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ARTICLE

Seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers: what a White emerging scholar learned about positionality in research with racially diverse practitioners

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ABSTRACT

Framed by autoethnographic methods, I use Milner's framework for researching around race and culture to critically analyze my work as a researcher with a group of diverse educational administrators. I identify seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers that I experienced in my research as a white doctoral student and university professor, and consider how they impact my development as an educational researcher. I conclude with implications for doctoral students as emerging scholars interested in researching race as well as implications for researchers working with elites.

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For the past 10 years, I have had the opportunity to serve as a researcher documenting the learning of a superintendent network sponsored by an educational foundation. I began this work as a doctoral student studying school reform. At that point in time, I had taught middle school for nine years in the San Francisco Public Unified School District. Three of these nine years, I helped to open a school that was then effectively closed when the school board chose to relocate it. Throughout these years, I participated in and/or witnessed limited success of a range of equity-focused reform efforts, and I watched committed equity-oriented educators struggle to effect systems wide change. These experiences led me to doubt the possibilities for equity-focused school reform even as I took this research position. However, the position provided me with the opportunity to engage in research with my dissertation advisor around an aspect of schooling—central office administration—that was new to me. Despite my doubts, I found hope in the equity vision of the educational foundation that supported the network and the commitments of the foundation officers for equity-focused school reform. The foundation drew on Singleton & Linton's (2006) work in defining equity as eliminating the predictability of students' background in determining academic outcomes. For foundation officers, all of their work related to K-12 education is grounded in this definition, including the creation of this network.

Ten years later, as an assistant professor of educational leadership, I would like to take a few moments to reflect on how this opportunity has supported my development as an emerging scholar in the field of educational leadership. In particular, this network's focus on issues of race and racism resonated with my beliefs about the nature of schooling and the challenges of school reform. Working with the network has provided a foundation for my emerging line of inquiry

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around the development and support of equity-focused K-12 administrators. As a White person, my racialized experiences in the U.S. as a student and teacher often worked to make race hidden. In this network, I have been pushed to recognize race and whiteness explicitly. Milner's (2007) framework for reflecting on positionality, especially around race and culture has provided a useful way for me to reflect on my experiences in this work. Engaging with Milner's framework pushes me to think about what it means to be an emerging White scholar in the field of educational leadership, to engage in research with administrators from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and to talk and write about race in productive, thoughtful ways.

My engagement with the network's facilitation team—a group of six current and past educators who serve as foundation officers, consultants, and university professors (including my doctoral advisor)—in particular has had a powerful influence on how I think about race and racism in educational leadership. This facilitation team was unique in my K-12 experience because of its heterogeneity—the six facilitators include three Black and three White individuals, three former district-level administrators, three university professors, five men and one woman, with ages ranging from mid 40s to early 70s, with one person earning tenure at a university and two beginning retirement (which meant involvement with the network but no full-time employment). I started discussing this heterogeneity by listing individuals' races, and while all of the group's heterogeneities have supported my learning, it is the opportunity to engage in research with a racially mixed group of educators that has most pushed my thinking around race in educational leadership and research that is the focus of this article. To begin, I first position this work within the literature on race and researcher positionality, including studies of whiteness as well as literature on ways to center race and culture in the research process. Next, I discuss autoethnographic methods and my process of analysis for this paper. Then, I share two vignettes that occurred during my involvement with the network. After discussing the vignettes, I analyze them using Milner's (2007) ideas of different challenges that researchers face in engaging in work around race, and consider how his ideas might apply to work around race with educators involved in K-12 public education from various standpoints. Finally, I share some of the implications of my work with this network for myself as an emerging scholar and consider potential implications for doctoral students and researchers in the field of educational leadership.

Whiteness, culturally sensitive research, and how I know the world

Scheurich and Young (1997) coined the term 'epistemological racism' to unpack ways that race presents epistemological problems in educational research, arguing that the majority of foundational philosophers, scholars, and thinkers in the U.S. who 'have developed the ontological and axiological categories … .that we use to think … and that we use to socialize and educate children' (p. 8) have almost all been White—these thinkers have constructed the practice of educational research, embedding within it their beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives. The majority of the research epistemologies in the U.S. come from White social history. Alternate epistemologies have been and are being developed to support researchers in understanding this history and develop new ways to engage in research (Collins, 2002; Dillard, 2000; Smith, 1999; Solorzano & Yasso, 2001; Tillman, 2002). Smith's (1999) work on decolonizing methodologies, for example, challenges Western ways of research. She calls for indigenous research, asking whether non-indigenous researchers can conduct research with indigenous peoples and how they can do so through a non-imperialist lens. Reading these scholars as a White researcher working with participants from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds supports me in the understanding of my own culturally specific knowledge, as Tillman (2002) suggests, as well as that of the individuals with whom I work. Collins's (2002) discussion of the outsider within—Black female scholars' standpoint as members of the academy that keeps them on the margins—pushes me to think about positionality as complex and intersectional.

