring and developing their anti-racist practice. Audio recordings of each session were made, which were later used to produce typed transcripts.

The focus groups operated as conversations loosely guided by a series of pre-scripted and emergent questions. With the letters of invitation, teachers were provided with a list of the questions we would use to guide the focus group dialogue (Appendix B). The focus groups began by examining teachers' reactions to the presentation of

preliminary results. Discussion then turned to examining how recognizing racism in the school impacts how teachers saw the school and themselves. As faciliatators, Sheelah and I encouraged participants to explore how the racialization of, and stereotypes about, marginalized populations impacts teaching, and the difficulties with addressing these biases within education. Teachers also discussed their efforts to address racism in the classroom, including Aboriginal cultural inclusion. While the suburban focus group ended after the first session, the inner city focus group asked to meet again. In the second session, Sheelah and I choose to continue exploring and unpacking the ideas of cultural difference and schooling. These discussions explored different conceptions of Aboriginal culture as defined by traditional values and by poverty, as well as how the school could address these differences. The final inner city session flipped the lens to explore systems of normalized white privilege, and how institutional practices normalize flexibility for privileged white students and strict discipline for Aboriginal students.

As facilitators Sheelah and I directed the conversation to explore how educators understood racism and anti-racism in the school. At the beginning of each session, we used humour to establish rapport and a comfortable group atmosphere, joking about pseudonyms, formalities, and the strangeness of hearing recordings of our own voice. Then, Sheelah and I, facilitating the discussion, posed questions, directed conversation, prompted particular speakers' involvement, probed responses, challenged constructions, and occasionally contributed our own ideas and experiences. This differed from traditional research methods that require researchers to present themselves as distant and objective. Rather we situated ourselves as insiders to the research, contesting constructions and developing common understandings with participants. This engaged interventionist approach parallels developments in one-on-one research techniques from discursive psychology, however, the dynamics of focus group research function to dilute the role of the researcher among the community of participants (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999).

Unlike interview research that explores individual constructions, focus group research explores how collective notions are negotiated by the group (Berg, 2001). The focus group format allows participants to build on each other's ideas and explore common experiences. Through listening to and interacting with each other, developing a

flow of ideas, participants have the opportunity to add dimensions to the conversation as well as their own understanding (Reinharz, 1992). Group work allows the opportunity to explore how accounts are articulated, censured, changed, and corroborated through social interaction (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999).

### *The Role of Researcher Reflexivity*

While researchers generally focus on social relations and symbolic worlds beyond the research project, it remains important to locate Sheelah and myself within the social relations of the research project as white researchers. Our experiences provide a base location for entering this project, but while social location influences understanding, white researchers can explore and challenge systems of racial domination. Nevertheless, researchers remain racialized/racializing social actors (Best, 2003). Regardless of intellectual allegiances, the social construction of racial identities remains both an influence on the research environment and an active process occurring within it.

Already having introduced myself in the Introduction, I will now introduce my collaborator, Sheelah. Sheelah is a self-identified white educator who has been teaching for 15 years in the secondary system. She has primarily worked in inner city schools, teaching Native Studies to predominantly Aboriginal students. Similar to me, although far more professionally accomplished, Sheelah has been socialized into a possessive investment in whiteness and innocence. For us both, this research has functioned as an opportunity to interrogate the discourses we employ and normalize as educators. Although we are ostensibly studying other educators, this research is also a work of auto-ethnography and self-examination.

While social location and experience shape understanding, our standpoint as white researchers should not be read as deterministic. Although racialization is a pervasive social process, race remains a variable social construct, informed by class, gender, sexuality, as well as political ideology and geography. Thus, there can be no assumed essential character to racial identities such as whiteness. Too often researchers position themselves via a simple biography, leaving the reader to decipher how this history impacts the researchers' ability to engage in an area of study. Early problems within standpoint theory, based on essentialist readings of social location singularly

defined by class or gender, have been remedied through recognizing intersectionality as in Patricia Hill Collins's (1990) partial perspectives and Donna Haraway's (1991) situated knowledges. This is not to say that all knowledge is purely relative and all perspectives equal. Collins and Haraway both recognize the need to understand oppression from different vantage points using a lens that is critical of oppression. This highlights the possibility of developing situational understandings that conceal or expose power relations. Thus worldview cannot be presumed as fully determined (although it is constrained) by our social location.

While whiteness is not entirely encapsulating, neither is it entirely escapable. While whiteness is associated with imperialism and domination, while whiteness is power, being white does not necessarily reduce one to thinking in the terms and obfuscations of the powerful (Sleeter, 1996). But people are not – despite the prevalent ideological construction – autonomous individuals (St. Denis & Schick, 2003). People are social beings, and as such are impacted by their social interactions and the understanding circulating within their social sphere as well as broader society. White scholars, however, possess the freedom to expose themselves to writings that challenge racial oppression and engage in projects that cross boundaries and expose dominance. Through these practices, the experiences of learning and research itself, rather than a pre-positioned social location, researchers can create new collective identities and allegiances.

Conducting research into social construction that involves my personal interaction with the research subjects, I cannot avoid my own implication in the contestation and production of racial constructions, including my own whiteness. As Amy Best (2003) demonstrates the researcher/subject interaction in fieldwork serves as an interactional context through which the racial identity of the research subject *and* researcher are negotiated and accomplished.

As anti-racist researchers, the evasion of race and racism seems to be an enormously problematic position. However, the racial cognizance that Sheelah and I promoted, encouraging teachers to recognize the pervasive and powerful influence of racialization, often served as a resource for participants to mark our deviance and dismiss us. Best (2003) described an incident where she queried a white respondent regarding the relevance of race. Embedded within the question was the assumption the respondent

stereotyped people according to race. Through her hostile reply the respondent clarified this was not an assumption she shared, and implied that it was Best that was in fact the racist. Christine Sleeter (1996) asserts that white racial bonding is an everyday interactional accomplishment, where whites affirm a common stance on racial issues. Sleeter (1996: 151) argues that these interactions "serve the purpose of defining racial lines and inviting individuals to either declare their solidarity or mark themselves as deviant." Within our research project we encountered resistance as we put forward questions regarding the reality of racism in the school. Teachers challenged our emphasis on recognizing race and racism as only perpetuating racial logics. Thus, we, like Best, at times became the racists as participants distinguished themselves from us.

However, by paying greater attention to the interactional work of race, particularly whiteness, in the focus groups we created a context for a meaningful discussion of race, racism, and anti-racism in the school. Ruth Frankenberg (1993) discussed in *White Women, Race Matters* how stories about her own experiences of racial privilege functioned in her interviews to facilitate more frank discussions about race. Similarly, by using stories of our own racialized experiences – demonstrating people's willingness to trust us or give us the benefit of the doubt – we exposed and emphasized our shared privilege and gave white participants permission to explore the ways in which they had internalized racism. And as we acknowledged our commonality as white educators, we also involved ourselves not simply as researchers but also members of the community of research participants. Reflecting on how educators both minimize racism and construct sites for anti-racist action, these explorations became as much as about understanding ourselves as others.

### *Data Analysis*

I use discourse analysis to analyze the survey and focus group data. Discourse analysis allows researchers to extend beyond explorations of the content of text and talk to examine the action that occurs within discourse, for example crafting identities and attributing blame. Examining the action of talk, positioning actors, deploying categories and relying on assumed knowledge, unveils important aspects of how educators contest and negotiate constructions of place and identity. Discourse analysis furnishes important

tools to understand how discourses operate in text and talk. Focusing on nuanced readings of texts, the discourse analysis paradigm permits an intricate reading of the discursive constructions that are produced in texts, as well as how different constructions of racism and anti-racism are corroborated and contested in talk.

Discourse analysis strives to critically examine language and its relationship to power. Discourse can be understood broadly as forming the boundaries of conceivable truths. But discrete discourses can be delineated marking particular frameworks, vocabularies, and expressions that constitute distinct versions of the world. For example, two notably distinct discourses can be used to construct guerilla movements as "freedom fighters" or "terrorists" (Fairclough, 2003). Not simply an avenue to convey material truths, discourse is itself a form of social practice. Discourse simultaneously represents the world (reflecting social practices) and constitutes a form of power (as a social practice). Thus, writing and speaking are not simply representations but also actions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysts examine how speakers and writers use discursive resources and repertoires to perform actions, such as (re)positioning themselves, avoiding responsibility, and justifying inequity (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Where there are challenges to or contentions over power, discourses are involved, both justifying inequalities and crafting challenges to the status quo.

It is important to recognize this data is not a generalized representation of teachers' understanding, but an interrogation of some of the discourses available to and used by educators to construct racism and anti-racism in schools. As Antaki, Billig, Edwards, and Potter (2003) caution, there is a danger of treating a discursive interaction as a false-survey, generalizing beyond the context of study. Thus, this research cannot be presumed to represent the entire teaching population, and a comparison of two schools cannot accurately illuminate the general pattern for different types of schools. Through examining the discourses emerging from specific sites in specific circumstances, I initiate an exploration into the neglected discourses of racism and anti-racism within the Prairies. The explorations and negotiations of constructions of racism, anti-racism, and identity with this small number of interested teachers identified the discourses circulating among particular educators responding to particular questions, highlighting some of the discursive possibilities within larger conversations about racism. This research cannot be

read as a roadmap for how these processes should or would occur in different circumstances with different (i.e. disinterested) teachers, but it can suggest some possible or probable constructions that could be circulating.

Positioning relates to the configuration of a person within a specific context. Discourse analysis in social psychology stresses the notion of selves as multiple and shifting (Wood & Kroger, 2000). This contrasts with traditional approaches, which assume a coherent rational actor (usually white, male, and middle- or upper-class). In discourse analysis, positioning refers to the (re)constitution of actors in particular ways through discursive practices (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Within the focus group interviews, for example, Sheelah and I positioned ourselves as insiders to the research, part of the population we were studying, and as people privileged by our whiteness. Through our practices of speech, facilitators and participants created and modified a context with which we understood ourselves and others. But as speech is dynamic, prior speech acts become discursive resources that can be (and are) further drawn upon as participants negotiate new positions in the course of an argument. I want to examine how this occurs in the context of constructing racism and anti-racism.

Another type of discursive action I explore is that of categorization. Categorization is not only an activity of the analyst, but something participants themselves perform as they articulate the social world in their conversations. Thus, analyzing participants' treatment of categories constitutes a major task in discourse analysis (Wood & Kroger, 2000). I will be examining the social categories of race and education, those of whiteness and Aboriginality, and of teachers and students. When speakers identify an individual (or themselves) as a member of a certain category, certain characteristics of the person are assumed or implied. Alternatively, describing a person's features, attributes, knowledge, or activities can be used to invoke category membership. Social category memberships like race tend to be enduring, carried from one conversation to the next, and embedded as part of a broader social knowledge that is drawn on as a discursive resource within the context of individual conversations (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). In analyzing categories, the focus is on how these categorizations are treated and used in participants' talk. Discourse analysis attends to the detail of how participants actually select, formulate, and use categories in such a way that their specific features

accomplish certain goals (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). I propose to extend this approach to theorize the socio-spatial components of the categories of race (whiteness/Aboriginality) and education (teacher/student) as participants formulate them. As these categories refer not just to people but also places, I intend to examine how these categories are deployed within conversation to claim and justify notions of the meaning of places such as the school, the home, and the street as well as the inner city and the suburbs.

