Racial Dialogues: Challenges Faculty of Color Face in the Classroom

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Research on the experiences of faculty of color in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) suggests that they often experience the campus climate as invalidating, alienating, and hostile. Few studies, however, have actually focused on the classroom experiences of faculty of color when difficult racial dialogues occur. Using Consensually Qualitative Research, eight faculty of color were interviewed about their experiences in the classroom when racially tinged topics arose. Three major findings emerged. First, difficult racial dialogues were frequently instigated by the presence of racial microaggressions delivered toward students of color or the professor. Dialogues on race were made more difficult when the classrooms were diverse, when heated emotions arose, when there was a strong fear of self-disclosure, and when racial perspectives differed. Second, all faculty experienced an internal struggle between balancing their own values and beliefs with an attempt to remain objective. This conflict was often described as exhausting and energy-depleting. Third, faculty of color described both successful and unsuccessful strategies in facilitating difficult dialogues on race that arose in the course of their teaching. These findings have major implications for how PWIs can develop new programs, policies, and practices that will aid and support colleagues of color.

Keywords: racial dialogues, racial microaggressions, faculty of color, teaching strategies

There is increasing recognition that faculty of color at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) often experience the campus climate as isolating, alienating, extremely stressful, risky, and invalidating (Harlow, 2003; Stanley, 2006; Turner, Gonzalez & Wood, 2008). The stressors they encounter are both qualitatively and quantitatively different from those of their non-Latino White colleagues (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008). Faculty of color are more likely to (a) experience being "the only one," which leads to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Alexander & Moore, 2008), (b) lack mentors who possess knowledge of the "minority experience" (Stanley, 2006), (c) have their research and scholarship devalued and considered illegitimate (Turner et al., 2008), (d) be subjected to a hostile and invalidating racial climate (Guzman, Trevino, Lubuguin, & Aryan, 2010), (e) have their racial identities assailed (Harlow, 2003), (f) experience elevated levels of stress and distress in PWIs (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008), (g) be subjected to biased promotion and tenure decisions (Fenelon, 2003), and (h) have many White students question their qualifications or credentials to hold the status of "Professor" (Harlow, 2003). The challenges and struggles for faculty of color at PWIs are well documented in empirical studies, conceptual and theoretical pieces, anecdotal reports, and in personal narratives (Stanley, 2006; Turner et al., 2008).

There are surprisingly few studies, however, that focus on the classroom experiences of faculty of color, how they deal with racial microaggressions, how their race may influence their teaching, and what they have found to be successful or unsuccessful strategies in facilitating racial dialogues that arise in the course of their teaching (Harlow, 2003; Sanchez-Hucles & Jones, 2005; Sue, 2010). Those that exist tend to focus on the K–12 classroom setting (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990; Stanley, 2006), deal primarily with challenges to their authority and expertise, and discuss negative behaviors from students, faculty, and administrators that take away from the joy of teaching. In light of the need to increase diversity in higher education and repeated attempts to diversify the faculty (Turner et al., 2008), it is disheartening to realize that faculty of color may have less than positive experiences in their classrooms. This issue is more critical when one realizes that the primary attraction of academe for faculty of color resides in their stated "love of teaching" (Harlow, 2003).

A strong case can be made that classroom dynamics between faculty of color and White students represent a microcosm of race relations in our society (Blanding, 2007; Sue, 2010). Thus, it is not surprising that many of the racial prejudices and stereotypes may be reenacted in classroom interactions between faculty of color and students. Two promising directions in research have shed light upon classroom racial dynamics that impede the teaching effectiveness of teachers and undermine students' learning: (a) the manifestation, dynamics, and impact of racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007; Sue, 2010); and (b) the challenging nature of facilitating difficult dialogues on race (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009; Watt, 2007; Young, 2003).

Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, insults, invalidations, and indignities, whether they are intentional or unintentional, which are directed toward people of color (Sue et al., 2007). Most microaggressions are unintentional and occur outside the level of conscious awareness of the perpetrators. Stud-

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ies reveal that racial microaggressions, albeit seemingly trivial in nature, have major consequences for persons of color because they (a) attack the mental health of recipients (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008), (b) foster a hostile and invalidating campus climate (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), (c) induce stereotype threat (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002), (d) cause physical health problems (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999), (e) devalue social group identities in the broader society (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, & Ditlmann, 2008), and (f) interfere with student learning and/or work productivity (Dovidio, 2001; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007). Far from being benign slights, racial microaggressions have been shown to be extremely harmful to people of color.

When microaggressions occur in the classroom, they often trigger difficult dialogues on race, an area of study intimately related to the stresses experienced by faculty of color (Sue, Torino, Capodilupo, Rivera, & Lin, 2009; Sue, Rivera, Capodilupo, Lin, & Torino, 2010). Difficult dialogues on race have been defined as threatening conversations or interactions between members of different racial or ethnic groups (Sue, Lin, et al., 2009). They are threatening for faculty and students because such dialogues may reveal intimate thoughts, beliefs, or feelings related to racial prejudice or bias. The scholarship devoted to difficult racial dialogues in the classroom, however, has focused primarily on aiding White faculty and preK–12 teachers to develop strategies in teaching students about race and racism (Bell, 2003; Blanding, 2007; Bolgatz, 2005; Young, 2003).