Whiteness studies is another approach that offers an alternate to epistemologies that are implicitly based on White social history but do not explicitly recognize this reality (Leonardo, 2002). whiteness does not just refer to people's skin color; rather it 'refers to hegemonic racial structurings of social and material realities . . . .that perpetuate racialized inequalities and injustices' (Jupp, Berry, & Lensmire, 2016, p. 1154). Whiteness is constituted by dynamic, relational processes and practices (DiAngelo, 2011). Multiple subjectivities exist among individuals who are White, including ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation, amongst others, meaning that there is not one uniform experience of whiteness. At the same time, individuals with a White identity all experience aspects of privilege in the U.S. in K-12 education and beyond (Banks, 2001; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Much of the focus of Whiteness studies in education has centered on White preservice teachers (Jupp, Berry, & Lensmire, 2016; Marx, 2004; Matias & Zemblyas, 2014; Picower, 2009), in part, a result of the predominance of White teachers in U.S. public schools where the majority of students are students of color (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016). While most educational leaders (superintendents, principals, etc.) in the U.S. are also White, Blackmore (2010) argues that 'the whiteness of educational leaders is rarely questioned' (p. 45). While much research has focused on the experiences of leaders of color in the U.S., primarily conducted by scholars of color, (Horsford, 2010; Jackson, 1996; Ortiz, 2001; Scott, 1990), it is only recently that whiteness has emerged as a research focus, with initial findings that suggest White administrators have difficulty talking about whiteness or understanding racism as a systemic issue (McMahon, 2007). Scholars of whiteness studies argue that White educators need to recognize their racialized history and understand its impact on their identity and development (Leonardo, 2002).

Performing whiteness is another central concept in the literature. For Cooks (2003), whiteness refers to 'a set of rhetorical strategies employed to construct and maintain a dominant White culture and identities' (p. 246). From this perspective, drawing on the work of Butler (1990), race exists through the performance of race—specific acts are coded as White. Individuals are not White per se; rather they perform whiteness through a series of acts repeated over time (Warren, 2001). When I was student teaching, my understanding of my whiteness was challenged by one of my 8th graders, a first-generation Vietnamese student, who asked me if I was Vietnamese. As a native English speaker with pale, peach skin, I was surprised and asked her why she asked me that question. She said that she saw the Vietnamese language newspaper on my desk. For this student, race/ethnicity was performed through language—they were not given categories based on skin color. Since individuals repeat certain acts and not others, their performances constitute race—at the same time, performativity theory includes the potential for transformation and deconstruction of what seems to be natural (Warren, 2001).

Focusing on performativity and whiteness is a useful start for this process because it makes whiteness visible in ways that many White Americans avoid (Case, 2012; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The concept of White fragility acknowledges the 'social environment that protects and insulates [White people in North America] from race-based stress' (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 54). From this perceptive, DiAngelo goes on to explain how discussions of race often lead White individuals to engage with anger, silence, or guilt. She argues that most White Americans are racially isolated—they interact predominately with other White individuals and thus have 'reduced psychosocial stamina' (p. 56). In other words, when even a small incident, comment, or question occurs, White individuals almost immediately engage in defensive behaviors.

For all educational researchers, and especially for those who are White and/or see their racial identity as invisible, the literature on qualitative research is clear: it is critical to unpack their researcher positionality—that way that their race, background, and culture serve as the lens through which they engage in, conceptualize, conduct, and write about research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). Much of this literature, from scholars of color and White scholars, has focused on power dynamics between researchers and participants, with researchers coming to the work from a position of power as a result of their backgrounds, university affiliations, and other types of

privilege (Knight, 2011; Mantzoukas, 2004; Milner, 2007; Pollock, 2001; Siddle Walker, 1999). This literature highlights the need for researchers to reflect on their experiences, maintain an awareness of their positionality, and engage in collaborative and reciprocal research projects. Culturally sensitive research (CSR) guides researches on how to center questions of culture, race, and identity—of both the participants and the researchers (Siddle Walker, 2005; Tillman, 2002). Of note, Tillman's (2002, 2006) framework for CSR, developed out of her research on African American educational experiences, requires that researchers examine their own positionality in relation to participants. She suggests that researchers' culturally specific knowledge interacts with the culturally specific knowledge of their participants, whether they share a similar culture or not.

