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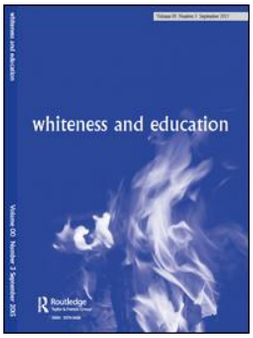

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When racism and masculinity collide: some methodological considerations from a Man of Colour studying Whiteness

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ABSTRACT
This paper considers the positionality of a Man of Colour studying Whiteness among male undergraduates, and the methodological challenges this poses. While some have explored the politics of representation when a researcher comes from the socially dominant group or from the same racial group there are almost no explorations of the researcher/participant dynamic when the scholar comes from the socially marginalised background. This article chronicles one researcher's methodological approach to this issue. In particular, it explores the way that interviews can become sites of racial microaggressions against a Scholar of Colour, and how a researcher insufficient taking account of his unconscious masculinity almost derailed the critical interrogation of Whiteness.

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> I don't think I would have been as honest with you if you were a Black man.

The following quotation came from a research participant in my project studying White male racial ideologies at two institutions of higher education, and it highlights the critical importance researcher positionality plays when studying racism. While being a Man of Colour exploring Whiteness poses a number of unique methodological problems, there is very little guidance on the issue from the research methods literature. I am sensitive to Plummer's (2005) description of research as a non-linear, and frequently chaotic endeavour, 'Research – like life – is a contradictory, messy affair. Only in the pages of "how-to-do-it" research methods texts or in the classrooms of research methods courses can it be sorted out in linear stages, clear protocols, and firm principles' (Plummer 2005, 363). Despite this critique, there are still texts which outline general rules for conducting research and they have some utility (e.g. Babbie 2007; Creswell 2003). For example, these texts can be instructive in proving a framework within which to conduct research, while highlighting potential issues that can and do arise when engaging this process. With respect to being a Man of Colour studying Whiteness, this kind of guidance does not currently exist.

When the subjects of Whiteness and method intersect, it is usually in the context of critiquing racism embedded within 'objective' social science. For example, the edited volume *White Logic, White Methods* (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008), highlights the numerous ways that Whiteness and racism inform both methodological approaches and interpretation of results in social science research. While there are a number of issues explored, there are very few solutions offered. One of the few people to

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elucidate a methodological approach to studying Whiteness was Gallagher (2000) in his book chapter, 'White like me? Methods, Meaning, and Manipulation in the Field of Whiteness Studies.' While many of his arguments are instructive, he specifically discussed being a White man studying Whiteness and issues posed by being a racial insider (White on White) and a scholar of racism. His work did not address the issue of being a racial outsider studying the same issue.

Rhoads (1997) more specifically engaged the methodological issues of being an outsider as a heterosexual man studying the coming out processes of gay and bisexual men in college. This research, again while instructive, is a different dynamic than the one embedded in my study of White men. Rhoads (1997) was sensitive to the power dynamics being a heterosexual man representing the voices of sexually marginalised men. Thus, he argued for collaborative strategies in the politics of representation. What happens when the power dynamic is inverted and the researcher comes from the marginalised social background and is studying the dominant? How does this affect the context of the interviews? What happens when research participants have no interest in collaborative research strategies? If Mills is correct (1997) that Whiteness represents, *an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance* (italics original, 18), how does one interpret the narratives of White men when they are concurrently accurate and inaccurate?[1] How does a researcher from a racially marginalised group effectively navigate interviews when those interviews become racially hostile? This was particularly relevant when my unexamined masculinity prevented me from acknowledging how the racial linguistic violence of the interviews affected me and prevented me from effectively analysing them. I argue that my positionality of being *both* a Person of Colour and a man studying racism poses unique methodological challenges – or when Whiteness and masculinity collide.[2]

The formation of the study: where is racism in higher education scholarship?

The idea of studying White men in higher education and their views on race stemmed from two critiques of higher education literature. First, working on a nationwide study regarding the diversification of the biomedical and behavioural sciences, I became familiar with the *diversity rationale* as much of the work was contextualised within it (Hurtado et al. 2012). The diversity rationale highlights the educational benefits accrued by all students (including White) that stem from learning within diverse and inclusive environments. While this framework is informative and legally justifiable in support of affirmative action, I was always asking where racism was located within the diversity rationale. As I read further exploring racism and higher education, I found that while race was frequently discussed as a variable or social identity, there was very little regarding systemic racial oppression. Harper (2012) empirically corroborated this critique in his critical literature review of higher education literature. He argued that while race as a descriptor is frequently part of higher education scholarship, critical analyses of what this means in terms of systemic racial inequality are generally not discussed; or higher education studies apply 'Race without racism' (Harper 2012).

