

PERSONAL VIEWS OF RACISM IN WHITE FAMILIES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

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Abstract

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This exploratory phenomenological study examined how adult children developed an accepting stance toward racial diversity that differs from the racism present in their families of origin. Three women were interviewed. Data analysis explored how these individuals were influenced by their parents and how they were able to break away from the racist norms set by their parents. Themes found included: mothers' silence, fathers' dominant racist views, spirituality, discrepancy between religious teachings and parents' racist views, education, observing other races, shame, and personal turning points.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The question of how parents' racist attitudes influence their children is a complex one. According to Fishbein (2002) very few studies have actually tackled this issue since the 1960's. Of available studies, only a handful have investigated both the mother's and the father's views of race, and the conclusions were mixed as to what impact, if any, parents have on their children's racial attitudes.

Although recent studies show no strong correlation between parental racial attitudes and their children's racial attitudes, many people continue to hold the social learning view which states that attitudes are "acquired from socialization agents such as parents, siblings, teachers, and the media" (Rosenfield & Stephan, 1981, p. 274). Gordon Allport (1954) was the theorist who most notably promoted the view that children would attain racial attitudes from their parents.

The purpose of this study was to examine how adult children developed an accepting stance toward racial diversity that differs from the racism present in their family of origin.

This study was based on the principles of general systems theory. Broderick (1993) states "A general principle of systems theory holds that the processes of every system are necessarily shaped by the attributes of the particular subsystems from which it is composed" (p.54).

This theory is the basis of my view that whether or not a parent's opinion of race determines their child's view of race, the parental view influences the child's view. When children acquire views of racism that differ markedly from their families of origin, these children diverge from what would have been expected of them in maintaining homeostasis in their family systems. This exploratory study examined how individuals have developed an accepting stance towards racial diversity that differs from the racism present in their family of origin.

I reject the notion that individuals can be non-racist. Racism is both overt and covert. Often when we think of individuals as being racist, we think of blatant overt racism. Frequently we imagine extremist groups such as the KKK, or Aryan Nations when we conjure images of racism. I believe that racism lies on a continuum. Racism is fluid. Racism is often unconscious and "embedded in commonsense reasoning" (San Juan Jr., 2002, p.46).

There is relatively little written on the subject of familial attitudes and racism. As an adult who was reared in a family where there was and still is racism present, I hope to bring to life the stories of others who have struggled with similar concerns, and determine how they were able to subdue the racism in their own lives. Perhaps this study will open the door to more discussion and encourage others to tell stories of their own struggles of family and racism. Also, I hope to bring to life some of the questions that other researchers struggled with in their research on families and racism.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

I chose to do a qualitative study in order to listen to the stories from those who have experienced the struggle of working through their own personal racism and dealing with racism in their families. I began reading stories in Clark's and O'Donnell's (1999) book to see what others were saying about their own encounters with racism in their families.

The "Other"

Christine Clark (1999) writes about the first important lesson she learned in her personal process with racism. This was:

"...coming to realize on a conscious level, *seeing*, that I am white, that I am raced, and that I have culture, several in fact, from which I derive and practice cultural norms. I am ethnic too. The irony here is that because in some cosmological way I perceived the existence of the secret without fully knowing it, this perception led me to experience myself, as an 'outsider,' 'Other' is pathological in some sense because as a white, upper middle-class child, I was never 'other.' I knew this self-perception made me different from those whom I was

around, presumably family members..." (Clark 1999, p.96).

Arnold Cooper (1999) wrote "My mother and father never used racial epithets in front of my sister and I. Instead, they talked openly about their fear that 'those people' were going to move into the neighborhood" (p.112).

Secondly, Cooper noted how "the media abetted my misconceptions of people of color" (Cooper, 1999, p.112). He also stated that "the crucible for me came when I went south to study at Duke University for a graduate degree in history at the age of twenty-one. Several of my professors were northerners active in promoting awareness of racial inequities by encouraging students to participate in voter education campaigns or the picketing of a local Shoney's restaurant that refused to serve African Americans" (Clark & O'Donnell, 1999, p.113).

O'Donnell (1999) spoke of his first racial experience when he was on a bus trip with his grandmother:

As I peered through the window at the people standing on the corner, I remember excitedly telling my brother to 'look at those people they are...' [black or colored]. At that moment my grandmother brushed my hand from the window and said, 'Don't point at those people.' Her tone and her manner signified to me that

something was 'different' about those people
(O'Donnell, 1999, p.140).

Dating the "Other"

O'Grady (1999) wrote "We girls were warned that these 'boys' [black men] were dangerous criminals, and we should avoid them if we encountered them because they might hurt us. We were never warned about the white boys in the Job Corps"(p.123). She then went on to add:

When I was a sophomore in high school, word got around that an older girl...was dating an African American guy...Many of us asked our parents what they would do if we came home with an African American boyfriend. The answers were predictable. To our parents, it was worse than an interfaith marriage (O'Grady, 1999, p.125).