Drawing on critical race theory and the literature on race in education, Milner (2007) developed a framework to support researchers in 'a process of racial and cultural consciousness as they conduct education research' (p. 388). His framework guides researchers in working through some of the challenges of engaging in questions of race and culture throughout the research process. The framework's four tenets include researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from the self to system. For the first two tenets, Milner poses a series of questions to support researchers in engaging in the key ideas, which may be specifically difficult for researchers from dominant cultures. Almost all of these questions are followed by the question, 'How do I know?' For example, in terms of researching the self in relation to others, Milner asks, 'What are the racial and cultural heritage and the historical landscape of the participants in the study? How do I know?' (p. 395). Milner calls on researchers to reflect on their backgrounds and that of their participants and to consider the evidence they are using to support their understandings.

Milner (2007) suggests that this framework can help researchers to navigate seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers that prevent them from engaging in careful, thoughtful research around race and/or with participants who are of different racial and cultural backgrounds. The seen dangers refer to those that emerge explicitly as a result of a researcher's decisions; unseen dangers are those that are hidden or implicit or dangers that a researcher is not conscious of, and unforeseen dangers are those that are unexpected. Framed by autoethnography, I first use Milner's depictions of these three types of dangers to analyze two vignettes in my research experience, and I then use his framework to support my thinking about researcher positionality in my work on race with the network's facilitation team.

Methods

Autoethnographic methods call on the writer to focus both inward and outward through 'the interplay of the introspective personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation' (Ellis, 2004, p. 38). Autoethnography embraces researchers' subjectivities and calls on them to connect the personal to the cultural, social, and political within their research (Ellis, 2004; Humphreys, 2005; McClellan, 2012). As such, autoethnography is a powerful method for understanding research with racially diverse current and former educators, especially in the field of educational leadership, where faculty and practitioners often experience difficulty discussing race in constructive ways (Carpenter & Diem, 2013; López, 2003; Rusch & Horsford, 2009; Tatum, 2007; Young & Laible, 2000). Providing a critical study of how I have developed and continue to develop as a researcher in this context can support the reflection of scholars engaged in similar work.

Autoethnography in educational leadership is an emerging field, with scholars giving attention to their experiences around issues of race and racism. One approach to autoethnography, new to educational leadership, involves researchers engaging participants in autoethnographies. One of the first studies taking this approach is Theoharis' (2007) empirical study using principles of autoethnography to develop a theory of social justice leadership. In this study, he included

himself as one of the participants, making the 'work more personal and reflective' (p. 225). He had another principal interview and he assigned himself a pseudonym. In doing so, he placed his work as a principal and his analysis as a researcher within the sociocultural context of K-12 educational leadership in the U.S. Contrasting this use of autoethnography, Garza (2008) focused his work on developing a descriptive analysis of his experiences as a first-time superintendent and the difficulties of enacting social justice leadership within a rural district in southern Texas. Although Garza's analysis included brief, one to two paragraph diary-type entries of his experiences, Castañeda's (2011) autoethnography included narrative story-telling of her childhood and her path toward educational administration as she analyzed the culture of measurement within schools in the U.S. While these scholars take up autoethnography in different ways, they all focus on social justice leadership within sociocultural contexts, reflecting on race, politics, systems of oppression, and possibility as K-12 school leaders and researchers.

Building off of this foundation, in this study, I reflect on my work as a researcher of K-12 educational leadership. Using autoethnographic methods, I focus on my experiences of the facilitation team and network and how I continually work to understand how race operates in my interactions and writing. I make no claims to generalize my experiences in any way; rather my intention is to embed my critical reflections within the larger sociocultural contexts of race and racism within the U.S. In doing so, I hope that this piece elicits reflection for its readers around how they engage race in their work.

Research context

This research takes place within the context of the superintendent network and facilitation team that developed, implemented, and supported the work of the network over 10 years. The executive director of the foundation proposed the initiative and invited two foundation consultants and two university professors to join him and the assistant executive director as a facilitation team to support the network. The facilitation team began the meeting in the summer and fall of 2008, working with a pilot group of superintendents to create a network that would support their growth as systems-level instructional leaders.

The network's inaugural meeting was held in December of 2008, with a group of 16 superintendents who were recruited through the facilitation team members' contacts. These superintendents represented urban, rural, and suburban districts with different student demographics and local histories; they included first-year superintendents and those who had been in the position for over 20 years. Since then, over 40 superintendents have participated in the network; about one-third are Black, Latin, or Asian, and about two-thirds are White; about one-third are female and about two-thirds are male. Entering the network's 10th year, two superintendents who were part of the original 16 are still members. After the first year, new superintendents are invited to join the network through nominations by current members.

The network meets once a month during the school year, focusing on various activities related to equity-focused, systems-level leadership. Superintendents develop their theories of action during network meetings, working together to identify key leverage points to impact their systems. In the past few years, the network has begun having explicit conversations related to race and racism three to four times a year, using Singleton and Linton's (2006) work on courageous conversations as a foundation. Every year, the network invites equity-focused district leaders from across the country to share their experiences in school reform as well.

