Sticks and Stones:
Racism as Experienced by Adolescents in New Brunswick

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L'objectif de la recherche était de décrire la nature du racisme tel que vécu par des adolescents affirmant être victimes de ségrégation dans la province du Nouveau-Brunswick, au Canada, ainsi que leur réaction face aux incidents de racisme perçu. Une méthodologie qualitative fondée sur un paradigme constructiviste a été utilisée dans le cadre de cette étude. Des entrevues en profondeur ont été menées auprès d'adolescents non blancs qui ont été victimes de racisme et auprès des parents de ces victimes. Bien que la recherche ait été initiée en réponse à une campagne publicitaire intensive portant sur la violence raciale chez les adolescents, les résultats indiquent que les incidents de racisme sont un phénomène connu des participants. Ces derniers décrivent un problème insidieux mais aussi persistant auquel ils ont dû faire face lorsqu'ils ont commencé à fréquenter l'école publique. Les injures constituent la forme de racisme la plus répandue et font partie de la plupart des incidents décrits. Même si les symboles d'autorité les qualifient d'inoffensives, les injures semblent produire des effets à long terme sur les personnes ciblées. Selon les résultats, les réactions des participants face au racisme comportent trois phases : l'éclatement de l'univers, la résistance en spirale et le désengagement. Les résultats révèlent que les infirmières œuvrant en milieu scolaire doivent traiter des questions ayant trait au racisme avec les enfants et les adolescents.

The purpose of the study was to describe both the nature of racism as experienced by adolescent self-described victims in the province of New Brunswick and their response to the perceived racist incidents. A qualitative methodology based on the constructivist paradigm was used. In-depth interviews were conducted with non-White adolescent victims of racism and with parents of victims. Although the study was initiated in response to an eruption of publicity about teenage racial violence, the findings indicate that racist incidents were not a new phenomenon for the participants. They described a low-key but long-term problem that had begun when they entered the public school system. Name-calling was by far the most common form of racism identified and it played a part in most of the other incidents described; dismissed as harmless by authority figures, it appeared to have long-term consequences for its targets. The participants' response to racism was found to have three phases: splintered universe, spiralling resistance, and disengagement. The results suggest that nurses working in the field of school health should address issues of racism among children and adolescents.

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Over the last three decades, changes in Canada's immigration policy have transformed its ethnic composition. Although the proportion of the population not born in Canada has remained stable, the percentage from non-European countries has increased dramatically (Badet, 1993). The resulting increase in visible ethnic diversity has given racism greater public salience. There has also been a growing recognition among health-care professionals that racism is a determinant of health as well as a significant social issue. Stress related to racist incidents has been associated with a wide variety of physical and emotional health problems (Rollock & Gordon, 2000).

Of particular concern has been increased interethnic conflict among adolescents. Most investigations of this problem have been conducted in metropolitan centres with large immigrant communities. A number of reported incidents of racially motivated violence targeting non-White youths in the province of New Brunswick prompted a study of the problem in a different social context, since, unlike some areas of Canada, New Brunswick has a relatively homogeneous population (Badet, 1993). The purpose of this study was to describe the nature of racism from the perspective of adolescent victims living in areas of limited ethnic diversity, as well as their responses to racist incidents. It was undertaken as a first step in a larger project designed to promote sensitive institutional responses to the needs of young victims of racism. The specific questions examined were: *What is the nature of racism as experienced by self-described adolescent victims in the province of New Brunswick? How do self-described adolescent victims of racism respond to perceived racist incidents?*

Background

Definitions of racism focus on three central attributes: assignment to a racial group based on physical characteristics, associated inferiority or superiority of designated racial groups, and policies or behaviours that differentially affect the self-esteem and life chances of members of a racial group (Green, 1995; Rollock & Gordon, 2000). Scholars differ in the extent to which they believe racism should be studied individually or structurally (Rollock & Gordon). Institutional racism is differentiated from individual racism. The former exists when institutions grant fewer rights to a given racial/ethnic group or limit the opportunities of that group to exercise its rights (Green). The health effects of both individual and institutional racism have been documented. At the individual level, racism has been linked to general emotional well-being (Vrana & Rollock, 1996, 1998), psycholophysiology (Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999), and restrictions on lifestyle options (Rollock &

Gordon). Perceived institutional racism has been linked to mental health (Hendryx & Ahern, 1997).