Silent mother

DeRosa (1999) wrote of experiences with her parents and prejudice in her family. DeRosa's parents decided they to move to New York. Although Long Island was not their first choice to find real estate, they began looking there. The real estate agent had warned her father that "blacks" are living on the other side of the house that they were interested in buying and they better reconsider. When her father brought this to her mother's attention her mother's

response was "So what?" DeRosa wrote of her mother, "She does not recall fighting him on the issue, and that was the end of that discussion. They eventually purchased a house in Franklin Square, where I grew up" (DeRosa, 1999, p.180).

Reading these stories sensitized me to themes that I might see in my research. They also validated my belief that these adults had been influenced by their families' views of race. Although today they may not hold the same views as their families, these racial moments were so powerful that after many years they still caused intense emotion.

Further Research

Although parents' influence on their children's racial views has recently been scrutinized, perhaps the most widely held belief about how children adopt their attitudes of race is Allport's (1954) social reflection theory. Allport stated that children will adopt racial attitudes that are similar to their parents by virtue of children wishing to please their parents. Aboud (1988) agreed that children do imitate their parents, but questioned if children will actually adopt their parents' attitudes.

Parents' views are not significant

Aboud (1988) found evidence that "children do not always adopt their parents' ethnic attitudes, and if they

do it is usually after 7 years of age" (p.88-89). She described research conducted by Davey (1983), Branch and Newcombe (1980; 1986), Spencer (1983), and Epstein and Komorita (1966) to support and illustrate her position.

Davey's (1983) research found no relationship between racial attitudes of parents and their children between the ages of 7 and 10 years. In this study parents and children were given tests measuring their attitudes towards their own ethnic identity and other ethnic groups. When the parents' and children's scores were examined there were no significant results supporting similarity of views.

Branch and Newcombe (1980) also found no correlation between parents' activism and children's prejudice. In this study 4 or 5 year old children were given the PRAM II and the Clark's doll test. In the Clark's doll test "children are given four white and black dolls and are offered either a positive or negative description of the dolls" (Fishbein, 2002, p.266). These children are then asked to pick the doll that best fits the description. Based on the responses on the questionnaires on the PRAM II, which looked at racial preferences or biases, there was no relationship between the parents' activism and children's prejudice. However, as Fishbein stated, the higher the mother's activism, the more pro-white the

children were (2002). The children of parents that were non-activists showed no racial prejudice.

Parents' Views are Somewhat Significant

In 1986, Branch and Newcombe administered the same instruments (as in their previous research in 1980) to parents of 6 and 7 year olds and found that there was a positive correlation between the views of parents and children: However the correlation was significant in only one out of every four parent/child pairs.

Spencer (1983) administered the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure to black children who were 3 to 9 years of age. Similar to Branch and Newcombe's (1986) research, findings were that "parental attitudes and strategies for discussing racial matters do not begin to be reflected in the attitudes of black children until after the age of 6 or 7" (Aboud, 1988, p.90).

In research on white children conducted by Epstein and Komorita (1966) it was found that white children's attitudes of ethnocentrism between the ages of 9-11 and their parents' attitudes were significantly correlated ($r = 0.48$), supporting Allport's claim.

Aboud (1988) cited research done by Carlson and Iovini (1985) which examined the relationship between black and white adolescent boys' attitudes and those of their

fathers. This research found that there was a modest positive relationship between white sons' attitudes and those of their fathers, yet no relationship between the attitudes of black sons and their fathers.

Most Recent Findings

In 1996 Aboud and Doyle examined white Canadian mothers and their 9 year old children. In this study the mothers and their children were given the PRAM II and the Multiresponse Racial Attitude Measure. These instruments were used to evaluate the responses of white, black, and Native Canadian Indian groups. These researchers found no significant correlation between the children's attitudes and their mother's attitudes.

The most recent study of prejudice in parents and children was done by O'Bryan, Fishbein, and Ritchey (1999). In this study parents were found to have a small, but positive, effect across 6 areas of prejudice, one being prejudice against black people. This study also found that it was the mothers who influenced their children's prejudice against blacks, not fathers.

Influences of racial attitudes

We cannot yet be certain exactly what role parents' attitudes play in the development of their childrens' racial attitudes. There is also discussion about what other

possible influences in shaping children's racial attitudes. Social learning theories suggest that prejudiced attitudes are learned not only from parents, but also from peers, and the media (Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2001).

Peers

There are, again, few studies which examine peers influence on the racial attitudes of children. Glock (1975) found that for anti-Semitism, there was a modest relationship between adolescents' attitudes and the attitudes of their peers. When looking at black prejudice in the same study, there was no correlation between the attitudes of peers. In research conducted by Aboud and Doyle (1996) neither of the instruments that were used found substantial relationships between whether or not a child chose a white friend over a black friend. The most recent research completed was by Ritchey and Fishbein (2001). This research also found that there were no significant correlations between adolescents' prejudices and stereotyping and their friends' prejudices and stereotyping.

Media

In studies conducted by Gorn, Goldberg, & Kanungo (1976), Graves (1999), Houser (1978), and Kraus (1972) data supported using media outlets to lessen prejudice. These

studies involved children ranging between the ages of 3 and 17.