Data sources

I draw on two data sources: researcher memos and debrief notes. Over the past 10 years, I have written about 80 memos after participating in network activities. I used an open-ended format

for these and wrote about what stood out to me, what questions I had, or how the activity connected to my dissertation, a course I was taking, or a journal article I was working on.

I wrote debrief notes after I participated in planning and network meetings. In the early years, I did this by myself after a meeting, focusing on how the meeting addressed the question of how the network is impacting superintendent learning. I frequently carpooled with another facilitation team member; we often spent over an hour, stuck in traffic, discussing what had happened at the network's activities and our interpretations of the events in terms of superintendent learning. In the later years of the project, I often wrote debrief notes as we drove.

Whenever something occurred that was particularly interesting to me personally, I would joke that 'This is definitely going into my autoethnography!' (I had been learning about autoethnography in my methods courses.) These jokes, about an unwritten manuscript, helped me handle moments of discomfort, such as being called 'sir.' I am a cisgender female, and perhaps due to my short hair or pantsuit, I am occasionally identified as male. Once, I was followed into a women's restroom by a security guard, banging on the door for me to come out because he thought I was a man. Thinking about this potential manuscript also helped me to process racialized tensions within meetings.

There was no set format to the debrief notes; sometimes I just sent myself an email with one or two things to think about; other times, my colleague and I drafted full paragraphs on the road. Over 10 years, I had amassed dozens of emails, sent to myself or to my colleague, and about 50 files, that contained debrief notes.

Data analysis

I began my analysis by reviewing the memos and debrief notes. Some were short, some in list form, and others quite lengthy. I first read the data to identify memos or debriefs that could best help me think about my development as a researcher in the field of educational leadership around issues of race. In reading the data, two incidents repeatedly arose across multiple memos and debrief notes. The first was around racist artwork and the second was around a journal article I had co-written that focused on race in the network. Across multiple years and in different ways, I wondered about each incident, feeling alternately concerned, stressed, saddened, angered, or confused. In both incidents, race was explicitly salient in my work with the facilitation team.

Because of my perceptions of the salience of race in the incidents and the frequency they were mentioned within the data, I chose to focus this study around the two incidents. Doing so could help me to better think both about myself as a researcher with racially diverse educators and also about my racialized identity as an emerging scholar. I began by constructing a vignette of each incident, in which I described what occurred from my perspective, including my thinking at the time and my understanding, if any, of other individuals' perspectives. In drafting these vignettes, I drew on Richardson and St. Pierre's (2008) understanding of writing as a method of inquiry. Writing is constitutive. The words that I chose, the ways that I highlighted or avoided specific topics, my stylistic decisions—these are all the ways that my drafting of the vignettes shaped and informed the meaning I made and making of the incidents. This meaning evolved with each writing, as I reread, revised, edited, and deleted words, creating different interpretations of the data of my own experiences.

To analyze these vignettes, I drew on Milner's (2007) framework for researchers to support them in thinking about race and culture. I first analyzed each vignette through the three dangers he identified: seen, unseen, and unforeseen. I then used Milner's framework to consider the implications of these experiences for myself and others engaged in similar work around issues of race and culture. To do so, I began by a focused reading of Milner's description of each of the

dangers and the examples he provided, as well as the ways that Gildersleeve (2010) interpreted Milner's framework. I then engaged in free writing on each danger for each vignette in which I tried to apply the framework to my experience. In free writing, I wrote without stopping for a minimum of 15 min to capture my initial impressions without explicit analysis. I then reviewed my free writings, in an attempt to understand the different dangers of each and how they might align to Milner's descriptions of the dangers. While the written vignettes and ensuing analysis are linear, my actual process was much more fluid.

Vignettes

Each vignette illustrates a different part of my learning with the network facilitation team. The first vignette describes a recurring event, an end-of-the-year celebratory dinner, that highlights how easy it is for me to remain silent and how my silence has evolved over the years. The second vignette occurred in the seventh year of my work with the team when I shared with them an article about the network that I co-wrote with two other authors, both members of the facilitation team, and it illustrates a moment of reflexivity of discomfort (Pillow, 2003) that highlights how my racialized worldview as White impacts my research.

Vignette 1: dinner at the Lexington Inn amidst racist artwork

At the end of every year, the network has chosen to hold its celebratory dinner at the Lexington Inn (a pseudonym), a building constructed in the mid-1750s during the colonial era of the U.S., located in a town that received its charter from England in the 17th century. The walls included several murals that were attributed by the restaurant owners to being created as part of the New Deal's Federal Art Project. Funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), this project commissioned artists to paint murals in public places across the country depicting scenes of American life (Zimmer, 1998).