Although nurses have investigated cross-cultural relationships, they have given racism little attention as a distinct phenomenon, tending instead to see it as part of cultural differences. The few nursing studies of the phenomenon that have been done have focused on racism among caregivers. Bonaparte's (1979) investigation of nurses' attitudes towards culturally different clients suggests that ego defensiveness and closed-mindedness play a part. Similarly, racism is among the problems identified in Béguin Stockli's 1997 study of problematic issues in the care of refugees and other asylum-seekers in Switzerland (cited in Shaha, 1998). Shaha explicitly set out to determine whether patients in a Swiss hospital encountered everyday racism. Her findings, however, are ambiguous. Green (1995) also focused directly on racism. She developed a scale to measure perceived racism among African-American women in the United States. Nursing studies support findings that racism impacts on the delivery of health care.

Racism and its effects have been studied in children. Racial prejudice has been found to be distressingly common among children (Bigler & Liben, 1993; Doyle & Aboud, 1995). Despite a popular conception that prejudice is learned as people become adults, it is reported that children as young as 5 years possess perceptual and attitudinal biases. White children in particular have been found to express prejudice towards Blacks and Natives (Corenblum & Annis, 1993). Studies of the effects of racism on young people have found it to be related to poor emotional health (Tatum, 1992), low academic achievement (Harrell, 2000), and lack of hope for the future (Murray & Clark, 1990).

As noted, most investigations of the impact of racism on adolescents have been conducted in metropolitan centres where victims are numerous enough to form large groups. Little is known about the experience of racism among non-White youths dispersed in small numbers throughout a region of limited ethnic diversity.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative methodology based on a constructivist research paradigm in which realities are considered to be "apprehendable in the form of multiple intangible mental constructions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 10). The research process is inductive and is guided by a relativist ontology. Findings are constructed through the interactions of the investigator and participants (Appleton & King, 1997). Data col-

lection involves both a hermeneutic and a dialectical approach (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Hermeneutics is concerned with the interpretation of texts and is used to understand the way people experience their world and their place in it (Carpenter, 1999). Interviews with participants are transcribed into a "field text," which is read and reread as the investigators categorize it and seek patterns of meaningful connection (Carpenter). This involves a hermeneutic circle of interpretation, in which the investigators move back and forth between understanding the parts of the text in light of their global view of the phenomenon and understanding their global view in light of their interpretation of its parts (Allen & Jensen, 1990; Carpenter). Interpretations of the text are checked with participants and with counterparts until consensus is achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000).

Dialectic logic sees oppositions and contradictions as fruitful of new and better syntheses (Appleton & King, 1997). A dialectical process guides constructivist inquiry on several levels. Investigators seek divergent views or experiences through purposeful sampling and through flexible interview schedules. They also contrast divergent views or experiences when analyzing the data in order to achieve a better understanding of the phenomenon (Appleton & King; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Sampling

Interviews were conducted with a sample of 25 adolescent self-described victims of racism and 14 parents of perceived victims. Sampling was purposive. In order to ensure some geographical variation, the sample was selected from the four areas of the province with the most ethnic diversity: the cities of Moncton, Fredericton, and Saint John and the region of Richibucto/Miramichi. Board members of multicultural associations in each of the four areas as well as personnel of band offices (administrative units) of four First Nations reserves assisted investigators by recruiting participants. A number of participants also referred others. During the recruitment process, participants were given a form describing the study. Selection criteria were that the subject be between 15 and 19 years of age and believe he or she had been the target of racism. In addition, an effort was made to balance the ratio of male to female respondents and to achieve even distribution among the four geographic areas. Parents of perceived victims were interviewed in order to gather additional information on the adolescents' experiences of racism. They provided triangulation of data

(Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994) in that their observations and experiences echoed what the young people were articulating.