A careful reading of discourse must remain attentive to the spoken and also the unspoken. Everything that could be said about an event, person, or place is not said. Much must go unsaid – sometimes the information is deemed irrelevant, sometimes listeners are expected to read social contexts into narrative gaps and over contradictions. Identifying these gaps often involves questioning what knowledge is required to make a particular utterance meaningful. Discourse analysts often use techniques such as imagining how the meaning of a statement would change in a radically different context – this helps unearth what assumptions shape the meaning of that statement in the context it was made. Hence, a central concern will be how speakers and writers rely on implicit knowledge and unspoken social contexts – commonsense understandings – to construct meaning in communicative interaction (Billig, 1999).

Integrating an analysis of positioning, categorizing, and silencing, I will explore how teachers' constructions of racism related to their representations of schools and teaching. Exploring the survey data I shall examine the multiple techniques teachers use to story racism, both exposing racism and containing the image of racism as beneath or beyond the school. Using the data from the focus group of teachers interested in anti-racist education, I shall explore the rhetorical contestation and malleability of constructions of anti-racism. This analysis shall attend to the different constructions of anti-racism and their proposed targets for change. It shall explore how different versions of anti-racism open opportunities for change, but can also rely on constructions of racism that efface responsibility (and even agency) for teachers and schools to change.

*Conclusion*

This examination of the social geography of teachers' constructions of racism and anti-racism develops the methodological avenues of inquiry for both studies in geography

and education. Textually nuanced discourse analysis remains a marginal method within geography. This method offers the opportunity to explore how research participants construct versions of the world, representing activities, people, and places. Through open-ended surveys and focus groups, we explored how teachers constructed racism in the school. Focus groups offered the opportunity to examine the negotiations that occurred as people constructed and contested versions of racism. Both the surveys and the focus groups opened a window into teachers' constructions of place and identity. Through an examination of how teachers presented the school and teaching in relation to racism, this study expands our understanding of how race and place are constructed in discourse. This spatial analysis contributes an important lens to the study of anti-racist education, exposing the spatial elements to teachers' constructions.

# CHAPTER FOUR: RACISM

How do teachers construct racism in education? How do they portray racism as existing, if at all, in their schools? Where and with whom do they situate the problem of racism? In this chapter I use our survey data to explore how teachers circulate constructions of racism. Using discourse analysis, I examine how the practices of naming, patterning, and ordering knowledge about racism affect the representation of schools and teaching. Using data from a suburban and inner city school, I explore the similar and different discourses teachers from different schools used to contain racism. While conveying an image of some of the racial tensions in education through their responses, teachers' constructions often simultaneously operated to minimize the image of racism in the school. Countering the emergent image of racism in the school, teachers consistently employed discursive techniques to cast racism as external to education, or at least their school. In this chapter I explore four of these techniques of minimization: individualizing racism, blaming the victim, displacing racism, and situating school segregation as a student problem. I quote extensively from the surveys, often engaging in a detailed examination of how teachers' responses represent racism. My purpose is, without erasing the nuance of individual texts, to illustrate broader constructions circulating through the many texts and how they form common discursive repertoires that minimize racism. Through the discussion of racism in the school, teachers create and preserve space for normalized white teacher and school identities, silencing the cultural domination of whiteness and maintaining the image of the school as a space largely antithetical to racism.

## Individualized Racism

A focus on individual acts of racism was common to the teachers' narratives, from stories of students stereotyping Aboriginals to schoolyard slurs and fights. Teachers frequently portrayed the problem of racism as produced by prejudiced individuals purveying stereotypes and plying inappropriate slurs. In both the suburban and inner city schools, teachers regularly exposed the stereotyping of Aboriginal people by students. In the suburban school, these negative stereotypes were spatialized through the racialization of the inner city as an imagined area of Aboriginality, crime, and deviance. Within the

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inner city, a different discourse emerged about the internalized racism within marginalized students' self-deprecating comments. Through emphasizing individual prejudice teachers highlighted certain pervasive and problematic beliefs, but silenced the institutional and systemic racism in education that permeates our society. Racism infiltrated the school through individual bodies, but the fabric of the institution and of teaching was not systemically implicated with racism.

While racism is any action or structure that subordinates an individual or group based on socially constructed ideas about race, it is most common to recognize racism within individual acts. A common sense understanding associates beliefs and behaviors primarily with individuals, and as a result most accounts imply that racism is first and foremost a matter of individual agency. According to this conception, racism is a disease lodged in the hearts or minds of individuals, made manifest through their words and actions. We asked teachers to "Describe in as much detail as possible any examples or incidents that you think indicate racism or racial insensitivity (whether or not you believe such incidents were intentional or unintentional) that you have witnessed, heard about, or experienced in your work in school(s)." The survey question we used did not define racism or specifically query teachers' perspectives on the institutional environment. Rather the terms "incident" and "example" cued teachers to locate racism in specific instances rather than the school culture and institutional norms. In interpreting this question, teachers drew upon common sense understandings of racism, generally documenting a few instances of individual racism within the school.

Teachers from both schools regularly reported the presence of racial stereotypes, particularly in regard to Aboriginal people. Stories of student stereotypes were the most common of any narrative. Classroom incidents regularly involved students voicing stereotyped views of others, particularly Aboriginal people, in class comments and writing. The great majority of the stereotypes reflected negative views of Aboriginal people. Stereotypes categorically portrayed Aboriginals as violent, criminal, and the cause of gangs, as lazy and taking everything for free, and as poor, drunk, and implicitly inferior. Teachers often explicitly combated such beliefs in the narratives through counterpoising history, disputing the generalizability of the claim, humanizing Aboriginal people, or simply policing the comments as inappropriate.

Last year in a … course a group of young men expressed their opinions about the "Indian" population within [the province]. They felt that the First Nations population had numerous liberties that were unfare [sic]. They believed that "Indians were lazy", & "expected everything for free". Their rant went on for about 3 minutes before I had the opportunity to attempt to interject some sanity into the situation. I tried to teach them the facts by showing historical truths that countered their stereotypes. (IC-08)[9]

This inner city teacher described some of the irrational racist beliefs of some students. In contrast, the teacher situated themself[10] as the bearer of truth trying to imbue their gifts of knowledge. The repeated contrasts of facts and truth with stereotypes and beliefs located the teacher within the main of a civilized scientific society, and placed the students as lacking "sanity" and occupying a deviant social location. Racism was confined within a few aberrant individuals, and contrasted to and countered by the "historical truths" purveyed through Western education. Absent from the narrative was any mention of the debates within education over how the versions of history that we teach situate injustices in the past and perpetuate stereotypes (for example, Willinsky, 1998).

Teachers' brief discussions of slurs and jibes often effaced the complexities of race relations, portraying an even field of prejudiced exchanges. For example, one teacher wrote that "The bathroom cubicles probably sport the most racism, in [the] form of slurs such as 'whitey' or 'white chick' to 'fuckin indian' and 'fuckin whitey'" (IC-70). Here, absent an analysis of social power, racism was depicted as the simple exchange of racially targeted volleys. Another teacher listed evidence of racial issues in the schools, paralleling "racist graffiti in the boys washroom directed at native students; [and] similar graffiti directed at Caucasian students" (IC-26). The discussion of bathroom graffiti, all from the inner city school, consistently depicted racism as equally emerging from and victimizing both white and non-white students. Thus, whiteness was disassociated from

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[9] These bracketed letters and numbers refer to the school and participant respectively. IC stands for inner city Central, while SS represents suburban Sunnydale.

[10] As the survey did not specifically solicit teachers' gender identities, this information was only available when teachers indicated their gender through their response. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to individual teachers using the terms they, their, and themself, instead of assuming normative maleness or using the cumbersome his/her pairing. Despite the strong construction of a gender binary, male and female do not reflect the only gender constructions available (Bornstein, 1994). While theorists such as Bornstein have pioneered singular gender neutral terms such as ze and hir, these terms lack broad usage. I prefer to simply use the already gender neutral they, their, and themself. While the plural/singular uses of they do create some grammatical confusion, in response to recent developments in queer theory, it reflects what I consider the best of a number of imperfect options.

cultural and institutional power, and constructed as just another category caught in the racial conflict. Neglecting the institutional context and defining racism as individual prejudicial acts, these teachers conveyed an image of racism as resulting from injurious individual beliefs and equally targeting white and marginalized students.

In addition to inter-racial conflict and stereotypes, teachers in the inner city conveyed a sense that internalized racism operated within the discourse of marginalized students. Teachers asserted marginalized students' assertions of their own racial identity, playing with and attempting to reclaim racial constructs, constituted a form of internalized racism. "Many times the racial language used was Aboriginal students or Afro American students talking about themselves or their own race. Examples that I have heard in the past are 'indian time' or 'nigger'" (IC-29). Teachers depicted marginalized students as purveying and reproducing racism through plying antiquated and offensive names for themselves, and putting down their own race. The theme of these stories was that marginalized students perpetuated their own stigmatization.

> I have often heard First Nations make racial slurs about other First Nations. One may say that as a culture, Native peoples have been known to have a 'good sense of humor' and the ability to 'laugh at oneself', yet it is questionable as to whether these comments always fit this characterization, or whether they constitute a negative insensitivity. In my experience, I would often characterize them as negative, and have most often brought this to the attention of those involved. (IC-25)

This teacher disputes the positive valuation of Aboriginal self-deprecating humour. The teacher first rhetorically questioned whether the Aboriginal "slurs" are good humor, then answered that Aboriginal comments are negative. The teacher portrays themself from their outsider perspective as possessing a crucial knowledge unseen by cultural insiders, and benevolently sharing this knowledge with the improperly acculturated Aboriginal students. Through their actions teachers sought to keep the Aboriginal students from sullying themselves with such undignified remarks, and instill appropriate cultural pride.

> Myself (classroom teacher) and the educational associate reprimanded [sic] a girl for poor table manners. The girl countered us, 'Who cares We're just a bunch of savages.' (or something like this)
> NOTE: We have approximately 10 students in our classroom, a large percentage who are Native. The main thing we see is the native students making remarks and comments about themselves & making fun of their race
> We told her that this kind of comment was inappropriate and not acceptable.
> My thought are that as educators we need to continue to instill pride & dignity in First

Nations youth by teaching them about their culture. They seem to put themselves down at times and this behavior must be learned. We need to counter it. (IC-71)

Here the students' jibe is presented as self-effacing and "inappropriate." The problem of racism is portrayed as belonging to the culturally misinformed students, who need to be reacquainted with their culture by beneficent school staff. By situating the problem with the Aboriginal, the systems of domination are erased from analysis. The history of colonization, the targeted destruction of Aboriginal societies, and the systems of colonial ideology that rationalized and justified the dispossession of Aboriginal people are absent. Instead we see a self-derogating student, improperly acculturated to her difference. This Aboriginal girl had wrongly learned how to become an Indian. The teacher neglects the possibility that the student is resisting authority by casting back dominant cultural stereotypes, implying "who cares," *you think* "we're just a bunch of savages." The teacher's role is plain and pure: to counter these demeaning articulations of identity and direct the student as to how to be a good Indian.

Teachers positioned themselves as compassionate educators in addressing racism among students. They acted to police appropriate behaviour, humanize as well as rehabilitate the racial Other, and respectfully engage racists. Through persistence and avoiding immediate antagonism, teachers enabled education – a process that did not always translate into immediate success but often instead the slow opening of possibilities for alternative understanding and learning. Resistance to this pedagogical politic was narrated as overcome through patience, perseverance, and an abiding humanity. Teachers at times exposed useful frames and techniques with which to engage racism (themes further explored in Chapter 5); however, these interventions occurred within the context of addressing racism among members of the student body – strategies for engaging structural racial biases in education did not emerge. Instead the emergent image is of a persistent individual racism countered in the schools through the humanizing force of education.