The first year, as we sat down to eat, I looked around at the WPA murals surrounding us—White men and women as central characters, a broadly grinning enslaved African, and a Native American person bowing before a White man, perhaps being converted. That first year, with Jeremy, a White member of the facilitation team, I walked around taking pictures and joked about the images with Claude, one of the Black facilitation team members. As I drove home with Jeremy, I expressed my shock that anyone would suggest this racist restaurant, especially Derrick, the member of the facilitation team whom I thought had chosen it and who is Black. How could we sit down to dinner and talk about advancing equity while surrounded by racist images? I did not know the history of the WPA project, and I could not even believe a restaurant would have these images, let alone that a group of leaders who spoke of equity would want to eat there. Every year after that first year, I was surprised that anyone in the network would continue to suggest this same restaurant—and that no one suggested we eat elsewhere because of the artwork. I later learned that one of the prominent figures in the mural is David Brainerd, considered to be one of the most influential Christian missionaries in the 18th century (Barlow, 2018). As the years followed, we returned to this restaurant every year, though depending on our group size, we often sat in a different room with different artwork. I was not familiar with the geographic area and was unaware of other possible restaurants to offer as suggestions. Three members of the facilitation team lived in the state, with varying degrees of knowledge of the specific town in which the restaurant was located.

Vignette 2: member checking around racialized data interpretations

I had just completed a solid draft of an article I co-wrote with two White facilitation team members looking at how network participants and facilitators talked about issues of race. While it

was co-authored, I was primarily responsible for its direction, analysis, and write-up. I thought this article was a strong piece of writing. When my co-authors and I shared it with network facilitators in June 2015, the three of us were unprepared for their response, particularly from Derrick and Claude, the two Black men on the team.

'This made me angry' basically encapsulates their response—while they did not disagree with the data, extensive quotes and descriptions of events that occurred, they both strongly disagreed with the way that my co-authors and I had interpreted the data. They felt accused of not focusing on race, and they called us to task on the ways that our worldviews as White researchers impacted our ability to understand their perspective (Roegman, Allen, & Hatch, 2017). One gave the following example: 'If a White facilitator asks a difficult question about race, he is following the protocol. If I ask the same question, I am an angry Black man.' It became immediately clear to me that our initial analysis was flawed. My co-authors and I had failed to understand or consider how Black male facilitators, in particular, choose to engage in conversations about race with racially diverse audiences.

Seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers

Milner's (2007) dangers and framework for thinking about researcher positionality around race and culture offer a useful tool to begin to unpack these two vignettes. Analyzing these vignettes through the three dangers that he identified illustrates some of the challenges that I experienced in engaging with work around race with educators who are of different racial and cultural backgrounds from myself. I now consider the seen—dangers that emerged explicitly as a result of my research decisions, the unseen—dangers that were hidden to me, and the unforeseen—dangers that arose, which I had not anticipated.

The seen

In the first vignette, at the Lexington Inn, I was unsettled by racist, colonialist images on the walls and did not understand how people committed to equity-focused leadership could choose to patronize such an establishment. It was not just that the artwork existed, but that my colleagues would want to eat there. In a way, I was internally criticizing my colleagues for this choice of such visible racism. At this restaurant, the *seen* was most seemingly tangible—the artwork and the choice. At the same time, what was *seen* was also Derrick and Claude's jokes, every year, about the risks of driving while Black in the community surrounding this restaurant. It was not just the artwork, but the other patrons, the demographics of the town, and the anticipated reactions of local police officers that brought dining while Black at the Lexington Inn into focus as a site, not just of historical racialized artwork but the living legacy of segregation that continues to this day in this northeastern state.

The *seen* in the second vignette was my observation of a lack of extended conversation around race. I had chosen to focus the paper on how conversations related to equity changed over the network's first six years, and it was quickly apparent to me in the first round of data analysis on that paper, that even though the number of comments related to race and equity increased, the amount of conversations were sparse and those that did occur were relatively brief. This was an area of concern to me, and of all of the members of the facilitation team, though my initial understanding of this was based on what I saw.

In a sense, the *seen* is what I, as a researcher, already notice—presences and absences of race from my perspective. Following this, there are a set of experiences or data that I will identify as *seen* in my research because of my positionality: as a White woman who has lived and worked in predominantly White communities and institutions in the U.S. To a degree, the *seen* is almost literal, what is really there, but at the same time, it is highly subjective, as different individuals

will always see different things based on their own beliefs, experiences, and perspectives. Part of the *seen* is both what I saw and also my interpretations of what I saw—the artwork and the choice to eat there, or the lack of equity-focused conversations and the choice to not extend them—which in fact meant I was implicitly blaming others without fully understanding the context in which the vignettes occurred.