When scholars do focus on racism, the studies frequently highlight issues of microaggressions, or the common, subtle everyday slights against marginalised people which have a cumulative, negative impact stemming from this racial stressor (Yosso et al. 2009). Engaging this literature led to my second critique: If Students of Colour are consistently the target of microaggressions, there must be a microaggressee and a microaggressor. What are the processes and ideologies that lead many White students to engage, frequently unintentionally, in acts of racism against their peers of colour? With these two critiques in mind, I benchmarked Bonilla-Silva's (2006) of racial ideologies, and embarked on an interrogation of Whiteness in higher education among male undergraduates. I specifically chose to interview male-identified students to match the identity of the interviewer, trying to avoid gender-based power relations (male interviewer, female interviewee) clouding the racial analysis. Later, I would find that my exclusive focus on race and racism led me to ignore how masculinity intersecting with racial dynamics inhibited my ability to effectively analyse the participants' narratives.

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Participant recruitment: 'Wanna' talk about race?'

The first area where I anticipated trouble, participant recruitment, was surprisingly easy. My recruitment strategy involved in-person solicitations at registered student group meetings. I targeted those with political affiliations so I could intentionally recruit people from a range of political ideologies as racial and political ideologies are strongly correlated, especially for people with a 'rightwing authoritarian' political orientation (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). I engaged in this strategy because I wanted to hear and document the widest variety of discourses of Whiteness possible. Without a recruitment strategy like this, I would likely only hear from those students on campus with the strongest views on race who are frequently either right-wing or left-wing activists. This does not represent the typical experience of White university students, and I wanted to understand this experience because the marginalisation of students of colour on campus cannot simply be attributed to a few political extremists. For example, racial microaggressions occur on a regular basis which leads to their cumulative effect (Pérez Huber and Solorzano 2014). Thus, many (or most) White students are engaging in this form of linguistic racial violence against students of colour on a regular basis (Leonardo and Porter 2010) and they represent more of the norm as opposed to a fringe campus element.

Additionally, I was interested in exploring how to disrupt racist practices on campus, and a great deal of campus-based racism occurs when there are not Students of Colour present (Cabrera 2014b; Picca and Feagin 2007). For example, Cabrera (2014b) demonstrated how White male undergraduates regularly engage in racial joke telling, but they only do it in racially homogenous, White environments. Picca and Feagin (2007) had similar findings whereby White students reported that in racially isolated areas it was common to hear the use of racial epitaphs including the *n-word*. Similar to micoaggressions, these findings do not only stem from marginal elements of the campus population. Rather, they represent a more normative experience, and this is why I intentionally recruited students from a range of political ideologies. This allowed me to examine the everyday ways that racism was enacted (and sometimes challenged) within the context of higher education.

I thought there would be trepidation or at least scepticism, especially when asking the College Republicans, Objectivists and fraternity members if they would like to participate. Instead, the novelty of studying Whiteness seemed to peak the students' interest. Many of the participants did not feel they could talk about issues of race in their classes or interpersonal lives even though they held very strong views on the issue. One participant told me after an interview, 'You are the first person to ask me about race from the position of being a White man.' This was a very common trend in part, because of perceived political correctness on campus which many of the participants said silenced them in discussions of race. I use the word *perceived* because I probed this issue when the participants discussed 'silencing' in the interviews, trying to find instances when the participants were attacked for their views on race. One participant responded, 'I don't know. It's just kind of a feeling I've got.'