The adolescents were a mix of first-generation Canadians and youths from communities with long roots in the province. The former group included two participants whose parents had emigrated from Africa and two whose parents had emigrated from the West Indies. The latter were either members of one of New Brunswick's two First Nations communities, the Mi'kmaq and the Malaseet, or members of an indigenous community of Blacks. The Mi'kmaq and the Malaseet have inhabited the Atlantic region for more than two thousand years (Whitehead, 1991) and in New Brunswick number approximately 15,000 (New Brunswick Family Policy Secretariat, 1995). The Mi'kmaq participants were mostly from rural reserves in the Richibucto/Miramichi region, whereas the Malaseet participants were from the St. Mary's reserve in Fredericton. The indigenous people of colour in the province are descendants of British Empire Loyalists from New York State and are estimated to number 3,500.[1] They live mainly in Fredericton and Saint John. Natives and indigenous people of colour are the two largest visible-minority groups in the province. Eight adolescents identified themselves as members of the indigenous Black community and 13 as either Mi'kmaq or Malaseet.

Data Collection and Analysis

To enhance consistency, only one member of the research team conducted the interviews. The interviewer took care to establish rapport with the respondents in order to gather data of depth. The interview schedule consisted of 10 broad, open-ended questions. It was used flexibly to collect as much information as possible about racist incidents and the participants' response to them; for instance, one question asked adolescents to describe their first racist incident. Parents were asked the same 10 questions about their child's racist experiences. To ensure a dialectical process, the interviewer sought to clarify the respondents' statements and explored alternative constructions with them. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. A brief socio-demographic questionnaire was administered to obtain an overview of the sample (Table 1).

Following the inductive methodology of the constructivist paradigm, data analysis was begun during data collection. It involved Lincoln and Guba's (1985) steps of unitizing, categorizing, and pattern-

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[1] Estimates from PRUDE Inc. (Pride of Race, Unity, Dignity, Education), Saint John, NB.

Table 1 *Adolescent Participants*

	Age	Gender	Ethnic Background of Parents
Moncton	18	F	Indigenous Black (from Saint John)
	17	F	Indigenous Black (from Nova Scotia)
	19	M	Indigenous Black (from Nova Scotia)
	16	F	West Indian Black
	18	F	African Black (from Zaire)
Fredericton	15	F	Malaseet
	15	M	Malaseet
	20	F	Malaseet
	17	M	Malaseet
	17	F	Malaseet
	19	M	Indigenous Black
Saint John	19	M	Indigenous Black
	17	F	Indigenous Black
	19	F	American Black
	18	M	Indigenous Black
	19	M	Indigenous Black
	19	M	Jamaican Black
Richibucto/Miramichi	18	M	Mi'kmaq
	15	M	Mi'kmaq
	18	F	Mi'kmaq
	19	F	Mi'kmaq
	18	M	Mi'kmaq
	15	M	Mi'kmaq
	15	M	Mi'kmaq
	19	F	Mi'kmaq

seeking. In the first step, the transcribed interviews were broken down into units of data. In the second step, units were brought together into provisional categories. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used, whereby researchers constantly compare data sets to redefine units and to develop and refine categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, as new units of data were assigned to categories, they were continuously compared with previously identified units. Finally, pat-

terns were sought as categories were reassembled into a construction of the experiences being examined. In doing this, the investigators moved back and forth between the categorized data and the original field text. Memo writing was used to describe emerging patterns in the data and to reflect on relationships among categories (Appleton & King, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To enhance the credibility of the study, those affected by the phenomenon under investigation were asked to contribute to its design and to the emerging analysis, in several ways. A panel of parents of self-described victims of racism initially guided investigators in developing the study questions and suggesting ways of recruiting participants. Emergent findings were discussed first with a focus group of adolescents and parents, later with individual respondents, and finally with the original panel of parents. An audit decision trail was kept to enhance dependability. Two investigators unitized and categorized data separately and then compared and contrasted analyses until consensus was achieved. Throughout this process, the emerging categories and constructions were discussed with the investigator who conducted the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Participants signed a consent form that described the project and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. The study was approved by the Université de Moncton ethics committee before data collection was begun.

Findings

The inductive nature of the methodology quickly revealed that the primary concern of both adolescent and parent respondents was not the highly publicized episodes of racial violence that had prompted the study. Rather, it was the stress of dealing with a long-term but low-key racist environment. They framed racism as a life-long burden, not a recent phenomenon. One mother summed up this view succinctly: "People sometimes need bad actions like we had lately here in Moncton to see that something wrong is going on, because what just boiled over was not new; it has been going on for ages." Furthermore, racism was a cumulative experience for the adolescents, and their response to it was an evolving one. In presenting the findings, the nature of the racist incidents experienced by the adolescents will be described first, followed by the participants' evolving response to racism.

