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When Theory Meets Practice: Challenging Racial Inequality in a Post-Civil Rights Era

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WHEN THEORY MEETS PRACTICE: CHALLENGING RACIAL INEQUALITY IN

A POST-CIVIL RIGHTS ERA

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Because racism changes and develops, because it is simultaneously a vast phenomenon framed by epochal historical developments, and a moment-to-moment experiential reality, we can never expect fully to capture it theoretically. Nor can we expect that it will ever be fully overcome. That does not mean, however, that we are free to detest from trying.

—Howard Winant, *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice*

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Knowledge about racial inequality is important because it can inform racially just practices. To this end, multiple scholars have shown how racial inequality operates and how it can be challenged in various facets of social life. However, what does challenging racism look like when theory meets practice? Building on racial formation theory, this thesis examines a racial justice organization's (RJO) training and consulting services through the lens of a political project that is rearticulating the meaning of race and thus, the role of race in the social structure. Evidenced by observations and interviews with RJO staff and their clients, this process includes the disorganization of color-blindness and post-racialism as dominant racial ideologies and the construction of racial justice as an oppositional framework.

Introduction

Despite the monumental nature of racism—history, fluidity, and impact on lived experiences through time (Winant 2004)—this paper is about people who are fighting for a society where life chances are not determined by race. Specifically, this is a case study of a national racial justice non-profit organization that I call "RJO." To understand the social discourse surrounding racism in this context as well as how interpretations of racism impact actions against racial inequality, I employ Omi and Winant's (1986, 1994) concept of a political project as an analytical framework. Political projects represent one facet of racial formation theory. In Omi and Winant's (1994) words, racial formation is "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (p. 55). From this vantage point, race, racial groupings, and racism are malleable, largely political, constructs that change over time (Omi and Winant 1994; Berrey 2008). As a process, racial formation is driven by "historically situated projects" that seek to uphold or break down the racial status quo (Omi and Winant 1994: 55). In this paper, I contend that RJO is a political project that is seeking to dismantle racial inequality. To advance this argument, I show how RJO rearticulates the meaning of race by disorganizing color-blindness and post-racialism as dominant racial ideologies and discuss how it constructs and executes racial justice as an oppositional framework.

Through media, research, and activism, RJO has two goals. The first goal is to alter how racism is understood in the United States and the second is to prepare people to

work towards racial justice. I intentionally selected this organization for multiple

reasons. First, RJO is well established and has been in existence for roughly thirty years.

Additionally, RJO's emergence in the 1980s is historically significant because this time

period marks heightened political backlash against accomplishments of the civil rights

movement (e.g., claims of "reverse racism" among many white people in opposition to

affirmative action, Omi and Winant 1994; Steinberg 1995; Doane 2003). Second, RJO

prides itself on having a multi-generational and multi-racial staff, which Bonilla-Silva

(2006) and Yancey (2003) have pointed out as vital features for challenging racial

inequality today. Lastly, RJO promotes a structural or systemic examination of racism

rather than focusing on personal attitudes and behaviors, and this view aligns with

multiple contemporary race theories (Omi and Winant 1994; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Feagin

2000; Winant 2000).

Of RJO's three focal areas—media, research, and activism—I chose to

concentrate on the activism branch of the organization. Even though RJO's goals are

carried forward through each of these initiatives, I am most interested in how systemic

understandings of racism are developed and practiced in the visage of dominant

ideologies such as color-blindness and post-racialism. For people and organizations

trying to challenge racial inequality, these ideologies, which coalesce around America

having "transcended race," pose a significant barrier. This barrier is the lack of a

common sense understanding of what racism means beyond personal prejudice or bigoted

actions (Winant 2004; Doane 2003; Bell 2007). Through its training and consulting

services, RJO expands the meaning of race to institutional and structural levels while

preparing people and their organizations to practice systemic solutions. This makes its

activism branch, explicitly its training and consulting services (see Figure 1), the most

conducive feature for this study. Theories focusing on the perpetuation of racial

inequality (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Feagin 2000; Lewis 2004) have called for structural

approaches to combating racism for many years, yet studies of praxis remain rare. By

focusing on RJO's training and consulting services, this paper represents an attempt to

magnify ideological understandings and actions that occur in the space between theory

and practice.

Figure 1. Depiction of Training and Consulting Services Housed within RJO
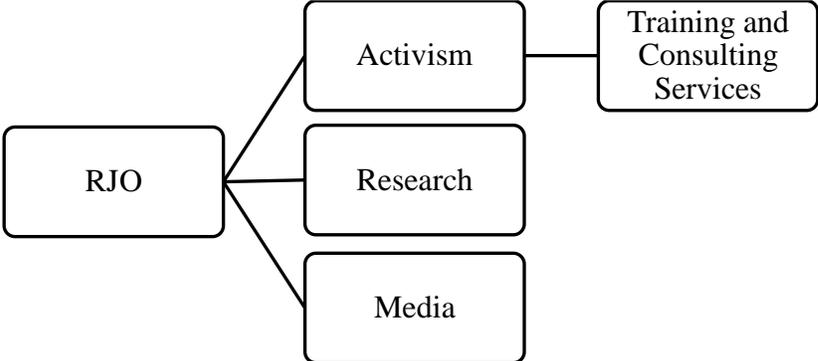
Like Warren's (2010) study of white racial justice activists, I found that the reach

of RJO's training and consulting services, although national, are localized at the city level

and fragmented across states. RJO has multiple clients in the Midwest, Northeast, and

West, yet its ties in the South are minimal. Consequently, the data do not allow me to

concretely determine the existence or non-existence of a full-blown racially based

movement. However, this dilemma does not mean that I cannot speak to a political

process (see Meyer 2004: 50). For example, Omi and Winant (1986) note that "Racially based movements begin as political projects which both build upon and break away from their cultural and political predecessors…Such 'projects' challenge pre-existing racial ideology. They are efforts to *rearticulate* the meaning of race, and responses to such efforts. The rearticulation of pre-existing racial ideology is a dual process of *disorganization* of the dominant ideology and of *construction* of an alternative, oppositional framework" (p. 84-85, italics original).

Political or racially based projects are the basis or "building blocks" of racial formation within a given sociohistorical context (Staiger 2004: 162). As Omi and Winant (1994) argue, these projects bind "what race *means* in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning" (p. 56, italics original). There are multiple projects in existence at any given time, and they are organized through state agencies, popular movements, elites, cultural and religious organizations, and by intellectuals. These projects compete on the macro-level to define large-scale policy and meaning and on the micro-level to shape common sense understandings of race, racial discourse, and every day practices (Omi and Winant 1994; Alumkal 2004).

Based on this perspective, I view RJO's training and consulting work through the lens of a political project that rearticulates the meaning of race and thus, the role of race in the social structure. For RJO, the meaning of race is that it plays a significant part in the determination of peoples' life chances due to the structural or systemic qualities of racism. Therefore, the role of race in the social structure means that race specific ideas

and policies should guide practices that align with the goal of producing equitable opportunities among all racial groups.

To walk through RJO's process of rearticulation, I first discuss color-blindness and post-racialism as dominant racial ideologies. Second, I introduce RJO's primary trainers and consultants as the intellectuals who are leading this rearticulation process. Third, I outline the disorganization of colorblindness and post-racialism through RJO's discussion of internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural forms of racism. Lastly, I show how RJO constructs an oppositional framework, which its trainers and consultants refer to as racial justice.

Methods and Sample

Case studies allow for an in-depth analysis of social phenomena through the perspective of a person, organization, or event in a particular context grounded in time (Ragin 1994). In this study, the case is RJO and the social occurrence within this context is challenging racial inequality. Using qualitative and engaged methods, I collected data over a five-month period through observations and interviews. I observed three training seminars. One was tailored for faculty, staff, and administrators at a public high school in the Midwest that RJO has been working with for roughly two-years. The other two were in webinar format and were open to the public.[1] The first webinar provided a systemic understanding of racism, and the second outlined strategies for reframing conversations about race through a racial justice lens. I recorded data from the training at

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[1] Webinars are a form of internet-based conferencing that allows real-time transmission of visual and audio communication between a sender and multiple receivers. The RJO webinars I observed consisted of PowerPoint presentations that were given by trainers and consultants.

the high school in the form of fieldnotes. The webinars were audio recorded by RJO in

real-time and later emailed to participants with the accompanying PowerPoint

presentations. This allowed me to transcribe the webinars verbatim. To accompany these

observations, I interviewed two RJO staff members, the Midwest and Executive Director,

who take the lead in providing their training and consulting services, as well as thirteen

representatives from organizations that have received these services within the past ten

years. Including RJO staff and clients, I conducted fifteen interviews total. For purposes

of anonymity, pseudonyms are used in this paper.

Throughout the development and progression of this project, the Midwest

Director of RJO was my primary contact. After attending their 2010 racial justice

conference, which drew a crowd of roughly eight hundred participants and featured

scholars, public intellectuals, political figures, and racial justice advocates, I called the

Midwest Director to discuss my interest in conducting a case study of RJO. We

established a rapport over a two-month period. During this time, we discussed the project

objectives, developed a semi-structured interview schedule, and purposefully selected

training and consulting recipients to represent RJO's client base (Stoecker 2005).

Like many projects where engaged methods are utilized (Nyden et al. 2012), the

Midwest Director and I approached the research table with multiple objectives. The first

was to provide RJO with interview data regarding its training and consulting services.

This took the form of an evaluation that I composed for RJO. The Midwest Director is

currently using this information to assess the initiative's impact and augment the services

and support RJO provides to clients. The second objective was to learn about

participants, their interpretations of race and racial inequality as well as their actions against racism for this thesis research project.

Each of these objectives was reflected in our interview instrument, which included questions about participants' backgrounds, their interpretations of race and racism, the strategies they use to challenge racial inequality, and their experiences with RJO (see Appendix A). To select RJO client interviewees, the Midwest Director and I considered their organization's geographical location, size, racial composition, population served, and reasons for seeking RJO's services. We also took intensity into account, and invited participants that had developed short-term (months) and long-term (years) relationships with RJO. To recruit clients, we developed a letter that he sent to them via email outlining the purpose of this project (see Appendix B). I conducted the interviews over the telephone. They were audio-recorded, transcribed, and each lasted roughly one-hour.