Experience With Other Races

Towles-Schwen and Fazio (2001) concluded that interracial contact may reduce prejudice provided that "contact is of a noncompetitive nature, participants have equal status, participants have ample opportunities to become personally acquainted, and the contact is approved by relevant authorities" (p.164). They theorize that perhaps whites who have had a greater amount of experiences with different races in schools and neighborhoods would indeed have less prejudiced attitudes as adults. However, they note that little is known about the extent of transformation in these individuals. These authors speculate that perhaps any changes formed by interracial contact as a child may dissolve by adulthood. They refer to the research conducted by Aboud and Doyle (1996) and Aboud (1988), and state that perhaps there are certain ages at which interracial contact would be most effective at dismantling children's prejudice.

Personality

Fishbein (2002) highlights four different personality traits that relate to influencing racial attitudes. Those four are religious beliefs and practices, right-wing

authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, and humanitarianism-egalitarianism.

In research conducted by Bateson and Burris (1994) it was found that intrinsic relation to religion was related to low prejudice, whereas extrinsic orientation was related to high prejudice. They defined intrinsic orientation as "views religion as an end in itself, and serves as a 'master motive' in one's life" (Fishbein, 2002 p.273). They defined extrinsic orientation as one that "uses religion as a self-serving means to non-religious ends, such as forming good social relationships and gaining personal security" (Fishbein, 2002, p.273).

Duck and Hunsberger (1999) found that race prejudice was negatively correlated with intrinsic religious orientation and positively correlated with extrinsic orientation. Case, Fishbein, and Ritchey (2000) found that there was no relationship between religious orientation and racial prejudice.

Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) as defined by Fishbein (2002) is a "combination of three attitudinal clusters that are found in varying degree in all persons" (p. 277). These three clusters are Authoritarian Submission, Authoritarian Aggression, and Conventionalism.

Authoritarian submission refers to the belief that one should submit to the perceived authorities of the culture. You should accept at face value their statements and actions, and be willing to comply with their instructions. You act on the principle that authorities know best. Authoritarian aggression is the willingness to harm others, either physically, psychologically, or financially, whom you believe that the authorities in the culture want to see harmed, or would approve of you harming them. Authoritarian aggression serves, in part, to preserve the authority structure of a culture. Conventionalism refers to being strongly committed to and adhering to the social conventions or traditional social norms of a culture. People scoring high on this cluster believe that they authorities in the culture strongly support these norms (Fishbein, 2002, p. 277-278).

According to Altemeyer (1996) those with high RWA scores are much more likely to commit crimes against other races other than their own. They also help bring about and provoke intergroup conflict and they seek dominance over others.

Social dominance orientation (SDO) refers to the people who desire that those in their group - the ingroup -

be dominant over others perceived to be in the outgroup. In research conducted by Sidanius and Liu (1992) the higher one's SDO, the more likely one will believe in racial superiority. A higher SDO was also positively correlated with racism in research conducted by Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo (1996).

The Humanitarianism-Egalitarianism Scale was developed to assess the strength of a value system held by persons who have a shared outlook of their culture (Fishbein, 2002). Research has shown that college students with high humanitarian-egalitarianism scores have a more positive outlook towards blacks and were much lower in prejudice towards blacks (Golver, 1994). Research also suggested that students with high humanitarian-egalitarianism had more positive attitudes towards Mexican Americans and had fewer stereotypes towards illegal immigrants from Mexico (Cowan, Martinez, & Mendiola, 1997).

The research is mixed as to whom or what is the primary influence on children's racial attitudes. It is my belief that a number of factors are influential in some way, and for each person the mix of influences is unique. One child may be heavily influenced by a television show, another by a book, or a parent's statement. My objective was to explore, some of the influences that have a bearing

on children, particularly the words and behaviors of family members, and to begin to develop an understanding of their impact, even into adulthood.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This study was a qualitative, phenomenological research project looking into white family racism. Its' purpose was to explore the stories of white adult children raised in racist homes and to examine how these children have developed an accepting stance toward racial diversity.

Qualitative Research

Patton (1987) stated that qualitative research permits the evaluator "to study selected issues, cases, or events in depth and detail" (p.26). He also noted that qualitative data provides depth and detail through quotations and lengthy descriptions. Data analysis is guided by questions, issues, and a search for patterns, not by a specific hypothesis.

Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p.7-10) described qualitative research as having these characteristics:

1. Qualitative researchers are concerned with the meanings people attach to things in their lives.
2. Qualitative research is inductive.
3. In qualitative methodology the researcher looks at settings and people holistically; people, settings, or groups are not reduced to variables, but are viewed as a whole.

4. Qualitative researchers are concerned with how people think and act in their everyday lives.
5. For the qualitative researcher, all perspectives are worthy of study.
6. Qualitative research emphasizes how the people make meaning in their lives.
7. For the qualitative researcher, there is something to be learned in all settings and groups.
8. Qualitative research is a craft.

Phenomenology

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) describe the phenomenological researcher as one who "views human behavior, what people say and do, as a product of how people define their world" (p.11). They describe the task of the phenomenologist as one who "capture[s] how people construct their realities" (p.11).

Sample Selection

The participants for this study were selected using a convenience case sampling method. Although the results of these case samples are informative, I understand that they cannot be generalized to all people in similar situations.