The Face of Racism

The nature of the racism experienced by the adolescents was strikingly similar regardless of their background or geographic location. Furthermore, the perceptions of parents mirrored the accounts of the adolescents. By far the most common problem identified was name-calling. Although the specific racial slurs varied, every adolescent interviewed had been exposed to a considerable amount of this type of verbal abuse. Name-calling also played a role in most of the other types of racist incidents described.

The second most frequent form of racism reported was either threat of or actual physical violence on the part of peers. This was both an individual and a collective phenomenon. In their early years at school, participants had been "shoved," "pushed," and "punched" by individual name-callers. As the participants grew older, these situations sometimes involved groups of young people or members of particular teen groups ("the hillbilly crowd," "the skinheads," "the skaters"). Several had received written threats, often accompanied by swastikas. For example, one girl received a note "with all kinds of Nazi symbols" and the message "niggers must die," and another discovered "Squaw you're next" written on her school locker.

Even though many participants singled out a particular teacher, principal, or policeman as having gone out of their way to support them, the third most frequently identified problem was unfair treatment by authority figures. All the youths described instances in which they believed they had been subjected to injustice because of racism. These instances typically involved the participant's having responded to name-calling by fighting back. For example, a Black youth in Saint John who had been charged following a fight with a skinhead over racial slurs said, "The cop looked at me straight in the face. I couldn't believe what he says: 'Does your father have a criminal background?' My father could have been a *priest*!"

As a result of such experiences, both the adolescents and the parents were convinced that non-White youths are constantly at risk of unfair treatment because of racial stereotyping. One mother said, "I tell my kids, you can be in a crowd of a hundred White people — if something happens they will come and single you out and nobody will stand up for you except those few minority kids who are your friends." This theme was revisited frequently during the interviews.

Since schooling holds a dominant position in the lives of youths, it is not surprising that school was the key arena for racist experiences.

Most participants vividly recalled their first brush with racism, and the majority of these incidents occurred at school, often in the very early years. A Mi'kmaq participant described his initial reaction to attending school off the reserve: "I didn't really prepare myself for that [racial taunting] — all those people who don't really like us in the White world."

As the children grew older, the arena for racist experiences extended to malls, streets, parks, restaurants, bars, and dances. Incidents in these areas, however, were sporadic and as a result often caught them completely off guard. One youth described an incident at a mall: "This guy approached me and said, 'Hey, nigger.' I turned around and I thought I was hearing things. 'Are you talking to me?' And he goes, 'I hate niggers.... Nigger, you're not listening to me. I kill niggers'." The cumulative effect of these intermittent experiences left respondents with the perception that racism can surface anywhere at any time in the community.

Evolving Response to Racism

The participants' response to racist incidents involved a synergistic and negative process that compounded the effects of racism on them. Two covert factors driving this process surfaced from the data. Both involved a significant dichotomy in understandings between participants and members of the mainstream society. Before outlining phases in participants' changing response to racism, we will describe this dichotomy. The first covert factor involved incompatible views of the meaning of racist name-calling, the second an historic versus episodic understanding of individual racist incidents.

Meaning of name-calling. Participants considered racial taunts to be both highly wounding and unequivocal evidence of racism. Racist names brought to the surface a sense that people were imposing on them an inalterable and discredited social identity because they were visibly different. For instance, a Moncton girl said she had been walking by a busy coffee shop when an old man came up to her and said, "Hey, you black bitch, do you want to fuck?" She said of the incident, "It really made me realize, like, Oh my God, I'm Black and people notice it." In contrast, authority figures consistently discounted the importance of racial slurs, seeing name-calling as something all children do and all children have to put up with. One young participant said he was told by a school principal, "Being called a nigger is no different from being called a geek or a nerd." For the youth, however, it was completely different. He explained why: "When I was a kid I wasn't aware of being