The unseen

When people do not talk about what is seen, it remains implicit and often hidden—at least in my case. In the first vignette, at the Lexington Inn, it took me seven years to come to think that I should just ask everyone, not just the colleague with whom I carpool, what they think about the murals and the restaurant choice, and two more years to realize that I could begin these conversations by sharing what I think. I used my status as a doctoral student and my self-positioning as a quiet observer of network activity as excuses for not sharing my concerns. My initial inclination to not ask questions resonates with DiAngelo's (2011) discussion of White fragility—I was unsure what would come up if I raised a concern. I chose to not engage as a way to avoid potential stress and instead, after the first year, only joked about the murals with one White colleague in the relative insularity of his car. By not sharing, the unseen remained, preventing me from understanding better the complexities of racialized experiences for everyone in the network, including the colleagues who recommended we revisit this place every year.

In relation to the second vignette, the theme of not interpreting data together kept key insights hidden for me in understanding different individuals' choices of when and how to engage others around race. While I did share the paper with the entire team, I did so right at the end of my writing process. I had never thought to consider the reasoning behind different participants' choices during network meetings, such as asking why a participant might choose to downplay race in one instance. In part, this was a result of the study design (analyzing old transcripts instead of interviewing participants about their participation in these conversations), and in part, it was a question I had not thought about. While I do not ascribe to a color-neutral approach to race in the U.S., my initial analysis of the network conversations also illustrates that while I did see race operate in one way (explicit comments in conversations), I did not see race in terms of speakers' racial identities and consider why participants of color, both facilitators and superintendents, might respond in different ways than White participants. By focusing on participants as non-racialized individuals within conversations about race, I perpetuated a color-neutral approach that assumes White as the norm and disregard systemic inequities (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Fergus, 2017). I ignored one way that White privilege manifests itself—that a white facilitator could ask an explicit question about race with less risk than a Black facilitator.

Now, when I analyze network conversations related to race, I have more nuanced questions to ask of the data and my interpretations. Did a facilitator choose to minimize race deliberately since a more explicit comment might not be received well? How have the facilitators assessed the potential fragility of network members in these types of discussions? If I see the two engaged in a private conversation during lunch, is the facilitator asking a more explicit question in this setting, instead of in front of the whole group? It was common, for example, after Claude, one of the Black facilitators, commented on the overrepresentation of boys of color in a pull-out classroom apparent in one district, that he would make a follow-up comment that this pattern exists across the country. These types of generalizing comments seemed to take the pressure off of the superintendent to justify racial disproportionality in their district. It was not until after I, along with my two co-authors, brainstormed, organized, coded, analyzed data, presented at a conference, and drafted the article for submission, that I actually heard from network facilitators about the intentionality behind this type of comment. Claude shared his philosophy of 'racial calibration'—how he would balance his assessment of superintendents' readiness to engage in

issues related to race with his desire to keep everyone engaged in the conversation. If he pushed too hard, he was concerned that White superintendents, in particular, would disengage entirely, their White fragility triggered.

While I am certain there is more unseen than I am discussing here, what stands out for me is the connection between the *seen* and the *unseen* in my own process. In both vignettes, I quickly and confidently identified the *seen*, but it was not until much later that I realized the need to also identify what was unseen to me, even though what was seen directly linked to the *unseen*. I know that what was unseen by me was likely seen by others, that even as I attempt to center race, there will be things still unseen to me.

The unforeseen

Continuing to dine at the Lexington Inn carries the risk of the *unforeseen*—is the network, including myself as a member of the facilitation team, sanctioning racist artwork by patronizing this restaurant? Through conversation—actually discussing the art—the network has the potential to construct a counter-narrative of what the murals mean within the context of the network's work and within the context of U.S. history. Discussing the murals together could have served as an introduction to talking about race amongst network facilitators and helped each other to understand varied perspectives on different aspects of the artwork, including the possibility that the murals were inconsequential to people's racialized experiences. It was not until the eighth dinner at this restaurant, as a result of writing this paper that I asked my colleagues about this choice of restaurant. When I asked what they thought about the art, one Black facilitation team member said, 'I didn't even notice,' Black and White members alike laughed, looking up and commenting on the Native American conversion briefly, and then we all continued with our meal. Later on, I learned that someone outside of the network recommended the restaurant the first year because of its geographic proximity to the location of the next day's meeting; there were few other nearby restaurants.

The *unforeseen* in the second vignette was equally apparent—the negative responses of two colleagues whom I respect and who respect me was unexpected and uncomfortable, even though I knew from the moment they began to explain that I had misinterpreted the data in a problematic way. This was unforeseen both in that I had not expected it, and also in terms of the potential unforeseen danger to readers of my first version of the article—who might have read that article and drawn similar conclusions to mine. I would have been perpetuating a legacy of White scholars interpreting data from their racialized perspectives even as I held explicit commitments to do the contrary—to interpret data from the perspectives of my participants and to include them in the process as much as possible (Lewis, 2001).

