

“Until We Weep”: Rhode Island Protestant Christian Churches and Moving Beyond a Diversity
Paradigm to Feeling Equality

By

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ABSTRACT

Underlying, interweaving with, and impacting the implementation of diversity paradigms are racialized emotions present in an organization. However, emotions are under-engaged in literature on organizations' diversity initiatives. Through focus group discussions, one-to-one interviews, and participant observation within Rhode Island Protestant Christian churches that engage in racial reconciliation, I asked how they define and describe their work. This study shows that these churches do use diversity paradigms but go beyond them in order to address the intangible spiritual and emotional effects of both the problem of racism and the process to address it. Additionally, these qualitative methods revealed that the timeline of attaining the intangible is inefficient for an organization. Regardless, the church leaders felt that organizational diversity paradigms were insufficient, that pursuing intangible goals was inherent in all racial justice/reconciliation/diversity programs, and that doing so would require a communal approach. These findings suggest that organizations that do not actively attempt to engage with the intangible goals inherent in diversity work will continue to miss an integral facet of addressing racism.

INTRODUCTION

"I'm getting the impression that you feel I shouldn't [preach about race as I have planned]. So, why don't you tell me why?"

Frank,¹ a white lay-leader of a predominantly white, monoracial church, posed the question to a congregant in his church. He had approached the man to pray for him and the upcoming sermon he had planned for addressing racism. This man, who Frank described as being someone "high up in a fairly large corporation" responded: "We get sensitivity training; we get diversity training...For the past two years at work that's all I get. I understand that needs to happen, but that's all I get. My kids are in private Christian school. All they've been dealing with for the past two years is race relations. I get it at work. I go home, I hear my kids talking about it. I turn on the TV, I get it there. I can't get away from it."

Frank countered, "Where aren't you hearing about it?...You're not hearing about it in the church.... We should be the largest proponent of racial unity. You're not getting it here and that's why I'm going to preach on it."

"You're absolutely right," the man said. "I agree with you- but please don't do it. I'm afraid you're going to push people to the margins.... I'm afraid there's people out there that aren't going to see things like you. They're quiet and you're going to push them towards the door."

"I'm going to pray that I bring them to the Cross. If they choose the door that's between them and God...I want to bring them to the Cross because that's where it needs to be."

Impression. Feeling. Fatigue. Fear. Conviction. For organizations that are interested in developing diversity and harnessing it for their benefit, diversity training and education are common organizational diversity management policy (Thomas and Ely 1996). However, underlying, interweaving with, and impacting the implementation of diversity paradigms are racialized emotions of organization members. Emotions are present in but under-engaged in literature on organizations' diversity initiatives (Bonilla-Silva 2019). Analyzing churches that engage in racial reconciliation work helps reveal the emotion that are a present when an organization grapples with racism. I spent over sixteen months participating in the Protestant Christian community in Rhode Island while also conducting focus group discussions and one-to-

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

one interviews with pastors and lay-leaders in order to better understand how churches address racism and better race relations.

Churches present an interesting case since they are volunteer organizations. Thus, they are unable to force or incentivize “compliance” with an organizational mission geared toward diversity. In New England, a region that denies its own racism (Melish 1998), getting white congregants and leaders to buy-in to voluntarily go through a painful and tiring process like racial reconciliation is no small feat. With church attendance declining across the United States (Pew Research Center 2015) and Rhode Island Christianity being strongly represented by Catholicism (Pew Research Center 2019), Protestant Christian churches face challenges in attracting and retaining membership without adding pressures of navigating racialized emotion. What, then, is the story of racial reconciliation work in Protestant Christian churches in Rhode Island, a Catholic-dominant state in a region that tends to deny its own racism? More specifically, how do these churches that engage in racial reconciliation define and describe their work?