Teachers occasionally named racism within the teaching population, but described far less resolve or ability to address racism within other educators. These narratives again often positioned racism in other people's wrongly-held beliefs. But in contrast to students, who required education and socialization, colleagues were addressed as equals

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and above re-education. Thus, teachers did not confront racism among their colleagues. Instead, as one teacher described "I have responded always in the typical fashion, one of quiet acceptance - no challenge was made to the person's remarks" (IC-55). Thus this set of narratives exposed another avenue for individual racism, a racism that was not combated in professional practice.

Through individualizing discourses, teachers conveyed racism as an individual problem rather than an institutional one. Teachers at both schools routinely attempted to mitigate incidents of racism by highlighting the general atmosphere of racial harmony at the school or the humanizing influence of education. By positioning racism as an individual attribute, teachers minimized the image of racism within the school. Education was constructed as a liberating environment, where teachers endowed students with the knowledge to dispel racism. This focus on individual acts of racism continued to silence the role of systemic racism in perpetuating racial inequalities in education today. Generally, these constructions allowed teachers to maintain the school image of an inclusive institution, and portray themselves as benevolent educators.

### Blaming the Victim

Marginalized community members, however, asserted the presence of racism among the staff, or in the preferred terminology of teacher surveys, "pulled the race card." Teachers from both schools universally dismissed these accusations of racism. The race card was mentioned in one-third of the surveys, predominantly in relation to Aboriginal students. It was never cast as correctly identifying teacher prejudice. In this section, I explore the different strategies that white and Aboriginal teachers used to dismiss accusations of racism, and thus, minimize the image of racism within their practice. White teachers sought to mitigate student and parent claims of teacher bias by drawing upon the discourse of colour-blind sameness, asserting the fairness of their treatment of all students. Aboriginal teachers, in contrast, relied on their race as a resource to rebuke reports of racism. These teachers asserted they were not white authorities and thus could not be racist towards Aboriginal students. Both Aboriginal and white teachers purveyed themselves as innocent and attacked with fallacious allegations while simply doing their job. Through this construction, teachers conveyed the racial

problem as originating in the propensity of marginalized people to wrongly portray themselves as victims of prejudice. Thus, teachers' narrations of accusations of racism construed the accusers as being in the wrong, and limited the extent to which racism belonged to educators or the school.

White teachers regularly countered accusations of racism by asserting their fairness and equality in dealing with students. Instead teachers clearly conveyed it was the activities and accusations of Aboriginal students that were out-of-place.

> The only "incident" I recall was from an aboriginal student who was confronted with smoking in an inapprop. location started in on the teacher that he was being picked on by "you white guys" cause he was an indian. He became quite hostile & loud then when I went over & said none was to be smoking here I don't care if you were green its [sic] because you shouldt [sic] be smoking so put it out. He put out his smoke & marched away.
> At this point there were 3 teachers involved. (IC-14)

The Aboriginal student confronted smoking out-of-place, starts a greater disorder by challenging "the white guys" in authority with claims of racial bias. The racial conflict emerges with the student casting the conflict in the terms of whiteness and Indianness, injecting race into the conversation. "Hostile & loud," the student's behaviour is out-of-order, requiring three teachers to police the situation. The teachers, in contrast, are depicted as agents acting to restore the appropriate socio-spatial order. The narrator counters claims of racial marking with a reinforced emphasis on the out-of-place behaviour of the student, invoking greenness to exemplify the staff colour-blindness. Green signifies the ultimate alien or out-of-place colouration, and the assertion of its irrelevance functions to assure the neutrality of staff to issues of race. The importance of colour-blindness and the uniformity of treatment by educators regardless of race were common themes throughout the race card narratives.

White teachers portrayed the problem of school racism as originating from Aboriginal people, their behaviour and their accusations. Attacked with charges of racism, teachers conveyed their own sense of victimization by marginalized people who pulled the race card. The social and historical context of institutional racism against Aboriginals was rarely visited, and Aboriginal people were portrayed as without cause for suspicion and unfairly leveraging race for personal gain (most commonly to avoid

punishment). These teachers thus constructed themselves as innocents under attack by marginalized students unfairly wielding their race to access differential treatment.

> There have been incidents in the past where aboriginal students have been given preferential treatment and have received lighter consequences because admin was afraid of having the race card pulled on them. …
> I have no more tolerance for people using their race to intimidate others as I do for people who are racist to others. (IC-49)

This teacher highlighted the intolerable inequity of allowing "preferential treatment," and the necessity of maintaining a hard-line against students using the race card. Student accusations of racism are clearly linked to a strategy of intimidation for "preferential treatment" and "lighter consequences." In many narratives teachers conveyed little sympathy for Aboriginal accusations, and portrayed themselves as wise to Aboriginal students' games. Another teacher who rescued their teaching assistant from the allegations of an Aboriginal student explained that "with my years of experience in the area I would not allow this to take place" (IC-30). The writer invoked experience as endowing them with knowledge of the fallacious nature of student allegations of racism – so much so that the teacher could easily and readily dismiss the possibility of racism in an incident involving their teacher assistant that the teacher was not even present to witness. Aboriginal students were presented with predictable motives, but not cause for such claims.

Aboriginal teachers also faced claims of racism, but they did not portray these as simply efforts by Aboriginal students to vie for preferential treatment. Unlike most teachers, self-identified Aboriginal teachers did not convey the image of Aboriginal claims of racism as selfishly inveighed. Instead these teachers articulated racism as part of Aboriginal experience, and fair treatment as necessary to overcome the inclination of Aboriginal students to respond to every negative experience with authority as racially motivated. One teacher stated, "I do believe 'being brown' does cause racism in some cases, however I believe some of these students have experienced so much of it that they use 'because I am brown' when it isn't necessarily because they are brown" (IC-09). To ameliorate students' claims of racism these few Aboriginal teachers inveighed the need for greater impartiality.

Aboriginal teachers, thus, mediated Aboriginal student claims, not by assuming the illegitimacy of the allegation, but through combining the discourses of Aboriginality and impartiality. Aboriginal teachers assured students of their own impartiality through recourse to their own marginalized status. Teachers described how "our First Nations students often assume that teachers, (who they perceive as 'white') are going to judge them on the basis of color" (IC-35). Aboriginal teachers did not challenge Aboriginal students' associations of whiteness with racism, but sought to differentiate themselves as non-white and therefore also not racist.

> I was on supervision. There were some aboriginal older youth smoking at the front of [Central]. As they saw me approaching, they got rid of their cigarettes. When I told them that the smoking area is not at the front of the school they denied smoking. One of them said that I was picking on them because they were brown.
> I responded that I am just as brown as them so they should not use that as an excuse. There was a silence and then the guys burst into laughter. We were all laughing together. Now when they see me in the hallway, they smile and say hi. (IC-50)

Here brownness is disassociated from the discipline when the teacher negotiates it as a common attribute. Aboriginal students are challenged for using their race as "an excuse," and indicated to be in the wrong both smoking out-of-place and making false accusations to avoid the consequences of their actions. Unlike other teachers, however, this teacher attempts to articulate their impartiality through their racialized commonality with marginalized students – thus, simultaneously bonding and disciplining. The Aboriginal students react to this challenge to their allegations of racism as humourous, and the teacher affirms this in the next sentence as "we all laughed together." This is portrayed as a moment of common bonding, and current relations between the students and the teacher – a nuance few other teachers reflected upon in the aftermath of accusations of racism – are portrayed as amicable.

Throughout the narratives of Aboriginal students pulling the race card, teachers maintained their innocence while positioning marginalized students as inappropriately leveraging race in the school. Some teachers indicated that simply asserting difference in experience and understanding of the world is inappropriate in the school. For example one teacher described how "Aboriginal students have made comments towards me about my race. Examples would be 'you wouldn't understand because you are white' [or] 'you are just a rich white boy'" (IC-29). This teacher conveys the very assertion of difference

– of a distinct standpoint on the basis of race and also poverty – as potentially problematic. Most (white) teachers appealed to discourses of colour-blindness, presenting themselves as neutral authority figures under attack and the assertion of racialized experience or racism as problematic. Normative (white) authority was not to be challenged. A few Aboriginal teachers, in contrast, disrupted student accusations of racism by asserting that they were in fact Aboriginal and not the face of white authority, and thus obviously not racist. Through these narratives, educators maintained their innocence and contained accusations of racism by portraying the accusers as in the wrong. Thus despite student accusations to the contrary, the image of education remained that of a racially neutral institution.

### *Displacing Racism*

Teachers often used strategies of geographic or temporal displacement to mitigate the image of racism in their school. This was particularly evident among inner city teachers. Teachers communicated that the real problem of racism was elsewhere and not endemic to the inner city school environment. Teachers geographically situated racism as a problem originating from the neighbourhood or home. Using progress narratives, drawing on their personal history in the city, teachers explained how race relations were in fact improving. Inner city teachers also relied on the diversity of their school as a resource that contrasted with the monolithic whiteness and exclusivity of suburban schools. These surveys regularly minimized racism through displacing the problem onto other sites and claiming that, incidents of racism aside, racism was not an issue of the classroom.

Within the school, teachers sited the most overt forms of racism outside classroom supervision. This was often evident in the teacher's stories of slurs and jibes discussed earlier. Teachers from both schools described incidents where students used derisive comments to attack members of another racialized group, similarly depicting the space of slurs as outside the controlled environment of the classroom. "I hear deragoratory [sic] comments in hallways. They are aimed at other students and are hurtful" (IC-45). Thus, more overt racism was noted in areas with reduced oversight, in

writing on the bathroom walls and overhead hallway comments. These constructions functioned to diminish the image of racism within the classroom.

Similarly teachers situated their stories of physical violence outside the school. Drawing on racialized violence in the inner city neighbourhood, inner city educators, diminished the image of racism in the school by contrast, geographically placing racism as external to the school. The school slurs and stereotypes paled in contrast to the violence of the street.

> Curiously enough, despite having taught in [Central] for 10 years, I have seen very little racism. Most racial incidents have been hearsay from students who repeat situations they've experienced on the weekends, after school, or at parties. Some have described being jumped[11] because they were 'white' or 'native'. (IC-70)

This teacher temporally bounded most incidents of racism to periods outside of school time. They introduced racialized violence as a student experience, although diminished it as "hearsay." The problem remained located outside the school, and the remnants of racism within the institution were portrayed as neither common nor the base of the problem. Another teacher described how "I can't really site [sic] a specific instance in the school between students. I can site [sic] lots of examples from the street or at bus terminals and in parking lots" (IC-33). Occasionally having to step beyond the school boundaries to police racial conflicts, teachers marked after-school incidents with a ferocity that was rarely evident with the subtle racism with the school building.

> One day after 4PM, I looked out the office window to see a large group of kids streaming over to an area west of [Central] on [the street]. Hurrying over by myself, I found myself in a crowd of approx. 200 students. Two Caucasians, one a former [Central] student, one a current, were each going after an Iraqi student (SS-02).

By geographically displacing the problem of racism to the streetscape, the cement urban enclave of racial hostilities, teachers maintained and bolstered the image of the school as a tolerant place by contrast.

Other teachers described how the neighbourhood environs often endowed inner city students with racialized biases based upon their experience of racialized violence. This was particularly invoked in reference to the prejudice white students developed after being victimized by Aboriginal people. One inner city educator explained, "Students who see themselves as victims of 'jumping' by 'Natives' are very difficult to convince

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[11] Jumping refers to a sudden physical attack.

that they can't generalize about all because of the actions of one or of a few" (IC-23). This teacher struggled to reinforce that experiences of violence from Aboriginals does not translate into all Aboriginals being violent. Another teacher narrated their shifting sympathies from defending Aboriginals to sympathizing with whites when reoccurring stories of white students getting jumped continued to arise in their class over time.