My interpretation of RJO as a political project that is rearticulating the meaning of race steadily emerged over the course of my analysis. I began by sharing three randomly selected and de-identified RJO client interview transcripts with two of my colleagues. They provided analytical feedback, which I used to guide my development of codes in Atlas.ti, a qualitative software program. This program allowed me to upload and navigate between my primary documents throughout the coding process. Rather than coding by pen and paper or using a word processing program, Atlas.ti provided a major advantage because it tracks the frequency of codes across primary documents, and once a code is created it can easily be dragged and dropped from the master code list onto any

text in the database. Codes were grouped according to the interview questions by

assigning a numbered prefix that corresponded to the question number on the interview

schedule. Because the interview schedule was organized by topic, these steps produced

an organizational schema of codes that were structured by the project's objectives:

learning about participants' backgrounds, their interpretations of race and racism, the

strategies they use to challenge racial inequality, and their experiences with RJO.

Even though codes were grouped in above way, this does not mean that codes did

not reoccur across topics. For example, one of my codes was called, "four levels of

racism." This code represents RJO's framework for discussing racism with clients, and it

includes internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural manifestations. I was

able to determine that this code reflected a salient finding, not only because all RJO

clients referenced this framework, but because participants discussed it at various points

of the interview. Some spoke of these four levels when I asked them to describe racism,

which was in the "interpretations of race and racism" section of the interview. Others

referenced it when I asked them what they found most useful about RJO's training and

consulting services, or when I asked them what key ideas about race RJO helped them

clarify. These two questions were in the "experiences with RJO" section of the

interview. This was the last and only section of the interview where I spoke of RJO.

This process yielded an analysis that was complementary to racial formation theory,

specifically the rearticulation of race by RJO as a political project.

Overall, the majority of interview participants were white, yet there were

relatively equal numbers of people of color, including informants who described their

race as Asian, black, and multi-racial. Additionally, most of the interviewees were women. Participants' ages ranged from twenty-one to sixty-nine, with the most frequent age range being forty to forty-nine. Nearly everyone reported being middle class. All participants received higher education, and most had a graduate degree (see Table 1).

Table 1. Composition of Interview Participants*

Race
Asian	2
Black	3 (including 1 African person and 2 African American people)
Multiracial	3 (including 2 Asian/white people and 1 black/mixed person)
White	7

Gender
Men	5
Women	10

Age
21-29	2
30-39	2
40-49	6
50-59	4
60-69	1

Socioeconomic Status
Middle class	14
Upper middle class	1

Education
Bachelor's degree	4
Doctoral degree	3
Master's degree	7

One participant did not provide their highest degree received. Instead, they reported completing college.

* Prior to the interviews, I sent participants a Face Sheet to record the following data. On the Face Sheet, categories were provided for age and socioeconomic status. Potential responses for race, gender, and education were open-ended. Data pertaining to RJO staff and clients is included in this table, n = 15.

The interviewees who received RJO's training and consulting services represented five types of organizations including community organizing, educational, faith-based, health and human services, and philanthropic (see Figure 2). Of these

Figure 2. Depiction of RJO Training and Consulting Client Organization Types
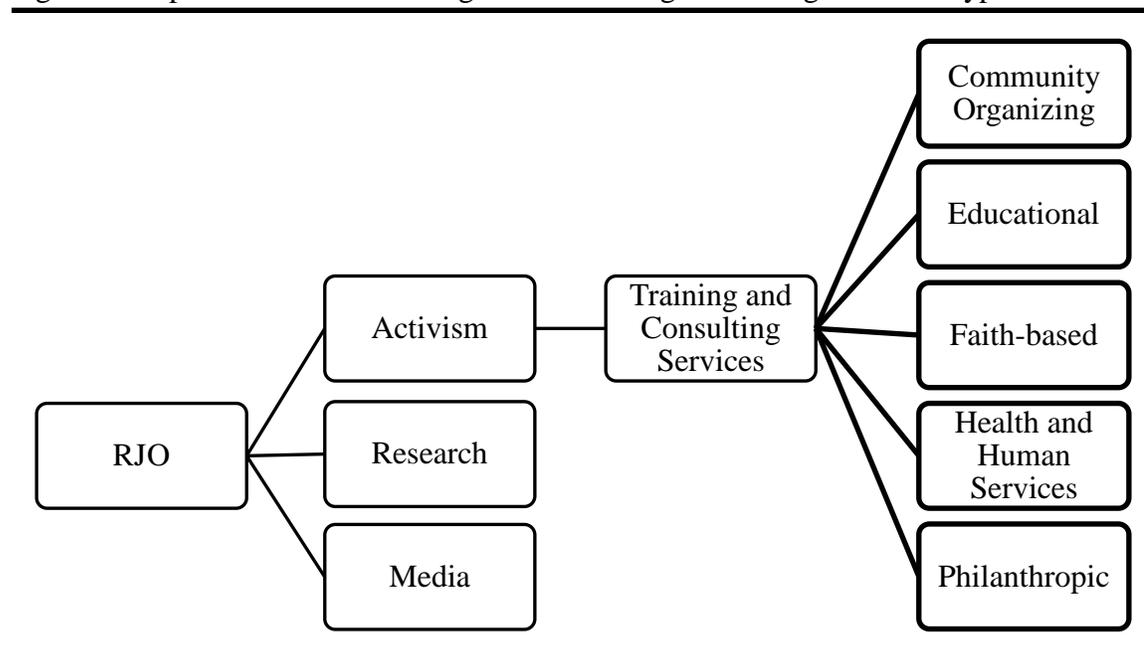
organization types, representatives from the fields of community organizing and education were the most frequent. These organizations were located in the Midwest, Northeast, South, and West, and the majority were in the Midwest. RJO clients were largely in upper management positions, and most of my conversations were with directors of an organizational unit. Lastly, many of the people I talked to had been with their organization for six to ten years (see Table 2).

Even though I attempt to reflect a multi-racial approach to challenging racism in this study, the voices of American Indians and Latinos are absent. American Indians are not present because RJO has had few American Indian clients over the years and none in

Table 2. RJO Client Organizations*

Organization Type
Community Organizing	4
Education	4
Faith-based	1
Health and Human Services	2
Philanthropic	2

Some of the organizations had multiple focus areas. I categorized them here according to their primary domain.

Location
Midwest	5
Northeast	4
South	1
West	3

Title
Co-Director/Director	5
Executive Director/President	4
Manager/Program Officer	3
Professor	1

This category refers to the participant's title at their organization.

Years Employed
Less than 1	1
1-5	4
6-10	5
11-15	1
More than 15	2

This refers to the number of years participants have been employed by their organization.

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* Prior to the interviews, I sent participants a Face Sheet to record the following data. On the Face Sheet, potential responses for organization type, location, title, and years employed were open-ended. The data captured in this table only reflects RJO clients, n = 13.

the past ten years. The Midwest Director did report presently working with some

Latinos, yet we did not receive a response to participate in an interview. Although this

project provides a modest start, future research inclusive of all racial groups collaborating

for purposes of challenging racism is needed.

As a final point, the people in this study reflect a unique group. It is improbable that my below discussion of RJO's rearticulation process will apply to the majority of people who work in fields such as community organizing, education, faith, health and human services, and philanthropy. Wide-reaching generalizability is beyond the scope of this project. Moreover, RJO staff work with people who want to work with them, and it is unlikely for RJO to work with organizations that are primarily interested in diversity trainings. I asked RJO's Midwest Director to discuss how the training and consulting process works, and it largely begins by an organizational representative calling RJO directly. From here, the Midwest Director and prospective client figure out if the systemic focus RJO offers is what the potential client is looking for. In the Midwest Director's words:

> Pretty much all of our connections are ones that are initiated by groups and organizations or the institutions themselves. We actually haven't really had to do too much marketing of our work. It's pretty much been through word of mouth. Those that have been through it will suggest it to other people… A lot of my job is to field those calls or inquires from different groups and then, basically vet them to figure out whether what we have to offer is a good match for what they need. Sometimes it is sometimes it isn't. Sometimes, groups are looking more for a diversity trainer or a cultural competency trainer and that's not quite what our niche is. We think those things are important, but those aren't really our niche. As I mentioned, we're trying to emphasize more systemic change. So, we try and make sure people are clear on what we have to offer… I think it's important for groups to realize that there's no quick fix silver bullet approach to this. If you really want to transform your organization and your work, it takes a deep and ongoing investment to do that. So, I think, we help groups explore what some of those possible models could be for going through that transformation process.

RJO does not lack a steady pool of potential organizations to work with, and therefore, RJO staff can be selective and strategic about the organizations they provide their services to. From this perspective, RJO is in a sense "preaching to the choir." However, knowing that a choir exists—allocating resources towards and doing the work of racial justice—is nonetheless a significant and compelling finding.

Ideological Targets for Rearticulation: Color-Blindness and Post-Racialism

When viewing RJO through the lens of a political project, I was guided by the following analytical questions: (1) What racial ideology(ies) is RJO targeting for rearticulation; (2) Who are the intellectuals leading RJO's rearticulation process; (3) How is RJO disorganizing dominant racial ideology(ies); and (4) How does RJO construct racial justice as an oppositional framework? In this section, I address the first question. The answer is twofold and includes color-blindness and post-racialism as current dominant racial ideologies. For example, I observed Nathan, RJO's Midwest Director, articulating this point at a training session. He was explaining the many threads of structural racism, and these threads included a brief discussion of history, culture, interrelated institutions, and racial ideology.

Nathan related history to the "cumulative impacts of white domination in the U.S.," while linking culture to the "normalization and replication of everyday racism." He described interconnected institutions as "compounding relationships and rules that reinforce racism" and introduced racial ideology as "popular ideas and myths that perpetuate racial hierarchies." For RJO, these popular ideas and myths are captured by the terms color-blindness and post-racialism. Nathan connected these ideologies to the

notion of "transcending race," and as a facet of the structure of racism, he also associated

outcomes of these ideologies with institutional practices that change over time. In

Nathan's words:

> Right now we're in this popular notion of color-blindness or post-
> racialism or transcending race. It's all this stuff we hear especially after
> Obama got elected that somehow we've moved beyond race and now we
> just need to get over it. That notion of color-blindness is sort of the
> dominant ideology, and it's even being reflected in the court system now
> and other institutions. At different times there were other major ideas.
> There was the idea of eugenics at one point where people were trying to
> really instruct laws and institutions around the notion that people were
> genetically predisposed based on their race to intelligence, to violence, to
> sexual proclivities, all kinds of stuff which has been largely discredited,
> but there are still a lot of people who hold those beliefs. Those ideas are a
> part of the structure of racism.