Racial reconciliation in Rhode Island Protestant Christian churches is a process that steps beyond the diversity paradigm. In this process the churches explore race as it is shaped in spiritual and emotional language and experiences. The spiritual and emotional experiences are what define racial reconciliation work as more than a diversity management initiative. It is a response that involves addressing the intangible realities of racial inequality. It is a response that measures success by a feeling of equality rather than relying predominantly on tangible measures. It is a response that is a continual process of learning and imagining a different way to be. A church as an organization enacts this response through education and relationship building which are accomplished through various formal (like discussion groups and sermons) and

informal interactions (like congregants visiting one another's homes). This is a story about defining a process meant to dismantle racism. This is a story about the struggle of responding to the problem. This is a story about grappling with what racial equality *feels* like and not just what it looks like.

CHURCHES AND RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES

The history of Christianity in the United States is intimately tied to racism. Churches that pursue the betterment of race relations today are caught within a bramble bush that their predecessors created and that they reify even as some attempt to cut themselves and their communities out of it. For example, parts of the Christian community supported chattel slavery even as other parts championed the abolition movement (Lowance 2003). This tension existed even during the Civil Rights Movement. Black churches were the key drivers of activism. However, they had inconsistent support from white churches. Some even outright opposed the movement (Tisby 2019).

After the Civil Rights Movement came a move for racial reconciliation, born out of a group of Black churches that pursued cross-racial relationship as well as racial justice and equality. Racial reconciliation became a goal that was adopted by many churches in the Protestant Christian community. This led to organizational commitments in the 1990s: for example, initiatives by The Promise Keepers, the 1994 "Racial Reconciliation Manifesto" created by white and Black Pentecostals, and the 1995 Resolution on Racial Reconciliation released on the 150th anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention (Bracey and Moore 2017; Edwards, Christerson, and Emerson 2013). However, this movement left many dissatisfied. It did not seem to create substantive change. As I will address further below, the racial reconciliation

movement led to superficial diversity that can quantify an increase in church diversity but forgot that part of its original purpose was racial justice and equality.

Protestant churches that pursue the betterment of race relations today live with this contentious and sometimes dissatisfying legacy. They also exist within a highly racialized context. Black Lives Matter has sent out a rallying cry that has captured the attention of not only America but the rest of the world as well. The role of white evangelical Protestants in electing President Trump agitated racial tensions within the evangelical community (Robertson 2018). It also brought into sharp, undeniable relief that the religious right was still in touch with the racist roots of its formation (Eagan 2018; Gorski 2017; Smith and Martínez 2016).

Racism in the United States has both a tangible and an intangible impact upon people. This is a condition which Christian churches, like other religious organizations, are positioned to address in a unique way. They create missions, objectives, procedures, and programs that are linked to both tangible and intangible outcomes. Focusing on Protestant churches that work to better race relations, I build my findings around a theory of racialized emotion to answer the question of how churches identify and respond to racism. This theory that attempts to articulate a feeling of equality that steps beyond common understandings of diversity management in organizations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Diversity Management and Its Presence in Churches

Organizations are not removed from the social construction of race (Ray 2019; Wooten and Couloute 2017). Their culture, policy, and procedures are constituted by and impact the constitution of the racial construct. Diversity management initiatives are evidence of this. Organizations create and implement these initiatives in response to perceived inequalities, like those based upon race, internal to the organization as well as in response external pressures to

acknowledge inequalities impacting their clients or customer base. They are meant to make diversity legible and therefore useful to the organization while at the same time alleviating and eventually eliminating inequality. Diversity management is but one organizational response to racial inequalities (Berrey 2014). There are some practices, like cross-training and self-directed work teams, that also alleviate inequality although that was not their original purpose (Kalev 2009). However, diversity management initiatives have been the key focus of theoretical and empirical scholarship on the organizational response to combatting racial inequality. They have also been the key focus of various degrees of discontent.