A great deal of the empirical literature on cross-racial campus discussions highlights how White people feeling defensive, guilty and silenced by People of Colour occurs in these settings (e.g. DiAngelo and Sensoy 2014; Ringrose 2007). That is, during discussions about diversity, many White people feel as though their views and opinions are less valid or that their peers might be perceived by them as being racist (Applebaum 2008; DiAngelo and Sensoy 2014). This is why perceptions of safety become a prerequisite for White people engaging in racial dialogues, although this frequently becomes a means of facilitating linguistic violence against People of Colour, as I will later demonstrate (Leonardo and Porter 2010). Regardless, these interviews tended to represent a 'safe space' – by which I mean an environment where the participants could speak free from any criticism or rebuke. I only asked them questions (i.e. we were not dialoguing), and our relationship only lasted the length of the interview. There were many safeguards in place to ensure participant anonymity (e.g. using pseudonyms), so there was almost no chance the participants' narratives could result in some form of a racial reprimand. Within this context, and contrary to my initial expectation, these students were hungry to talk about race but only in an extremely sheltered environment.

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Role of researcher: a light-skinned Chicano male talking about race with White men

Once interviewing began, another problem presented itself: I am a Person of Colour interviewing White men on the subject of race. How do I account for how this dynamic affects the direction of the participant narratives? In Gallagher (2000), he questioned if a generational gap between researcher and participant might inform the content of his interviews on Whiteness. He asked provocative questions such as, '[Did the participant] view me as part of the generation that was responsible for black oppression' (75). However, he also argued that being a White man interviewing White people on the subject of race helped create an insider positionality that afforded him increased access to this population. What happens when the dynamic is cross-racial? How can it affect the interview if the interviewer is light-skinned and can speak 'standard English'?

This is a critically important question because many scholars have documented that the racial/ethnic background of an interviewer can significantly change the content of an interview (e.g. Finkel, Guterbock, and Borg 1991; Hatchett and Schuman 1975). Within this context, I wanted to take a conservative approach to the study. I began the interviews by racially self-identifying as Chicano (my primary racial identity) and I had the participants also racially self-identify. I thought this would create a cross-racial dynamic where the participants might tend towards more 'politically correct' and more tempered answers. After a number of interviews laced with profanity and anger, I began to question this dynamic. Were the participants being politically correct, and this was their form of self-censure? Were they comfortable enough in the interview environment, that they were willing truly willing to open up? Was part of their White privilege to be oblivious to the frequently racist nature of their answers? Was my racial background ambiguous enough that it slipped into the background during the course of the interviews despite my self-identification?

I began asking my participants what they thought my racial identity to be, and most said, 'I don't know.' Some thought mixed race, others thought southern European, and one swore I was Russian. They consistently said, however, that they tended to not consider my racial identity during the course of the interviews. It thus appears that the verbal cue ('I am Chicano') was an insufficient reminder of my racial/ethnic background relative to the visual cue of my phenotypic ambiguity (hence the previous quotation, 'I don't think I would have been as honest with you if you were a Black man').

There are likely a number of additional issues at play. There is the possibility that the male participants felt more comfortable speaking to me as a man (i.e. their answers might have been different if I was female or transgender). Previous research has demonstrated that cross-racial interactions can be facilitated by a shared interest (e.g. Erickson and Shultz 1982; Ngai 2011; Watson 2013), and some of my colleagues have speculated that a shared masculinity might have partially facilitated participants' willingness to open up to me. This is tangentially supported by my previous analyses whereby the participants were not only engaging in discourses of Whiteness but also of masculinity (Cabrera 2014a), however this is a delicate issue. We never engaged in anything that could be considered traditional male bonding (e.g. discussions of sports), as our pre-interview small talk tended to focus on classes. There were some cues that might have signalled to the participants a shared masculinity (e.g. I have goatee and tend to dress in white t-shirts and jeans). Thus, I have no way of verifying the effects of the male-to-male interview structure, although this dynamic likely played a role in the participants opening up to me.

Listening and challenging: the delicate balance of interviewing White men on race

Macalpine and Marsh (2005) interrogated the normality of Whiteness in management education. Their participants were generally oblivious to issues of race in general and issues of Whiteness in particular. To this end, they used one participant's quotation for their title, 'On being White: There's Nothing I Can Say' (Macalpine and Marsh 2005). This is relatively consistent with a lot of Whiteness literature. Mills (1997) argues that Whiteness represents an epistemology of ignorance, and Bonilla-Silva (2006) argues the rhetorical incoherence of many White people on issues of race is a function trying to frame

racist views in the most politically correct way possible. Much of this research points to the idea that White people when discussing issues of race are frequently quiet, oblivious or afraid of being labelled 'a racist' (Cabrera 2014a; DiAngleo and Sensoy 2014). This contrasted dramatically with the interviews I conducted in this research. While many of the participant narratives were self-contradictory, very few of them struggled with political correctness or rhetorical incoherence. Rather, they had a number of pent up frustrations about race that came spilling out with few prompts.