Studies on how White faculty and White students perceive and react to difficult dialogues on race reveal that they experience considerable anxiety when racial topics arise, find it difficult to recognize racial microaggressions, and fear they will self-disclose their own racial biases. In addition, White faculty are apprehensive about racial dialogues because they fear losing control of the classroom dynamics and believe they are ill-prepared to deal with "hot" racial topics (Sue et al., 2010; Sue, Torino, et al., 2009). As a consequence, when a difficult dialogue on race presents itself, White faculty and White students tend to avoid or minimize the importance of the topic. The result is the proverbial "elephant in the room" that detracts from the learning experience of all students. The impact of a poorly handled or avoided difficult dialogue on race for students of color has been found to be quite devastating. The denial and minimization of racial topics are experienced as a denial of their racial realities, assailing their racial identities, and evoking powerful emotions of anger, frustration, and alienation (Sue, Lin, et al., 2009).

It seems equally important to also ask how faculty of color handle difficult dialogues on race. Are they equally paralyzed when racial topics arise in their classrooms? Do they find racial topics threatening? What emotions do they experience when racial conversations arise? Are their struggles unique or similar to those of their White colleagues? To date no published research has addressed specifically how faculty of color perceive and react to difficult dialogues on race, the internal struggles they experience, and the teaching strategies they employ during these difficult dialogues. Implications for education and training and for devising new programs and practices to support faculty of color may be derived from such an understanding.

Method

A qualitative methodology was used to explore how faculty of color experience and facilitate difficult dialogues on race in the classroom. Qualitative methodologies are especially appropriate for the study of underinvestigated phenomena (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morrow & Smith, 2000). More specifically, Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR; Hill et al., 2005; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997) was used for the current study; it has been successfully employed in revealing dynamics of difficult dialogues on race in classroom settings (Sue, Lin, et al., 2009; Sue et al., 2010; Sue, Torino, et al., 2009). Defining features of CQR include the use of multiple researchers who must achieve consensus throughout the data analysis process, as well as the inclusion of an independent auditor to periodically review the work in order to limit the influence of individual bias.

Participants

The participants were faculty of color from a private university in the Northeastern United States. Eight individuals (two men and six women) agreed to be interviewed and all of their responses were analyzed for this study. Of the eight, four were Asian, three were Black/African American, and one was Latino. The eight informants ranged in age from 36 to 59 years, three were born in the United States and five resided in the U.S. between 9 and 38 years. All participants possessed doctorates in their respective fields; seven held the rank of professor and one was a full-time lecturer. All eight participants taught at the graduate level; five in education, two in social work, and one in business. It is important to note that the courses they taught did not specifically address topics of race or multicultural issues. Similar to the study on difficult dialogues with White faculty (Sue, Torino, et al., 2009), the researchers utilized a purposive sampling method to recruit participants with the following criteria: (a) faculty of color, (b) a good amount of classroom teaching experience (i.e., at least 5 years teaching experience), and (c) willingness to speak about their experiences in addressing dialogues on race. Based on these criteria, the researchers compiled a list of prospective faculty members, and the principal investigator sent the group an initial e-mail describing the study and asking for volunteers. A total of nine faculty of color out of the 15 who were contacted expressed an interest in participating, but one dropped out midway through the study. None were financially compensated for their involvement.

Researchers

The principal investigator, an Asian American male faculty member, served as the auditor in the study. A team of five doctoral students (one Latino male, two African American females, one Asian International female, and one Asian American female) conducted the data analysis. Two of the team members had prior experience with CQR analysis and provided training for the three other members. An important aspect of CQR is to reduce the subjective impact of researcher biases, which required team members to disclose their beliefs and expectations of study results prior to data analysis (Hill et al., 2005; Hill et al., 1997). Beliefs of the data analysis team included assumptions that professors of color would (a) find that their own races and the racial compositions of

their classes would influence racial dialogues, (b) more readily recognize difficult dialogues than their White counterparts, (c) report more resistance from White students during racial dialogues, (d) be concerned about their student evaluations, and (e) feel a lack of institutional support. These biases were reexamined during the course of the data analysis to minimize their effects and maximize the integrity of participant voices.

Measures

Information about each participant's race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, occupational status, and teaching experience was gathered using a brief demographic questionnaire. A semistructured interview protocol was utilized to investigate components of difficult dialogues about race. The questions were introduced using the following statement: "We are interested in studying how racial issues, whether explicit or implicit, make their presence felt in the classroom. As you know, when these incidents occur, strong emotions are often felt or expressed by the parties involved. These difficult dialogues or exchanges often occur between students and/or the professor and have the ability to impede effective classroom communication and learning. Hence, we will be focusing on your experiences with difficult dialogues as an instructor." Four major questions were organized around (a) faculty of color definitions of difficult racial dialogues, (b) how they dealt with them, (c) what they considered effective and ineffective strategies, and (d) the role their races played in the classroom.