Very often organizations' diversity management focuses on the observable composition of the workforce, which scholars have noted is not enough (Benschop et al. 2015; Roberson 2006). Thomas and Ely (1996) recognized the limitations of diversity management but also its potential to counter the influence of the racial construct. They identified three perspectives – two that are most established and one that is rarer – that tend to guide these initiatives. The first, the discrimination-and-fairness paradigm, measures success by the number of employees in programs that help support their distinct identity group. However, this perspective does not facilitate organizational change since it promotes assimilation, which in the case of race in the United States tends to mean adherence to whiteness as an organizational norm. This allows organizations to be superficially welcoming to diversity while simultaneously suppressing difference. For example, Bracey and Moore (2017) conducted ethnographies of seven evangelical, predominantly white churches and found that white congregants and leaders performed “race tests” upon incoming people of color. Race tests are patterned racial microaggressions meant to create a semipermeable boundary to participation in the church that

privileges the white congregants. Although these churches claimed that they were open to racial diversity, they were only open to congregants of color who adhered to norms of whiteness.

The second perspective Thomas and Ely identified was the access-and-legitimacy paradigm. In contrast with the first paradigm, this one celebrates difference because it helps the organization address an obstacle or take advantage of an opportunity. However, organizations working within this diversity paradigm do not think through ways to incorporate into organizational culture the different practices and perspectives that emerged while benefiting from the diversity. They do not think through how diversity changes, or should change, the organization. Barron (2016) conducted an ethnography of the organizational practices an evangelical church in downtown Chicago employed to manage diversity and the practices' impact upon the congregants' experiences. This church's racially charged practices (e.g., commodifying the racialized black urbanite) and the various conceptions of diversity complicated the "members' capacity for integration into organizational community" (31). Congregants of color who attained leadership positions often felt burned out and used. Barron argued that the church attempted to manage diversity using practices based on a variety of tropes to achieve competing outcomes. They did so without thinking through the way the church policy changes and the way it should change in response to racial diversity in the church. This ultimately resulted in the type of disconnect between potential and practice that Thomas and Ely suggest is inherent to the access-and-legitimacy paradigm.

These two perspectives, and their limitations, have been the focus of literature about organizations' responses to racial inequality. Literature on churches' responses to racism post-Civil Rights Movement focus on this topic as well. This has resulted, in part, in a research preoccupation with churches' pursuit of internal integration and building a multiracial

congregation (Dougherty and Emerson 2018; Dougherty and Huyser 2008; Marti 2009), limiting the imagined possibilities for racial justice action by churches. Dougherty and Emerson (2018) define a multiracial congregation as one in which at least 20 percent of the congregants are not members of the racial majority group. However, 90 percent of churches in America are still 90 percent one race (Emerson and Kim 2003). Monoracial churches (those with more than 80 percent of congregants being of the majority race) that are attempting to address racism are outside of this scope. Scholars have asked questions about the integration of churches and the management of diversity in an integrated space. How are multiracial churches challenging or replicating social racial inequalities (Barron 2016)? What helps facilitate racial integration (Dougherty and Huyser 2008)? What impedes racial integration (Bracey and Moore 2017)? However, there has been little literature that focuses on how post-Civil Rights Movement churches participate in racial justice work that reaches beyond internal integration. Is there another way to imagine how churches respond to racial inequality that does not discount the importance of addressing segregation still present among United States' churches ("Worship Hour Found Time of Segregation" 1952; Emerson and Kim 2003) while at the same time is not swallowed in an integration narrative driven by the two prevalent diversity paradigms?

The Possibilities in a Different Type of Diversity Paradigm

Thomas and Ely's third diversity management perspective – the learning-and-effectiveness paradigm – suggests the possibility of addressing the limitations of the two common paradigms. This approach “enables [leaders] to incorporate employees' perspectives into the main work of the organization and to enhance work by rethinking primary tasks and redefining markets, products, strategies, missions, business practices, and even cultures” (Thomas and Ely 1996:85). This perspective emphasizes integration that is built upon inclusion. Thomas and Ely provide eight preconditions broken into three foci – the leadership, the

organizational culture, and the organization – for organizations to shift their paradigms from the prevalent two toward this rarer third paradigm (Table 1).