For example, one participant offered, 'I really don't give a damn what someone who thinks that my opinion is invalid because I'm White and haven't experienced racism …' The participants tended to be extremely opinionated on issue of race ranging from campus racial segregation, affirmative action, while generally discounting that White privilege affected their lives in any way. As previously discussed, the flow of these interviews partially stemmed from the fact that this was one of the first times these young men felt comfortable openly discussing issues of race in a sheltered environment, and they functioned as a form of racial venting. This was further supported by the fact that more than half continued the conversation well after the interview officially ended, and one even followed me into the bathroom. Fundamentally, these participants wanted to talk about race, but only in an environment where there was minimal potential for conflict.

The interviews themselves became very challenging for an additional reason: The participants frequently espoused beliefs that were concurrently true and untrue. They were true in the sense that they represented the participant's viewpoint. They were untrue in the sense of lacking an empirical reality. For example, one participant offered, 'I also knew already that [university name] has like a certain quota of races it tries to fill when it takes in students. I found that out from my brother.' Quotas were outlawed in 1978 with the *Bakke* Supreme Court decision, however, this participant was sure (because his brother told him) that quotas were still practiced at his institution and this served to oppress him as a White male. This posed a difficult methodological tension for me because, as Bogdan and Biklen (1998) argue, 'Good interviews are those in which the subjects are at ease and talk freely about their points of view' (95). However, I did not want to let these views go unchallenged, or at least clarified, which could be easily construed as attacking.

I tried to strike a balance by offering information in the least threatening way I knew. For example, many participants said that they were oppressed by affirmative action programmes that no longer existed. In response, I offered some derivative of, 'I heard that affirmative action at this campus was eliminated about 10 years ago,' and let the participants respond. If they continued to assert that they were denied opportunities due to affirmative action that did not exist (frequently framed as quotas), I would ask, 'How do you know?' This led to one of two responses. The participants either used a form of the cyclical logic, 'I know because I know,' or they relied on the first-hand testimony of someone who had a form of 'insider knowledge.' This assertive probing helped create a deeper understanding of White male perceptions of racial victimisation (Cabrera 2014a), which would not have been possible if I simply let them 'talk freely about their points of view' (Bogdan and Biklen 1998, 95).

Within this context, I was very sensitive to the fact that some participants might have misspoken or reacted 'off-the-cuff.' I reached out to many participants in hopes of conducting member checking (Jones, Torres, and Arminio 2006) to ensure that the transcripts accurately reflected the participants' views on the subject of race, and I was very surprised when all of my outreach was met with silence. I am unsure why this occurred. Perhaps the participants received what they wanted out of the interviews; the ability to racially vent, and once this was over, they had no more use for them. I am almost certain that they were unaware how racist their views were. The racism in their narratives became one of the most difficult issues to work through being a Man of Colour studying Whiteness and trying not to internalise many of the microaggressions that were pervasive throughout the interviews.

When interviews become microaggressions

Sue (2010) defines microaggressions as, '[T]he brief and common place daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory,

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or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target a person or group' (5). Within this context, the truly insidious impact of these slights is cumulative (Yosso et al. 2009), and it can lead to a series of adverse impacts upon the targeted group including emotional distress, questioning of ability, fatigue and rage/anger (Pérez Huber and Solorzano 2014; Sue 2010). Many of my participants' narratives described themselves microaggressing[3] People of Colour on their college campus, although they were oblivious to the racism embedded in their actions. I had one participant tell me that he was searching for a person to interview regarding an election in East LA, so he wandered into the Chicano Studies library identifying a student he described as, 'your typical Chicano activist.' The participant said that he approached this student who was studying, and a stranger to him, to ask about the election. The student was hesitant to respond to unexpected questions from an unknown person, and actually told the participant, 'you're annoying me.' Instead of leaving the student alone, he pressed the question, 'Why?', and justified this by stating, 'I wanna learn about other cultures, and I want to share my culture with them and learn about them. And I think that's what our ideal, multicultural society should be about.'