> At [Central] a number of students have shared personal experiences that have occurred outside of school, where Aboriginal students "knifed, jumped, robbed or fought" white kids. My experience listening to these stories share several commonalities in that the victims of these stories all experienced these incidents in their home neighborhood, at night, random attacks, assailants were not known, but were all identified as being "native" or "Indian." Many kids will follow their story by saying they don't want to be racist, but when the same sort of incidents continue to occur they've begun to develop a hatred against this particular race. They also express the opinion that these are gang members.
> My reaction the first few times was verbal shock, disbelief and denial. After hearing the same type of story being described several times, my reaction was much less verbal in trying to deny, defend or rationalize these incidents. My attempt to persuade students not to feel such disdain turned into response of sympathy and quiet resignation that they were speaking their truth.
> In retrospect I think my initial responses of denial and rationalization actually devalued their experience as though what they were telling me was not valid. I think that because I had never experienced such assaults I was reticent to believe it could actually be happening. I do believe that the students bring their experience of hatred, fear and racism to the school. (IC-13)

This teacher positioned the jumped white students as model victims: whites in their home neighbourhood, not drunk or engaging in any incriminating activities, attacked by unknown Aboriginal assailants, probably gang members. In good order and in their place, there was no justification for violence. The violence then became the justification for racial hatred of Aboriginals – a generalization contested by the earlier teacher but not this one. The teacher described their initial denials and rationalizations and these faltered in the face of white students' truth. The teacher concludes their narrative with the assertion of their belief that students do bring racism – now justified – into the school.

Teachers also situated racism as originating in the home. The interactional lives of inner city students and their parents, regularly in contact with Aboriginal people, emboldened students with an arsenal of experiential justifications.

> In my experience most racism at [Central] is directed toward First Nations students. Even with our large immigrant population, I do not hear any negative comments directed at or about these students. I also find that a lot of the negative attitudes seem to come from

home.
For example, I have had kids tell me things such as "My dad works with this Indian ..."
or "The Natives live next door ..."
In spite of the above, I do not think there is a lot of open racism in the school. (IC-23)

The narrator indicated that the neighborhood and family experiences and anecdotes – from the unspoken position of whiteness – fed this racism. The writer closed by delimiting the extent of racism with another disclaimer that generally racism was not a problem in the school.

I grew up with the generation in which racial jokes were the norm. On the play ground, on television, & in advertising racial joke[s] & racial stereotypes (for the sake of humour) were common place.
I would say that I notice this far less frequently, however when I do hear a joke I find it is something that immediately strikes me as out of place. (IC-06)

This teacher reframed current race relations through contrast to their past. The contrast served to diminish contemporary racism while the recourse to personal experience endowed the narrator with greater authority. The author emphasized that not only did they hear racial jokes less frequently but such humour was markedly out-of-place now. Racism had thus been erased by progress and no longer belonged in contemporary culture (or schools). This narrative of progress emerged with another inner city teacher.

When I first read this question I truly had a hard time thinking of an example of racism in our school. My thought was that we are such a diverse school and that we have more acceptance of other peoples cultures and traditions. Especially when I compare it to the racism that I was witness to during my own high school experiences at a predominantly white [suburban] school. (IC-21)

This teacher integrated several strategies to diminish the extent of racism at the school. After narrating their difficulty in producing examples of racism, this educator indicated the inner city school's diversity defused racism. Comparing the inner city school with the white suburban school of their upbringing, this teacher used both a temporal and geographic contrast to elevate the image of inclusivity at the inner city school. Racism was portrayed as a problem of other times and places.

Inner city teachers continually highlighted the diversity of their school, often in contrast to white suburban schools, to defuse the image of racism within their school. Many teachers who had worked in both suburban and inner city environments, described

racism as more sublimated in the suburban setting, operating beneath the surface and emerging when class content addressed Aboriginal people or inequality.

> [Sunnydale] seems much more sedate than [Central]. At [Central], emotions ran high, and students were incredibly open and verbal when anything seemed 'unfair' to them. [Sunnydale] students seem oblivious to certain issues and rather cocooned. I say 'seem.' I believe there is a wire of tension that runs just below the surface. They have an idea of what their privileges are and they stand by them. (IC-12)

Thus in suburban enclaves, racism remained even without the presence of the substantial numbers of Aboriginal students. Teachers often compared their experiences of teaching at inner city and suburban schools. One teacher contrasted their successful experience teaching Native literature in an inner city environment, as "often students talked openly about how the writer's experience reflected their own" (IC-44), with the tensions involved in addressing this same subject matter in a suburban environment.

> Teaching the unit at [Sunnydale] was quite different. At [Sunnydale] there are very few 'visibly' native students - often those that are bleach their hair (etc.) Anyway at [Sunnydale] the unit drew a real range of responses, including the not uncommon attitude that what happened in the past is the past & native people need to 'get with the program'. In addition some students were honest about the fact that their experiences with & perceptions of native people were largely negative. Like most middle class Canadians, many students at [Sunnydale] did not like to admit to these feelings, were in fact uncomfortable with acknowledging them, but held them. (IC-44)

This teacher began by describing the suburban difference; although whiteness was not explicitly named it was heavily implied. Whiteness operates as the normative centre that others are marked against. The absence of the Aboriginal Other in the suburban school functions to emphasize its whiteness. This is further highlighted by the whitening or "bleaching" of those Aboriginals present. In this narrative, whiteness operated as a mark of intolerance in contrast to the diversity and inclusiveness of inner city communities. While the Native content in the inner city was presented as invoking student experience and involvement, in the suburbs it solicited stereotypes and attitudes. But by phrasing intolerance within a range of student responses the teacher avoids casting the students as categorically racist while exposing normativity of racism among them. The teacher described the discomfort of addressing racism and the "middle class" preference to leave our bigotry unspoken.

Through these narratives teachers conveyed racism as a problem originating outside their inner city school. The inner city staff employed the discourse of Aboriginal

violence in the inner city to minimize the image of racism in the school by contrast. The discourse of diversity also operated to highlight an image of inclusivity, contrasting with the resilient, if sublimated, racism within the suburban school. The school figured as a neutral site contaminated by external racial tensions that students carried into school. These constructions allowed teachers to maintain the image of their school image as an inclusive institution.

### *School Segregation*

Another distinct set of narratives, drawn particularly from suburban Sunnydale, addressed the topic of school segregation. In these stories, teachers exposed the power of race in constituting, as well as separating, groups of students. However, within these narratives teachers still mitigated the degree of responsibility attributed to the institutional authority of education by portraying segregation as predominantly a student issue. Teachers varied from critically addressing the dynamics of racial dominance within the student body, to conveying marginalization as self-imposed. Throughout, however, teachers consistently conveyed the problem of segregation as originating in student relations, positioning themselves as external to these processes. Thus, teachers simultaneously exposed and contained a pernicious aspect of racism within education, by construing segregation as a student problem.

In suburban stereotypes, Aboriginal people were portrayed as belonging to and causing the violence and disorder of the inner city. In contrast Sunnydale was figured as safe and white; a place where Aboriginals did not belong. While exposing the racialized suburban consciousness, again these imaginations belonged to individuals and by and large teachers did not delve into how this permeated our institutions of learning. A suburban educator noted, "a [suburban]/[inner city] bias does exist among the student body when classroom discussion centers on the city the majority of the students fall into the [suburban]/[inner city] bias. [Suburban] being viewed as safe haven, while the [inner city] is generally viewed as rife with, gangs, crime and violence" (SS-16). This teacher exposes how places come to represent imaginations of the realities of their denizens and their activities.

The dominant constructions of racialized space, defining suburban normalcy by an often unspoken whiteness, operated to the exclusion of non-white students within the suburban school. This segregated school culture was frequently mentioned by teachers. Generally these statements indicated how students tend to cluster racially and dissociate with those of other races. Teachers noted Aboriginal students felt particularly out-of-place at Sunnydale, often choosing to leave the school.  Thus, while racism remained unspoken in the suburban everyday, it is exposed when the sensitive topic of the Other was broached in class or by observing the subtle nuances of students' everyday interactions.  One teacher explained that although Sunnydale "reveals very little outward racism, but in observing who people chose to befriend and spend time with, one can clearly see that the 'color-blindness' many students claim to have does not actually exist" (SS-07).  Another teacher described this social dynamic as leaving marginalized students out, who then clustered together of necessity.

> Many of our students do not associate with the Muslim girls who wear head wear to school. These girls often seem lonely and tend to group to themselves (out of necessity). … Rarely do our school leaders seem to associate with 'people of other races'. … Most of our racism is very subtle. The students for the most part do not openly say racist things. They do it in very subtle ways instead. (SS-18)

Here it was the dominant (white) students that are presented as isolating Muslims and "people of other races."  Marginalized students were conveyed as clustering together as a social survival strategy in a hostile environment, while student leaders were defining a racial hierarchy dominated by an unspoken whiteness.

Teachers exposed an often visceral fear among suburban students of Aboriginality as associated with violence, a threat to their safety that did not belong in their school.

> A group of grade twelve girls ran to me in the hall and said, 'Protect us!'  and asked if they could get into the SRC room to hide. When I asked why they pointed out the window where a native man around twenty years old was approaching the school. He was not dressed any differently, except perhaps a bit more neatly, than the boys at [Sunnydale]. I asked the girls to explain why they feared the boy. They said, 'You know…' They fumbled with their words and stated they were sure he was not a student. One of the girls expressed shame while the others didn't see my point. (SS-1)

Throughout this excerpt is a strong thread of the implicit racial threat. Neither the narrator of the story nor any of the actors within it explicitly articulated the racial underpinnings of this threat, but it is strongly inferred. But through the narrative it is clear that to these white girls an Aboriginal man, out-of-place in a white school, was

transgressing boundaries and presenting a physical danger. An earlier story by this same author further highlighted the constructed threat of racial transgression, of people out-of-place: white female students from the suburban school were afraid to play volleyball at an inner city school because they might get "raped by some Indian" (SS-1). White bodies, out-of-place in an Aboriginal neighbourhood, were construed as endangered, threatened with the gravest of bodily violations by Aboriginal people. This teacher reports the students, in the space of the white suburban school, constructing an Aboriginal man was a commonsensical threat that white girls must be protected from. While the white women in the story presented themselves as fragile bodies threatened by violation and in need of protection, they presented Aboriginality as a category carrying the implicit association of violence. In the school the Aboriginal man was negatively defined as someone not belonging, "not a student."

Other teachers employed narratives of school segregation which foisted responsibility for isolation and segregation on the marginalized students themselves. Common to both the aforementioned critical narratives and these stories blaming the victims was the virtual absence of the teacher as involved in establishing the school's culture and climate, working to endow a spirit of inclusiveness to the students.

> A few years ago while coaching a [Sunnydale] girls [sports] team I had one native student participate in tryouts and consequently make the team. She played successfully on the team for a few weeks and then her attitude began to change. She started coming late to games and practices and became a bit of a loner at practices. When I spoke with her about this change she claimed that none of the other players liked her because she was native.
> I asked her to specifically speak about the things that had been said or done to her or any specific incidents that had occured [sic]. She could not name anything and she could not provide me with an example but she just felt that she did not 'fit in' because she was different. She continued to play on the team but found that the situation became worse. It was sort of like the situation of her not feeling like she fit in perpetuated the problem and then she did not fit in. She in essence alienated herself. She ended up quitting the team shortly thereafter.
> The entire incident was unfortunate. [Sunnydale's] native population is small but growing. This particular young lady ended up leaving [Sunnydale] and moving to [Central]. I don't believe that there was a specific incident that perpetuated the problem but more there is an underlying current that is hard to detect and even more difficult to fight. I am not sure that I could have handle [sic] things any differently. (SS-19)

Throughout this story the school coach constantly scripted their own inability to act. There was a tangible absence of leadership: the coach scripted their role as one of response when incidents occur. Their role was that of the investigator – the coach was

open to justice: they tried to investigate but found nothing. According to this version, the coach did all they could do. As no specific breach of proper conduct occurred, the coach had no real agency to addressing racism. Rhetorically giving the students control also meant giving students responsibility and absolving teachers of setting an inclusive school climate. But this was not the only role teachers could figure themselves as filling. A focus on understanding social organization and forging relationships, as opposed to a focus on evidence and isolated incidents, would have radically shifted the teacher's role.