Indeed, past and present ideas about race are central to the structure of racism or

what Bonilla-Silva (1997) calls a "racialized social system" (p. 469). Even though an in-

depth analysis of the relationship between the racial structure of the United States and

racial ideologies extends beyond the scope of this paper, an overview of these concepts

will lay the necessary groundwork for the analysis of RJO as a political project. When

viewing the United States as a racialized social system, its fabric—social, political,

economic, and ideological—is woven by the assignment of people into hierarchical racial

categories. Ultimately, this racial positioning creates inequality among racial groups

(Bonilla-Silva 1997). As expressed by Leonardo (2005):

> Race was invented in order to accomplish certain social goals. In order to
> rationalize their place in the world and then justify the treatment of others,
> White Europeans invented a classification system that put people of
> darkest skin tones at the bottom of the human hierarchy and the lightest at
> the top. This position makes inequality central to the concept of a racial
> order and questions the notion that racial orders exist because of the mere
> presence of racial difference (p. 409).

From this standpoint, racial categories are not fixed by phenotypical characteristics alone, and as a social construction, race will not cease to exist if it is ignored. Rather race is malleable and subject to political contestation (Omi and Winant 1984). It is a vehicle through which social relationships of privilege and oppression are hierarchically organized, and it serves as a means to grant or deny access to social and material resources (Bell 2007). Resources distributed along racial lines such as education, housing, wealth, and employment have historically benefited white people and disadvantaged people of color (Bobo 2011; Warren 2010; Smelser et al. 2001). Therefore, race and racial categories play a significant part in determining peoples' life chances.

Socially, the privileged race is generally endowed with high esteem (e.g., Eurocentric standards of attractiveness, femininity, and beauty as depicted in the media, Chito Childs 2009), which is often accompanied by normalized social and physical segregation from people in marginalized races (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Yancey 2003). Politically, the favored race has historically dominated primary positions (Feagin 2000), and economically, members of the superior race usually have greater and more preferable employment opportunities (Bonilla Silva 1997). For example, Royster (2003) analyzed the experiences of fifty black and white men as they transitioned from a vocational high school into blue-collar jobs. Even though white and black students shared classrooms, teachers, and school resources, Royster found that life chances between these two groups were far from equal. In school, black students often got higher grades, were less likely to

get in trouble with authorities, and more frequently sought formal assistance for career placement. However, after graduation the white students were more likely to obtain employment, receive higher wages, and they were able to more easily transition from one position to the next due to strong social networks with other white men. As Bonilla-Silva (1997) argues, "the totality of these racialized social relations and practices constitutes the racial structure of a society" (p. 470).

The continued impact of race on structuring life opportunities socially, politically, and economically is further upheld by racial ideologies. Generally, ideologies are widespread systems of thought that undergird a "common sense" understanding of how the social world works (Omi and Winant 1994). For the most part, they favor the interests of a specific social group, and the acceptance or knowledge of an ideology in its entirety need not be adopted by an individual to influence their interpretation of or their actions within social reality (van Dijk 2006). Similarly, racial ideologies are "generalized belief systems that explain social relationships and social practices in racialized language" (Doane 2006: 256). In the United States, dominant racial ideologies have historically been employed to warrant colonialism, genocide, slavery, and discrimination as well as the perpetuation of stratification and resource inequalities along racial lines (Feagin 2000; Doane 2003).

Although dominant racial ideologies have traditionally been invoked to justify racial inequality, this does not mean that they have gone unchallenged. Referring back to racial formation theory, political projects "seek to transform (or 'rearticulate'…) the dominant racial ideology. They summarize and explain problems—economic inequality,

absence of political rights, cultural repression, etc.—in racial terms" (Omi and Winant 1986: 80-81). Consequently, racial ideologies are fluid rather than fixed, existing in a perpetual state of flux as social actors, institutions, and the state vie to challenge or uphold present affairs.

As a form of political struggle, disputing or maintaining the racial status quo is carried forward through racial discourse. This is "the collective text and talk of society with respect to issues of race" (Doane 2006: 256). Discourse shapes ideological belief systems by cementing or altering common sense interpretations of the social world. Like ideology, racial discourse is not void of disproportionate power relations between dominant and subordinate groups. The mechanisms of discourse transmission such as the media as well as governmental and educational institutions excessively provide preferential treatment to dominant groups, and this favoritism perpetuates the minimization of inequality and normalization dominant perspectives (van Dijk 1997; Doane 2006). For example, Vera and Gordon (2003) demonstrate the power generated by the collaborative efforts of white supremacy, as an ideology, and Hollywood, as an industry. Together, this ideology and industry fabricate and uphold racist discourse and images in order to replicate and maintain white privilege and its accompanying social capital. Even though racialized images of people of color have improved over the past century, the authors contend that "minority figures in Hollywood movies remain projections of the white imagination intended to prop up the white self" (p. 186).

Contemporary dominant racial ideologies as well as their accompanying discourses can be captured through the concepts "color-blindness" and "post-racialism."

Borrowing from Bonilla-Silva (2006), color-blind racism "explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics" (p. 2). Nonracial dynamics include rhetorical strategies such as "abstract liberalism" (e.g., the interpretation of affirmative action as preferential treatment), "naturalization" (e.g., the reduction of neighborhood segregation to personal preference), "cultural racism" (e.g. the idea that a particular racial group is lazy, unappreciative of education, etc. because of their culture), and the "minimization of racism" (e.g., the view that racism is only manifest in personal behavior and that it has largely been overcome today) (Bonilla-Sliva 2006: 26-30).

Color-blindness crystallized in response to numerous social and political protests led by civil rights organizations in the 1960s (Bonilla-Silva 2001). These "racial events" (Doane 2006: 259) challenged overtly racist ideologies, discourses, policies, and practices of the Jim Crow era, which produced a reduction in outward ideological expressions of white superiority as well as an expansion of legal civil rights (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Winant 2000; Collins 1997; Schuman et al. 1997). However, as Omi and Winant explain, "once such challenges have been posed and become part of the established political discourse, they in turn become subject to rearticulation" (Omi and Winant 1986: 86). From this vantage point, color-blindness is an ideological tactic that is employed through racial discourse (e.g., "It wasn't me!," Bonilla-Silva et al. 2003) to structurally maintain white dominance in an era when overt expressions of racism have become relatively uncouth and subject to public sanction. In Bonilla-Silva's (2006) words:

Much as Jim Crow racism served as the glue for defending a brutal and overt system of racial oppression in the pre-Civil Rights era, color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era. And the beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those who it rewards" (p. 3-4).

In comparison, post-racialism "reflects a belief that due to racial progress the state need not engage in race-based decision-making or adopt race-based remedies, and that civil society should eschew race as a central organizing principle of social action" (Cho 2009: 1589). Like color-blindness, post-racial logic opts for race-neutral policies and practices in the name of "raising all boats," while historically, these universal actions (e.g., the Interstate Highway Act, the GI Bill) have served white men and their families (Cho 2009; Powell 2009; Katznelson 2005). It blames people of color, particularly African Americans, for "playing the race card" in a nation that has mostly eschewed overt oppression, and it assumes that demographic shifts, particularly increased numbers of people of color, will create a deracialized "beige" melting pot (Bobo 2011; Hsu 2009; Yancey 2003).

Other than its entry into the common lexicon in the United States largely after the election of President Obama in 2008 (Feagin 2010; Metzler 2010), consensus regarding the distinction between color-blindness and post-racialism has yet to be reached among race theorists. Both perspectives are ideological tools used to situate racism in the past and paint a picture of America as presently "beyond race." For example, Bobo (2011) views "transcending race" as a key feature of post-racialism and color-blindness, while

Cho (2009) contends that "transcending race" is what makes the post-racial perspective

unique. For example, Bobo (2011) writes:

> [P]erhaps the most controversial view of post-racialism has the most in
> common with the well-rehearsed rhetoric of color blindness. To wit,
> American society, or at least a large and steadily growing fraction of it,
> has genuinely moved beyond race - so much so that we as a nation are
> now ready to transcend the disabling racial divisions of the past. From
> this perspective, nothing symbolizes better the moment of transcendence
> than Obama's election as president (p. 14).

In contrast, Cho (2009) argues:

> While race-neutral policies and rationales designed to camouflage the
> operation of racial subordination are at least as old as the post-bellum
> Amendments, what is new and distinct about post-racialism (as compared
> to say, colorblindness) is that that state's retreat from race-based remedies
> is only possible in a society that is perceived as having made significant
> strides in racial equality, at least symbolically. The election of Barack
> Obama as president provides the watershed moment to allow the transition
> from the civil-rights era to the post-racial era. The narrative of
> transcendent racial progress is the descriptive fact that distinguishes post-
> racialism from colorblindness (p. 1645).

As we have seen, contemporary dominant racial ideologies such as color-

blindness and post-racialism position racism as a historical phenomenon. Returning to

what Nathan said, "It's all this stuff we hear especially after Obama got elected that

somehow we've moved beyond race and now we just need to get over it." From this

perspective, the meaning of race is that it is no longer a significant determinant of

peoples' life chances. It is largely thought of as only coming into play through isolated,

bigoted, individual acts of overt racism. Thus, structurally, the logic is that race should

not be taken into account in public decision making even if the objective is to address

current manifestations of racial inequality. Policies and practices must benefit "all

Americans," regardless of the racial structure of society, which has principally provided white people with material, social, political, and ideological gains over people of color for the past four hundred years (Bonilla-Silva 2006; Feagin 2010; Cho 2009).

For people and organizations trying to change the racial status quo, this perspective of race and racism poses a significant barrier, which is the lack of a common sense understanding of what racism means beyond personal prejudice and discrimination (Winant 2004; Doane 2003; Bell 2007). In the section that follows, I discuss how RJO fills this void by rearticulating the meaning of race as a significant determinant of peoples' life chances. First, I introduce RJO's primary trainers and consultants as the intellectuals who are leading this charge. Second, I show how they deconstruct the "transcendent" character of color-blindness and post-racialism by moving the conversation about race from "internalized and interpersonal" to "institutional and structural" understandings of racism. Lastly, I introduce racial justice as RJO's oppositional framework.

RJO as a Political Project: A Process of Rearticulation

The Intellectuals

Intellectuals are key to the rearticulation process. In Omi and Winant's (1986) words, "Racial movements come into being as the result of political projects, political interventions led by 'intellectuals'" (p. 80). Here the term "intellectuals" is used to represent "social actors whose position and training permits them to express the worldviews, ideas and sense of social identity of various social actors" (Omi and Winant

1986: 171n32). At RJO, Sachita and Nathan are the primary intellectuals behind the training and consulting initiative.