Participants were recruited by questioning white graduate students in the Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, to see if any

fit the criteria of having been raised in homes with racism present, yet having developed an accepting stance towards racial diversity. Additionally I recruited white graduate students that were completing their practicum experience at the University Counseling Center at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. I found 3 individuals that met the criteria for inclusion in the study and who agreed to be interviewed. I purposely selected Stout graduate students from the MFT and Mental Health Counseling programs as participants for this study, since the coursework in these programs encourages and supports students in developing their skills in self-reflection, and specifically assists in self-exploration of their experiences of racism. I felt that this group of students, more than most people, might be more aware of racism and its influences, and more able to articulate their ideas on this topic.

Data Collection and Analysis

The graduate students who agreed to be interviewed were contacted in person or by phone and the interviews were scheduled. One participant chose to interview at her home, one at her office, and the other at the library at the university. The participants were given a set of research questions at least one day prior to the interview and were informed that these were some of the questions

that would be asked during the interview. The interviews were semi-structured, leaving some room for probes and follow-up questions. The questions asked were as follows:

1. Would you speak about how you saw racism play out in your family? What were some of the earliest racist experiences that you had?
2. What was your reaction to the realization that there was racism present in your family?
3. Was there acceptance of your views of racial acceptance in your family? If not, how did your family react?
4. Could you speak about the experiences that helped shape your view of racial acceptance?
5. How do you feel the experiences surrounding racism in your family have shaped who you are today?
6. Given your work towards racial acceptance, what do you feel you continue to struggle with? Does this relate to your family of origin? If so how?
7. Do you feel your family's views of race affected you? If so, how?

Prior to the interview I described the purpose and procedures of the research I was conducting and acquired informed consent from each individual. I transcribed each

interview after it was conducted. After all transcriptions were complete, I began to read them and look for themes.

Validity

One strategy to enhance qualitative validity is researcher reflexivity (Johnson, 1997). Prior to doing the interviews, I attempted to identify my personal biases regarding families and racism. While conducting interviews and analyzing the data, I attempted to set aside my assumptions and biases. There were times during the interviews when I had thoughts about questions that the participants posed and pondered, yet I kept my thoughts to myself in order to keep my personal biases out of the interview and to enhance the validity of the data.

I also employed a peer review of the transcripts to assist me in maintaining my objectivity, and in validating my interpretations of the data. The transcripts were reviewed by two graduate students who were familiar with qualitative research. Each was asked to identify themes present in the interviews and to look for my bias as a researcher. The reviewers found themes similar to those I found during analysis and affirmed my sense that I had not allowed my biases to influence the interviews.

Strengths of the Study

This study was strengthened by my profound interest in the subject that was being studied. Both Prior to and during the study, I invested a large amount of time and effort to exploring issues related to families and racism. In doing this study, my hope was that therapists as well as society would benefit from this research. Additionally, based on a personal knowledge of racism within my own family, I had the ability to ask pertinent questions.

This study was strengthened by my ability to provide structure to the interview, yet to allow the interviewee to take the interview to where they felt the most emotion. I allowed space for interviewees to create and convey the personal meanings of their experiences. I also transcribed each interview personally and in that process was able to become thoroughly familiar with the responses of the interviewees.

This study was strengthened by the participants who were chosen for the study. The participants had done some personal work exploring racism in their lives and may have been more aware of the effects of racism and oppression than those who have not done this work. I was personally acquainted with the participants, which may have resulted in their feeling safer to disclose their stories to me.

Limitations of the Study

The biggest limitation of this study was my lack of experience as an interviewer. I was new to the experience of doing qualitative research and at time during the interviews I was somewhat unsure about how to proceed. At times, while transcribing, I wished I had asked more probing questions. In the future I would plan to do short follow-up interviews to revisit responses and issues that weren't fully explored in the first interview.

The study was also limited by the small sample size. Although the information obtained was rich, obviously these stories will not generalize to the general population. They only provide clues for how to more fully explore this topic. The sample also included only female stories. There may be differences in how males and females come to their views of race.

My personal relationships with the participants may have been a hindrance in this study. Although they may have felt more comfortable in sharing because we had a previous relationship, it is also possible participants felt less comfortable sharing such personal experiences with someone they already knew.

As the researcher I must trust that the participants correctly recalled the events they spoke about in their interviews. At the same time, participants may have

struggled with admitting to biases or racist views that they had when they were younger, or even to their current views on race related topics.

Ethical Considerations

The participants were informed of the purpose of the interview and willingly consented. Each participant was informed that I would make a transcription of the interview. They were also informed that peer reviewers would read the transcripts, but that I would disguise or remove any information that might identify them.

I was also aware that following the interviews there was a possibility that, due to the sensitive and emotional nature of the topic, the participants might have become distressed. Because of this, each participant was given a list of mental health facilities in the area that could provide further assistance if such a situation arose.

Chapter Four

Analysis

After interviewing the participants I transcribed the interviews. After all three interviews were conducted, I gathered the transcriptions, reviewed them, and began to observe themes emerging from the stories that were told. There were both similarities and differences in the stories that were told. Many of the themes present echoed those explored in my reading.

Spirituality

The theme that was most significant across interviews was the enormous influence that the participants' spirituality played in their lives. Each of the interviewees had a difficult time with the discrepancy between what their parents were teaching them through their church involvement and religious upbringing and what their parents were teaching them at home.

H: What was your reaction to the realization that there was racism present in your family?