In the coach's story, the Aboriginal girl's exclusion happened in contrast to no nameable community of the included. The white school community excluding the girl remained largely absent. But racial inclusions and exclusions are paired human constructions, the coach silenced the suburban school's exclusive whiteness, so clear in the earlier story of a threatening out-of-place Aboriginal person.

Through the notable narrative absences, this description of school exclusion conveyed that marginalization may in fact be the fault of the marginalized. Throughout the narrative the prevalent actor was the Aboriginal girl. It was "her attitude [that] began to change;" she "became a loner." Lacking meaningful engagement with how the Aboriginal girl was excluded from whiteness, the problem is easily construed as her own affective disorder. With the white girls absent, it was the Aboriginal girl's feeling or perception of exclusion that shifts into focus. The fault lay with her: she perceived exclusion, but she could not produce the evidence. As the coach states at one point, the Aboriginal girl "in essence alienated herself." Where there was a human agent to blame for her exclusion, it was the Aboriginal girl who was positioned as responsible. The outcome: she quit the team and changed schools.

In the final paragraph, the positioning of responsibility shifted from the Aboriginal girl to the "underlying current" of institutional racism. Here the story is haunted by its sheer lack of human actors. The Aboriginal girl was haunted by an invisible force of vague discrimination. Her experience was "unfortunate," – a term associated with luck as opposed to resulting from directed human action. The coach identified racism as "an underlying current that is hard to detect and even more difficult to fight," placing it as a presence beyond her responsibility and past her capacity to engage.

The white environs of the suburban school thus functioned as an exclusive space, and the majority of teachers' narratives about Aboriginal student segregation and eventual drop-out emerged from this setting. Throughout these stories of school segregation, teachers play but a minor role, and responsibility for school segregation shifts between white and marginalized students. Although teachers exposed an important aspect of institutionalized racism, they mediated this recognition by limiting their own implication within it.

*Conclusion*

In their survey responses, teachers regularly sought to maintain the image of their impartiality and portray their school environment as an equitable and accepting one. Teachers minimized the image of racism in the school by individualizing racism, blaming the victim, displacing racism, and situating school segregation as a student problem. With the first and most pervasive technique, teachers individualized racism, obscuring the racialized institutional context. While teachers from both schools regularly discussed student slurs and stereotypes, inner city teachers conveyed the unique image of internalized racism in marginalized students' self-representation. Through individualizing racism, teachers equated racism to individual prejudice and the racialized power relations in society were masked. In the second technique, blaming the victim, teachers positioned marginalized community members as the problem. This was particularly evident in stories from both schools about marginalized students and parents accusing teachers of racism, where teachers positioned the racial problem with the accuser. Third, teachers displaced racism as a product of other places and times. This was particularly prevalent at the inner city schools, as teachers attributed responsibility for racism to neighbourhood streets and homes, and diminished racism in their school by contrast to the deeply entrenched racial biases of suburbanites. Thus, through contrast to other geographic frames, teachers diminished the image of racism within the schools. The fourth technique, situating school segregation among students, emerged from the suburban environment. While exposing the power of race in constituting student communities, these teachers still mitigated the degree of responsibility attributed to the institutional authority of education by portraying racism as predominantly a student issue. Thus,

through multiple techniques of containment and minimization, teachers regularly controlled narratives of racism in the school to limit the extent to which racism belonged to the school and educators.

Although their stories conveyed some of the racial tensions in education, teachers often simultaneously employed techniques of minimization to maintain the inclusive and impartial image of education. Racism was regularly constructed as an attribute brought into the school by individual as opposed to a pervasive episteme that permeates education within a racialized society. Teachers displaced racism from the institutional fabric of the school onto other people and places. Teachers thus mediated between the processes of exposing and containing the image of racism in the school. Exploring how educators position themselves and their schools in relation to racism indicates an alarming propensity among teachers to minimize the degree to which racism is understood as permeating the institution. However, teachers' engagements with the question of racism in the schools exposed the presence of racism within their institutions, particularly when reading the surveys in concert. This raises the question of how teachers can move towards accountability and further act to combat racism in the school.

# CHAPTER FIVE: ANTI-RACISM

Recognizing racism in the school raises the question of what can be done about it. Throughout the extended focus group dialogue between teachers and facilitators, different images of how to address racism and racial inequalities emerged. I have categorized these into three forms: multiculturalism, psychological anti-racism, and institutional anti-racism. Although these different forms intersect and overlap, these divisions serve to exemplify certain core themes that are indicative of particular forms of anti-racist practice. Multiculturalism aims to promote and celebrate cultural differences. Psychological anti-racism targets the racialization of individuals' consciousness. Institutional anti-racism seeks to instill organizational change by altering organizational practices and norms. Through these different approaches teachers mapped avenues for change to address racial inequality.

Teachers navigated often contradictory constructions. Teachers negotiated between critically conceptualizing the school to define sites for change and constructing the problem as external to education or beyond teachers' capacity to address. Multiculturalism elevated the importance of cross-cultural understanding, but teachers' talk about the cultural differences of impoverished communities often blamed those marginalized communities for inequity. Psychological anti-racism highlighted the importance of consciousness-raising, but could be used to construct racism as an attribute of only particular aberrant homes. Institutional anti-racism challenged the structure of education and society, but risked effacing the agency of teachers and schools to create change. Exploring how teachers articulated different versions of the school environment, the identities of students, and their own identities within and between these different anti-racist discourses, I will highlight some of these contradictions, exposing both the critical and absolving constructions conveyed by contemporary anti-racist pedagogues on the Canadian Prairies.

## *Multiculturalism*

Within the rubric of multiculturalism, teachers employed the rhetoric of cultural empowerment and cultural diversity as the solution to racial problems in the school. Rather than confronting racist structures and ideologies, multiculturalism works through

the celebration of difference. Thus, there is a marked shift in emphasis from racial dominance to the culture of the Other, often following essentialized constructions. Through promoting diversity, educators proposed to address cultural exclusion, exercise empathetic imagination, and promote cultural pride. But contradicting and undermining the celebratory elevation of traditional Aboriginal culture, culture talk also demonized Aboriginal people as living in a culture of poverty that failed to accord adequate value to education. Thus, notions of cultural difference served as discursive resources to both include and blame marginalized students.

Advocates of multiculturalism deploy it as both an affirmative and transformative process. As the educational apparatus in Canada is dominated by white Western cultural norms the inclusion of multiculturalism in curriculum works to address the cultural exclusion and denigration of the Other. The inclusion of positive images is posited as aiding marginalized students in asserting a positive racialized identity.

> Jughead: Well, I think the more comfortable people feel in their setting the easier it is for them to succeed at whatever they are doing. So if culture is being, y'know honoured and recognized and accepted in their school then maybe they'd be more likely to stay

In this excerpt on the role of culture in the school, Jughead articulates how cultural inclusion can help establish a comfortable and supportive environment. Culture is deployed in this discourse as a euphemism for race. Jughead notes how "they'd be more likely to stay" if (their) culture was "honoured and recognized." In this discourse, only marginalized students are portrayed as culture-bearing, silencing the presence of an exclusionary school culture. Teachers are depicted as modifying the school environment to further enable students, acting with benevolence and compassion to ensure the inclusion of racialized students. This was similarly evident in the survey reflections. As one teacher said, "Teachers have to be role models, not of 'tolerance,' but of the celebration of differences, because then each can be proud of who he is" (IC-35). These discourses promoted addressing racial inequities and exclusions through engagement with the marginalized students' psychological processes of internal identification and pride. Although privilege is muted within the discourse of multiculturalism, multiculturalists also promote infusing the white school culture and students with an understanding of others. Through celebrating the importance and value

of diversity, teachers sought to humanize other races and cultures and expand our notions of the world.

> Archie: One of the things that I think about is, is um, how the cultures have different worldviews and different ways of expressing that worldview. And that um, when I spent time in the First Nations cultures and [Asian cultures]and I've stepped into a world which I was very uncomfortable in, cause I didn't have a way to connect, language problems, nevermind that, but just concepts and how they, what they're saying and what they're meaning by it. It can be very, very different. It's very different. And it's very confusing. … I think about we tend to teach from a particular worldview, an- and we operate on the assumption that it's, that it's the one that matters. And I think one direction would be to, to actually allow the students of different cultures to express theirs, give them an opportunity for us to learn from them about what their worldview is, and as a result broaden our capacity to be accepting, to work with them effectively. … And that's a difficult process. People have to accept that the school culture as it is isn't complete. It's incomplete.

In this narrative, Archie explores and articulates the process of building empathy and understanding between communities. Archie begins by asserting the presence of cultural (instead of racial) difference. He conveys his empathy for culturally excluded students by drawing upon his own experience, confused as an outsider to other cultures. He contrasts this experience with that of students in a monocultural school. The contrast here establishes commonality and thus works to humanize the experience of exclusion. Archie does not seek merely to confront students with Otherness, but seeks to enable empathy and understanding.

However, his empathetic narrative portrays power and responsibility in sometimes problematic ways. His construction of difference naturalizes it as belonging to the diverse internal processes of different human communities. The colonial production of Otherness through material and symbolic processes is unmentioned. When he establishes commonality between experiences of exclusion, he does not account for differences in his position as a powerful cultural outsider (a white man in Asia and a white teacher on reserve) compared to Aboriginal students' position as marginalized cultural outsiders within a colonial society. Exclusion is rather conveyed as a faultless or at least unintentional process, a result of normative cultural behaviours. However when he reflects on the particular cultural modes of education, he problematizes their monoculturalism, and how it may be silencing other voices. He reinforces teacher authority while calling for its diminishment. He diminishes the authority of his own voice through the use of tentative language and partial solutions,

but simultaneously elevates educators as the deities to "allow" and "give" the Other voice. However, ultimately he privileges learning from these neglected voices as necessary for a "complete" education, asserting that the pervasive monotonous drone of the dominant white culture is "incomplete" and requires supplementation.

Archie recognizes the cultural exclusivity of normative teaching practices in prairie schools as coming from "a particular worldview." He proposes this particularity should be opened up to the world. Schools are diminished as incomplete and requiring multicultural supplementation to accord with the world out there. He asserts that schools must be cosmopolitan institutions to be "complete." Asserting that schools are "incomplete" or culturally exclusive is depicted as "difficult" not simply because we must engage other cultures but because we must recognize the incomplete nature of our own knowledge of the world.