Sachita is the Executive Director of RJO. She is South Asian and in her forties. After spending the first few years of her life in India, she and her family moved to a suburban community in the northeastern United States. Here, she grew up in mixed as well as majority black and majority white working to middle class neighborhoods and attended a working to upper middle class majority white high school. After high school, she went on to earn a master's degree in journalism, and today she resides in the urban Northeast. She discussed her current neighborhood as working to middle class where many of the residents are European, Caribbean, Latino, or Asian immigrants.

In her view, race is a social construction that ascribes characteristics to human bodies, and racism is a phenomenon that disadvantages or advantages people based on their race. For example, when I asked her to describe these terms she said, "I think of race as a social construction that assigns characteristics to people based on phenotype, and I think of racism as the result of a social construction that values those characteristics differently and then assigns punishment and privilege based on both the characteristics and the value given to them."

I asked Sachita to talk about how she developed this understanding of race, and she told me a story about one of her childhood experiences. She was about to start seventh grade at a new school. As a part of the enrollment process, she was given an IQ test, and the school counselor suggested that she skip a grade. At this time, she began to question the concept of race as something that was biologically based, and her

understanding of race as a social construction was further developed in college. Based on

Sachita's definition of race as "characteristics" assigned to human bodies, the

characteristic in the below quote is intelligence, and it is associated with South Asian-

ness. For example, Sachita recalled her experience with the school counselor:

> She said something along the lines of, "You Indian kids are so smart. I
> don't know what makes you like this and why American kids can't
> achieve the way you achieve." I think she actually asked me, "What is it
> about being an Indian kid that makes you so smart and makes you do so
> well?" I remember feeling very stumped and coming up with this answer
> about our culture like, "We really value learning and education in our
> culture." I remembered that not feeling quite right to me. That answer
> and that question seemed really weird. I kind of mulled and lived with it.
> I did skip the grade, and I lived with it through my high school years. I
> think that was when I first understood that people think there's something
> inherent about how I am, that all South Asians are like, all Indians in
> particular, and it can't be that all Indians are like this. I think it started
> with that question.

Regarding her understanding of racism, Sachita credits her experiences in

communities, her professional life, and members of her social network. I asked her to

elaborate on one of these experiences, and she discussed working as an organizer in her

early twenties. She was serving as the lead consultant and coach on a campaign that was

organizing roughly sixty-five homeless families who were living in temporary housing.

She said:

> We had won the campaign in about six or seven weeks and got everybody
> moved into permanent Section 8 apartments, but I remember this one time
> in particular having one of the women say to me, "What are you doing
> here? You're supposed to be on the side of the South Asian landlord, the
> Indian landlord." She didn't say it to me meanly. She was just surprised,
> and she was like, "I've never seen an Indian kind of come around us
> before unless it was to collect our money."
>
> That whole experience really made me think very hard about racism and
> power, because we were trying to go from advocacy to organizing - what

the families in that hotel would gain from building power for themselves that they couldn't gain just from being clients of social workers from an advocacy organization… It also helped me understand that there is a racial hierarchy in the country. As a South Asian…, you know, I understood that in my gut because I had grown up in the States, but I hadn't really had a lot of chances to talk to people about it until that leader asked me that, and I had to come up with an answer.

Her work at RJO spans an eleven years. To learn more about her role, I asked Sachita to talk about what a typical day is like, and she classified her responsibilities as "internal" and "external." Her internal activities include fundraising and organizational leadership, and her external activities involve influencing racial discourse and strategies among people she referred to as "race players." Some examples she gave of race players consisted of community organizations, reporters, public health administrators, and politicians.

Sachita's roots with RJO began through her work with the prior executive director roughly two decades ago at another non-profit, and she described him as a mentor. This relationship as well as RJO's multi-racial staff and political agenda drew Sachita to RJO. For example, she said, "The thing that made [RJO] really attractive to me then was the multi-racialness of the staff and of the political agenda. You know, it is a truly multi-racial, multi-issue, political agenda. Also, I felt like [RJO] was preparing to take a modern, a contemporary approach to racism." I asked her to elaborate on what she meant by a "contemporary approach to racism," and her description that follows directly parallels RJO's aim to promote a systemic understanding of how racial inequality works:

> I feel like a contemporary approach to racism has to…look at those seemingly neutral structural arrangements that continue to keep us so divided. If Americans think that all racism is overt and intentional, and if that's the only kind of racism that they're ever going to be concerned

about, when there are bad racial outcomes for certain racial groups they're going to assume that there's no real reason for that because we've outlawed intentional, individual, and overt racism. So, if you're doing poorly and you're an immigrant, it must be because there's something wrong with you or your people… A modern approach has to help Americans expand their definition of racism and expand their definition of solutions so we can move beyond individual shame and blame, and get people to focus on the kinds of policies and practices that generate equity.

This standpoint not only echoes elements of contemporary race theories, it sets the stage for pulling theory into the realm of practice. In this quote, Sachita is calling for a structural as opposed to an individual understanding of racism. Moreover, by connecting an individual level perception to a logic that blames the victim (see Bonilla-Sliva 2006: 40; Forman 2004: 50), she problematizes intentional and overt understandings of racism. This point of view goes beyond "unmasking inequality" (Cancian 1995: 345). Rather than strictly focusing on racism as a social problem, Sachita closes with an urgency to move the discussion of a contemporary understanding of racism to practicing equity. The goal of changing how peoples' lives are organized based on race was also evident in my discussions with Nathan who I previously introduced as RJO's Midwest Director.

Nathan is white and in his fifties. He grew up in a predominantly white, middle class, suburban community near an urban center in the Midwest. He attended a middle to upper middle class Catholic high school that he said, "was pretty much reflective of the neighborhood. It was pretty much all white." Nathan has a bachelor's degree, and he currently resides in a large Midwestern city that he described as economically and racially diverse. In his words, "My current neighborhood is pretty racially diverse and economically diverse. It looks pretty different from the one I grew up in. I send my son

to the neighborhood public school. The majority of his classmates are people of color or

students of color."

Nathan views race as a historically and institutionally based "system of

inequality" that mainly benefits white people and disadvantages people of color. Like

Sachita, he largely attributes the placement of people into racial categories to phenotype.

For example, when I asked him to describe race, he said:

> I would say that race is a system of inequality that is based on features that
> we associate with race usually skin color but sometimes facial features or
> other kinds of phenotypical attributes. Basically, it's a system of
> hierarchy and inequality that's based on racial features, and the system for
> the most part benefits people who are white and for the most part
> disadvantages people who are of color, and it's a pretty long term
> historically based and institutionally based system of inequality.

Nathan discussed developing this perspective throughout the course of his life. Early on,

he associated racism with personal prejudice and thought that being a racist or not

depended on choice. However, as he progressed through high school and college, he

began to connect race to life chances regardless of personal beliefs or intentions. In his

words:

> I think that when I was young I pretty much had this…a similar notion of
> race that probably most people do, which is really about personal
> prejudice. Racism was really something that was in your heart and in your
> mind and therefore anyone could simply choose to be racist or not racist,
> and I thought of myself not as a racist. But I think that as I grew older I
> realized a lot more about racism that regardless of what's in your heart or
> in your mind you can still have white privilege and that gives you a lot of
> advantages whether you are conscious of those advantages or not. And
> the flipside is those who are people of color are exposed to a lot of
> disadvantages at every turn whether it's at the store or at school or trying
> to get a home or trying to get a job. There's all kinds of discrimination
> that people of color face. So, I think that wasn't until more into high
> school and into college. I think it was mostly college when I started
> getting a more systemic framework of how race operates.

I asked Nathan to discuss an experience that impacted his current understanding of racism, and he shared a story about being a tester for a fair housing organization. Similar to Pager's (2007) study of racial employment discrimination, this organization made variables among white people and people of color as equivalent as possible, and then sent them to look for jobs, public accommodations, and housing within a similar timeframe. The setting for Nathan's experience is in a hotel in the South. In the quote that follows, he connected his race with respectful treatment and acceptance which contrasted the disrespectful treatment and non-acceptance of African Americans:

> It was just interesting to see how it seemed like I got very good service and just always was treated with respect and everything, and it was…it made me just much more conscious of the kind of barriers that might exist for someone who didn't look like me. For example, in one of the hotels they had a restaurant bar area, and there was a big sign at the front of the bar that said, "If you are in the following clothing or appearance you can't enter." So it said things like, if you have any do-rags on your head you're not allowed in, and there was a whole list. There were about ten things on that sign, and pretty much, they were all things that African Americans typically would wear rather than white people.

> I remember writing down the words exactly on that sign as I was doing some recording of my experience at that hotel, and I think that the organization I was volunteering for was able to use that to inform the hotel that is was a discriminatory practice… So, things like that were a lot of times a routine way of doing business, and it often creates more barriers for people of color and more access for white people.

Nathan has worked at RJO for eighteen years, and most of his responsibilities revolve around their training and consulting services. He develops and presents their training curriculum and serves as the primary consultant for organizations that receive these services. Often, training and consulting reinforce one another. For example, Nathan described this process of applying theoretical understandings of racism and racial

justice presented at trainings to organizational practices through consulting in the

following way:

> We often couple our racial justice trainings with consulting. Sometimes, before we even do a training with a group, I'll be on the phone with them several times just learning about their group, their needs, their interests, and what their trying to do so we can develop a training that is really going to be useful to them. Then, after the training sometimes we'll provide strategic coaching to those in the group who are going to be on the front lines of whatever change efforts they're trying to advance. Just giving them the theory and the skills isn't enough, learning how to apply those to real issues and in real time is where, I think, the real work occurs, and having someone to help think through things with you at that point can be very instructive.

Like Sachita, Nathan was drawn to RJO because of this organization's explicit

focus on race as well as their systemic approach to racism. Prior to working at RJO, he

was a community organizer for multiple years. During this time, his view of racial

inequality as a causal determinant of social divisions and disparities was reinforced. For

example, he explained, "I found through many years of doing that work that one of the

most significant sources of both social disparities as well as social divisions was race, and

I felt that unless we approach in a much more systematic and strategic way than the ways

that were typically being done—even in fields like community organizing that are all

about social change—that we would not significantly transform our country in ways that

its needs to be transformed…there's such significant inequality in our country, and a lot

of that inequality occurs along racial lines."

Returning to Omi and Winant's (1986) description of intellectuals—social actors

who have the ability to express ideas, identities, and worldviews to other actors through

their training and position—I have gone into some depth regarding Sachita's and

Nathan's backgrounds, understandings of race and racism, and their experiences at RJO because who they are matters to their clients. For example, Carol is multi-racial and in her twenties. She is a program officer at a health and human services agency in the Midwest, and her organization has been working with RJO for six months. I asked her to discuss the performance quality of the trainers and consultants, and she said, "I thought they were really great, and I got a lot positive feedback on the trainers and their content. Many people said their training style was interesting. So, it kept their attention the whole way through. I would say that their quality is high." As a follow-up, I asked if there was a particular example that stood out, and she replied:

> I think how they interject their own stories into it and the examples that they give. It's the way that they present their information. It's more of a dialogue and not a didactic like me feeding you all of this information. It was very laidback…I think participants were…very comfortable in exchanging ideas and thoughts with the trainers.