After continuing to badger the other student in the library, the participant heard him say that he was hesitant to answer the questions because the participant was White. Instead of reflecting on the dynamic of a White student entering the Chicano Studies library and demanding time from a complete stranger, he turned this situation into one that 'victimised' him as a White person:

> I said, "You know, that's not fair. You like, you, you judged me like on the colour of my skin. You said, 'You're White, I'm not gonna talk to you.'" And I came back, and I sort of, I told him this. And I told him that this is quite offensive.

As this participant would not leave the student alone, and the Chicano Studies librarian interceded, and the incident continued to escalate. As the participant described:

> The librarian asked me, "Oh, do brown people interest you?" To which I responded, sort of sarcastically, "Yes, but not as much as Africans." Uh (laughs), I – I also use humor to talk about this stuff 'cause it's, you know, important that we don't take ourselves too seriously.

This participant was annoyed at the situation, but tended to make light of it. He had not consideration of how his actions might have adversely affected the student or the librarian. Instead, he felt that he honestly wanted more information, and there was nothing wrong with his actions. This was very surprising to me as an interviewer because the participant was vividly describing actions that bordered on racial harassment, and he felt that he was both completely justified and really the only offensive actions were conducted by the student and librarian. This was doubly shocking for me as an interviewer because 2 weeks prior, the participant published an Op-Ed in the student newspaper calling for his White peers to take account of White privilege. Unconsciously, I began to internalise these narratives as I have been in similar situations where a White student enters an ethnic centre demanding my time.

These narratives were common throughout the interviews, and sometimes they became very personal. There was one participant in particular who described why he thought Latina/os were not as successful as White people, offering, '[Latina/os are] probably not very, not very success-oriented. I'm sure they want their kids to be self-sufficient, but not wildly successful like they probably don't have aspirations for their children to be businessmen, doctors and stuff like that.' In his understanding, Latina/os do not want to be successful, and therefore, they are not. I asked how his theory operated as I, the interviewer, was a Chicano PhD student in a top-five College of Education, and his response was almost archetypal, 'You're the exception, not the rule.' These were some of the many ways that the interviews created a relatively unique racial dynamic, and the methodological literature has been generally silent on effectively navigating this terrain.

Masculinity and suppression of racial pain

Many problems arose by immersing myself into a constant array of racial microaggressions via these interviews I was conducting. I vividly remember being torn because the interviewer in social science

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research is supposed to be more of a facilitator; ask questions and offer prompts to create an environment where participants can speak openly and freely (Babbie 2007; Creswell 2003). I had difficulty conducting this methodological approach because, as previously discussed, the issues were very personal. These racial slights usually were not directly targeting me, but I still felt them as participant after participant described in vivid detail his disdain for 'minorities whining' and deficit models of racial inequality (i.e. blaming the marginalised group for their marginalised status).

Please do not misconstrue this to be seeking sympathy or whining. I chose to embark on this journey into the heart of Whiteness, and as Hunter S. Thompson was fond of saying, 'Buy the ticket, take the ride.' Rather, this added a level of methodological complexity to this project. I was always able to maintain a calm demeanour during the interviews, and I never let the participants know how their narratives affected me personally, although I frequently denied this information to myself as well. After completion of the interviews, this meant I usually had to find a colleague with whom I would debrief and the discussion usually began with an expletive-laden, 'You are not going to believe what this guy said …' This venting was a temporary fix, but I was generally unaware of the long-term impacts these interviews had on me.

This could be, in part, because my own unconscious conception of masculinity means appearing unaffected, which is generally consistent with the research on the subject (e.g. Connell 2005). While the debriefing sessions were momentarily cathartic, the focus was always on what the participant did and not how they affected me. After being immersed in these interviews for about 2 years, I realised I had been consistently angry with my participants for the majority of this time. I was in denial that as a heterosexual man these narratives would affect me, implicitly and unconsciously buying into models of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). This almost had tangible effects on the analysis of the transcript data.

Multiple positionalities, epistemologies of ignorance and data analysis

There were two unique issues I had to address during the data analysis component of this research. The first I previously alluded to: Taking account of my emotional responses to the interviews to allow for the most accurate analysis possible. The second involves the tension between Whiteness representing an epistemology of ignorance (Matias 2013; Mills 1997) and the methodological issues this poses in terms of analysing transcript data.