P2: Confusion. Um...cause like I said...he was so accepting of everyone else and my parents have always been generous with their time and money with people outside of the family, along with us kids of course. So I didn't see how that fit with their values and

beliefs that they always taught us, how to exclude one set of people...

H: Was there a certain set of values or beliefs that you felt really contradicted?

P2: (pause) Like...well...yeah! Because (laughing) I felt it was kind of hypocritical because my parents have always been very religious, and, um, you stay out on Saturday night you go to church on Sunday. That's the rule and umm...We went to Sunday school every Sunday, vacation bible school every summer. I taught it for a couple years. What else was there? My mom worked in the kitchen at vacation bible school.

Um...you know it was just the love your neighbor as yourself except for...So that was...Ya...I didn't get it.

Similarly, in interview #3 the participant spoke about how spirituality influenced her views of racial acceptance.

Now I remember as a little girl going to Sunday school and my mother was our teacher a lot of the time and I remember singing the song 'red and yellow black and white they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.'

At another point in the interview when asked what helped shape her views of racial acceptance she stated "It was that Sunday school idealistic stuff."

Participant #1 spoke the most extensively about her spiritual beliefs:

I wrestled with that a lot, and how I wrestled with that, you know, my dad would say kind of all of these racist things and then we'd go to mass every Sunday and we would hear love your neighbor. I'd hear all people are the same. You know, I'd hear messages coming from the pulpit like that and I would think, well, what I am learning, and when my dad is taking me to church every week does not match what he is saying!

Also when I asked participant #1 what experiences helped shape her view of racial acceptance she responded:

I think it started out in church. That was the biggest place. I think that for me, like I said, it just didn't fit with the values that the church was teaching and I took that pretty seriously when I was a kid. I thought okay, the way you get to heaven is to listen to these things.

While the research conducted by Batson and Burris (1994) found a correlation between intrinsic spirituality and a lower rate of prejudice, the findings in this study

suggest a somewhat different relationship between religion and participants' beliefs. While participants may not have developed intrinsic spirituality, their questioning of their parents was stimulated by the difference between what they were being taught at church and what they were being taught by their parents. The participants' parents were taking their children to church with the expectation that the children would follow what was taught by the church, but what was taught at the church contradicted what was taught to the children at home. This discrepancy seemed to open the door for participants to question their parents' views.

A Mother's Silence

In every interview each participants spoke about her mother's silence or passivity surrounding racism. This was also a theme in the story written by DeRosa (1999).

Interviewee #1 spoke the most about her mother's voice related to racism. She stated

I can always remember then...remember, you know, my mom joining in to the rhetoric [comments about blacks living in the area making the area undesirable], not completely buying into it, but using the rhetoric when she would speak with my dad...

At other points in the interview she stated, "I think my mom kind of goes along with my dad..." "Maybe my mom is more quiet," and "My mom's voice on racism was much quieter. She never stood up..."

When interviewee #2 spoke about from whom the racism came in her family she stated, "It was more my dad than my mom." Interviewee #3 stated that when she had questioned racism in her family she didn't understand why her mother did not contradict what her grandfather had stated because "I remember that and I thought, Ya, I'm on board, my mommy's on board, and then this incident with my grandfather was a little unsettling and I thought, hmm...grandma [the participant's mother] didn't learn that [acceptance of races] from him."

A Father's Roar/ "Not With My Daughter!"

In all three interviews the most predominant messages of racism were given to the participants by their fathers. Another prominent issue related to this theme was that two of the three interviewees had their most heated race related arguments with their fathers concerning dating or spending time with a black man, a theme that also was evident in O'Grady story (1999). Participant #2 stated:

It was more my dad than my mom...The first time I remember him saying anything that really struck me was

when I went off to travel school in Minneapolis and he said you better not bring home a black guy...

Participant #1 also felt that the racial slurs in her family were predominantly from her father. "I remember mostly racial slurs from my father. He used words like 'jap' and words like um, 'nigger'."

Participant #3 spoke about an experience where she was asked out on a date with a black boy from her school and her parents went "ballistic."

I mean they were spinning and they just kept going and the sparks were flying off and finally my father calmed down and he said, "You will not go on this date!" and I said, "I already told him I would!" [Her father said] "You will call him back and tell him you will not be going!" And I said "Why?" He seemed to be a tolerant person, what was this all about? "You guys tell me that we are supposed to..." and he said "because..." and I saw him think. My dad was a negotiator for his electrical utility with labor unions and when he stopped and thought, he was trying to find a way to frame it and I could tell that. He said "Because if you go out with him there will be a lot of other white boys who would never ever ever consider dating you." And I said to him, "Well if

they are that narrow minded why would I want to go out with them anyway!" and he said "You might feel differently later." I said "Well I don't think I am going to." He started getting mad again and said "Well you are not going!" And I said "What's wrong I already told him I'd go! If you only want me to go once I can understand that, but that's stupid for me to call him and say I can't go cause you have a problem with it." [Her father responded] "You will not go and if he shows up here to pick you up I will go out and tell him to leave!"

Education

A theme that came from interviews that was not spoken about in previous literature was education. Two of the three participants spoke about how the self-exploration encouraged by their education had aided them in their own process of racial acceptance.