Recognizing the partiality of our own perspective requires understanding the diversity of others' histories and social relationships according to how others would represent them. However, calling upon racially Othered students to dialogue about cultural diversity poses further questions. Archie privileges the importance of allowing others to perform their difference before the class. With the use of the word "allow," Archie indicates that marginalized students desire to speak but are unable. Alison Jones (1999) has indicated some problems with this construction. Jones states, "Most important in educational dialogue is not the *speaking voice*, but the *voice heard*" (1999: 307). The problematic is not the absolute silence of the subaltern, but the refusal by the dominant to hear the voice of the subaltern. The dominant ways of knowing simultaneously justify and mystify oppression, and set the terms for evaluating truth. Stories critical of oppression do not easily fit within this paradigm of truth, if at all. White students maintain the power to judge the experiences of others. Thus, Jones (1999) raises the imperialist undertones of white desires and assumptions to access the (experiential) resources of the Other for their (educational) enrichment. The desire for dialogue may not be mutual as Aboriginal and other marginalized students, already immersed in the culture and narratives of dominant white society, may neither need nor desire to hear the stories of the dominant and may not want to share their stories to be judged by the exclusionary dominant community.

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Conversely, white teachers conveyed that they lacked the cultural authority to speak on behalf of the Other, and felt limited to the extent that they could participate in creating inclusive classrooms through paradigms that privilege the inclusion of traditional Aboriginal culture.

> Jughead: I mean as myself, I would feel really awkward burning sweetgrass in my room, because I don't understand it. It doesn't have anything with my culture where I've been. I respect people who do it, and I can acknowledge that it is important to them. But if I was to do it in my class, it would be like what, yeah what is the white girl doing burning the sweetgrass
>
> <Laughter>
>
> Veronica: I mean really that's how it would feel
>
> Archie: No it wouldn't make any sense no

Teachers expressed discomfort with taking individual initiative to include specific Aboriginal cultural practices in the classroom. Jughead clearly articulates that she lacked the cultural authority to introduce Aboriginal spirituality, as she marks herself as a white cultural outsider. While Jughead positions herself as able to respect and acknowledge students culture, she feels uncomfortable with assuming the authority as an Aboriginal cultural expert. The teachers found consensus that this form of cultural inclusion, in Archie's words, "wouldn't make any sense" for white teachers.

However, talk about Aboriginal students' cultural difference did not merely circulate ideas of traditional Aboriginal culture. Although participants first evoked the nobility of Aboriginal traditions as worthy of multicultural celebration, contemporary Aboriginal culture was often defined as a culture of deprivation and depravity, a culture of poverty. Within this discourse Aboriginal culture was positioned as responsible for Aboriginal students' failure.

> Veronica: I think that comes down to kinda the definition of culture because, I think when I say the word culture I look it as in a positive light like, with the language and the traditions and the stories and the songs. But I think also a lot of our Aboriginal kids are living in a culture, of where, school completion is not a priority and it doesn't have any importance in the home or really in the community. Like I just, I tend to uh, well I think more and more they are trying to encourage kids. But I think that in the past there has been such a. A lot of the kids I taught, it's not a priority, it's not a goal. It's not something that has been brought in the home as, as being, this is something you need to do.

This provides a strong contrast between positive (Aboriginal) culture and the deficient culture of a lot of Aboriginal homes. It is not evident in this excerpt how this culture is produced. Rather than interrogating how living in a racist culture where Aboriginal people are discriminated against, and living in disadvantaged material conditions might contribute to Aboriginal students deprioritizing school, the focus is on the (Aboriginal) community and its wayward value system. Veronica, however, portrays a discomfort with this possibly racist denigration of the Aboriginal community. She interjects a narrative of progress, where the community is now "more and more" supportive of kids and the problem was in "the past," and thus aiding Aboriginal school completion. She mediates the negative image of the Aboriginal community, and distances herself from the potentially racist position. She negotiates between situating the problem of lacking support for education in Aboriginal communities as one of the past and present, slipping verb tenses. Beginning with the present progressive ("are living") and simple present ("is not a priority"), she mediates with a tentative present progressive ("are trying to encourage"), before sliding through the past tense ("taught") and back to the present and present perfect ("has been brought"). Through this negotiation she constructs an image of Aboriginal culture as unsupportive but improving.

Thus, the Aboriginal community not the school was construed as needing change. Teachers positioned the Aboriginal culture of poverty as irreconcilable with school success. Aboriginal families were blamed for failing to equip students with the appropriate cultural resources for success. Ahistorical narratives of the Aboriginal home diminish the role of colonialism in producing poverty and the cycles of abuse. Instead Aboriginal families merely appear deviant, improperly grounded in the value of education. This focus neglects the role of domination, and instead portrays racial inequalities as emerging from culturally deprived homes.

Multiculturalism relies on notions of culture that serve as discursive resources to both include and blame marginalized students. Common among these approaches is using the language of culture as a euphuism for race, and proposing celebration of correct cultural values as a cure to racial inequality. However, without naming racial inequality and the systems that produce racial inequality, power is often submerged within the discourse of multiculturalism. By acknowledging diversity, educators proposed to open

up the school, encourage cross-cultural understanding, and promote cultural pride in marginalized students. However, because a critical analysis of power is not integral to culture talk, Aboriginal culture was also used as a discursive resource in rhetorics that blamed the marginalized community for racial inequity. This potential conservative derailment of culture talk highlights the necessity of integrating a critical analysis of power and unequal social relations into our understanding of race in the school.

### *Psychological Anti-racism*

Psychological anti-racism emphasizes the importance of engaging with and problematizing how people internalize racial and racist ideas. As Alastair Bonnet (2000a) has described, race awareness workshops and anti-racist trainings often embody the psychological approach. This emphasis accords with a particular constructivist ontology that equates changing consciousness with changing the world. Thus, the assumption is that anti-racism is best enacted at the level of individual consciousness. Within the focus group sessions two versions of this generalized schema emerged in accordance with different constructions of the school. While in one version education countered racism, in another version racism was depicted as permeating education. In these contradictory accounts, racism was conveyed as first the attribute of aberrant individuals, and second, a pervasive influence shaping educators' own consciousness. Both versions highlighted the importance of shifting peoples' awareness, although only this latter critical view begins to link individuals to pervasive racialized normative frames.

In accordance with the predominant construction of racism as individual and external to the school, in one version of psychological anti-racism, racism was conveyed as an irrationality emerging from the home and contrasted against the school. Racism was portrayed as external to the school and the teaching profession, which both function as bulwarks against racism by assisting in the socialization of individuals as members of a diverse and tolerant society. In this excerpt, Veronica responds to a series of queries regarding the idea that racism comes from the home and is thus difficult to tackle.

> Veronica: Absolutely there are things that definitely come from the home. And I think that's true of any home, myself included, but learning from a different viewpoint is critical. I mean you'll never change those views if you don't learn that here is something else. … So unless you are given more information, you'll live in that state of ignorance.

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… My goal is to make sure they realize there is something beyond what they have learned so far out there.

Veronica begins by firmly asserting that there are "things" that come from the home. However, she then quickly moderates the possible demonization of particular homes, asserting the universality of home influence. She mediates the differentiation of racist homes from implicitly good homes, drawing on her own experience. Sites of learning, however, are constructed as globalizing, exposing learners to "a different viewpoint," beyond the limited perspectives of our origins. Racism is constructed as an attribute of shallow spaces, where people are limited in their understanding of the world. Education figures as a "critical" part of socialization bringing us out of "that state of ignorance" and into the world. Thus, school functions as a site of globalizing knowledge. With this final comment Veronica introduces the contrast of local home space-times with global space-times that is continued by other participants in the conversation.

> Betty: Because ultimately when they go off into the world and they become, y'know, adults. Obviously, I mean they're, what they've growing up with is going to be instrumental and is going to be key. But I think what they've learned at school and what they take away from that, um, and what they can gain in terms of power, in terms of making their own decisions, and how they feel about certain things is really important. And I think just giving kids the opportunity to look at things in a different way is huge.

Betty here expands on the contrast of the global and local space-times of school and home. School figures as the developmental site for coming of age as students gain the knowledge and power to make independent decisions. The specificity of the home is unavoidable, but the school is vital as a launching ground to the breadth of the world "out there." Building upon this common version of education, Archie emphasized that "we need to be willing to expose the children to diversity, and, uh, give people different people's ways of seeing things." Thus, it is the responsibility of education to imbue students with a greater awareness of diversity and the world beyond their home.

Contradicting the image of education as humanizing, however, teachers also noted that the school reproduced racial inequalities. In these discussions of racism within the school, and educational practice, teachers problematized themselves and their own practice. Thus, it was not merely that education needed to amend the perspectives of others, but also that as teachers we needed to reflect on the racialization of our own consciousness.

Tyler: When we start recognizing racism as more institutional, as producing the way we see the world, um, it brings it from a point where it's a few bigots to something that we unknowing have become a part of

Archie: Umhmm

Tyler: Um, how does that affect how you see yourself as a teacher?

Betty: I, I think for me, it gets me to just, I'm questioning all the time …. I'm always thinking, rethinking about the way I posed a question, the way the response I gave after I got responses back from students, and I'm constantly gauging that all the time. And there have been, there have been times when I thought I don't feel like I'll address this topic with this group, because I just get a sense from them that, y'know it will be an uncomfortable conversation, or it might go somewhere where I don't want it to go, because I don't know how I'll deal with it when it gets there kind of thing

Here Betty reflects on how recognizing the pervasiveness of racialization brought her to continually reflect upon her own teaching practice. Constantly "rethinking" her practice, Betty describes how she interlaces practice and reflection to examine and improve her teaching. She also recognizes how there are times when she does not address "this topic" of racism. She justifies this evasion of tackling racism in the classroom on the basis of the discomfort and the potential uncontrollability of the conversation. But in admitting to sometimes not challenging racism, Betty acknowledges there are places where she could improve her classroom practice. This recognition of racism in the school often led participants towards personal reflection on their practice.

Tyler: What if we … start talking about racism? Does it change the way, do you feel like it changes the way we see the school? Or does it change the way we see the classroom?

Veronica: It, for me personally I find it changes, it makes me think more about my interactions and my behaviors. And is everything, is there places where I can improve in that way? And the answer's got to be yes. …  I find a discussion like this doesn't make me look at [Central] in a different way, it makes me look at myself, my classroom, how I teach, how I interact. … I can see where people get a bit uncomfortable because it makes you really, for me-myself, it makes me question where my own, uh prejudices and where my own stereotypes lie, and, that's, that's tough to examine

Veronica tightly couples place and personal identity. She immediately personalizes the recognition of racism within the institution, and her classroom in particular. However, this recognition does not easily accord with constructions of teacher identity as racially unbiased, something Veronica later characterizes as a desire "to think that you're, you're letting students walk into the classroom judgment free, and everybody has a clean slate." She describes this disjunction between her recognized and desired state

as "uncomfortable." This state is further exhibited in the tentative and uncertain nature of her speech with significant pauses and restarts. Recognizing her bias, she continues on to query "how do I teach so that they're not feeling it [preconceived notions], as much at least." Through conveying her interest in providing a non-judgmental atmosphere, Veronica partially repairs her identity. Although she recognizes that her socialization in a racist society has imbued her with racial biases, she asserts her desire for neutrality. However, she indicates that racialized consciousness is not easily erased, and speaks with a high degree of tentativeness regarding the possibility of simply choosing to supercede systems of racialization. Rather, as theorists such as Thompson (2002), Jones (1999), and Wang (2005) suggest, Veronica proposes a continual process of troubling and re-articulating identity as matrixed within systems of social privilege.

In teachers' talk, psychological anti-racism had the most obvious resonance with the project of education, endowing people with crucial knowledge of our society and our place within it. However, psychological racism remained marked by a number of ambivalences originating from its emphasis on the individual. With its heavy focus on consciousness, psychological anti-racism had a tendency towards individualizing racism as an attribute of deviant individuals. But teachers carefully negotiated conversation to try to avoid demonizing an aberrant few as the only racists. Recognizing the pervasive nature of racialization while desiring racial neutrality, teachers spoke in polyphonic phrases, interweaving critical self-awareness with their discomfort in exposing their own bias. The psychological focus highlighted how individuals' awareness is shaped by racialization and how individual actions perpetuate racial inequities. However, within this frame, potential changes only emerged at the level of individual beliefs and interactions. Confronting racial inequalities requires altering both the systems of belief justifying that organization and the unequal organization of society through cultural and institutional norms. While psychological anti-racism powerfully challenges the former of this duality, it requires integration with other forms of anti-racism to accord significant attention to social organization.