In addition to the trainers and consultants generally being described as "thoughtful," "high quality," "articulate," "practical," and "knowledgeable," as messengers of racial meanings, their racial identities also mattered. As a case in point, one participant, John, thought that having a white male trainer was beneficial. John is white, in his fifties, and a director at a public high school in the Midwest that has been working with RJO for roughly two years. He said, "I think that some white members of our staff will listen to things that a white male says and that they wouldn't necessarily listen as closely to someone of color." In contrast, Ellen who is Asian, in her forties, and a director at a university in the West, noted that having a multi-racial group of trainers "had different ways of bringing knowledge to the people."

When coupled with RJO's thirty year history, Sachita and Nathan are viewed by many in this sample as experts in the racial justice field. As Carol put it when I asked her what she found most useful about the training and consulting services, "The thing that is most helpful is that they are really experts in racial justice and have a racial justice lens explicitly. They help us to wrap our heads around the racial justice framework and they help us to move on to concrete solutions in our daily work at the institutional level." This perspective was also echoed by Dennis. Dennis is white, in his forties, and a manager at a university in the South. He has been in contact with RJO for about a year and a half, and I asked him what was most useful about their services. He said, "I think probably what may be the most useful is…you know, one of the first things that I got out of that first workshop was this sort of affirmation that I'm up to speed. I don't know if conceptually I learned that much at that workshop [on structural racism], but it made me feel like I was I kind of where I needed to be and wasn't lagging too far behind."

Part of this expertise is described by some participants as RJO trainers and consultants having experience, and another part involves views of the organization as having a track record of success. For example, I asked Clair, the prior executive director of an advocacy group in the Northeast, why her organization decided to select RJO's services. Clair is white, in her fifties, and her organization worked with RJO for roughly two years. In response to my question, she described her unsatisfactory experience with another consulting group, which positioned her to make an argument for hiring RJO. She explained:

> We [her organization] decided to have a major focus on racial justice, and
> we had a convening of fifty or sixty people. There was a racially charged
> interaction during the session, and the consultant didn't know how to
> handle it. I was like, "Enough fooling around." I basically said, "We need
> to do this [work with RJO]," and I just pushed it through. There was some
> opposition of staff, and it was a huge financial commitment of twenty
> thousand dollars for the contract. But, I was just like, "We need to do this.
> We can't continue just learning on the fly. We need to go with someone,
> an organization that has a track record of having done it before."

Given color-blindness or post-racialism as RJO's targets for rearticulation as well as

trainers and consultants that are held in high esteem by their clients, the next question

becomes: How does RJO present a common sense understanding of racism when race is

predominantly considered a non-determinant of peoples' life chances? It is to this

discussion that I will now turn.

Disorganizing Dominant Racial Ideologies

As previously discussed, through the lens of color-blindness or post-racialism, the

meaning of race is that it plays no part in the determination of peoples' life chances

because the United States has "transcended" race. Therefore, this meaning shapes the

role of race in the social structure, and this role is that race should not play any part in the

development and implementation of policies and practices regardless of recurrent racial

disparities. These are the dominant perspectives undergoing rearticulation by RJO as a

political project, and this process begins by disorganizing color-blind or post-racial

ideologies through what RJO calls the "four levels of racism."

I was attending a training session led by Nathan, and to introduce this framework

he said, "Racism is generally thought of as simply personal prejudice. That's a popular

notion of what racism is. That's only the tip of the iceberg. Really, most racism is part

of a whole system of hierarchy and inequality." To ground racism systemically, RJO

presents multiple levels of racism which are referred to as internalized, interpersonal,

institutional, and structural. Internalized and interpersonal forms are viewed as micro or

personal manifestations, while institutional and structural forms operate at the macro or

systemic level. At the training session Nathan continued with an in-depth description of

each of these levels:

> Internalized racism lies within individuals. It's your own way you've
> taken in all the racism we've been exposed to in the broader culture.
> Billboard messages, television, movies, commercials coming at us all the
> time have racialized images, and the way we take those in can really affect
> our attitudes and our actions. We all end up with some kind of prejudice
> or bias. For white people it can sometimes take the form of internalized
> privilege thinking we are more entitled to whatever that might be. For
> people of color, it can take the form of internalized oppression, sometimes
> internalizing the negative messages about one's self or one's community.

> Once we take our private stuff and begin interacting with other people
> around that, we jump to the level of interpersonal racism. Whatever's
> inside us starts playing out with others. If we have a prejudice, if we have
> bias, we begin to express that sometimes implicitly sometimes explicitly
> in our behavior. Sometimes it's very overt. It can be hate crimes and
> outright bigotry. Those are more personal forms of racism.

> Then, let's jump to the more systemic or the macro levels starting with
> institutional racism. There are all kinds of institutions that we interact
> with daily… They have a lot of practices and often the practices and the
> policies can result in different kinds of unfair treatment based on race…
> [An example of this is] like a school system, an everyday typical school
> system that concentrates people of color in the most over crowded classes
> and has the least funding and has the least qualified teachers. If you
> compare that to where more white students are concentrated, you can see
> these patterns of racial disparity reinforcing themselves and replicating
> themselves in our everyday lives in so many places.

> Jumping to the next level, this is a little less familiar to people sometimes
> is structural racism, and you can think of that as sort of the big container.
> It's the system that contains all the institutions and all the individuals and
> all the interactions between them. When you have a system like we do

where the cumulative and compounded effects of all those interactions end up systematically privileging white people and disadvantaging people of color, that's what we would call structural racism… [A] great example of structural racism and that whole cumulative and compounding effect is that racial wealth divide. The statistics are pretty glaring. The amount of wealth can be ten to twenty times for the median white household compared to the median household income in communities of color or families of color. That represents a legacy of a lot of different policies over the years, banking policies, housing policies, school discriminatory admissions policies, and all kinds of things that affect people's income, then overtime, their wealth or their lack of wealth, their debt.

Through a discussion of these different types of racism, RJO provides recipients

of its training and consulting services with a common sense understanding of racism.

This common sense understanding is based on three "ideological themes" (Omi and

Winant 1986: 85) that directly disorganize the perception of the United States as color-

blind or post-racial (see Figure 3). Based on Nathan's description, we can see that racism

Figure 3. Ideological Themes and the Disorganization of Dominant Ideologies

Ideological Themes	Disorganization of Dominant Ideologies
Racism is contextualized in four levels of social life.	America is not "beyond race."
Racism is positioned as producing outcomes that benefit white people and disadvantage people of color.	Race directly impacts peoples' life chances.
Examples move the focus from internalized and interpersonal forms of racism to institutional and structural interpretations.	Resources are distributed along racial lines.

is contextualized in four spheres of social life. It is described as residing within people,

social interactions, institutions, and structures. These levels are then compartmentalized

into "personal/micro" or "systemic/macro" manifestations (see Figure 4). By breaking

out the spheres in which racism operates, this framework positions it as existing in

multiple facets of social life, which directly counters the notion of a society "beyond

race."

Figure 4. RJO's Four Levels of Racism

Internalized
(micro/personal)

Interpersonal
(micro/personal)

Institutional
(macro/systemic)

Structural
(macro/systemic)
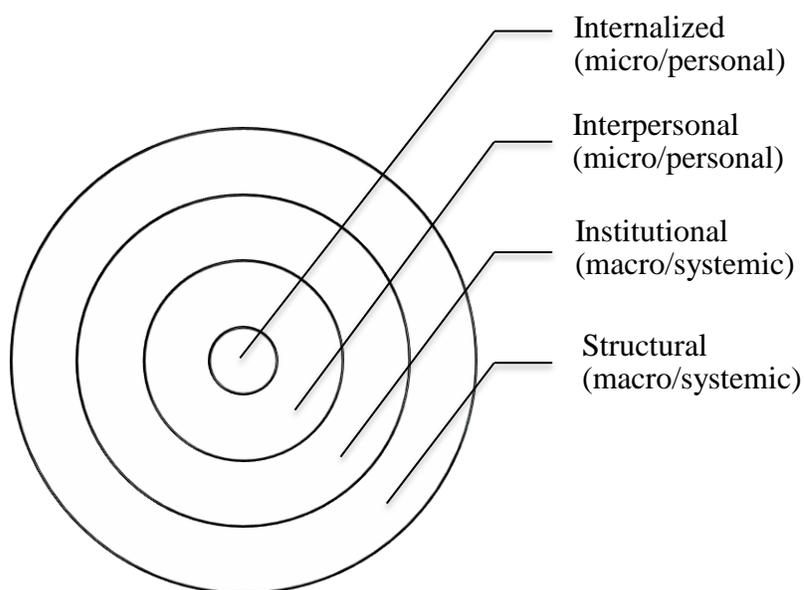
Second, racism is situated within each of these realms as a means for producing

outcomes. Particularly at the institutional and structural levels, outcomes shaped by

racism are presented as either benefiting or disadvantaging people based on their race.

Nathan made this explicit when talking about institutions. He said, "They have a lot of

practices and often the practices and the policies can result in different kinds of unfair

treatment based on race." It was also evident when he presented RJO's definition of

structural racism. For example, he said, "When you have a system like we do where the

cumulative and compounded effects of all those interactions end up systematically

privileging white people and disadvantaging people of color, that's what we would call

structural racism." Unlike the color-blind or post-racial stance, this framework connects race to life chances.

Lastly, examples are given regarding how racism plays out in each level, and this widens the divide between micro and macro forms of racism while placing emphasis on the institutional and structural levels. For instance, contrasting examples given for personal thoughts and actions like bias and bigotry, racism at the macro level is connected to the unequal distribution of resources based on race. At the institutional level, Nathan drew attention to the unequal distribution of school resources like class size, funding, and qualified teachers between white students and students of color (see Lipman 2011), and he discussed the contemporary racial wealth divide among white families and families of color through the lens of a legacy of discriminatory policies (see Oliver and Shapiro 2006). In opposition to color-blindness or post-racialism, these macro-level examples demonstrate that resources have been historically and continue to be distributed along racial lines.