Participant #2 stated "What helped me the most [with racial acceptance] was the class that we had with [a teacher] here...that really opened my eyes quite a bit."

Participant #1 stated:

I would have to say I had school experiences after that. I had a class in cultural comp[etence] which was entitled sociology and ethnicity, or something

like that, as a lead into this program and to finish up my undergrad. I got statistics, and I got, I had to write things for a completely different perspective. I had a teacher who was really culturally competent and challenged us at every turn and I realized my own privilege for the first time. So that was a real turning point and then of course [a teacher's] class, where I had to just challenge absolutely everything I know, turn it upside down, find a feeling to go with it, scrape my gut, come up with some writing, and it made me realize that I not only had been racist but that I have been privileged in all of those other things and actually had to put myself into those shoes and admit some really hard things for myself.

Another important part of the education for both of these participants was that they were required to face their privilege as a white person. Participant #1 stated, "I realized my own privilege for the first time..." Participated #2 stated that her education helped her to realize:

I take my position in society for granted. I really do...and when I walk into places and I see people of different cultures I go 'ugh.' It isn't as easy for them as it is for me to just walk in, don't have a

care. I don't think about people following me around in the mall.

Shame

The shame surrounding racism was also evident throughout the interviews of two participants. Shame was evident in their stories of the past, and it also seemed to persist during their interviews. Both interviewees stated their discomfort with themselves because of the racism that was present in their family.

P2: I don't think I'd ever talk about those experiences [racism in her family] with someone of another race. I wouldn't want to tell people how racist my family was, just because I don't want them to see me and see that as a reflection on me. And they might just say "that's your family, that's not you."

H: Have you ever spoken with anyone about it? I mean any friends or family?

P2: You mean other than classmates?

H: So you *did* speak about it in class then?

P2: Just in small groups and that was not a very diverse group either. I think we only had, well the instructor was African-American and there were two

Asian women in there. I don't think there were any other cultures represented.

H: So you felt somewhat comfortable in that class?

P2: Ya. I felt comfortable writing about it because I couldn't see her reaction then and I didn't know if she was going "oh my god" you know...

When interviewee #1 stated the racial slurs that her father used she stated, "Excuse me, I hate to say it [racial slurs]. I feel like I should wash my mouth out with soap after I say that." It was interesting to hear this in the beginning of the interview as later, towards the middle of the interview, she stated, "You know when I first realized it [racism in her family], it was like the words and my own personal shame." She also stated that it is almost "like I'm carrying my ancestry with me, because I come from a racist family."

The "other"

When the participants were asked what they felt they continued to struggle with, two of the participants spoke about the discomfort they felt when they related to people of other races. They spoke about not knowing exactly how to act, what to do, or what to say.

Participant #1 spoke about her experience of working with a colleague of another race. "You know, like for

instance today in the clinic, I was really nervous about talking to [a colleague of another race]. I was like, is he going to take this the wrong way? Is he that much different?" At another time during the interview she stated:

Well, I still think, you know, like that mystery of races that I haven't had much contact with. If I haven't had a contact with that race, I feel like that shame come up again. I don't know what to say or do. Maybe that person isn't going to understand me or maybe I'm a caveman myself in a certain respect...I still have that mystery of maybe there is a race that I haven't found that's going to be [different].

Participant #2 stated "I continue to struggle with my fear of offending someone of another culture by something that I do that's just normal for me." Later in the interview she stated, "I still don't know how to start a relationship or even conversation with some[one] of another race. You know, I just don't want to walk up and say 'I'm white and you're black let's talk!' She also spoke about the experience she had had living in a large diverse city when she went to college for the first time. All of the women in her dorm were white except one woman who was from Africa. "I always wanted to go talk to her but I never

knew what we had in common, so, I never knew what to say. How can you start a conversation? So it was just 'Hi!' and 'Haw' and that's about it."

Stereotypes

The family members that projected racist views toward the participants were also more likely to have believed in racist stereotypes. The stereotypes that participant #1 spoke of were: "Black people steal and they are bad you know." "I was taught, you know, all blacks, you know, live in the ghetto and can't read or write." Participant #2 stated that she also received the message that all blacks came from the "ghetto."

In participant #1's situation, she was witness to situations where she saw that the stereotypes she was told were not true.

Judy [an acquaintance], the African-American girl, she was like our valedictorian and so she was kind of like my brainy friend! We would discuss things, you know, so I had this complete different experience of race than what I was taught.

Observing Other Races

Two of the participants also spoke about experiences they had with other races, experiences which contradicted the stereotypes they'd been told in their family. This may

have happened when they watched a television program, ate at a restaurant, or shopped at a bakery. Participant #1 stated:

I guess another way I would weigh it out was, we'd go into the city and have like ethnic experiences, like, we'd go into China town and go into a Chinese restaurant, and you know, um, the people around, the family around the restaurant were nice and polite and accommodating, and I'm like, well, they are people! They are like a family, they live upstairs, whatever. It's not like, I felt like, well, it's not like they are so different. But I find it ironic that my dad would subject me to all these kind of more ethnic experiences with him.

Participant #2 questioned the entertainment that her dad watched on television.