### Institutional Anti-Racism

Institutional racism refers to the endemic and systemic racism that operates through institutions as a result of their normative assumptions and organization. It reflects not individual, idiosyncratic beliefs, but a pervasive systemic logic that results in the collective failure of an organization to provide appropriate service to marginalized communities. Race is a social construction, but it is a social construction made powerful through the particular, unequal social organization of our society. The practice of institutional anti-racism involves beginning to challenge and change the institutional environment. Traditionally the institutional environment is considered the domain of administrators; however, the teachers did repeatedly address the broader school arrangement. Teachers criticized the school's organization and articulated their own agency in narratives challenging it. Teachers spoke of ensuring that students have the prerequisite supports necessary to learn and defending marginalized students targeted for disciplinary action. Their agency, however, remained limited, restrained by administrators within the school and socio-economic systems beyond the school. These stories firmly established another important avenue for anti-racism remains beyond the classroom, but also at times demonstrated the potential within a structural analysis to derail and erase personal responsibility and agency.

Within the focus group, facilitators and participants negotiated the meaning of normative assumptions about race in education. As facilitators, we were attempting to direct the group toward an exploration of how the normalization of particular experiences and demonization of others contributed to marginalize certain groups while privileging others.

> Sheelah: I was thinking about what you said about some Aboriginal students wanting to go home, to family for various different reasons and missing chunks of school and teachers being livid about it and thinking they should fail because of that. And I thought about [hockey] players that I have taught in the past
>
> <Laughter>
>
> Sheelah: And how they can miss huge amounts of time
>
> <Laughter>
>
> Betty: As I nod my head
>
> Archie: Good example

Sheelah here exposes how particular constructions of acceptability and respectability privilege hockey players and permit them flexibility unavailable for Aboriginal students returning to visit family on reserve. Sheelah builds upon earlier discussion, contrasting how "teachers don't feel livid" about creating special course packages for absent athletes with the frustration teachers voice with truant Aboriginal students. The aptness of this contrast is remarked upon by both Betty and Archie. However, there was no easy consensus on the matter, and Jughead challenged the construction.

> Jughead: With the [hockey] players, you know ahead of time that they are going, and you make the packages up for them to go. So often the kids that are going to go to the reserve just go. They don't know ahead of time, and they just go. And they come back when they can get a ride, or when their family brings them back, or whatever. And sometimes it's a week and sometimes it's a month, but they don't know a lot of times ahead of time that they're going, so we have no time to get a package ready for them and say okay, so you're not behind when you get back, try and get this, this, and this done

Jughead resituates Aboriginal truancy as incommensurate with athletic absences. In her version athletes provide adequate notice, and thus are able to progress through materials and keep pace with the class. She states, however, that Aboriginal students often end up "hopelessly behind" because they are unable to keep pace. Jughead indicates that teachers want Aboriginal students to succeed but feel frustrated by absences that hinder Aboriginal success. While acknowledging certain truths within this version, Veronica contests the construction of teacher innocence.

> Veronica: I agree with you [Jughead]

> Archie: Uhh

> Veronica: But there is part of me that goes, if more teachers said, 'Okay, lets sit down and have a chat. Where were you and why was that important to you?' But I think an immediate judgment comes on: they just took off, they didn't give a crap about their schoolwork, they didn't give a crap about my class. And then we take it almost like

> Sheelah: Personally

> Veronica: Almost personally, like you didn't, you didn't put enough value in our school system, in our classroom to

> <Laughter>

> Veronica: To, to have consideration for me and my schedule, then I'm just not going to bother. Like you obviously don't care so I don't care.

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Veronica resituates the problem in not Aboriginal student's absence, but how teachers responded. Without directly challenging the distinctions Jughead made between athletic and Aboriginal student absences, Veronica reframes the discussion again focusing on the role of teachers in creating a welcoming or hostile environment. Veronica asserts to Jughead, "You and I both know, [with] so many staff members, they've taken off, they're gone." Veronica indicates that teachers often exhibit a staunch rigidity with respect to Aboriginal students, a reality that Jughead corroborates. Thus, the focus again shifted to denaturalizing the normative assumptions of a racialized society that position deviance with Aboriginality and respectability with whiteness.

> Tyler: So there's a question of when we see flexibility in the system, so we are able to build it in for the hockey players, we are able to build it in for y'know the kind of academic students, or the ones we sort of see a bit of ourselves in.

> Veronica: Absolutely, yeah. It's, I, the more I think about that whole thing of white privilege, I think of how many situations I have walked into and been given the benefit of the doubt, full trust, um, like given so many privileges simply before I've opened my mouth, simply because of how I present myself, the fact that I'm white

An exploration of institutional norms exposed the persuasive racialization of teachers' interactions with students. Shifting the gaze from the Other and fixing it upon white privilege exposed how race influenced students' experiences with the school. Within the focus groups, facilitators and participants attempted to decentre normative assumptions about race and education by situating our understanding within an awareness of the systems of racial domination and white privilege. This opened potential to change how teachers interacted with students, as well as the normative structure of education. By critically examining how the practice of education is racialized, teachers were able to reflect upon elements of their own practice and how they could make changes to create a more inclusive school.

Educators also used contested and reframed the discussion of the culture of poverty situating deprivation within an unequal economic system. Whereas earlier dialogue had blamed deviant Aboriginal cultural values for devaluing education, speakers shifted the terms and brought socio-economic circumstances into the conversation. Thus, blame was shifted off Aboriginal families and onto their conditions.

Betty: I think all families want their children to be successful, and want them to learn. But I think sometimes, and unfortunately, umm, predominantly probably within our Aboriginal, umm, community, there is a different culture. There is another culture that is going on there too. I think there is sometimes the culture of poverty that we are experiencing. So that we have kids that are living in, in not great conditions – and this is true of any student regardless of their colour – but when you are living in a culture of poverty it is very difficult at times to make school a priority, no matter how welcoming it is. … There are so many other outside factors that are inhibiting kids, or stopping them from coming to school, and it is not always just the place, the people within the building

Betty sharply redefines culture, shifting it from a racial attribute to an economic or class attribute. She hesitantly and regretfully acknowledges the racialization of poverty, although she claims economic deprivation will act to the detriment of "any student['s]" learning. Thus the problem rests with the family's economic situation as opposed to their deficient value system. In fact, she suggests that "all families" hold similar desires for educational success. Some families are simply unable to actualize these desires because of the limits imposed by their material conditions. These "outside factors" suggest that creating a more multicultural school environment and raising teachers' consciousness may not be sufficient to fully address the educational barriers that marginalized students face. This position could be seen as shifting the blame for marginalized student failure to the economic system, effacing the agency and responsibility of educators and schools in addressing educational inequities.

However, other educators described actions within the school that began to address economic disparities that form barriers to student learning. Constructing school and teacher agency in addressing economic barriers, Jughead said, "Well, I, we do some things, like we have lunch programs, to try and help feed the people who aren't eating at home, which is a start." Jughead positions herself with a high degree of personal responsibility for this program beginning "I" before broadening to the more inclusive "we." Her personal relationship to the program continued to be articulated through the discussion of the lunch program, simultaneously demonstrating the agency of individual teachers as well as the school as an institution in making changes to address economic barriers to learning. However, Jughead also recognized the insufficiency of these efforts, marking her comments with a high degree of tentativeness, saying "we do some things" "to try and help," "which is a start."

The patchwork nature of the lunch program was further challenged by other speakers, who asserted the necessity of broader institutional changes.

Betty: I do think that there is a stigma though having it in a separate room

Veronica: Yes

Betty: Don't you?

Jughead: Yeah

Betty: Like the kids that go to that room

Jughead: Yeah

Betty: There is obviously a reason why they need to go

Archie: Probably [inaudible]

Jughead: Umhmm

Betty: If it were something where it was in our cafeteria and like you it was a lunch program

Jughead: Umhmm

Betty: There was something set up for all students regardless

Jughead: Umhmm

Betty: And it wasn't separate and apart from everything else, I think that that would change things

Betty challenges Jughead in this extract, articulating how the institution reifies class divisions even in its attempts to aid marginalized students. Thus, the organization of the program, socially and spatially separated from regular school lunch environment isolates the poor. Further, the requirements for self-identification denigrate marginalized students and in the discussion it became clear that some teachers were unaware that the school lunch program was even running. Betty denaturalizes this form of inclusion or student support by contrasting it with a universal lunch program "for all students regardless." Rather than adding different programs to address difference while maintaining its stigma, Betty proposes a real change would involve shifting school organization so that basic nutritional needs were provided for all students.

However, Betty does not position herself with agency to create an inclusive lunch program. Emphasizing larger social structures and the need for greater change, she shifts the responsibility for change beyond the sphere of an individual educator. While Jughead demonstrated personal initiative and agency through her involvement with the lunch program, speaking with intimate knowledge through her close association with the program, Betty spoke as an external critic. Jughead attempted reforms through what resources were available, while acknowledging the need for further change. Financial constraints and administrative authority, however, control the potential for larger program. Over-emphasizing the structural barriers whether budget limitations, administrative authority, or poverty in the community, diminished the extent that educators constructed themselves as agents of change.

But teachers narrated their own personal agency in their own advocacy work on behalf of students. Recognizing the necessity of larger institutional changes, both within and beyond the school, teachers described how policies are enacted upon individual students, creating sites to engage and advocate on behalf of students with each disciplinary action.

> Jughead: I end up, I end up fighting for them, more so than my non-Aboriginal kids. [Umhmm] Like, so-and-so has missed the last two weeks of school. I will get a call from administration. 'What's going on with this kid [Jughead]?' 'Well there's this. There's this. There's this.' 'Oh okay. So we should let him be for a little while.' 'Yes give him a chance.' 'Okay.' But y'know without that call it would be <snap> gone, and that's it

In this narration of an almost blasé incident, Jughead depicts how small interventions, attempting to understand and convey the circumstances facing marginalized students can make a significant difference. Jughead describes how without her extension of effort this student's enrollment may have ended.

However, the effectiveness of a teacher's intervention is mediated by the willingness of administrators to listen. While Jughead describes administrators as open to listen to educators and give students "a chance," other educators described less amicable exchanges with less harmonious outcomes. In Jughead's tale we hear the voices of benevolent authority calmly and respectfully performing their duties. In contrast, Veronica described her frustration after an administrator decided to eject an Aboriginal student she had spent several years establishing a relationship with. "I was almost in

tears. I had to walk out of [the Administrator's] office actually, cause, I was like, I don't understand the rational for it." Veronica contested the rigorous application of rules to a student she described as "definitely a targeted Aboriginal youth without a support system," and conveyed a less compassionate image of administration. But by attempting to understand and respect students' circumstances, and advocate for students with administration, these teachers described how they acted as important intermediaries advocating marginalized students' interest.

Teachers conveyed that change to the institutional environment is a necessary part of anti-racism; however, without institutional authority to dictate policy, teachers sometimes positioned themselves as possessing limited agency to address institutional racism. From ensuring adequate nutrition to challenging disciplinary decisions, teachers spoke of working to change or ameliorate structural and institutional barriers to marginalized students' learning. Although they often voiced limited agency in this regard, and at times the discussion of institutional racism verged upon displacing the onus for change off teachers, these teacher continued to assert the role of educators in addressing racism through various forms of anti-racism.