Procedures

Data collection. A White female faculty member with considerable qualitative experience was employed to conduct the interviews. Although we were cognizant that her race might influence the responses of the faculty of color, our decision to use this interviewer was positively supported by several factors. First, the faculty member had just finished an extensive series of interviews on a parallel study of White faculty (Sue, Torino, et al., 2009) and was well-versed in the process. Second, her area of expertise and sensitivity to racial and cultural issues were well established. Last, although not explicitly stated by the participants, the richness of the self-disclosures and interview data suggested to us that the race of the interviewer had minimal effect on the participants' desire to speak openly about matters related to racial dialogues in the classroom. We followed the same procedures for data collection and analysis used in a previous study by Sue, Torino, et al. (2009). The only difference was that our participants for this study were all faculty of color instead of White faculty. The interviews were approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour in length, audiotaped, and professionally transcribed verbatim. Indistinct words or statements were not transcribed, and therefore they were not used in the analysis. Each participant was assigned a coded number after removing all identifying information on the transcripts.

Data analysis. Following accepted CQR methodology, research team members individually identified topic areas or domains in order to classify the initial data set from the interview transcripts. Then the members met as a team to reach consensus on a final set of domains. The domains were presented to the external auditor, who was not part of the data analysis. Feedback from the auditor was helpful in clarifying similarities and differences be-

tween domains, reducing domains by subsuming related categories into broader ones, and refining terminology to better characterize them. After the auditor provided feedback and consensus was reached on the domains, the team members were asked to individually extract core ideas or summary statements from the domains. The purpose of constructing core ideas is to condense participant's words into concise statements and to reduce redundancy (Hill et al., 2005). After the team members independently read through the interview transcripts and grouped responses into core ideas, the team convened to discuss, analyze, and reach consensus. The core ideas were presented to the auditor and detailed feedback was given to the research team before beginning a cross-analysis of the data. The auditor's feedback was necessary in confirming that the core ideas adequately illustrated the participant's message and were properly assigned to the correct domains. During cross-analysis, all the interview transcripts were subjected to intense scrutiny to arrive at the wording of categories and placement of core ideas into each of them (Hill et al., 2005). In order to determine the frequency of occurrence of each category, we used established CQR protocol (Hill et al., 1997) in which *general* applies to all cases, *typical* applies to at least half of the cases, and *variant* applies to at least two or three cases. The auditor provided feedback to the research team and consensus was reached among the research team members regarding further editing or changes that needed to be made.

Results

From the CQR analysis, six domains emerged from the data: (a) Characteristics of Difficult Dialogues, (b) Microaggressions as Instigators to Difficult Dialogues, (c) Reactions to Difficult Dialogues, (d) Outcomes of Difficult Dialogues, (e) Institutional Structures, and (f) Strategies Used to Facilitate Dialogues. Because of the large number of categories generated (see Table 1), not all of the categories could be discussed equally within the scope of this article. Thus, we concentrate on the major findings and report other results in Table 1.

Domain 1: Characteristics of Difficult Dialogues for Students

Faculty of color described what they believed constitutes a difficult dialogue on race. Categories such as classroom diversity (e.g., race and gender), strong emotional reactions, clash of racial realities, fears of self-disclosure, and explicit racial topics were named by the participants.

Classroom diversity (general). In all cases, participants indicated that presence of students who differed in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender either instigated or influenced racial dialogues. For example, one female stated, ". . . the kind of racial-ethnic make-up of the classroom is a clue as to whether the dialogue will be difficult." Similarly, one informant observed that ". . . the more White the classroom is, the more likely it is [the students] to be silent." Professors felt that the diversity in class would generate different conflicting perspectives from students that would not be present if the class were homogenous.

Strong and intense emotional reactions (typical). Additionally, the generation of intense emotions, whether directly expressed or not, added to the discomfort of students and the pro-

Table 1
Summary of Results

Domain	Category	Frequency
Characteristics of Difficult Dialogues for Students	Classroom Diversity	General
	Strong & Intense Emotional Reactions	Typical
	Clash of Racial Realities	Typical
	Fear of Self-Disclosure	Variant
	Explicit Racial Topics or Curriculum	Variant
Microaggressions as Instigators of Difficult Dialogues	Ability to Recognize Microaggressions	General
	White Privilege & Racial Microaggressions	Typical
Reactions	*Internal Faculty Struggles*	
	Conflict in Balancing Personal Values and Beliefs with Objectivity	General
	Struggle with Microaggressions Directed at Professors	General
	"Expert Syndrome"	General
	Emotional Conflicts	Typical
	Perceived Student Reactions	
	Emotional	General
	Behavioral	General
	Cognitive	Typical
	Clash of Worldviews	Typical
Outcomes of Difficult Dialogues	*Positive*	
	Increased Awareness of Biases	Typical
	Increased Empathy	Typical
	Desire to Continue the Difficult Dialogue	Variant
	Acknowledging the Role of Power, Privilege, & Oppression	Variant
	Negative	
	No Change in Perspective or Actions	Typical
Institutional Pressures	Supportive Institutional Structure & Practices	Typical
	Time Constraints	Typical
	Promotion & Tenure Concerns	Variant
	Emphasis on Acquisition of Knowledge & Course Content	Variant
	Institutional Structures May Inherently Foster Microaggressions	Variant
Strategies for Facilitating Difficult Dialogues	Self-Disclosing Professor's Biased Thoughts, Feelings, & Mistakes	General
	Making Examples Personal, Real, & Concrete	General
	Facilitating the Exploration of Students' Experiences	General
	Checking in with Students	Typical
	Being Aware of Professor's Impact on Students	Typical
	Active Intervention to Identify & Process the Meaning of Implicit Bias	Variant
	Student & Professor Develop Positive Relationship	Variant
	Obtain Continuing Professional Development & Training	Variant