As Omi and Winant (1986) note, "Racially based movements have as their most fundamental task the creation of new identities, new racial meanings, new collective subjectivity" (Omi and Winant 1986: 85-86). To this end, all of the RJO clients I interviewed referenced these four levels of racism, which is an indicator of frame alignment among RJO and the people who receive its training and consulting services. Frame alignment is "the linkage of individual and SMO [social movement organization] interpretative orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values, and beliefs and SMO activities, goals and ideology are congruent and complimentary" (Snow et al.

1986, p. 464). For example, I asked Martha what key concepts she took away from

working with RJO. Martha is black, in her forties, and a senior program officer at a

philanthropic organization in the Midwest. She said, "I think it really drove home these

four levels of racism - the micro level, which is the internalized and interpersonal level

and the macro level, which is the institutional and the structural level. I think it made me

better articulate those different levels of racism." I asked her to describe these levels, and

she continued:

> Internalized racism is individual and a private manifestation of racism that
> resides in our minds. So, if someone is prejudiced towards you that's
> something that is internalized. Interpersonal racism is what happens
> between individuals. After this internal racism occurs, then you bring
> your private beliefs into how you act with others. The example of the man
> who asked me, "Cash or [food] stamps?" when he saw the color of my
> skin might be an example of interpersonal racism. Institutional racism is
> within institutions. Whether it's a school system that concentrates
> children in the most overcrowded schools with the least qualified teachers,
> you know, that's an example or a hospital that provides poor services to
> people of color. That's an example of an institution that's doing it on a
> large scale, which starts at the micro and goes to the macro. Structural
> racism is the example of laws that have been put in place to systematically
> privilege white people and disadvantage people of color.

Like Martha, most participants' descriptions of these types of racism closely

paralleled or were "congruent and complementary" to Nathan's discussion that we saw

above. Nonetheless, this was not always the case. For instance, Dennis illustrated

structural racism in the following way:

> A great example of structural racism would be housing patterns, whether
> it's in [the South] or [the Midwest]. There are historically black
> neighborhoods, historically Hispanic neighborhoods, and those
> neighborhoods can have poorer schools. So the parents of the children
> living in those neighborhoods had a bad educational experience, and so
> they don't see any point in evaluating their children's educational

> experience because school never was a good place for them. So, why
> should they try to make it a good place for their children? That creates
> this perpetual cycle of hopelessness and poverty.

Even though his discussion of individual, interpersonal, and institutional forms of racism aligned with RJO's framework, his example of structural racism more closely reflects a culture of poverty argument (Lewis 1961), which largely blames the victims of inequality for their own suffering (Gorski 2008). Although culture can mediate life opportunities, social structure is more of a causal determinant. On the other hand, this does not mean that culture and structure are mutually exclusive. In Wilson's (2009) view, "one could argue that national cultural forces as embodied in the various forms of racist attitudes have had a greater impact on the social outcomes of poor African Americans over the years than have the cultural forces within the ghetto. However, racist attitudes are not simply traits of individuals; they are also embedded in social structures. Indeed, as an aspect of culture, racist attitudes gain their power mainly through incorporation into social structures" (p. 153).

Additionally, multiple participants said that this was the first time people in their organization heard this kind of framework to discuss racism, which can be described as an "ah ha" moment. For example, Bernard is black, in his forties and a professor in the Northeast. We were talking about different ways he has interacted with RJO over the past decade, and he explained one of his colleague's reactions to an RJO training:

> I remember after the training occurred there was one guy on the board
> who had been on the board for I think several decades actually, and this
> was a guy who had been very involved in progressive politics for a
> number of years. I remember him saying, after the training, that he really
> got something that he hadn't gotten before about the role of race and

racism in society… That was an "ah ha" moment for him where he had just gotten something that he hadn't gotten before.

The key to this common sense interpretation of racism is RJO's focus on institutions and structures instead of individuals. Knowing that systems of inequality can be challenged without calling individuals racist or trying to change people's understanding of inequality one-by-one can be empowering. For instance, I asked Joan to discuss a key concept that she learned from working with RJO. Joan is white, in her thirties, and a director at an immigrant rights organization in the West. In response to my question, she discussed how moving from individual to institutional understandings of racism helped a fellow advocate in their immigrant rights work:

> I think one of the key pieces that's been really important is the piece around the different levels of racism. I'm thinking back to when we did this thing in 2003, and there was this woman from a very small town in [the Midwest] who was…she was really having a hard time. She herself wasn't having a hard time with the immigrant rights work… She was having a hard time in her community having to explain why. So, helping her think about that there's this personal level and this institutional level, and what we're trying to do is change institutions and not actually every individuals' hearts and minds was really very helpful, I think, for her to be able to think about how she could stay in the campaign and even how she could talk to other people about the work that she was doing. I think that piece has been really important in a lot of the communities we work in where you have a lot of folks who are experiencing a lot of individual racism in their community. To be able to see that there is this other thing you can change, I think is empowering for people. There are institutions that we can go after and fix. You don't have to deal with every person on your block.

Similarly, being able to move beyond a conversation about who is a racist or not has also been helpful for Natalie who is a co-director at a health department in the Northeast. She is multi-racial, in her thirties, and her organization has been working with RJO for about two and a half years. I asked her to talk about an experience that

significantly impacted her understanding of racism, and she pulled from one of her

organization's recent training sessions with RJO:

> One conversation that I felt was really helpful recently was [Nathan] and
> [another trainer] were leading us through an exercise where we were kind
> of thinking about some other things that might challenge us as we do
> trainings on health equity and racial justice and some of the kind of
> counter arguments for the dominant frame. One in particular that kept
> coming up was this idea of reverse racism… I personally feel like there is
> no such thing as reverse racism but it was really helpful to hear it in a new
> way… [Nathan] said, "This isn't really about who's a racist. This is
> about what is racism, and how does it impact people as a system." That's
> been really helpful to kind of move away from "who's racist."

I asked Natalie to elaborate on what she meant by racism as a system, and she linked her

understanding of the four levels of racism to a system of inequality that is produced by

the placement of people into racial categories:

> You know, there are multiple levels. There's structural, institutional,
> interpersonal, and internalized. I think it operates on those four levels, but
> I think what I'm getting at is that it kind of operates systematically. It's
> not really about an individual person being a racist or the head of a college
> or the head of the health department or the housing authority or the
> president being a racist but that there are systems that continue to operate
> based on race.

As another follow-up question I asked her to expand on one of these systems, and she

discussed the unequal distribution of school resources between white students and

students of color in her community:

> Here in [her city], the schools are funded by taxes that are generated from
> that community. So, if you're in a low income community—we already
> know the connection between income and race and racism—then a lower
> income community of color that is generating less taxes [to] subsidize the
> school is going to have less resources available for students and
> potentially poorer quality education. So, there's this system that's
> ongoing. Then, that shapes the kind of education you get, the experience
> that you have in school, when you get out of school, whether or not you go
> to college, what college you go to, if you do go, what job you get if you

don't go, whether or not you even finish school. I think that there's a whole system at play...

Challenging racial inequality in a post-civil rights era requires a common sense understanding of how racism currently works. By disorganizing color-blindness or post-racialism through a discussion of internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural forms of racism, RJO provides its clients with this common sense understanding. This begins by contextualizing racism in four spheres of social life. Racism is then positioned as producing outcomes that benefit white people and disadvantage people of color. Lastly, examples move the focus from internalized and interpersonal forms of racism to institutional and structural interpretations. Through the assemblage of these threads, this framework demonstrates that America is not "beyond race" regardless of the election of our first black president or the decline in overtly racist behavior. On the contrary, race directly impacts peoples' life chances, and resources are continuing to be distributed along racial lines. Once these dominant ideologies have been disorganized, the question of how RJO constructs an oppositional framework can be raised.

Constructing Racial Justice as an Oppositional Framework

For RJO, the opposite of racism is racial justice. As Nathan said at a training session, "Just as importantly as understanding…racism…and…systemic racism is also understanding what racial justice is, which is the opposite of systemic racism…" Like social justice, racial justice is a process and a goal that involves systems change (Bell 2007). The process is grounded in a theoretical understanding of the four levels of racism, and it is action-oriented as well as participatory. It includes the development and

implementation of ideas, policies, and practices that align with the goal of producing

equitable opportunities among all racial groups. For example, this is how Sachita

described racial justice in our interview:

> It's the description of a system that proactively takes apart the racial hierarchy and tends to replace it with equity, and that is concerned with changing the rules and practices of, not just of individuals, but also of entities and communities. Anyplace where human beings are formed into a collective and managed as a collective, whether that's a family, hospital, school or workplace, racial justice is about having systems for promoting equity in those settings.

In the paragraphs that follow, I discuss how RJO constructs this oppositional framework

and show how it is practiced through the racial justice work of their clients.

Overall, this process begins by distinguishing racial justice from the terms

diversity and equality and by aligning it with equity or fairness. To illustrate this point,

let us turn to Nathan's introduction of racial justice at a training session:

> Some of the key concepts to understand—often when we talk about race people think immediately that we're talking about diversity. Diversity is really simply just variety. You can have a colorful mix of people, but that's not the same as equality or equity. Even though the terms equality and equity sound similar, they aren't. They also have a distinct meaning. Equality is more about sameness, while the concept of equity is more about fairness. When we're talking about the concept of racial justice we're really talking more about that concept of equity…
>
> For example, you can have diversity but not necessarily have equity. In fact, now we have schools that are integrated…but that doesn't necessarily mean that you have fairness in those schools. If you look in classrooms and start seeing a lot of white faces in the advanced placement classes and a lot of darker faces in some of the remedial classes, you realize some things going on here.
>
> The concept of equality isn't the same as equity. Again, using that school metaphor, equality in schools might be a funding formula that provides say seven thousand five hundred dollars per pupil. Just multiply the number of pupils in a school by that funding formula and that's how you

fund schools perhaps. But, an equitable formula would really consider who's in those schools… If kids don't have healthcare or meals, they might need more school nurses or meals provided… You might want to come up with a funding formula that's much more needs based that's simply not an equal formula. So, the concept of racial justice is really about getting to fairness.

From this quote we can see that, as a process, racial justice is not synonymous with diversity, and as a goal, equality is not equivalent to equity. Nathan connected diversity to the concept of difference, and using the example of a school, he argued that racial difference or integration will not automatically produce fairness because children are not entering schools with similar resources. As Lewis (2003) demonstrates, racial achievement gaps are not a product of individual merit or cultural behaviors but of racialized practices embedded within educational institutions. This is evidenced by racial ascription as a core component of children's identity formation, and this process becomes apparent through social meanings that accompany differing languages, cultures, names, socioeconomic statuses, and skin colors. Through these outwardly expressed similarities or differences, racial boundaries are formed based on likeness or its antithesis the "other," which is accompanied by inclusion or exclusion in both physical space and opportunity. Even though parents of color continuously challenge these socially created boarders, they are ultimately reinforced by disproportionate economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capitol.