Multiple positionalities and data analysis

While I do not argue that a purely objective analysis is possible, I am persuaded by Honeychurch's (1996) argument regarding research by LGBTQ scholars, 'In acknowledging and accepting responsibility for its positions, queered inquiry can address how its particular shapes and presumptions may slant and fashion the research process in its entirety. As a result, while objectivism is decreased, objectivity is increased' (344). While Honeychurch was specifically discussing positionality as it related to LGBTQ researchers, many of the same ideas translate to being a Man of Colour studying Whiteness. Entering into the research, I took account of how my racial/ethnic background might affect the participants, but I failed to ask how these interactions might affect me. Subsequently, my positionality within these numerous cross-racial dynamics engendered a strong sense of resentment in me towards my research participants, and I did not sufficiently take account of this as previously discussed.

What I did not understand was this anger and frustration was also clouding my judgement. I spent more time anticipating the next microaggression than truly listening to the participant narratives. This was an ironic development because I have criticised the White male participants in my research for framing racial joking as objectively funny as opposed to owning personal responsibility and saying, 'I find them funny' (Cabrera 2014b). During my venting sessions, I never said, 'I was really upset by Person X.' Instead, I focused on the content of their narrative and how it was racist. This misstep on my part is component of basic qualitative research. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) argue that a good

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qualitative researcher takes account of and documents his/her emotions throughout the research process, and I continually erred because, in part, to admit the participants' narratives hurt me was an affront to my masculinity.

By taking insufficient account of my emotional responses to these interviews, I almost made two critical missteps during my data analysis. First, I had difficulty analysing the underlying processes that led participants to hold such racist opinions because I was so angry and focused on the blatant bigotry of their views. This meant that during initial phases of data analysis, I missed the racism forest for all the microaggression trees. It was only after I began to take account of my personal reactions to the interviews, accepting that I was emotionally hurt and upset, that I could begin to more clearly analyse and understand these underlying processes. Prior to this, I was engaging in the self-defeating habits that arise when men unconsciously aspire to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005).

Second, not taking account of these microaggressions also almost led me to miss a critically important component of my participant narratives – the potential for students to work through Whiteness (Cabrera 2012). I fell into the analytical trap frequently present in Critical Whiteness Studies – homogenising White identity and White experiences by reducing them to manifestations of racism (Jupp 2010a, 2010b). There was a small, but important, minority of participants who did try to take account of their racial privileges and use them to promote racial justice. While most could not accurately be described as racial justice allies (Reason, Millar, and Scales 2005), they were still trying to engage the issue of racism (hence, *Working through Whiteness*). Affectively, I was not prepared to hear these narratives as I began to unconsciously create emotional defence mechanisms against the microaggressions I was anticipating. This involved beginning interviews by focusing on completing the semi-structured protocol, appearing to be attentive, but actually preparing myself for to hear the *words that wound* (Matsuda 1993).

I was so shielded from these microaggressions that I was not actually hearing many of my participants' narratives. This meant that when participants made racist comments, they were immediately grouped with the others who also made racist comments. Essentially, my defensiveness created a binary – either participants were racial justice allies or not. Lost in this equation were the participants who were working through their Whiteness (Cabrera 2012) but continued to struggle with issues of race. I came to this realisation while interviewing a participant who could be considered a racial justice ally based upon his understandings of race, critiques of oppression and actions that combated this systemic reality (Reason, Millar, and Scales 2005). His views were an academic breath of fresh air, and I was enthralled in his narrative specifically because it was so different than the others. I was nodding my head as he described community organising, and then the interview turned. He began volunteering his struggles being a White man in a community of colour doing organising, and the power dynamics at play. He was brutally honest and self-reflective, consistently asking difficult questions:

- Was he working *for* as opposed to *with* communities of colour?
- Were there times when he accidentally recreated racial power dynamics?
- How can he engage in meaningful community work while avoiding the temptation to leave when times become difficult?
- Broadly, how does one take account of the systemic, unwarranted privileges afforded by being White, male, and heterosexual?

For each of these questions, there was no easy answer, and this participant openly struggled with them in front of me. His ability to be vulnerable, in particular his ability to be vulnerable as a man, implicitly challenged me to do the same. It was at this point in the research process that I began to take account of my emotional state in the context of the interviews, and this simple acknowledgement helped me work through two key issues.