Note. General = all cases; Typical = 4–7 cases; Variant = 2–3 cases.

fessor, and made managing the classroom dialogue challenging. Overt displays of anger, defensiveness, and anxiety were directly expressed verbally and nonverbally. Raised voices, flushed faces, angry confrontive remarks, and conflicts between students also may result. Some faculty stated that emotions were not always visible, but they may be brewed in silence, although the "tension in the room" and "fear and anxiety" were felt by both professors and students in the classroom.

Clash of racial realities (typical). Many informants observed that the racial experiences of White students and students of color led to different racial realities that were played out in the classroom. Issues like color blindness, meritocracy, or White privilege could dominate discussions on race in the classroom. White students had difficulty understanding such concepts, which would result in a clash of worldviews. The professor often found it difficult to help students bridge the divide.

Fear of self-disclosure (variant) and explicit racial topics (variant). The fear of self-disclosure and explicit racial topics were two different themes that also emerged. Several informants mentioned that White students feared being misperceived as having racial biases during difficult dialogues on race, as evidenced by

their silence and avoidance of racial topics. This fear or trepidation made White students reluctant to engage in a dialogue, and when they did, their communications were brief and perfunctory, often punctuated with hesitations, self-censorship, and ambiguity. It was also noted that dialogues on race were also instigated by topics or content involving racial incidents and/or societal biases. This was manifested in the curriculum (topics or content on the "achievement gap," poverty, racism, or discrimination) or in recent incidents containing strong racial overtones that were introduced into classroom discussions.

Domain 2: Microaggressions as Instigators of Difficult Dialogues

All of the participants discussed the role that racial microaggressions played in inciting difficult dialogues in the classroom.

Ability to recognize microaggressions (general). All of the participants appeared to be able to recognize when potential difficult dialogues on race were about to occur in their classrooms. They observed that students of color had little difficulty recognizing microaggressions but that White students seemed unaware of

them. Our informants were able to recall multiple instances in which White students were microaggressive toward students of color. They all believed that microaggressions were often instigators of difficult dialogues on race. The most common were assumptions or comments indicating that people of color are intellectually inferior. Beliefs that students of color made it into the university through affirmative action or some other accommodated admissions process were given as examples. One professor shared that students of color frequently experienced intellectual inferiority microaggressions in all forms from their White peers: ". . . something happened in class that's a racist comment made by I think a White student to a Black student . . . the White student made comments like, 'Oh, you're so articulate!'" While recalling this exchange, the professor noted that this seemingly harmless compliment is a microaggression because (a) the White student seemed surprised that a Black student could be so bright, (b) it implied that Black students, in general, are not articulate and intelligent, and (c) that the Black student is an exception. Other microaggressions focused on "blaming the victim" philosophies when discussing problematic performances of students of color. For example, White students indicated that lower academic performance by children of color was due to low motivation, lower intelligence, or poor family upbringing.

White privilege and racial microaggressions (typical). The majority of professors believed that a strong relationship existed between the invisibility of White privilege and the tendency of White students to deliver microaggressions. Many White students, for example, acted in ways indicating that they had a right to control the classroom interactions. In many respects they would freely put forth their ideas, interrupt, and disagree with those voiced by students of color. The actions of White students often seemed to invalidate the differing racial realities being expressed. One professor shared the following about her perception of how White privilege manifests in the classroom: "I think the male student, who was a White male student, has been very outspoken in my class . . . he wasn't that considerate in terms of giving room for other [students of color] voices. He sort of just speaks."

Domain 3: Reactions

This domain consisted of (a) personal reactions by the professors to observed and/or experienced microaggressions in their classes, and (b) the reactions of students during an ongoing dialogue.

Internal faculty struggles. Faculty all described intense internal struggles, conflicts, and feelings associated with their roles as professors, and especially as professors of color. They described being placed in an unenviable position of processing their own reactions while managing the emotions being expressed by two groups of students. The faculty's internal struggles included (a) the need to remain an objective observer, (b) processing microaggressive statements directed at the faculty, (c) managing expectations about being the "expert," and (d) processing personal feelings elicited during difficult dialogues.