Many of the RJO clients I interviewed adopted this frame, naming racial justice expressly when I asked them to discuss the opposite of racism. Moreover, when I asked participants to explain the meaning of this term, they often described it as equity or fairness as opposed to equality. For example, Brian is multi-racial, in his twenties, and a

director at non-profit organization that focuses on community organizing in the

Northeast. His organization has been working with RJO for about five years. When I

asked him these questions he said:

> I really like the term [RJO] uses, racial justice, where there are equitable
> outcomes for communities of color. It's not equality, you know,
> everybody having the same situation in life like every school has the same
> amount of money. It might mean some schools need to have more money
> because there's just a history of all sorts of bad stuff that happened or
> people there don't speak English or whatever. People just need to invest
> more resources in that. I guess it's just a very simple idea. There's
> fairness between racial groups, and people are getting what they deserve,
> what they need.

Similarly, some participants distinguished racial justice from diversity and chose RJO's

services because they were trying to move away from a diversity framework. As a case

in point, Sandra is black, in her forties, and a director at a faith-based organization in the

Midwest. Her organization's relationship with RJO is just beginning. I asked her to talk

about some key activities that her church has undertaken to address racism up to this

point, and she discussed her dissatisfaction with diversity:

> Well, I think in the past it has been more focused on a quick fix solution.
> Maybe that's something like, "How do we change personnel?" If we have
> the right racial ethnic makeup then that's the solution. I think that's part
> of the downfall. That's part of the challenge. It's not just about being all
> of the colors of the rainbow, then mixing them all up in the crayon box
> together. How do we live beyond that? I think that's an area for elevating
> the conversation. How do we set ourselves up so our policies and
> practices live out beyond just bringing people together? How do we
> assess the work we do? How do we continue to educate ourselves and
> hold ourselves and our institution accountable?
>
> So, I think those are just some of the areas that, in the past, I think have
> been the short term solutions that have really just been about diversity and
> not about actually creating equitable outcomes for people from beginning
> to end. It's not just the hiring. It's once you hire someone, what's the
> environment going to be like for them? What are the tools and skills

they'll need to best serve? What are the resources that they'll specifically
need? So that one size fits all approach/diversity, I think that has been
most prevalent.

To follow-up, I asked her to expound upon impacts or changes that have come from this

model, and she referenced color-blindness:

> I think it can create color-blindness. I think that's part of the outcome that
> the window dressing has been done, and we don't need to talk about it
> anymore because we've done that. So, everybody should be good because
> we're now all on the same…you know, the playing field has been leveled.
> I think that's kind of the ideology. Then, that's just totally reinforced
> through media, through the langue that we use, through the historical
> changes that have happened— the election of a president who identifies as
> being African American. So, you know, we don't have to talk about it
> anymore without ever looking at the actual outcomes.

During my interview with Nathan, I asked him to walk me through the training

and consulting process from the point of contact with prospective clients, and he noted

that, "A lot of them come to us with a diversity framework." This makes sense because

in non-profit (e.g., universities, Berrey 2011) as well as for-profit (e.g., *Fortune* 1000

companies, Embrick 2011) sectors, diversity has flooded the social discourse as a means

for promoting a more inclusive environment even if the policies and practices that

undergird it do not deal with racial inequality explicitly. Likewise, diversity has largely

saturated the common lexicon. In Bell and Hartmann's (2007) words, "it is not just that

Americans are talking about diversity that is extraordinary; it is how they are talking

about it: extolling the virtues of difference, celebrating diversity as a value in itself, and

describing diversity as the new cornerstone of American democratic idealism" (p. 895).

Generally speaking, practitioners choose vocabulary strategically for terms to be

accepted and upheld, and this is based on knowing their audience as well as what they

will be receptive to (Ahmed 2007). As we saw from Sandra's quote above, diversity is not something new for RJO clients. Multiple participants previously explored this framework, and they came to RJO seeking an alternative because diversity was not producing racially equitable outcomes for their organizations. Therefore, several people are looking for this distinction and are in turn receptive to racial justice as an oppositional framework. In Sachita's words:

> In some ways we could say diversity and equity are not the same thing until we were blue in the face. But, if people that we were saying that to didn't have the experience in which diversity had not produced what they thought it was going to produce like equalized relationships and real collaboration within organizations, workplaces, coalitions, excreta, [and] if they hadn't had ten, fifteen, twenty years of experience seeing the failure of diversity, then that line [diversity does not equal equity] would not have made a light bulb go off. They already believed it, and that's why when we said it, they could see it.

Once these distinctions have been drawn, RJO trainers and consultants move into a discussion that encompasses features of racial justice. These threads include changing systems while focusing on outcomes and creating solutions that address race explicitly yet foster intersectionality. Starting with systems change, I was at a training session and Nathan explained this in the following way:

> So, as a strategy for change, racial justice is all about changing systems, changing institutions, policies, and outcomes. While individuals make up those systems, we really have to look at how those systems shape what those individuals are doing. We can't just be focused on changing individuals, because it's much bigger than that. We actually have to change individuals and systems but we can't just change systems by focusing on individuals.

This argument is grounded in the distinction between micro and macro forms of racism that we saw in Nathan's prior discussion of the four levels of racism. Instead of

focusing on overt manifestations like individual prejudice or discrimination, this

framework positions social actors as agents of structural change. Returning to Sachita's

description of racial justice, "It's the description of a system that *proactively* takes apart

the racial hierarchy and tends to replace it with equity" (my emphasis). The aim is to

mobilize racial justice as an ideology through human agency and resource allocation in

order to transform the racial structure of society. From this perspective, social structure

is not static. Rather, it is dynamic and malleable (see Sewell 1992: 27). Additionally,

unlike diversity training which is largely built on the premise that individuals must go

through personal transformation (e.g., sharing stories of privilege and oppression,

Srivastava and Francis 2006) in order to begin working towards change, this model starts

with doing the work, and personal change can be a latent effect.

For instance, I asked Brian to provide an example of personal change while

focusing on structural outcomes, and he told me a story about one of his organization's

board members who participated in an immigration reform campaign. Brian was the state

campaign director, and part of this role involved organizing community members to

participate in a rally. In order to get from the upper Northeast to Washington D.C.,

participants—American Indians, Asians, African refugees, people who were documented,

people who were undocumented, and multiple low income people— took a bus.

Although the systemic outcome Brian was looking for in this instance was policy change,

he noted that this process of engagement also led to personal change for a board member:

> I'd say that there were real relationship connections that got made on that
> bus. I've noticed changes in this one particular [board] member. One
> thing that he had noticed was that it wasn't just about middle class or

lower middle class people not being able to have insurance, but he'd noticed, in particular, how migrant workers lack healthcare in [the state] and how it's just this whole other level of bad for them, because they don't have insurance. Sometimes they're not treated well at the hospital. His healthcare analysis, I think, has broadened a little bit. He is now, I think, a little bit more tuned into this whole section of [the state] that's really important but is not necessarily—for the standard progressive person in [the state]—on the top of their list of injustices that they care about.

Lastly, RJO's racial justice framework involves creating solutions that speak to inequities, systems, ideologies, and historical circumstances. As Nathan said at a training session:

Part of the way we use that framework of the different levels of racism is to really do what we call a systems analysis, to really look more holistically at the whole array of individuals and institutions that may be interacting around this issue area. Then, through that analysis, figure out how we can generate more solutions and more strategies that are really going to get at some of the more fundamental roots of the problem so that we can really come up with some substantive change. Some of the questions to keep in front of you when you're doing a more systemic analysis [include]: [W]hat are the different racial inequities? Who's being hurt most? Who's benefiting? Then, what institutions or policies are shaping that? Sometimes, what are the popular ideas or myths or norms that help reinforce the way we see what the problem is? Often, [it involves] looking at how things got that way, and just trying to really get at those causes so that, through the solutions and strategies, we can start really targeting some of the specific causes or contributing factors.

Even though institutions and structures are the targets for action, from this quote we can see that social actors are positioned to carry this work forward once again. The actors conduct the systems analysis and move the work forward. Moreover, there is an element of responsibility, and this was further confirmed in my interviews with Sachita and Nathan when I asked them whose job it is to do the work of racial justice. They both said that it is everyone's responsibility, and Nathan elaborated on this point in the following way, "I think it's everyone's responsibility to do racial justice. I say that when

I'm working with organizations. I say that if we succeed, then everybody should see this as part of their work and everyone should see this as mission driven core work that shouldn't be optional… Not an add-on but completely infused in everything that we do."

Tabatha is one RJO client that internalized this message. She is white, in her fifties, and the executive director of a non-profit that focuses on community organizing in the Midwest. When I asked her to describe the opposite of racism, she not only named racial justice, she positioned the work of racial justice (e.g., equitable policies and practices) as everyone's responsibility:

> We talk about racial justice and racial equity… We talk about race-conscious decisions in which equitable outcomes are the goal. When we talk about racial equity…we're talking about systems and policies in which arriving at equitable outcomes and being unable to predict outcomes by race is central to how all of us work for the public good. That's one of our [her organization's] definitions… It's like we're basically saying [that] it's focused on outcomes, and it's focused on practices. So, it's both lining up all sorts of players to say that if we're seeing the kind of racial disparities that we're seeing right now, that those are a reflection of institutional and structural racism, and that it is everybody's job to be looking at policies and practices that change that and move us more and more towards equitable outcomes.

When making racial justice everyone's responsibility, addressing race explicitly while leaving room for intersectionality is essential. For example, none of the organizational representatives I interviewed solely focused on race. As previously discussed, their primary domains included community organizing, education, faith, health and human services, and philanthropy. However, many of them were able to make race an unambiguous part of their work, and this was often expressed by the incorporation of racial justice into their organizational mission statements and strategic plans. For

example, I asked Kathy to discuss a strategy that her organization employs to challenge

racism. Kathy is white, in her sixties, and the executive director of a philanthropic

organization in the West. Referencing her work with RJO, she said:

> We dedicated two days to working on a toolkit, which is essentially a
> series of statements that we could make about, for example, what we aim
> to have as a diverse staff, as a diverse board eventually, [and] when we
> work with other organizations, what the mandated requirements are. For
> example, we won't work with an organization that doesn't have women or
> people of color on their boards in certain ratios. We won't make grants to
> other organizations who don't have front and center policies that really
> look at race, gender, and class inequities and aren't really building that
> into their work. So, we've started to write very explicit statements about
> how this is front and center in our thinking and by doing that we hope
> other organizations will begin to develop policies like that.