First, I was able let go of some of the pent up anger that I did not realise I was carrying. This, in turn, helped me gain clarity when analysing the interviews, especially those who were working through Whiteness. This meant that instead of assessing whether or not a participant was a racial justice ally,

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I evaluated whether or not they were willing to engage their Whiteness. The participants working through Whiteness were still a minority of the interviews conducted, but in many respects, they spoke more clearly to the issue of praxis. Instead of seeing Whiteness in terms of good and bad Whites, it focused on those who were willing to engage, critique and struggle with very difficult questions.

Data interpretation and epistemologies of ignorance

Mills (1997) argued the persistence of White Supremacy relied upon a denial that racism exists, or an epistemology of ignorance (18). Essentially, Mills posits that White Supremacy exists and persists, in part, by a collective White denial that racism is even an issue. Feagin (2010) makes a similar argument in the *White Racial Frame* where he argues, 'A particular frame structures the thinking process and shapes what people see, or do not see' (10). According to Feagin, this means that frequently White people receive racial information, yet they process it in non-racial terms (e.g. 'It's really a matter of class, not race'). This forcible denial that race is an issue was frequently present in my interviews, and this creates a tension in that the interviews were concurrently accurate and inaccurate as I previously discussed.

To analyse the transcripts, I wanted to build theory using the constant comparative approach to data analysis (Glaser 1965) to develop an understanding of the process that led these White men to be so divorced from the contemporary reality of systemic racism (Feagin 2010). Within constant comparative analysis, theory building derives from inductive reasoning applied to the data that is ideally devoid of a priori assumptions. Rather than follow this method precisely, I took similar liberties to those utilised by Kezar (1996). I did not pretend to be start from a clean theoretical state while analysing the data for this project, and I think this is justified regarding the nature of the contemporary racism. If racial theorists are correct that the privileges of Whiteness are frequently invisible to the beneficiaries of the system (Feagin and O'Brien 2003), I cannot absolutely rely upon their personal testimonies as the basis for my analysis as this would likely justify the racial status quo. Conversely, if I were to take a completely critical view of the participants' narratives, I would run the risk of being dismissive of their views. I tried to strike a balance between being rooted in the data to generate theory while not completely neglecting existing theories of systemic racism. However, to accomplish this I had to be able to truly listen to what the participants told me; something that, again, was only possible once I better took account of my emotional responses to their racial narratives.

Conclusion: bringing it all together

I was surprised that the participants were very willing to participate in the study and actually had a number of strong opinions on the subject of race they felt they were not able to openly express publicly. The interviews, themselves, required me to be an attentive listener who also needed to assertively challenge some of the expressed views of the participants. This, again, was a slight departure from traditional views of interviewing where the participant is supposed to 'talk freely' (Bogdan and Biklen 1998). During these interviews, it was a challenge determining how the presence of a Man of Colour might affect the course of the interviews, and I was surprised at the participants' candour regarding how my racial/ethnic background slipped into the background during the course of the interviews. While I spent a great deal of time exploring how I as the interviewer affected the participants, I neglected how the participants affected me.

Most in the interviews functioned as microaggressions against me as the interviewer and this unexpected component of the research almost led to several methodological missteps. I took insufficient account of how these narratives negatively affected me, and my unexamined masculinity became an important barrier to making this realisation. While I entered this research understanding that I would need to chart new methodological terrain to complete it, my largest mistake was misinterpreting and misapplying some components of positionality in qualitative research. Thus, the current paper functions as one part methodology and one part cautionary note to men in particular: Masculinity

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can, and in my case did, become an important obstacle I had to overcome in order to completing this research. I was insufficiently introspective regarding my masculinity, focusing my attention on race at the expense of gender. Unexpectedly, a critical interrogation of White supremacy was almost derailed by unexamined masculinity.

Notes

1. By both accurate and inaccurate, I mean that these narratives accurately describe the participants' views and feelings about race while concurrently being inaccurate representations of contemporary racial realities. For example, see perceptions of White victimization or 'reverse racism' (Cabrera 2014a; Feagin and O'Brien 2003). The narratives reflect how the people feel, but 'reverse racism' is largely a myth (Bonilla-Silva 2006).
2. 'When racism and masculinity collide' was built upon Strayhorn's (2010) thesis 'When race and gender collide.' However, Strayhorn tended to reference race and gender as markers of difference whereas I am analysing social identity contextualised within systems of oppression and privilege.
3. This is the verb describing a microaggression occurring.

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