Conflict in balancing personal values and beliefs with objectivity (general). All of the participants described their own reactions in response to difficult dialogues about race. Many participants voiced that they had difficulty balancing their own personal social justice agenda with the importance of maintaining

objectivity in the classroom. One faculty member noted, "I think for me, I have to be very sort of objective, which is hard . . . and I also am mindful that I don't want to reinforce stereotypes." All professors reported a continual struggle between the desire to correct misinformation and taking the side of students of color at the same time trying to balance their role as an objective educator, someone who could maintain credibility with White students and students of color. For some faculty, maintaining "neutrality" often enraged students of color. For example, a female professor reported that a Black student was upset with her for not providing more support as another person of color: "So and then, when the class was over, the Black woman came to me and said, Professor M___, I cannot believe you did not support me during that conversation. I'm going to report you, report you to the Dean and to the President of the University." The faculty's role in this example was made more difficult by her struggle to simultaneously remain objective and to process her student's reaction.

The struggle with microaggressions directed at professors (general). All faculty members described the role their own racial minority status may play in the classroom dynamics and especially how it may influence student reactions to them. Some professors, for example, reported both implicit and explicit microaggressions they received from both students and other faculty. One male faculty member described how students challenged his authority by blurting out counter perspectives while he was teaching. They described how personal microaggressions drained their energies and placed them in an uncomfortable and oftentimes ambiguous situation. One female participant described how White students constantly questioned her position of authority and expertise. She gave the example of one female student who continually complained in class that the ideas proposed by the professor could not be verified in the textbook being used. Some professors also spoke about their experience receiving microaggressions from White faculty members who would imply that their colleagues of color were "oversensitive," thereby invalidating their experiential racial reality. Thus, not only did they feel little support from their White colleagues, but their concerns were often minimized and seen as trivial in nature.

The "Expert Syndrome" (general). All faculty described the intellectual pressure of dealing with expectations that faculty of color have special expertise in facilitating a difficult dialogue on race. Both White students and those of color expected faculty of color to be "experts" in facilitating such dialogues. One participant indicated that, "whenever those things come up [difficult dialogues], there's a lot of pressure on me—I'm sure other faculty feel this way—that you have to really think quickly about what's going on. And they're expecting you to. It's not only that you have to, they're sort of expecting you to be able to pull it together and help them understand." These concerns were compounded by fears that the professor would lose control of the classroom dynamics, reflecting negatively on his or her competence. In summary, faculty of color were expected to be experts, able to facilitate a racial dialogue successfully, and to create a positive outcome. When they were unable to do so, they would be perceived as incompetent.

Emotional conflicts (typical). Many participants noted their own emotional reactions as "hot buttons" that would be pushed when confronted with the racial biases and assumptions of their students. They described not being immune from intense emotional feelings, much like their students of color, when microag-

gressions occurred or when obvious stereotypes or misinformation seemed to form the basis of student opinions. On the one hand, they wanted to help students understand the dynamics of the difficult dialogue, but on the other hand, they would sometimes become angry or flooded with feelings that were difficult to control. Concealing these reactions was often described as exhausting. At times, the feelings could be overwhelming. One participant described the onslaught of emotions experienced during a difficult dialogue: "It was too much—anger or frustration or, you know, grief and shock. I mean, you name it. It's just everything." The inner emotional turmoil would often deplete energies away from more productive educational actions on the part of the professor.

Perceived student reactions.   Our participants also spent time describing student reactions to a difficult dialogue. They ordered their descriptions along emotional, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions. In the emotional (general) dimension, all of the participants described the deeply emotional reactions elicited for students during difficult dialogues. These emotions included anxiety, fear, anger, hopelessness, defensiveness, feeling attacked, and feeling deeply wounded. White students appeared to become defensive, which seemed to prevent them from listening or engaging in an open dialogue. Professors sometimes described how intense feelings would result in monologues where one student would simply state his or her position without responding to the other person. The other student, in turn, would restate his or her previous position without regard for the stance of the other. These reactions would often be described as "roadblocks" or barriers to a successful dialogue on race. In the behavioral (general) dimension, several professors indicated that silence in the classroom, avoidance, and ignoring racial topics were behaviors exhibited by White students. The effect was to dismiss or negate the importance of the topic. The most frequently observed reaction was silence when difficult dialogue was about to occur. Interpretations by professors ranged from students' disengagement to active listening. However, disengagement or avoidance of the topic could also be manifested actively: "I remember looking at a couple of girls in the back of the room, and they were busy not paying attention. Lots of chatting, lots of looking through their notes, like sort of digging in their books." Professors also noted that some White students would simply change the subject or make tangential remarks. Although many of the descriptions about reactions focused on the White students, many faculty members noted similar and different reactions in students of color as well. Silence by students of color, however, was interpreted differently than that for White students. For example, White students were perceived to be silent for fear of disclosing biases. In contrast, students of color were perceived to be fearful of being invalidated. In the cognitive (typical) dimension, differing and conflicting perspectives or viewpoints were cited by professors as intellectually challenging for many students. Cognitively, White students appeared to exhibit difficulty in understanding, accepting, and integrating new information about aspects of race and racism that conflicted with their own beliefs. They seemed to experience tension and had difficulty accepting the legitimacy of worldviews that differed from their own (clashing racial realities).