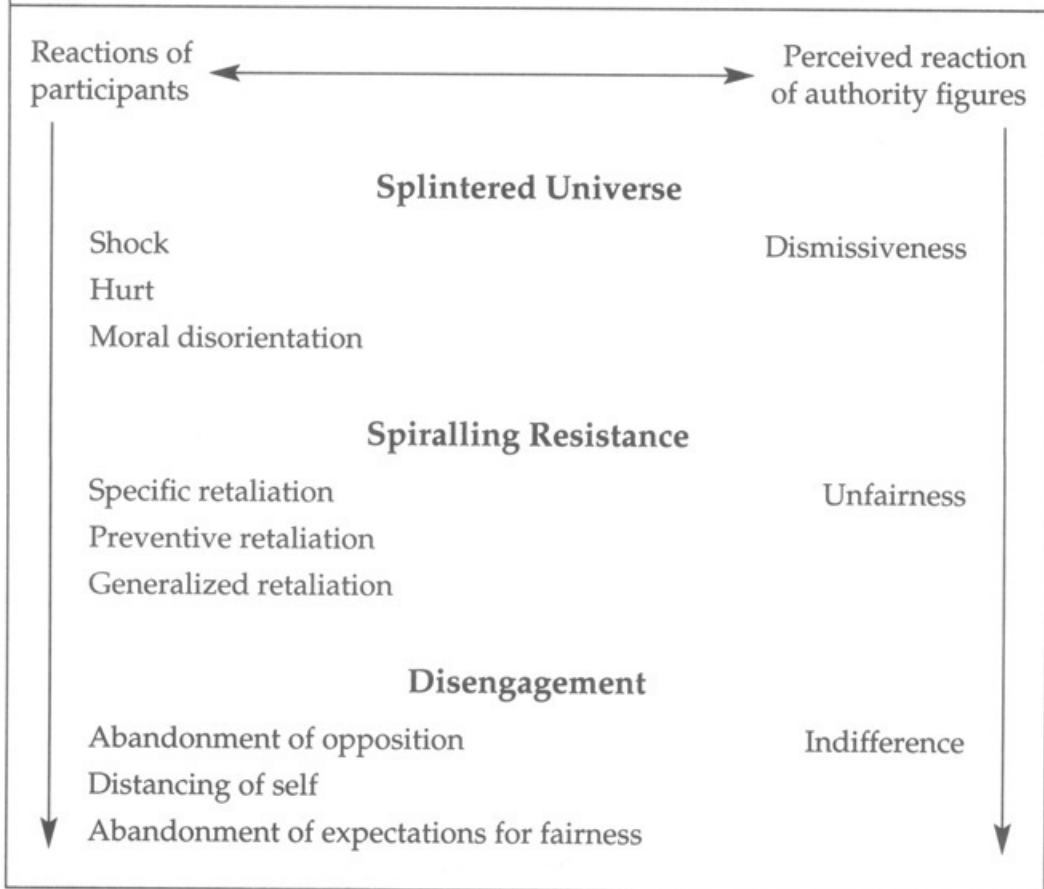Black. I was just me. And when it really hit home was being called 'nigger'."

Historic versus episodic understandings. Participants' descriptions of specific racist incidents indicate that they perceived the episode through the lens of their personal, accumulated experiences of racism. Their reaction to each individual act of racism was part of a life-long battle against the imposition of a socially discredited identity. Their accounts emphasized the event that had triggered their reaction, which usually was derogatory, racist name-calling. Authority figures responded to the retaliatory behaviour rather than to the triggering event, and the participants usually ended up being punished as a result. For example, one youth reported that while he was boarding the school bus another boy called out, "Hey, black boy." He responded, "Don't call me that," and kept on walking, but the boy taunted him again, with "nigger," so our participant, as he put it, "started flipping out." The bus driver pulled over, put him off the bus, and reported to his parent that he had "started everything." The bus driver judged the youth's violent reaction as the problem. Our participant, however, felt he had been the victim: the name-calling was another cut in the life-long wound of racism, and he was fighting a collective force of experienced racism. In these situations, authority figures witnessed an individual reaction (episodic understanding of the incident), whereas our participants were responding to just one more instance of harassment (historic understanding of the incident).

From Splintered Universe to Disengagement

Three phases were identified in participants' evolving response to racism. We term the first phase "splintered universe," the second "spiralling resistance," and the third "disengagement" (Figure 1). On the one hand, the response process involved gradual changes in how they reacted to specific incidents; on the other hand, it incorporated changes in how they perceived the reaction of authority figures to racism.