Table 1: Eight preconditions for shift to learning-and-effectiveness paradigm

Focal Point for Action	Action
Leadership	Recognize and value employees' varied perspectives Recognize the opportunities to learn from these varied perspectives and the challenges that accompany the learning process
Organizational Culture	Expects same high performance from all employees Stimulates personal development Encourages openness Makes workers feel valued
Organization	Make a widely understood and articulated mission that is clear Structure itself in relatively nonbureaucratic and egalitarian frame
Content from Thomas, David A. and Robin Ely. 1996. "Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity." <i>Harvard Business Review</i> 74(5):86-87.	

These eight preconditions forward the understanding of how organizations can respond to inequality in three ways. First, the eight preconditions reinforce the understanding that combatting inequality and attempting to build equality in its place is a continual learning process. The leadership's role is to persevere through challenges to learn from the diverse perspectives of their employees. The organization's role is to learn new processes and unlearn processes that reify inequality. The organizational culture's role is to facilitate the learning process through openness and to foster a feeling of being valued.

Second, these eight preconditions emphasize the importance of inclusive relationships in the organizational response to inequality. Scholars dissatisfied with diversity paradigms have turned to language of inclusion to describe a more appropriate method for organizations to respond to inequality (Benschop et al. 2015; Roberson 2006). This involves listening to and incorporating into the organization and organizational culture diverse perspectives. It is not simply a matter of addition – ‘Let *us* listen to *them as well*.’ It is a matter of: Keep listening until listening is a natural inclination. Then, keep listening until they sound less like an “other” – foreign and unknowable. Then, keep listening until what is said leads to action. Then, keep acting and listening until what is said and done becomes organizational culture. Keep on until that becomes the organization itself. Inclusion of this type, according Thomas and Ely, involves removing barriers to connection between employees – a relatively nonbureaucratic, egalitarian structure.

Finally, Thomas and Ely’s description of this paradigm implies that it is insufficient to consider diversity management in the usual ways (e.g., only studying policies, procedures, or even dynamics of power between employees). One can see this in the way that Thomas and Ely write about how employees of color *feel* respected in a paradigm shift or how *feelings* of broken *trust* can impede that shift. These *feelings*, these *emotions* are a central although underexplored facet of the organizational response to inequality. Churches, being organizations with missions that require them to delve into the realm of human emotions, are ideal for study so that we can think beyond where diversity paradigms have taken the literature on organizational response to inequality, in particular racial inequality.

Racialized Emotion

A theory of the link between emotions, race, and responses to racial inequality is growing. My understanding of that link is fashioned after Bonilla-Silva’s (2019) theorizing of

racialized emotions. According to Bonilla-Silva, emotions have a strong role in creating, maintaining, and experiencing the racial construct. They also have a role in addressing racial inequality. Bonilla-Silva builds upon Kim's (2016) "feeling of equality." That is, that along with material conditions, there is an emotional aspect to creating equality which goes beyond dignity and respect. This "feeling of equality" is the idea from racialized emotion theory with which I will interact the most because it demonstrates how emotion can be a vehicle for change. Bonilla-Silva outlines a set of four prerequisites, which I outline below, to creating a shift toward a feeling of racial equality. Current literature on how churches, particularly multiracial ones, do race – that is, how they manage, negotiate, and reify the racial identities of those who are within the context of the church (Best 2003; Ward 2008) – and the limitations of the diversity paradigms that they implement demonstrate the necessity of theorizing using racialized emotion. The prerequisites of feeling equality reveal that there are dimensions of the church policy and culture that a diversity paradigm alone cannot address.

The first prerequisite is deracialized subjectivity. The racialization of a person is not just an external action – someone else placing racial labels upon a person. There is an aspect of racialization that is also an internal emotional process with material consequences and a cognitive impact – both positive and negative. There is a historical weight of emotion that imprints upon a person and upon a group of people. Reaching a feeling of racial equality means creating deep, cross-racial relationships that develop a sense of mutuality and allow people to empathize with one another – this is deracializing subjectivity. Scholars have noted that congregants' religious identities in multi-racial churches supersede their racial identities. For example, Marti (2009) observed that people who became more involved in the church community indicated that their religious identity rather than race and ethnicity was the primary

tie that bound the multiracial community together. However, churches can create a culture that fosters this connection across races through the primacy of spiritual identity while at the same time the churches replicate society's racialized dynamics. This is particularly true in the case of predominantly white churches that have not been reflexive about the whiteness within the organization. Reflexivity on whiteness is a key facet of the second prerequisite.