I remember, I don't know why this is coming up, but I just remember my dad just loved Archie Bunker and All In The Family, and then George Jefferson came on as the neighbor. He would just roar [laugh] when George was on there. He thought he was so hilarious! So I just couldn't get it...

Participant #1 also spoke on the subject of television as one of the factors that influenced her racial perceptions.

There was a lot of violence in the sixty's and that was when I first started watching TV as a little kid and I would see people being beat and um, you know, I couldn't really make sense out of that. So that always fit the image of violence stands out in my mind too. If you're not supposed to hurt others, then why is this happening? What's going on?

Contradictions

One common theme that seemed to ring true with every participant was the contradiction around race in their families. The inconsistencies that the parents demonstrated with their children began to shape the children's views of racial acceptance. These children asked questions. They wanted their parents' views clarified, but as Interviewee #1 stated "no one had a really good answer. It was like, you know, what parents say to kids, 'Because I said so!'"

Participant #2 stated "It was kind of hypocritical..." and later in the interview stated:

It just didn't fit how he really, how he lived his life. He was so accepting of everyone else. He was a mailman so he was around tons of people everyday on

his routes. It blew me away that he would be so judgmental about certain things...but, ya, that confused me...

Participant #3 also stated her frustration with her father when he did not give her the answers she was seeking about why she was not allowed to go out on a date with the black boy in her school. After her father wouldn't give her the answers she was looking for and forbade her to see that boy ever again she stated, "And I thought *man* that's overkill."

The Turning Point

One of the most powerful themes in the interviews was the turning point, the moment in two of the women's lives when they took a stand in opposition to their parents. The stand stemmed from the morals and values that had been instilled in the interviewees, most often by their religious institutions.

Interviewee #3 spoke about the experience when she was forced, by her father, to tell the black boy she was going to go out with that she couldn't go with him or ever speak with him again.

I cried and cried and cried and cried and cried. I went to school the next day and I told him what had happened. He looked at me with pure hatred and he

slammed the locker and stormed off, our lockers were nearby. I was hurt so badly 'cause I felt like I had been forced to do this immoral thing, this ghastly horrible cruel thing to another human being. I slid down my locker and I crumbled on the floor and I sat right in the front of my locker crying...and it was at that moment that I decided my parents were never ever ever going to make me throw my integrity away...

Participant #1 also spoke of an experience that hit her "core."

When I got to college then and had a broader group of friends, um, that opened my eyes and actually, I had my first friends that were gay and that was very similar to me, you know, like an eye opening experience to me because I think I realized at that point that I was bisexual. So to me that like opened my lens to diversity and um, I was like, I almost had a fist fight with my father over that one, you and your gay friends and blah blah blah...and that hit my core...and he said those gay friends of yours mean more to you than your family and I said they treat me more like my family too. That kind of ended it, but that really shaped, you know, not only how I thought about race, but how I thought about people and just my

own struggle to fit in and not feel weird...so I was identifying myself with the underdog so to speak.

During the interviews these experiences still elicited intense emotion although they had happened many years ago.

Chapter Five

Discussion

All of the participants interviewed received much stronger racist views from their fathers than from their mothers. Why were their fathers much more overt with their racism than their mothers? Perhaps these white males were unaware of their own privilege. At times during the interviews it seemed as though it was much more about keeping their own power than it was about their personal views of another race. It was obvious throughout the interviews that these men had an authoritarian style of parenting. As participant #3 stated, "Children didn't have opinions." Also, two of the interviewees were given very strong messages of non-racial acceptance when they were being launched from their homes. This may have been a time when the interviewees' fathers were feeling as though they were giving the control or power over the participants that they had when their daughters were living at home. As a result, their racist views were an extension of the fathers' frustration in no longer having control over their daughters' lives.

The power dynamic may also explain why interviewees' mothers were silent or passive in their views of racism. Typically if these fathers did not allow their children to

express opinions, they may not have allowed their wives to express opinions. These homes may have been patriarchal: neither children nor women seemed to have a voice, at least related to racial matters.

The issues of power and authority might also explain the experiences that some interviewees had with people of other races. Interviewee #1 questioned why her father would have taken her to places where she stated she had "ethnic" experiences. She spoke about her father bringing her to China Town for dinner or a show, to the Jewish part of town to buy baked goods, or to the Italian part of town for food. Participant #2 also stated that she did not understand why George Jefferson was "okay" on television, but black people were not "okay" in real life. In all of these experiences the fathers in these families were in a position of authority. The people of other races were in a position of serving these white men in some way. George Jefferson was in the position of entertaining the father of participant #2. Participant #1 and her father were being waited on or entertained by a Chinese family. During each of these situations their fathers had power and authority over the people of other races or ethnicities. These men would then assume that the non-whites they are associating with are not threatening to their family, whereas, if a

non-white person were to enter a relationship with their daughter, the fathers may then be threatened.

It is interesting to speculate about the language used by the fathers. If these men had not been as outlandish in their racist remarks, the participants in these interviews might have believed more of what their parents were trying to teach them regarding race. As participant #3 stated it was "overkill." At times during the interviews it seemed that the participants felt the racist remarks they were given were so bizarre that no one with common sense would agree with them. Also since these families grouped all blacks into stereotyped characterizations, the participants were able to see evidence contrary to the typecasting; this discredited what they had been told by their families.