Splintered universe. This occurred when participants first encountered negative racial comments from other children. As noted above, the encounters often occurred very early in their schooling, sometimes on their first day of school. Their initial reaction was one of shock. A Mi'kmaq participant explained: "I wasn't used to it — it wasn't done to me before." For many, an element of the shock was the discovery that they were visibly different from their peers. One participant said, "I'd never seen myself any different from anyone else before, and then all of a sudden I was." Their lack of awareness of being visibly different prior

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Figure 1 *From Splintered Universe to Disengagement*

Reactions of   ⟷   Perceived reaction
participants   of authority figures

Splintered Universe

Shock   Dismissiveness
Hurt
Moral disorientation

Spiralling Resistance

Specific retaliation   Unfairness
Preventive retaliation
Generalized retaliation

Disengagement

Abandonment of opposition   Indifference
Distancing of self
Abandonment of expectations for fairness

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to these early name-calling incidents may be due to the limited ethnic diversity in the region.

Shock quickly gave way to hurt. Most of the youths and some of the parents had asked authority figures to intervene, but these people had a very different understanding of the meaning of name-calling. Teachers and principals downplayed or dismissed racist taunts with comments such as, "well, it's only names." One Black youth in Saint John said, "I was always told one way or another that I didn't feel the way I thought I felt and [that] I didn't hear that the way I thought I'd heard it." The result was moral disorientation. The message in the name-calling was that the visibly different person was irreversibly inferior, or as one participant put it, "a second-class citizen." And the message in the dismissive institutional response was that their distress was unimportant. In other words, the harm they were being done, which in their eyes was morally wrong, was being condoned by the authority figures in the moral social order. A mother spoke of having to go and retrieve her child from underneath a sink in the school bath-

room: "His hands were wrapped around the pipes and he refused to come out. The kids had been calling him 'nigger'…when he tried to tell the teacher, she said, 'It's not an issue'."

As their world splintered, many of the participants wished they were White. For instance, a Mi'kmaq participant said she had thought at the time, "I bet you if I was White I'd have all the friends I need but I had no friends because I'm Indian." Similarly, a Black youth said, "I remember going home at night and praying to God that I would wake up in the morning and be White like other kids."

Spiralling resistance. Sooner or later most participants fell into a pattern of spiralling resistance, attacking first those who attacked them and then any potential threat. As racist incidents accumulated in their lives, they increasingly interpreted individual episodes from the perspective of their history of racist experiences. The first development in this phase was direct retaliation against anyone responsible for an act of racial harassment. For instance, a participant explained that when she was called names like "little squaw" and "wagon burner" she began to "punch them out…I learned after a while, you know, they're going to say something to me, I'm going to say something right back." Another said, "I just couldn't take it no more and I'd got a little bit bigger, so I just went after them."

The youths (and many of their parents as well) believed that this type of retaliation had been an effective strategy in the short run. One girl said, "I just stopped crying and started beating people up, and that's why it stopped." Another participant said, "I used to be called names…. I stood up to them, that's when they left me alone." Perhaps because fighting back appeared to be effective, many of our participants began to adopt a preventive form of retaliation, such as attempting to circumvent racist situations with verbal threats: "I told them, 'You call me names and what's going to happen is I'm going to explode and I'm going to fight.' I said, 'I'll kick all your asses' — and they smartened up!"

Finally, many advanced to a generalized form of retaliation whereby any hint of racism towards themselves or actual racism towards someone else provoked a violent reaction, because it was viewed in the context of their long-term experience. An incident described by a Moncton youth who had been suspended from school following a fight will serve to illustrate this. He had been reacting to a racist comment directed not at him but at another Black student: "She got her test back. It was…something on the test like 'niggers,' 'I hate niggers.' Of course, the teacher is not going to put that on the test! It

was a skinhead in the class. He laughed about it, thought it was a big funny! So I approached him…so I got in a fight."

Authority figures, applying an episodic understanding of these incidents, punished the youths for retaliating. To the participants, applying an historic understanding of the experience, this was unfair. They felt they had been defending themselves against racist victimization and the instigators were not being reprimanded. One youth explained: "The teachers, they were always thinking that I had provoked it all. They used to say, 'Well, you must have done something for him to start going on like that,' and I would be the one in trouble. They wouldn't do anything to the kid who was calling me names." A young girl who had been sent for counselling because of her behaviour said of the counsellor, "She would say, 'So…what did you do to agitate the kid to call you that name?' How am I supposed to agitate a name like that?"