Domain 4: Outcomes of Difficult Dialogues

All professors described actual and possible outcomes of difficult dialogues on race in the classroom. These observations and expectations were categorized as either positive or negative.

Positive outcomes included (a) increased awareness of personal biases (typical), (b) increased empathy (typical) for diverse experiences, (c) the desire to continue difficult dialogue (variant), and (d) acknowledging the role of power, privilege, and oppression in society (variant). A negative outcome was identified as no change in perspective or actions (typical). The lack of change and even a hardening of biased beliefs or behaviors among students during an unsuccessful difficult dialogue was a major concern. A few professors indicated that students would often agree "to disagree" and/or appear to concede an argument despite unchanged beliefs. One professor lamented that a negative outcome would be for students not to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their own prejudices, and to leave the discussion feeling hurt, angry, or more entrenched in their biased convictions.

Domain 5: Institutional Pressures

Although the interview questions focused primarily on classroom experiences and not the wider college experience, responses in this domain were generally mentioned in passing (variant). They were, nevertheless, worthy of mention. First, several professors indicated apprehensions about student evaluations that influence their promotion and tenure prospects. Professors endorsed the belief that dealing with racial issues in class was potentially explosive and that student conflicts could affect their feelings about the class and specifically the professor. Prior to being tenured, some participants recalled heightened concern about negative student evaluations, which obstructed their willingness to facilitate difficult dialogues on race in the classroom. Second, the traditional educational emphasis on acquisition of knowledge and course content were seen as being at odds with emotive discussions on race. Third, many professors also indicated that time constraints were a significant factor in being unable to properly facilitate difficult racial dialogues. Classes limited to an hour or two were not seen as being conducive to emotional exploration. Fourth, institutional reluctance to acknowledge microaggressions on the administrative level and on the wider campus were also mentioned. This reluctance served to reinforce the biases and assumptions that continue to play a role in creating difficult dialogues in the classroom. As one faculty member noted, institutional cultivation of these assumptions and biases allows them to be perpetuated by students and educators. Finally, participants also identified supportive institutional structure and practices as well. For example, being in a position of authority (tenured), explicit vision or policy statements that condemned discriminatory behaviors, supportive administrators who are sensitive to experiences of faculty of color, in-service training for faculty on multicultural competence, and other supportive institutional policies and practices helped to create a climate of racial understanding.

Domain 6: Strategies for Facilitating Difficult Dialogues

All of the participants discussed what they believed were effective strategies for facilitating difficult dialogues. Six categories arose during the interviews.

Effective strategies.

Self-disclosing professor's biased thoughts, feelings, and mistakes (general). Many of the participants spoke about the importance of acknowledging professor biases and mistakes and disclosing personal limitations, their biases, and failings. One participant stated, "I think as professors or teachers, we sometimes think we need to know everything, to be an expert . . . that's when people are going to get the most out of your presence. But it's really not that way. They really get the most out of you, I think, when you are the most human." All informants echoed a belief that coming across as "human" and being equally fallible as their students (a) modeled honest self disclosure and (b) lessened the universal anxiety associated with revealing personal biases.

Making examples personal, real, and concrete (general). One participant spoke about the importance of bringing in concrete examples from personal experience in initiating difficult dialogues: "I have to realize also that they're not coming with those experiences, so I have to provide them some of those experiences and scenarios in the class and which they can speak about." Another did so in the following manner: "You use stories. I have lots and lots of stories and some of them are stories from my own experience, many of them are stories from my work and still other stories are people I know, my friends, students, my family, whatever it is. Because you know, putting them in story form kind of helps people kind of get it." A professor challenged the students to think about difficult dialogues both inside and outside the classroom: "Why does it [difficult dialogues] have to be stuck in the classroom? . . . once you understand the theories and models, when you watch TV, when you go to the movies, when you're at your job, you're in a case study, so you need to be thinking that way." The professor is suggesting that students apply what they learn in the classroom about engaging in difficult dialogues to their everyday experiences.

Facilitating the exploration of students' experiences (general). All of the professors indicated the importance of facilitating the exploration of the students' experience. One participant encouraged students to explore their experiences by initiating discussions: "Sometimes I would actually pull part of the person's points out and ask for feedback or make it into a discussion question to involve other students." Another professor provided space for students' exploration: "I give them a lot of space, a lot of opportunity to do their work, to do the soul searching." A female faculty member highlighted the importance of delving into the students' experiences in a nonjudgmental manner to reaffirm the notion that they are not alone: "That 'we' instead of 'you,' and then identify and validate the feelings instead of making judgments is always a good strategy." Another female participant highlighted the use of writing as a way for students to process and express their experiences: "I think when I ask students to reflect on a conversation, like in writing, they'll often say more in writing than they might say in the class." The faculty member did not mention implementing a formal writing program for the students; however, the purpose of this was to highlight that students may feel more comfortable expressing themselves through writing rather than speaking in class.