The contradictions were also another enormous part of children questioning their parents' views of race. From the children's perspective, the parents did not "practice what they preached." The interviewees' parents were instilling religious values in their children which stated they should love their neighbor and that "Jesus loves the little children." However, the parents did not express or practice these values in relation to blacks.

As the participants grew older and had their own experiences with others, discovered their personal

opinions, and found their own voices, they held strongly to their own opinions, whether or not their fathers felt that their opinions mattered. It was then, as participant #3 stated, that she decided "My parents were never ever ever going to make me throw my integrity away".

Language

Bias is often hidden in language. Therefore, I decided to pay attention to the particular language the participants used. I questioned, at one point, whether or not to include language used in the interviews under the theme of "shame." I struggled with whether or not the participants were trying to minimize and/or make excuses for why their fathers were racist, or if they were well intentioned and simply giving their fathers the "benefit of the doubt."

During one interview participant #2 stated "My dad grew up in really small towns and um, he was born in 1926 so that gives you a little bit of history on his age and group." Interviewee #1 spoke about her dad as "kind of a harsh guy." Having personally experienced the feeling of shame that was spoken about in these interviews, I wondered if interviewees used this type of language to feel less shame in describing their fathers' racism.

Whites tend to correlate race with people of color and to associate whiteness with racelessness. This tendency was illustrated by Clark (1999) in describing her developing awareness that she, as a white person, was raced. This intriguing issue was evident throughout the interview with participant #2, who stated, "Well the instructor was African-American and there were two Asian women in there and I don't think there were any other cultures represented." This participant failed to see that there may have been many other cultures represented, but because the remainder of her classmates were white, they were not "cultured."

Using Spirituality in Opposition to Racial Acceptance

I also found it interesting that although spiritual beliefs tended to contradict the racist values of the participants' parents, there was one instance where participant #2 stated that her father used a quote from the bible "out of context" to justify his position that it was wrong for African-American men to marry white women. Later in the interview when I asked if her family's views of race affect her she stated:

I still, I hate to admit it, but I still have a thing about interracial marriage, black and white. I still, and I, it has to go back to what my dad said about,

you know, you don't mix. There is something in there [the bible], it can be taken out of context and I don't think that is what they meant, but, don't mix blood with whatever. I wish I knew the exact verse and I could tell you but, ya, that came up around the same time. See I still have issues with interracial marriage, um, but only black and white.

I found this discussion fascinating. Although she felt that she had a conscious awareness of her biases, this seemed to be one that she was unaware of. This interaction with her father seemed to be the only time he had given her an answer or explanation for his views, yet she continued to carry that bias. Perhaps the very reason she carried this bias was because it was based on a source that was semi-credible at the time.

The Struggle

In one situation a participant became perplexed when her father seemed to have evidence that supported his racist ideology. Participant #1 spoke at length of the "struggle" she went through, weighing an incident that seemed to support some of her fathers claims, and what she personally believed was the truth. She spoke about an incident where her father was stabbed at work by a black man. She stated, "Well, I think that thing about my dad

being stabbed by an Africa-American really challenged, was one of the most challenging things for me because it confirmed my dad's view. That made me question what I was learning and what I was starting to believe on my own..."

Future Research

It would be interesting in future research to extend this study by interviewing others who have had similar struggles and to explore how they grappled with the conflicting views inside themselves.

Another intriguing area to study in the future may be the role that oppression (in any form) plays in these families. It seemed throughout these interviews that women and children were also oppressed within the family.

A useful area of research could also be the relationship between styles of parenting and racial acceptance. The fathers in these interviews seemed to use an authoritarian style of parenting. Would children raised in authoritative homes be more likely to have accepting views of race? How would children raised in permissive homes view race and those who are racially different?

Chapter Six

Summary

It was evident throughout the interviews that the participants struggled with what they personally felt towards nonwhite people and what their parents felt about other races. Shame was one feeling that was evident throughout the interviews. Fathers were often the greatest contributor of racist, frequently stereotypical, messages and mothers were often silent or passive in their views of race. Spirituality had been a vital influence to the participants' views of race. Education and experiences with people of other races were also influential in the development of participants' views of racial acceptance.

At least in the stories that were told by participants in this study, it was evident that parents' views of race did indeed affect their children. Most of the experiences recounted in the interviews happened many years in the past, yet the stories continued to be linked to intense emotion. The participants spoke about the racial struggles that they continued to grapple with currently in their lives which they believed were related to their families of origin.

Personally this process has been a long and intense journey. It was challenging to listen to the pain and the

shame that was evident in the interviews, and yet I felt blessed to have participants trust me enough to share their views so openly. Although the participants were not aware of it, my own personal experiences were often similar to the stories they told. The stories I heard made me wonder how many other stories have not yet been told.

My German-Russian grandmother once told me, before I left home for the first time, to remember who I am and where I came from and everything else in the world will fall into place. I often wonder how we can truly create change without knowing where it is that we came from. My desire for doing this research was to bring awareness to others (and to myself) about the long-term effects of racism in families. My hope is that sharing these stories will invite others to reexamine their own pasts, including those biases that still have influence, and thus, assist them to confront and move away from those biases.

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