The second prerequisite is a politics of recognition. That is, those who are racially dominant (in the case of the United States it is white people) have to recognize the experiences as well as the material and psychological struggles of those who are not racially dominant. This also entails the racially dominant recognizing their own privilege in the racialized social order, a privilege that has spanned generations, and their own complicity in oppression. Bracey and Moore (2017), in their study of race tests in predominantly white evangelical churches, noted that although the churches may have welcomed diversity on a surface level, because the churches failed to fully engage in what Bonilla-Silva would call politics of recognition they were not inclusive.

The third prerequisite to feeling equality is the pursuit of racial justice. This extends the feeling of equality beyond empathy towards action. Racial justice in the frame of racialized emotions involves confronting the affective components that support systemic racism, like "the economic motives, entrenched habits, and unconscious urges that sustain racial domination" (Gooding-Williams 2014:165-66). This involves politics with a moral motivation. It also involves a long-term vision supported with perseverance and with imagining a racial utopia.

The final prerequisite is three emotions linked with action. The first emotion is anger² that is a call to action, a force toward solidarity for the oppressed, and a driver towards justice.

² Anger can easily become destructive to self and others. It has the potential for good, but should be relied upon with caution (hooks 1995; Pittman 2012).

The second is empathy that is developed over time through experiences and interactions that create a path toward “recognizing racial Others as truly part of the Same” (Bonilla-Silva 2019:16). The final emotion is love. It is love that compels people from their comfort zones to exert themselves on behalf of someone else. It is also self-love that the oppressed need to continually build for themselves.

Together these four prerequisites – deracialized subjectivity, politics of recognition, racial justice, and the foundational emotions (anger, empathy, and love) – and their defining characteristics (**Table 2**) allow us to understand a dimension of organizations’ work to better race relations that the diversity paradigm alone cannot reveal. This is particularly true because diversity paradigm theory’s strength is in analyzing the diversity policy and procedure of an organization, how practice mis/aligns with that policy and procedure, and how this all impacts the efficiency of the organization. The theory, however, is *weak in analyzing the feeling of equality, that intangible and yet palpably missing element that drives many scholars’ frustration with diversity paradigms*. Analyzing the work of bettering race relations in churches with the lens of racialized emotion theory is an underexplored opportunity. Part of their business is understanding and changing human emotion. Much of their policy and procedure is aimed at spiritual and emotional outcomes (which have various material effects); because of the intangible aspect of their work, church leaders have to hone skills of perceiving and articulating emotional and spiritual changes. I spoke with 23 church leaders and visited churches in the Rhode Island Protestant Christian community. I share in my findings how they attempt to shape meaning from the intangible that they can act upon to better race relations. Thus, this study contributes to a developing turn in the sociology of race toward understanding racialized emotions. It also demonstrates how sociology of organizations, particularly those scholars who study diversity and

organizations, can begin excavating the hidden possibilities for action beneath organization members *feeling* valued or respected.

Table 2: Prerequisites to "feeling of equality"

Prerequisite	Description
Deracialized subjectivity	Decrease, through deep relationship, in the barriers between races' ability to understand and empathize with one another.
Politics of recognition	Racially dominant recognize the experiences, material and psychological struggles of those who are not racially dominant. Recognize their own historically based privilege in the racialized social order.
Racial justice	Confronting systemic racism with a morally motivated politics. Requires a long-term vision, perseverance, and imagination.
Foundational emotions Anger Empathy Love	As a call for action; productive for justice Created through constant interaction; the racial Other becomes the Same Compels towards action on behalf of others; develops self-love among oppressed
Content from Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2019. "Feeling Race: Theorizing the Racial Economy of Emotions." <i>American Sociological Review</i> 84(1):14-16	