Checking in with students (typical). Some participants emphasized the importance of checking in with students. After engaging in a difficult dialogue, some would ask students to come to their offices for conversations and/or make process observations about their behaviors: ". . . you seem to be a little bit quiet today." Another participant began a class by addressing the difficult dialogue that occurred during the last class: "I'll start the next class off with addressing some of the dynamics that I saw, and sort of give students sort of a sense of closure to the issue." Many of the informants felt that these process observations gave permission to students to talk about their reactions and apprehensions.

Being aware of the professor's impact on students (typical). This category reflects the participants' belief that it is essential to be aware of one's social impact on students. Many participants spoke specifically about the role of the professor's race and ethnicity on impacting difficult dialogues. "One of the trade-offs is that because I'm so clear about my position, I have no doubt that there are students whom I've silenced because they're afraid to be honest with me." The mere physical presence of professors of color would often add to the difficulty of racial dialogues in students. Several participants observed that many students seemed to be hypersensitive to the words, ideas and stances on racial topics that a faculty of color took. One participant observed: "They, you know, seemed to hang on every word I said." Students seemed to shape their responses or alter their participation in class so as to please or to not offend the professor. A Black female shared, "I think sometimes it's because I myself am Black, and so they don't want to say anything that will offend me. And so I can see them sort of struggling to word things in a way that doesn't, you know, indict me as part of this Black group that's underachieving . . ."

The acknowledgment of the power imbalance inherent between the professor and the students can be used as a tool in creating a safe space for students to be open and honest about their experience without fear of encountering repercussions. For example, one participant spoke about how students evade talking about their true feelings by focusing on sharing knowledge of the readings in order to gain approval from the professor and be seen as a "good student": "I think a lot of students cover themselves by doing less talking to each other, and really trying to talk to me to make sure that I have their attention and that I'm seeing that they did the reading, and that I'm appreciating that they're contributing something so that I can write them a letter."

The professor became aware that her position as an authority figure might have silenced students' opinions that may be contrary to her own. These participants would use different strategies to counteract or ameliorate the assumptions and biases of students. One participant used a class discussion on minority hiring to break stereotypes or false assumptions. As a faculty member of color, the students assumed that he would agree with the need to hire more people of color within an organization. However, the professor used his own race to provide a different perspective, challenging the students' assumptions and using this interaction to illustrate a point: "Helping them to see the divergent perspectives. That there is no one right answer . . . the answer is not just a diversified workforce. That's cookie-cutter, and that may not lead to creativity and here's why . . . and so coming from a Black professor, I think they didn't expect that." Several professors of color utilized a

modification of this strategy by voicing what they believed were the unstated thoughts of their students as if the beliefs were their very own. This approach helped give voice to the unspoken thoughts and feelings of students, and allowed the professor and entire class to discuss their merits. One participant emphasized the need to construct comments and feedback with awareness of its impact on students: "So I am constantly thinking about how to make sure that I structure the discussion and my own comments in a way that's not judgmental or not saying that people are wrong, but just making sure people see all sides to a particular issue." Based on the participants' experiences, an awareness of power, as well as racial and ethnic assumptions and attitudes, play integral roles in creating space for students to engage in difficult dialogues.

Three other variant strategies were mentioned by our informants. First, some felt that remaining passive or inactive during a difficult dialogue was the least effective means of dealing with a difficult dialogue. Active intervention to identify and process the meaning of implicit bias (variant) was needed to guide, point out, and challenge students' biases, rude behaviors, remarks, or problematic conversations during a difficult dialogue. To do nothing was to perpetuate misinformation and cause potential harm to students of color. Second, whenever possible, professors who develop positive relationships with students (variant) are more effective with those students when difficult dialogues arise. Positive relationships established inside and outside of the classroom with students in different capacities were extremely helpful in allowing students to feel safe with voicing their true feelings. Finally, several professors attributed their success in effectively facilitating difficult dialogues to continuing education and training workshops (variant) such as attending multicultural and diversity-focused training seminars and workshops.

Discussion

Our study produced an extremely rich abundance of information regarding how faculty of color perceive, experience, and react to difficult dialogues on race and ethnicity. These findings can be organized around several important themes: (a) faculty of color experience unique teaching challenges that make their classroom experiences less than positive, (b) they have learned to develop valuable teaching strategies to facilitate difficult dialogues on race, and (c) the impact of the professor's race on students is an important factor that influences racial dialogues.