Disengagement. The third phase is one of less external disruption but may feature internal difficulties, as it involves loss of hope and connection with society. Overt acts of opposition are abandoned, as resistance seems more and more futile. Participants realized that although fighting back might help them win battles against racism, they were losing the war. One said, "I just learned no matter how many times I would get all raged up and hurt somebody would be calling me names again, so it wasn't working." Another commented that fighting "didn't…get me anywhere really, even though it got me to get them to stop calling the names."

Instead of retaliating, many of our participants began to distance themselves emotionally from racist attacks. One way they did this was by defining racism as reflecting negatively on the racist rather than on them. A Mi'kmaq youth said, for instance, "I think people that make fun of us it's because they're not educated and they don't know they're ignorant." Another way they distanced themselves was by developing a protective social wariness so as never to be caught off guard and therefore hurt by a racist remark. A young participant, surprised by a racial slur one evening outside a nightclub, said, "It made me understand that there's a lot of ignorant people out there and it might happen again and it might not happen again, but, you know, don't let your guard down completely." Another explained, "I've learned not to trust Whites."

During this last phase, our participants dropped their expectations for an equitable society, seeing low-key racism as interwoven throughout the community and a permanent feature of it. Many stated that they had come to realize that racism will never go away. Parents also

believed this. A mother said, "When I was going to elementary school I got called names every day, so what I'm really trying to say is that we have never really been without racism…it's here, it's been here, and it always will be here." At this stage, therefore, there was no longer any expectation that authority figures would intervene fairly or effectively when racism surfaced. The participants understood institutional reactions to racist incidents as reflective of a fundamental social indifference to the issue. This attitude is illustrated by the comment of a mother who went to a member of the school board with a racist note her daughter had received at school: "He looked at it briefly, three seconds, and 'Oh that's terrible, Oh we'll deal with this.' So instead of dealing with this they were painting the walls [to remove racist graffiti]."

Discussion

Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me. These words, often used to soothe hurt feelings, reflect the widespread belief that name-calling is essentially harmless. Because of our focus on the subjective experience of racism, we did not investigate the attitudes of people who downplayed racial taunts. The comments of the participants suggest that authority figures truly considered such behaviour to be innocuous. The analysis indicates that, on the contrary, their dismissal of name-calling represented a tacit endorsement of racism and was at the root of a long, cumulative process. When our young participants first encountered racist taunting they began to feel distinct from others, and when their complaints were downplayed they began to understand their reality as different from that of others. Hall, Stevens, and Meleis (1994) identify this differentiation from the mainstream as an integral component of marginalization. In many respects, the synergistic impact of racist incidents on the adolescents in the present study can be understood as a process of marginalization as conceptualized by these authors.

Margins are defined as the periphery-determining aspects of persons, social networks, communities, and environments. Marginalization is the process by which persons are peripheralized on the basis of identities, associations, experiences, and environments (Hall, Stevens, & Meleis, 1994). Contemporary scholarship treats race as a social construction and discusses racialized identities in terms of a "socially constructed otherness" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 262). Our young participants' historic understanding of racist experiences caused them to vigorously resist the imposition by their peers of a socially constructed "otherness." This, in turn, merely compounded their peripheralization.

When authority figures intervened in their attempts to thwart racism, they saw a single, unconnected event. Although the punishment meted out might have fitted the actual behaviour, it was at odds with the reasons for the behaviour and therefore tended to heighten the sense of peripheralization. The youths experienced the powerlessness and silencing that Hall, Stevens, and Meleis identify as key components of marginalization. Parents fared no better in their attempts to stem the tide that was pushing the youths out from the mainstream. Most had complained to the school about racial taunts and threats, on behalf of their children, but felt that their concerns were put aside.