These unforeseen dangers and the risks of the potentially unforeseen highlight the need to engage with each other—and my need to participate in initiating these conversations and joining in when others initiate. Conversations enable individuals to create their own counter-narratives (Delgado, 1989; Gildersleeve, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) in the face of master narratives of race. As a facilitation team, we have worked together closely for 10 years, and we have explicitly attempted to engage participating superintendents in equity-focused systemic reforms. However, as a facilitation team, we have rarely held our own explicit conversations around race, attempted to unearth or share our assumptions, or asked each other questions about the impact of our racialized experiences on our work. I am not sure why we had not done so, and am glad that at least one unintended impact of the article from the second vignette is that it led us to engage in conversation around race as a facilitation team. What are the unforeseen dangers in maintaining this approach—that is, not engaging in conversation about race—while simultaneously and explicitly addressing race in the network's work with superintendents? At the same time, perhaps the dangers of addressing race, which present a greater risk for Black

facilitation team members in U.S. society, are greater than what is unforeseen—and likely there will always be things that I cannot predict. What if Derrick and Claude had said they love the murals because of their historical significance or that they saw them but did not care? I need to be open to what engaging in conversations might lead to, and how it might require me to change my thinking. The unforeseen relies on my ability to consider ways that my work may unintentionally perpetuate the racial hegemony in research and practice.

Discussion

Analyzing these vignettes through Milner's identified dangers of researching race illustrates how whiteness-as-absent was operating (Leonardo, 2002) and how I drew on research methodologies grounded in White social history that did not require me to engage with participants in interpreting data (Scheurich & Young, 1997). Instead of being attentive to how I was performing whiteness, I made assumptions about others' performances uncritically. Applebaum's (2013) call for White people to be vigilant about their own self-perceived goodness resonates here, as she argues that White people 'must continually be open to interrogating the consequences of their ethical and political practice on both the self and the world' (p. 25). I need to interrogate my own actions—when I speak up and when I remain silent, when I expect others to raise a concern and when I take responsibility for addressing racism, when I work to develop shared interpretations of data, and when I forge ahead on my own. It is not enough to have good intentions but to understand the consequences of my intentions and my work.

My experiences working with network facilitators have provided me opportunities to reflect on my multiple subjectivities within the context of the network and the facilitation team. As I reflect on my shared and different backgrounds with the team through Milner's dangers, my initial conclusion is that I need to be able to see more racialized incidences in what I experience everyday, so that more of the dangers that I risk in research would fall into the 'seen' aspect of my work. Even as I see dangers, I also must avoid implicit blame if others do not seem to share my vision. When I do not share my concerns or ask questions, I am more likely to engage unseen dangers in my work. The lenses through which I see the world, including that of being a White person in the U.S., leads me to see certain things and not see others.

Initially, I did not feel comfortable sharing my concerns about racist imagery with the facilitation team. In my first few years with the network, I wondered, who am I as a doctoral student to challenge the choice of restaurant, especially if everyone else seems to be okay with it? Even more so—Who am I as a White person to challenge the choice, if the Black team members seem to be okay with it? It was too easy for me to expect individuals of color to raise potential issues of racism than for me to take responsibility for doing so myself. Instead, I used my graduate student status as an excuse for not speaking up. I need to take responsibility for raising concerns and engaging in conversation about what I am seeing and thinking, instead of keeping silent and relying on individuals of color to do so.

Raising issues of race and racism will likely require me to cross the 'established boundaries in White racial discourse' (Crowley, 2016, p. 1016) and engage in transgressive White racial knowledge, instead of remaining in racial dialogue that feels safe to me. As Applebaum (2013) suggests, being vigilant around how whiteness is operating and continually interrogating my research require vulnerability. A key component of this involves me taking responsibility for my actions, beliefs, and concerns, and not waiting for someone else to do so. As Lorde (1984) said, 'Black and Third World people are expected to educate White people as to our humanity … the oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions' (p. 115). When I wait for Derrick or Claude to say something, instead of waiting for Jeremy or saying something myself, I am evading my responsibility as a team member committed to equity. Speaking out, instead of waiting for people of color, and educating myself are types of work needed to deconstruct and

transform what it means to perform whiteness, so that it may become just as natural for a White person to raise concerns or educate others as are current expectations for people of color (Warren, 2001). Whiteness exists through the performance of whiteness (Butler, 1990), and instead of relying on rhetorical strategies that maintain White supremacy, I need to ensure my research draws on an alternate set of strategies that problematize race and make more clear how whiteness is operating.