Racialized emotion and diversity paradigm literature together help frame how churches respond to racial inequality. In the findings I share below, I write about the work the interlocutors – leaders in their churches – and their churches engage in to *deracialize subjectivities through building inclusive relationships within the organization in particular while also teaching church members to do so outside of the organization*. I write about *the struggle of the politics of recognition's process of learning and unlearning*. This learning process was of particular importance because 15 of the 16 churches represented in this study are predominantly white. The white members and leaders of these congregations continually learn about racism and unlearn action and thoughts that support it. Finally, I write about the churches' *pursuit of racial justice that is shaped by the organization's environment as much as it is shaped by the internal*

dynamics of the organization. Throughout each of these “feeling of equality” focal points, interlocutors constantly evoke emotions like anger, empathy, and love.

METHODS

This study started long before I intended to formally research racial reconciliation. I am a Black woman who has grown up in the Protestant tradition. Since childhood I have attended different churches across multiple denominations with different types of racial configurations. I have volunteered at and/or worked for whatever church I attended since my parents deemed me old enough to help clean up after a Sunday service ended (I was four). These years have allowed me to experience and observe race relations within Protestant Christian churches in different racial settings (predominantly white, monoracial and multiracial churches; predominantly Black, monoracial and multiracial churches). I have been able to witness how various churches have addressed or remained silent on the problem of racism in the United States. My background and experiences made building relationships and connections with interlocutors and participation in the community natural.

My observation of Rhode Island Protestant Christian churches did not begin with a formal intent for research either. I had arrived in the state to begin a Ph.D. program at Brown University in 2017 and began looking for a church to call home. I lived in Providence, Rhode Island from 2008 to 2012 while an undergraduate student and so was somewhat familiar with the Protestant Christian community in the city. However, before I found a church home, I was curious to know what the trends were in the Protestant Christian community across the state. August 2017 through January 2018 I digitally watched sermons from and visited churches around Rhode Island. (I continued to occasionally visit churches around the state after choosing a home church, participation which also informed this study.) One common theme that emerged in

pastors' messages or in the announcements of church events in that August to January stretch was racial justice and reconciliation.

This trend remained with me even after I found a home church. In part it was because it is difficult to talk about racism in New England, especially present-day racism. This is in large part because after slavery was abolished the region developed great deal of its identity around a sort of amnesia that it existed in the first place (Melish 1998). This is also because the way the United States history is often told, the South is where racist atrocities existed (Theoharis and Woodard 2016). This makes it difficult for in-depth discussions about the existence of racism above the Mason-Dixon line. Therefore, the churches addressing racial justice and reconciliation were doing so in an environment that denies the problem of racism. In addition, these Rhode Island Protestant Christian churches exist in a state that is predominantly Catholic, with 42 percent of the population identifying as such (Pew Research Center 2019). It is not as if Protestants in the state are rare – they comprise close to 23 percent of the population (Pew Research Center 2019). In recent years, though, these churches have been impacted by a national trend – the rise in people who are religiously unaffiliated and the general decrease in church attendance (Smith et al. 2015). This has led to several Protestant churches closing their doors in Rhode Island (Gryboski 2012). They also exist in New England, the most non-religious region in the country (Pew Research Center 2019). These pressures made for an interesting study. On one side they are organizations that are attempting to push against a turning religious tide to remain open. On the other they are organizations attempting to turn back a narrative that obscures the realities of racial inequalities.

When I finally decided to make racial reconciliation a topic of formal research, I came in contact with Adele, a racial justice advocate who has done work in various faith communities

around Rhode Island. It was during a long conversation with her that the idea of holding discussion groups of Protestant church leaders emerged. These discussion groups were not simply group interviews. Data emerges not just in the content of the interlocutor's responses but in the interaction between the interlocutors as well as between the interlocutors and the moderator of the discussion (Acocella 2012). These interactions shape the direction of the discussion.