A recent study of sexual harassment in the lives of schoolgirls reported similar reactions on the part of authority figures. The girls' complaints were dismissed, and when they fought back they were the ones punished, not the perpetrators (Berman, McKenna, Traher Arnold, Taylor, & MacQuarrie, 2000). Sexism and racism among young people appear to have produced the same silencing of victims and to have received the same tacit endorsement by the social order. There are some important differences, however, in the experiences of the two groups of adolescents. Sexist and demeaning remarks were often tolerated by the girls in that study. The investigators report as well that the girls often discounted sexual harassment as just fun-making. In discussing the implications of their findings, they propose that nurses teach adolescent girls to recognize and name the everyday violence that they encounter. In marked contrast, the harassment faced by the youths in the present study was clearly named by the victims as racism, and it provoked a highly charged reaction from them. In fact, participants argued that it was members of the dominant group who failed to recognize and name the incidents as racism: "It's very easy for White people to say racism doesn't exist, because they've never experienced it."

Such comments reflect the broad perspective that many theorists on race have associated with marginalization and otherness (Ladson-Billings, 2000). In 1903 Cora Du Bois identified "the double consciousness" of Black Americans who understood the perspective of both those at the margin and those in the mainstream (Du Bois, 1953). Hall, Stevens, and Meleis (1994) link this perspectival advantage to the power inherent in marginalization, noting that those at the margins understand, by necessity, the way of thinking of those at the centre while the converse is seldom true.

Another difference between the adolescents in this study and those who participated in the study by Berman et al. (2000) is the reflective-ness characterizing the last stage of their response to racism. They came

to see racism as an inevitable feature of their social landscape, and redirected their resistance from external opposition to internal psychic work to avoid internalizing a stigmatized identity. Hall, Stevens, and Meleis (1994) describe the reflectiveness of marginalized people as conscious introspection in order to understand and compensate for the inner conflict caused by their peripheralization.

Racism is not typically defined by nurses as falling within the domain of nursing practice. The discipline, however, places an emphasis on health promotion and illness prevention. Racism is an unsolicited and unwarranted form of violence (Dobbins & Skillings, 2000) that threatens physical, psychological, social, functional, and spiritual well-being (Harrell, 2000). A recent review of racism-related stress concluded that "the evidence is compelling and growing that racism is pathogenic with respect to a variety of physical and mental health outcomes" (Harrell, p. 48). Certainly, the marginalization experienced by our young participants as a result of low-grade racism had health consequences for them. All three phases of their response to racist incidents involved distress, but emotional anguish was especially evident during the first phase, when they began to encounter name-calling. The subsequent phase of spiralling resistance affected their functional well-being, since their response to racism during this period tended to impact on their school performance; some avoided going to school, some were frequently sent out of class, and several were suspended for extended periods. During the disengagement phase, their inability to trust those in the dominant group had implications for their social well-being.

Chopoorian's seminal work in re-conceptualizing the environment as a focus for nursing interventions (Chopoorian, 1986) is relevant in considering the nursing implications of these findings. This view of environment incorporates social, economic, and political relationships that impact on health and well-being. Nurses are challenged to direct their interventions at changing the status quo and attempting to resolve social problems. Although findings of qualitative studies are inherently provisional and incomplete, data from the present study suggest that two aspects of the social environment may well have affected the well-being of the participants: the authorities' dismissal of racist name-calling and their episodic as opposed to historic understanding of conflicts between White and non-White youths. Previous research on racism provides further support for nursing interventions concerning such incidents. Researchers have found that the subjective experience of racism is commonly disbelieved or doubted by members of mainstream society (Essed, 1991; Harrell, 2000), that generally the victim's perception of racism is accurate (Taylor, Wright, & Porter, 1994), and,

finally, that others' resistance to validating the reality of a racist incident increases the stress experienced by the victim and thus the potential damage (Essed; Harrell).

As members of the school health team, public health nurses can play a key role in influencing attitudes and policy development related to racism in schools, a central element in the social environment of young people. Participants in this study proposed a range of solutions to the dichotomy of understandings of racist incidents in the school environment. We believe their suggestions provide a strategic place for nursing interventions to begin. First and foremost, the participants argued, members of the dominant group must acknowledge the racism inherent in name-calling. As one youth said, the first step is "to admit there is racism there." They argued as well for public condemnation of racial taunting and expressed the view that the school should take a formal stand by developing and implementing written policies specifying the consequences of such behaviour. Finally, they expressed the view that authority figures should always assess and take into account the triggering role of racist taunts and prior racist experiences when intervening in conflicts between White and non-White youths.

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