Milner's third tenet around engaged reflection and representation calls on researchers to interpret and analyze data in conjunction with participants. Doing so with current and former practitioners, such as the network facilitators with whom I work on this project, as well as the superintendents who participate in the network, is necessary on many levels. When I analyze and write up data on my own or with White colleagues, and when I do so without considering the likely possibility that colleagues of color have different interpretations of the same data, I am not engaging in culturally sensitive research (Tillman, 2002). Instead, I encounter danger in representing the data in incomplete, inaccurate, or color-neutral ways. Again, it is easy for me to make excuses—the facilitation team members all have busy professional lives and did not join the team to do research with me. However, if I use this excuse and do not find ways to engage in ongoing interpretation with them, my writing is more likely to misrepresent data in consequential ways.

It is Milner's fourth tenet, considered in conjunction with my experiences at the Lexington Inn, which has brought to home my need to continually engage in reflection on positionality. This is especially critical as I continue to conduct research on equity-focused leadership with practitioners of color. Milner suggests that 'researchers contextualize and ground their personal or individualistic, new and expanded consciousness to take into consideration historic, political, social, economic, racial and cultural realities on a broader scale' (p. 397). As I think about the racist artwork at the inn, Milner's suggestion has led me to think about this artwork within a larger societal context. At almost every dinner, my colleagues Derrick and Claude joked about their risk of being accosted or apprehended by police for driving while black in the restaurant's surrounding neighborhood. Their jokes highlighted the segregated history of this state and the real fears that people of color continue to face when moving between communities. Furthermore, every institution in the U.S., schools, restaurants, and beyond, are part of systems of oppression, including racism, even as individuals within them may be actively working to dismantle these systems. Different institutions demonstrate and support these systems in different ways. Some, like the Lexington Inn, demonstrate this through large murals depicting colonial era life, including images that are seen in the 21st century as stereotypical and racist. The existence of these murals at this restaurant understood either within their time period or within a modern-day context, does not mean that other institutions are not part of systems of oppression because they do not have similar artwork. In other words, if racism is operating institutionally at various levels, a different restaurant, though lacking in similar murals, might exhibit racism in other ways.

Beyond that, different individuals may find value in the images. Some individuals, including myself, interpret the images as racist—it is possible that the current restaurant owners do as well, as the images of slaves and Native Americans are cropped out of the murals that are shared on the restaurant's website. Others, however, value WPA-era murals because of their cultural significance, as many Black artists were hired to create murals depicting their interpretation of Black experience in the United States (Glennon, 2018). While not referencing the specific murals at the Lexington Inn, some view the murals as part of U.S. history and thus something to be preserved. When I made a quick judgment myself about these murals, ignorant of their cultural significance, I turn away from reflecting on my positionality and I ignore culturally specific knowledge that would inform different interpretations of this artwork.

Milner's framework, however, does not present a clear-cut guide that tells researchers what to do. Like any framework, there is a chance for researchers, including myself, to misinterpret or misuse it, perpetuating the very issues that he hopes researchers disrupt. Even as I draw on Milner's work, I question myself. Am I being truly reflexive? Could I go deeper in my analysis?

Am I authentically collaborating on interpreting data? Are there aspects of the situation I continue to not see? Do I fully understand all of the tenets in their complexity? Am I raising issues that I believe should be addressed? To all emerging scholars and doctoral students engaged in research around race and research with racially diverse participants, I argue for the need to read broadly about issues of race, both academic and practitioner literature, and reflect on how they impact researchers' work individually and with colleagues. For some, Milner may be a starting point, for others, a midpoint. I came to his work from coursework on culturally sensitive research (Siddle Walker, 2005; Tillman, 2002) and had the privilege of reading and discussing his ideas in a racially diverse doctoral seminar (Roegman, Knight, Taylor, & Watson, 2014). Capacity to do this work begins with a belief in its importance, continues with engagement in thought-provoking and provocative readings by authors with diverse perspectives, and must include critical colleagues with diverse subjectivities. In these conversations, researchers need to be open to different perspectives and experiences, especially if they do not fit into the researchers' initial framework or analysis.

For doctoral students and emerging scholars, and especially for White researchers doing work around race, implications from this work point to the need for continual engagement in frameworks such as Milner's (2007) that require researchers to reflect on their positionality and cultural background in conversation with participants. Turning this reflection into action, particularly though actively working to understand participant perspectives and engaging in shared interpretation and analysis, supports the creation of research that is more culturally sensitive (Tillman, 2006). Engaging in reflection on positionality is not a one-time thing, but is an ongoing part of what it means to do research, to help limit the dangers that researchers may experience, and to keep issues of race and culture at the center of the work.

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