In training sessions, this is what Nathan refers to as "race and…," which he defines as

"addressing race explicitly but not exclusively." To this end, he said, "Racial justice can

be a prominent and complementary priority to whatever you're working on… It doesn't

take anything away, and in fact, it often can make your efforts more effective.   They're

often more informed by some of the real dynamics at play."

This element of "race and…" has been put into practice through Natalie's work at

a health and human services agency. As the co-director of the health equity unit, one of

her primary responsibilities includes the distribution of grants to improve health

outcomes, particularly in communities of color. I asked her to discuss how she

challenges racism through her work, and she described her experience with a project that

was developed to address community health in a majority black neighborhood:

> The transformation in many of the communities has been pretty
> remarkable, because we're offering them the opportunity to look at health
> inequities by race and to take a different approach. For example, one of

our grantees is an organization that has focused on diabetes, obesity, and hunger as health outcomes that disproportionately impact the black residents in their neighborhood.

I think other funding opportunities would require them to create programs to get people to eat healthy, to do cooking classes, to get people active through a walking group, or to have shopping demonstrations. I think that those are fine interventions. However, they don't serve on the population level to really change the health outcomes that we see. You also need to think about the systems that are operating to disproportionately create or provide access to healthy options and healthy alternatives.

For example, that particular neighborhood doesn't have a grocery store. Once people of color started moving into the neighborhood, the whites started moving out, and the grocery store moved out of the neighborhood. That community was left with a population of thirty thousand people, almost ninety plus percent people of color, black residents specifically, with no full line grocery store, no access to healthy affordable food options, including produce.

We funded them to take a different look at how they would address the high rates of diabetes and obesity that they saw by taking a systems and policy level approach. This meant, don't use our funding to do a cooking club or a walking group. At the end of the year, or two years, or three you may have an impact on a few people who may continue to walk or continue to cook healthfully, but it wouldn't necessarily have an impact on the population level.

Their short term strategies include working with a grocer who's in another neighborhood a couple miles away… Another intermediate step they're taking is working with our elected officials to get some vacant lots rezoned for community gardens… Regarding the long term, they're working on a proposal with the city developers to build a full line grocery store in that neighborhood and to get a franchise or other grocer to come in. I think this project is a nice example of the kind of short term, intermediate, and long term strategies that they're using. I think they've really latched on to these principals of health equity and racial justice and have really been able to access the problem with a racial justice lens.

Through this focus on race and public health, it becomes clear that Natalie has applied an understanding of the four levels of racism and racial justice to her work. She views the point of intervention when challenging racism as getting at the system of inequality rather

than changing people or blaming the victims of structural racism. From her perspective, a large community of black residents was left without a grocery store due to white flight, and this was a historical as well as a causal factor in the inequitable health outcomes this community is experiencing today. Therefore, instead of focusing on interventions to alter personal behaviors such as cooking classes or walking clubs, the aim of their project is to redistribute resources along racial lines and get a grocery store that can offer fresh foods in this community.

Conclusion

Racial ideologies such as color-blindness or post-racialism position racial inequality as a historical phenomenon. In this context, the meaning of race is that it no longer impacts peoples' life opportunities. Therefore, structurally, race should not enter thought processes or influence decision making because "all boats" should be raised. For people attempting to challenge the racial status quo, these dominant racial ideologies have created a significant barrier. This hurdle is reflected in the lack of a common sense understanding of racism beyond the prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions of individuals. In this paper, I have argued that RJO is filling this void through its racial justice training and consulting services.

Building on Omi and Winant's (1986, 1994) racial formation theory, specifically their concept of a political project, I have shown how RJO is rearticulating the above meaning of race and thus, the role of race in the social structure. Unlike color-blind or post-racial perspectives, RJO situates race as a primary factor in shaping peoples well being. Consequently, RJO and its clients contend that race-specific thoughts and policies

should guide practices, and it is through such actions that the racial structure of society will be transformed. This process of rearticulation includes three core components: intellectuals, the disorganization of dominant racial ideologies, and the construction of an oppositional framework.

Through the culmination of their life experiences, training, and position, primary trainers and consultants are the intellectuals at RJO who lead this process. Who they are—their racial identities, the personal stories they tell—matters to their clients. They are viewed as experts in the racial justice field, having experience and a record of success. When coupled with expertise, being held in this high esteem positions them to be heard and taken seriously as they disorganize dominant ideologies through their presentation of micro and macro forms of racism.

By disorganizing color-blindness or post-racialism through a discussion of internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and structural forms of racism, RJO provides its clients with a common sense understanding of this term that is beyond prejudice and discrimination. Throughout this process of disorganization, racism is contextualized in four realms of the social world. It is positioned as producing outcomes that disadvantage people of color and benefit white people, and examples such as historically persistent disparities in education and wealth shift the focus from micro to macro manifestations of racial inequality. When these elements are gathered together, this perspective eschews the notion that the United States has "transcended" race, because race is situated as impacting life opportunities through the continued unequal distribution of resources along racial lines.

Lastly, RJO introduces racial justice as an alternative framework that is both a process and a goal. As a process, it is grounded in a theoretical understanding of micro and macro forms of racism, and it is solutions-centered as well as participatory. It is focused on social actors as structural change agents who are positioned as being socially responsible for the development and implementation of ideas, polices, and practices that parallel the goal of producing equitable opportunities among all racial groups. While constructing this oppositional framework, RJO distinguishes racial justice from diversity and aligns it with equity, which is described as fairness. Like the four levels of racism, many of the RJO clients I interviewed adopted this frame, and for some, this was due to their unfruitful experiences with diversity. Thus, the choice of language used to transmit this alternative framework is strategic on the part of RJO. Once these distinctions have been drawn, the spotlight turns to changing systems while focusing on outcomes rather than intentions as well as creating solutions that address race explicitly yet promote opportunities for intersectionality across multiple fields.

Even though many RJO clients have begun to implement this framework by restructuring their organizational policies and practices to equitability distribute resources along racial lines, they remain few in comparison to a sea of many Americans who continue to cling on to color-blind ideals regardless of their race (Hartmann et al. 2009). As a result, racial justice on the whole remains an objective that is yet to be accomplished on a society-wide scale (Steinberg 1995). To challenge racial inequality in this post-civil rights era, we must continue to examine the space between theory and practice. In Freire's (2000) words, "human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is

transformation of the world. And praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Human

activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. It cannot…be reduced to either

verbalism or activism" (p. 125).

Through this discussion of RJO as a political project, we have seen the reciprocal

relationship between thinking and doing. However, paralleling continued discussions

around the role of knowledge production outside university walls (see Korgen et al. 2011;

Feagin 2008; Burawoy 2004), we must not only advance the study of racial inequality for

the sake of informing prospective solutions. We must also study how theoretical

solutions work in the realm of practice. In other words, challenging racial inequality in

the present moment is going to take more than discussions of what *could be done*. We

must continue to illuminate what *is being done*. As Feagin (2000) contends, "Many

researchers have studied racial oppression. The point is to eradicate it" (p. 270).

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

RJO staff interviewees were not asked the RJO evaluation questions provided in Topic 4.

Topic 1: Background

I would like to begin by learning more about your background. Will you briefly tell me about where you grew up (North/South/East/West/Midwest, rural/urban, inner city/suburb, big/small town)?
- Who lived in your neighborhood in terms of class and race? (rich, middle class, or poor, black, white, etc.)?
- In comparison to where and the kind of people you grew up around, what is your current neighborhood like?

Briefly tell me about the kind of high school you attended while growing up (public/private, large/small, inner city/suburb)?
- Who went to your school in terms of class and race (rich, middle class, or poor, black, white, etc.)?

What are the race(s) and class(es) of three of your closest friends?
- What do you do together and how often do you get together?

What drew you to your position at _____?
- What prepared you for your position?

What is the racial and gender composition like where you work?

Topic 2: Interpretation of Race and Racial Inequality

How would you define the idea of race?
- How did you develop this understanding?

What does racism mean to you?
- How did you develop this understanding?

How would you describe the opposite of racism?
- How did you develop this understanding?

Topic 3: Strategies for Challenging Racial Inequality

Describe an instance when you were most pleased with your work in challenging racism at your present organization.

What is the largest hurdle you have faced in relation to challenging racism? Tell me about a specific instance.
- What did you do?

- How did this situation play out?

Topic 4: RJO Evaluation

What kind of racial justice training and/or consulting did RJO provide to your group?

What did you find most useful about RJO's training and/or consulting?

What key ideas or concept about race, if any, did RJO's training help your group clarify?

What skills for working on race as an issue, if any, did RJO's training/consulting help you develop?

What new or different strategies to address racism, if any, has your organization engaged in that were influenced by RJO's training/consulting? Give any examples.

What have been the key activities your organization has undertaken to address racism?

What have been the impacts or changes that have resulted from your work on race?

What part of RJO's training/consulting was least useful and what changes do you suggest?

What is your assessment of the performance quality of RJO's trainers/consultants?

What kinds of future services or support from RJO, if any, would be useful?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear _____,

I hope this letter finds you well.

We are doing some evaluation of [RJO's] racial justice training and consulting work and would like to ask for your help. As one who has participated in this work, your feedback would be most valuable.

Through a combination of surveys and one-on-one interviews, we want to: 1) get some candid and in-depth assessment of this work, 2) identify what impact it has had, and 3) identify new or improved services or support we could provide. This evaluation will not only sharpen our work and the way we work with others, but it can also inform others working in the field of racial justice.

In addition to the evaluation, your responses will provide data for a research project that will focus on challenging racial inequality.

The interview will be divided into two sections and will span roughly one hour and fifteen minutes. Approximately half the interview will focus on challenging racial inequality. This is the primary section for the research project, and information shared during this portion of the interview will remain confidential. The other half of the interview will focus on your reflections and feedback regarding [RJO's] racial justice training and consulting services. Information shared in this section will be provided to [RJO] staff non-confidentially. Each section will be audio recorded. The interview will be conducted over the phone by Victoria Brockett, a graduate student at Loyola University Chicago and the principal investigator for the research project.

To confirm your participation, please reply to this email, which is cc'd to Victoria, by using "reply all." We would appreciate if you could confirm by _____. Then, Victoria will be in touch to schedule a time to talk with you. If you have any questions about either part of the interview, feel free to contact Victoria directly at vbrockett@luc.edu or me.

Thank you for your consideration. Your participation will be most valuable.

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VITA

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