As a group they collectively work through an understanding of racial reconciliation. In doing so, their discussion highlights points of contention and similarity. How do they and their different churches pursue racial reconciliation? Is there a single way to do so? Multiple ways? Is there consensus on why they do it? This was not purely about contrasting these experiences or providing a coherent view of the Protestant Christian community (for my research question does span the Rhode Island Protestant Christian community). I wanted the interlocutors to remember to think of themselves as being a part of more than their local church or denomination. I wanted them to consider the contexts within which they do their work. This would help me ensure that the data I was collecting was not simply a series of individual cases that I would then string together. This was about the interlocutors helping me see ties and relationships within the field³ of Rhode Island Protestant Christian churches. Beyond creating richer data for the sake of the study, though, a motivating factor for me to use discussion was to get leaders from across denominations and churches in a room together to talk. I was hoping that they would create deeper connections across denominations and churches. Community ties could help these churches pursue racial justice.

³ DiMaggio and Powell's use of the term field best describes how I approached understanding the Rhode Island Protestant Christian churches as existing within a field – "those organizations that, in aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life" (1983:148).

I selected the interlocutors for this study based upon three criteria. 1) They were currently part of pastoral staff of a Protestant church, or 2) they were a lay-leader (paid or unpaid congregants who are not ordained ministers but hold various leadership responsibilities in supporting the local church) in one. These pastors and lay-leaders also 3) needed to be participating in racial reconciliation work in the Rhode Island Protestant Christian community. There were four sources that I depended upon in order to create a list of 39 potential interlocutors: Adele's Protestant Christian leader contacts; suggestions from campus ministry staff connected with the Brown University Chaplain's Office;⁴ church leaders with whom I have had previous contact; suggestions from interlocutors over the course of the April to June 2018 stretch of the study; and, when I had exhausted those resources, the first page of results from a very cursory Google search using the terms "racism church rhode island."

From the first one that gathered on a rainy day in April 2018 to the last on an overcast day in January 2019, I conducted four recorded⁵ discussion groups with 13 interlocutors (Table 3). The first included five individuals – four pastors and Adele.⁶ During the discussion they covered collaboration with women's rights groups and the different denominational positions on homosexuality. Reflecting on this later reminded me that discussing racism can lead to discussions of intersectionality (Collins 2009; Crenshaw 1990). There are certain subjects

⁴ I only contacted Brown University's Chaplain's Office because I felt that I was more likely to receive a prompt response from staff affiliated with Brown given the fact that I was a Ph.D. student in the university.

⁵ All recordings of focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews were done with the interlocutors' permission and knowledge. For the purpose of clarity in recording, the recording device was in sight for the discussion groups. For interviews, after the initial consent was granted, I kept the recorder out of the interlocutor's line of sight so that they would more quickly fall into an ordinary conversation pattern and forget that it was an interview. No interlocutor denied permission.

⁶ Her original role in the room was to be a secondary observer. However, it soon became apparent that the interlocutors did not see her as an observer. Because she had a role in supporting their racial reconciliation work, even if not all of them had met her, they drew her into the conversation.

surrounding gender and sexuality that are sensitive in Christianity that would derail the discussion groups if they emerged. Ensuring that interlocutors feel comfortable in their discussion groups is an important facet of my approach to this method. Although identifying contention in discussion is an advantage of this approach, gathering information on a sensitive topic like racial reconciliation requires interlocutors to feel a measure of comfort. They need to be able to be vulnerable about struggles in their church and their own struggles, something that is difficult enough to encourage without acrimony (Acocella 2012). So, I crafted the other focus groups based on shared schedules *and* on these two considerations: 1) do the churches represented agree on the subject of women in clergy? and 2) do the churches represented agree on the subject of homosexuality? I made this decision based upon my own knowledge of the churches' positions. For those churches with which I was unfamiliar, I visited the church's website and that of their denomination to answer those two questions.