*Conclusion*

We initiated these sessions with the purpose of exploring anti-racism in the school. From these discussions psychological, multicultural and institutional forms of anti-racism emerged, with significant diversity within and between these forms. Psychological anti-racism highlighted the importance of consciousness-raising. Multiculturalism elevated the vitality of cross-cultural understanding. And institutional anti-racism challenged the structure of education. Each practice presented certain opportunities, but also pitfalls. These discussions evolved through a process of recognizing the influence of racism within the student body, but perhaps more importantly through our own consciousness and the institutional structure of the school and society. Recognizing the pervasiveness of racism challenged both the image of the school and teachers as accepting and tolerant. This discomforting truth began to cast light upon the operation of privilege in the taken-for-granted school norms, and challenged the demonization of certain homes as deficient. Through explorations of the role of racism in

constituting our cultural and material realities, our identities and our institutional organization, teachers were able to draw upon multiple discourses, shift and challenge frames, and expand the unfinished project of anti-racism. By creating a space where educators had permission to engage in these processes and collectively reflect on their practice, we opened cracks for new stories, new narratives of what an anti-racist educator does.

# CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have explored how teachers' constructions of racism and anti-racism relate to their constructions of the school. Using survey data on teachers' perceptions of racism, I critically interrogated the propensity of white educators to minimize racism. Rather than recognizing racism as permeating our social institutions, we deny the systemic aspect of racism. Racism becomes an attribute of individuals not institutions, a problem of the marginalized not the dominant, a phenomenon of elsewhen and elsewhere not our current places, and dynamic of groups other than ourselves. These absolving constructions relate broadly to societal discourses that continue to minimize the image of racism within Canada. These discourses justify and normalize policies and practices maintaining racial domination, consistently aligning those with power and privilege with innocence while often demonizing marginalized populations. It is through these constructions that the teachers avoided implicating themselves or their institutions of learning within racism, maintaining the colour-blind image of education.

However in focus group dialogues exploring anti-racism, teachers negotiated different versions of the school environment, the identities of students, and their own identities. Discussing psychological, multicultural, and institutional approaches to anti-racism, teachers figured racism as both external and internal to education. Each approach embodied a particular focus for anti-racist work and enabled particular constructions for teachers to take and evade responsibility. Psychological anti-racism highlighted the importance of consciousness-raising with individuals, but could be used to construct racism as an attribute of only particular aberrant homes. Multiculturalism elevated the importance of cultural inclusion, but was also prone to blaming inequity on the cultural deficiencies of marginalized communities. Institutional anti-racism challenged the structural inequalities, but risked effacing the agency of teachers and schools to create change. A critical conceptualization of the various facets of racism remains necessary to build an integrated approach to take responsibility and address racism on the institutional, cultural, and individual levels.

Through teachers' constructions, this research has explored the racial imaginary of the Canadian Prairies. Distinct from metropolitan centres where whiteness is constructed against the Black and the immigrant Other, the predominant Other in the

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prairie context is Aboriginal people. Similar to stereotypes of the racialized Other from various Western societies, teachers exposed prairie racism within stories of stereotypes of the Aboriginal Other as violent, lazy, criminal, and inferior. Teachers often minimized racism through their narratives and rarely situated present day race relations within the history of oppression in Canada, instead blaming Aboriginal people for attempting to leverage race unfairly. Teachers appealed to the notion of sameness, of colour-blindness, erasing the power relationships that structure marginalized and white students' lives. In the absence of a power analysis Aboriginal people were portrayed as the cause of their own problems, as self-marginalizing; this again parallels studies from central Canada and the United States.

However, certain differences also emerged. Suburban educators noted specific local constructions of race that constituted their school and area as safe and white, in contrast to racialized inner city areas that students considered dangerous. This constitution of their safe, white school created a sometimes inhospitable climate for Aboriginal learners. In the inner city, with significantly higher numbers of Aboriginal students, teachers discussed the problem of students denigrating their own race. Aboriginal students often called each other savage, and sometimes played with the construction of their savagery to mock or satirize white authority. But while the contestation and reclamation of Aboriginal and savage identities by teachers and students was evident in the survey data, my theorizing is limited by the lack of available literature and research into this area. Significantly more research into the cultural politics of Aboriginality is needed, particularly those studies attending to the dynamics of resistance.

The cultural play on savage could be considered a form of resistance, a refusal to be a good Indian. By claiming savage as a positive identity Aboriginal youths could be reversing the meaning of demeaning terms or claiming a recalcitrant identity unpalatable to dominant white constructions of goodness. Within the discourse of multiculturalism, teachers espoused the value of diversity and cultural difference. However, for Aboriginal people these valuable differences were typically cast within the realm of traditional Aboriginal culture: language, song, dance, and a connection to the land. Urban Aboriginality involving poverty, gangs, drugs, and hip hop, was not spoken of so highly. In fact, it was precisely these facets of Aboriginal culture that were often construed as

responsible for lagging Aboriginal achievement. Thus, paralleling historic constructions of the noble Indian versus the violent savage, there was a juxtaposition of good traditional Indianness with bad Indianness; it is interesting to note these negative aspects of urban Aboriginal culture are commonly associated with the demonized activities of marginalized Black communities in other centres. As my research only tangentially hinted to these constructions, it remains a significant future area for cultural theorists to explore.

The second contribution of our research was methodological. Although psychologists such as Stephanie Taylor have begun to use discourse analysis methods to interrogate the construction of race and space in text and talk, it still is not a method widely used within geography. This method offers the opportunity to explore how research participants construct versions of the world, representing activities, people, and places. Through open-ended surveys and focus groups, we explored how teachers constructed racism in the school. However, the survey question did not challenge participants' commonsense notions and survey methods are not particularly dialogical. Interview techniques pioneered in discursive psychology would be an interesting tool to use to build upon this research. Challenging participants with difficult interview questions, researchers could analyze the strategies of justification and denial that speakers use when probed about the meaning of a particular utterance or questioned about a particular gap in their narrative. This could expose the strategies people use to negotiate and quell difficult or troubling topics. The focus groups, to some extent, accomplished this; however, the focus groups were composed of a particular sub-population of teachers interested in exploring anti-racism. While the focus groups highlighted the negotiation of collective constructions of events, including the contestation and reframing of versions of identities and events, the group dynamic tended towards consensus. It would be informative to analyze discussions of racism and anti-racism with disinterested or even hostile teachers, to explore how these teachers negotiate the topic. Interviews where reconciliation is not brokered between the parties can further highlight the rhetorical aspect of talk and argument (Billig, 1987). In depth interviews could also provide an opportunity to greatly expand on, and interrogate, teachers' constructions of place and identity.

The third area of research this thesis contributes to is that of anti-racist education. This research adds to the scant investigations of how teachers understand racism in Canada, corroborating earlier studies that indicated the vast majority of white educators do not recognize racism as pervasive within their institutions. Rather, as other theorists have indicated, teachers rely on a discourse of colour-blindness that obscures or erases the significance of race within teaching practice. As George Farkas (2003) has indicated, there is a significant possibility that generalized racist attitudes, conscious or unconscious, on the part of teachers and administrators contribute to racial inequities in education. However, the available evidence of the extent and consequences of teacher bias remains fragmentary. This research makes the modest contribution of highlighting the lack of racial cognizance among the staff, often denying or minimizing the significance of racism in education. This study also demonstrates that within a supportive environment, some teachers interested in anti-racism recognized racism as permeating the institution of the school as well as their own teaching practice.

It is clear that more research into the area of race and education is needed. As Farkas (2003) indicates, studies should continue to look directly at teacher attitudes. Possible avenues include interviewing, surveying, analyzing pre-service and in-service training, or even directly observing classroom interactions. In addition, it would be valuable to examine both marginalized and privileged students' perceptions of teachers' bias through surveys or interviews. And it would be useful to examine effective methods for staff intervention to address discrimination, exploring the impacts of different workshops and in-service presentations.

Through an examination of how teachers presented the school and teaching in relation to racism, this study also expands our understanding of how race and place are constructed in discourse. The role of place is often neglected in explorations of discourse. However, discourse purveys imaginations that are inherently social and spatial. Studying how those with power and authority construct the social and spatial can highlight often taken-for-granted ideas about space. These ideas are powerful resources that we draw upon to construct identity and negotiate responsibility. If we construct the school as a place of colour-blindness, then we imply that teachers are not racist and the problem of racism is contained outside the school. Such constructions of the school operate to deny

the assertions of marginalized community members about their feelings of isolation, alienation and victimization within a white institution. By contrast, if we situate the school as a place constituted by dominant forces in a racist society, the challenge of confronting racism is resituated as core to our own teacher practice and new opportunities for change are crafted.

Analyzing the relation between people's constructions of race and place remains a valuable avenue for continued research. People ground their identities in or foil their identities against places; but places also operate in discourses to legitimate particular social relations. Geographers need to interrogate how the constitution of places and identities contributes to the construction of particular versions of the world. One avenue I believe to be particularly valuable is investigating the production of innocence. While teachers maintained the innocence of their institution and themselves by denying that racism is a part of either, this is by no means the only way that place can figure in the production of identity and innocence. Throughout our colonial history, white people have situated our claims to innocence in our constructions of space. The travelogues of early artic explorer Samuel Hearne (1795) demonstrate how a harsh and abiding landscape can serve to mark his innocence. Instead of the bold crusader conquering new lands, Hearn narrates an anti-conquest, where the hero-explorer of the colonial encounter is staged as both passive and innocent (Pratt, 1992). Hearn diminishes his own agency, figuring himself as dependent on his Aboriginal guides for survival in the harsh and forbidding northern clime. The construction of landscape here functions as an integral aspect of colonialism. This occurs not simply in the manipulation and exploitation of geographical knowledge to dispossess Aboriginal knowledge in an effort to claim authority over space, but also, and perhaps more dramatically, in the facility with which white identities attain and silence their subjectivities in relation to these landscapes. As one of the most insidious barriers to achieving racial equity remains the persistent claim to innocence and denial of inequality by those holding power, naming the construction of these racialized spaces remains among the most necessary of tasks to create a truly inclusive society.

Evoking critical spaces for social change remains necessary and important. We need to construct uncomfortable, unfinished narratives that trouble our current locations (Thompson, 2003). We need to journey into the past to trouble the notions of who we are

and where we come from by examining quieted perspectives and stories. As bell hooks (1992) describes, we must create travel narratives into the past that are critical of the bourgeois aspect of touring. Discussing the practice of critical autobiography, Carol Schick and Verna St. Denis (2005: 389) suggest, "This implies going beyond normalized identity categories to examine experience through the social, economic and historic frames in which it is produced." These journeys require traversing – indeed living within – terrain that is both familiar and unfamiliar, grounds that are troubled. As we recognize some of the unpleasant hues of our current environment, there is hope that we can collectively develop the knowledge to re-vision our world as a place where everyone belongs as equals.

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# APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONAIRE

High School Teachers Perceptions of Racism Questionnaire

Please respond in paragraph format, multiple responses may be given.

1.  Describe in as much detail as possible any examples or incidents that you think indicate racism or racial insensitivity (whether or not you believe such incidents were intentional or unintentional) that you have witnessed, heard about, or experienced in your work in school(s).

2.  What were your thoughts about the particular incident(s)?

3.  Describe how you responded to the incident(s).

# APPENDIX B: INITIAL FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How do the survey results, presented on March 16th/17th, reflect the situation in today's classroom/school?

2. How does anti-racist anti-oppressive education fit into today's classroom/school?

3. How could anti-racist anti-oppressive education expand in the future?