When racial microaggressions occurred in the classroom, most of our faculty participants had little difficulty recognizing them. Although the ability to identify racial microaggressions as instigators to difficult dialogues on race is a first step to effective facilitation, it poses many challenges as well. First, faculty of color are placed in an unenviable internal struggle between balancing their own values and beliefs with the desire "to remain objective" and/or to maintain a neutral stance. When the dialogue involved racial stereotypes, misinformation, and a denial of the racial reality of students of color, however, many found it difficult to maintain "neutrality." Some expressed a concern that they could not in good conscience allow racial microaggressions to occur when they were obviously harmful to students of color. Second, all of our informants described many instances of implicit and explicit microaggressions directed at them. These negative behaviors and attitudes challenged their knowledge, competence, and authority, ques-

tioned the relevance of racial topics or discussions to the primary course content, and showed disrespect by interrupting when the professor was lecturing or facilitating a discussion. Third, they all experienced discomfort at "being trapped" in the "expert syndrome." They are often expected to possess special expertise in handling racial topics and situations. When they were unable to do so, faculty of color were apprehensive that they would be perceived as less capable and competent. Last, most of the professors experienced powerful emotional reactions when they witnessed or were the targets of microaggressions. They described having their "buttons pushed" when they felt demeaned and/or watched other students of color become targets. Managing the feelings of anger and frustration, constantly providing proof of one's competency, and being expected to represent an entire racial group were described as emotionally draining and "exhausting."

Our study revealed teaching strategies employed by faculty of color that were considered effective in facilitating racial dialogues. Among the most frequently endorsed were self-disclosing and sharing one's own racial biases and beliefs about other racial groups with their students when appropriate. Faculty of color believed this behavior enhanced credibility and facilitated discussions for several reasons: (a) It freed the professor from the constant guardedness and vigilance exercised in denying one's own prejudices and biases toward other groups; (b) it modeled truthfulness, openness, and sincerity to students on conversations about race and racism; (c) students seemed to respect and admire the courage of the professors in making themselves vulnerable by taking a risk to share with students their own anxieties and fears; (d) students appreciated hearing about the professor's own personal struggles to overcome his or her own prejudices; and (e) it might have encouraged students to approach the topic with honesty, because their own professor appeared equally "flawed."

The majority of participants mentioned the importance of being aware of how their race impacted students in their classes. They observed that students seemed extra cautious and anxious when racial dialogues ensued, and they would constantly check out the reactions and statements of the professor before volunteering or disclosing their own thoughts and feelings. Some seemed to fear offending the professor, would "hang on every word of the professor," and would shape their responses to align with what they thought he or she would want to hear. These behaviors were most noticeable when conversations involved racial topics as opposed to general course content. Faculty of color seemed to attribute this excessive anxiety to a power differential in that students were concerned about making a favorable impression so as not to negatively affect their grades.

Many professors used their race as a tool to enhance racial dialogues rather than detract from it. For example, some would surprise their students by taking stances diametrically opposed to what students expected (problems with affirmative action), give voice to unstated concerns of White students as if they held that position, build a more positive relationship with students inside and outside of the classroom, humanize themselves so that they represented more than a racial symbol, and/or directly discuss how the professor's race affects racial conversations.

It is interesting that none of our informants taught classes specifically related to curriculum in diversity and multiculturalism. They taught courses in urban education, business administration, and social work practice. Yet, many instances of difficult racial

dialogues arose during the course of their teaching. Because of their visible racial and ethnic minority statuses, issues of race and racism are a constant and continuing reality and presence in their classrooms. It may be possible for White faculty to remain oblivious and silent about racial issues that arise in the classroom, but ignoring and avoiding such topics are very difficult for faculty of color, especially when racial microaggressions are directed toward them or students of color. Clearly, the classroom teaching experience for faculty of color is quite different from that of their White colleagues; it poses additional challenges and stresses not experienced by White faculty. There is a strong need for PWIs to become cognizant of these additional pressures placed upon faculty of color; to provide support, validation and understanding for the unique challenges they confront in the classroom; to make public the racial teaching experiences of faculty of color; and to take these factors into consideration when evaluating teaching performance for promotion and tenure purposes.

In closing, it is important to note limitations of the study. First, the sample included only eight faculty members from a major Northeastern private university and was not racially, ethnically, or gender balanced. This demographic imbalance in our sample may have affected our findings; for example, there are likely to be differences between the types of classroom experiences faculty of color have based upon their gender. Second, our data was gathered from selective interview questions that were time-limited and no claim can be made that the entire universe of responses were sampled. Third, although the researchers attempted to control for interviewer biases and expectations in collecting and analyzing the data, it is possible that the researchers' general introductory remarks to the specific questions influenced how the participants responded and might have affected the data obtained. Fourth, while we believe that the participants' generous self-disclosures implied minimal impact of the interviewer's race, it is still possible that they withheld events, thoughts, and feelings from her because the interviewer was White.

Last, the overwhelming amount of data generated from the interviews did not allow us to report nor analyze many other equally important questions. For example, what are characteristics of a successful racial dialogue? Faculty of color listed a number of positive outcomes: increased awareness of biases, increased empathy, the desire to continue dialogues, and acknowledging the role of power and privilege. Are these positive outcomes related to the successful strategies employed by our informants? What are the negative outcomes in a failed difficult dialogue? On an institutional level, what have faculty of color found in the institutional policies and practices that either enhance or negate teaching effectiveness for faculty of color? Clearly, our findings suggest that PWIs need to begin developing new policies, practices, and programs to address the stressful challenges experienced by faculty of color.

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