Table 3: Composition of discussion groups and interviews

Method	Pastors/Lay-Leaders	Race	Gender	Racial Composition of Church
Discussion Group 1	4 Pastors 1 Activist*	1 Black 4 white	2 women 3 men	3 predominantly white, monoracial churches 1 church organization**
Discussion Group 2	4 Pastors	4 white	1 woman 3 men	<i>See above</i>
Discussion Group 3	2 Pastors 1 Lay-Leader	1 Black 2 white	1 woman 2 men	3 predominantly white, multiracial churches
Discussion Group 4	5 Lay-Leaders 1 Pastor***	2 Black 4 white	3 women 3 men	1 predominantly white, multiracial church
Discussion Group Follow-up Interview	2 Pastors	2 white		

One-to-one interviews	8 Pastors 2 Lay-Leaders	2 Black 8 white	5 women 5 men	7 predominantly white, monoracial churches 2 predominantly white, multiracial churches 1 predominantly Black, monoracial church
Note: Multiracial churches are those in which at most 80 percent of the congregants are members of the racial majority group. Monoracial churches are those in which more than 80 percent of the congregants are members of the racial majority group. <i>This does not mean that there is no other race in the church, just that other races are less than 20 percent.</i> See Dougherty, Kevin D. and Michael O. Emerson. 2018. "The Changing Complexion of American Congregations." <i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i> 57(1):24–38. * <i>The activist (Adele) was unable to attend the second discussion group. For that, only the four pastors were present.</i> ** <i>One of the interlocutors of this group is a pastor who often shared insights as someone that is part of an association made up of churches that pursue racial reconciliation and justice.</i> ***<i>The one pastor had participated in a previous discussion group.</i>				

The second discussion group included the same four pastors as the previous group. This is because there were new questions that emerged in the study after their first discussion that, for the sake of consistency, I wanted to be sure to ask them. Two individuals from the four discussion groups were able to participate in follow-up interviews. Also, seven discussion group interlocutors (at least two from each discussion group) submitted a written reflection on the discussion. These written reflections gave interlocutors the opportunity to share anything they may not have been comfortable sharing in the discussion group. It was also an opportunity for them to share thoughts that had not occurred to them in the discussion. Two discussion groups were canceled because of issues in the interested individuals' calendars. When this happened, or when an interested interlocutor could not commit to a discussion group, I conducted one-to-one interviews. With those eight pastors and two lay-leaders who could not attend a discussion group but were willing and able to participate, I conducted nine semi-structured, recorded interviews and two unstructured, unrecorded interviews that lasted from 40 minutes to about two and a half

hours. These one-to-one interviews provided greater depth of insight into the particular racial reconciliation work in which the interlocutors and their churches engage – a depth that a discussion group cannot reach because of limitations of time.

Both the discussion groups and the interviews centered around four major question themes: what the interlocutors believe racial reconciliation is; how they believe it is supposed to work within and through the church (a word the interlocutors used to refer to the local church, the denomination, as well as all Christians as a collective); how and when the churches (i.e., the local church and the denomination) have incorporated racial reconciliation into their practices (aimed at congregants in particular, community in general); and how and when the leaders have incorporated racial reconciliation into their personal and professional relationships. I transcribed the 17 hours of recorded group discussions and interviews, then coded them using NVivo 12. After each unrecorded interview – which lasted for a total of over four and a half hours – I immediately left the coffee shop where we met and recorded fieldnotes. These I also transcribed and then coded using NVivo 12.

Limitations and Future Research

The story of racism in the United States impacts more than the African diaspora. My being Black also impacted the conversations that I had face-to-face with people. Had I been (and been raced as) Latina, then the interactions between the church and the Latinx community may well have been more likely to emerge. The impact of my race in turn influenced the way that I framed this study – evidenced in the way I wrote of the history of racism in the United States’ Christianity starting with African chattel slavery. However, my being Black allowed Black interlocutors to feel more comfortable having conversation with me. My life experiences as a

Black Protestant Christian also helped me analyze racialized experiences and processes that I observed and about which interlocutors shared.

I did not include churches that do not pursue racial reconciliation in this study. In part this is due to constraints of capacity and methodology. As a Black woman, my presence as interviewer and discussion group moderator would make some interlocutors more uncomfortable sharing why they believe racism is not a problem that needs to be addressed by their church. Because I could not use these methods to gather information from that population, one of the questions I posed in the discussion groups and interviews was what obstacles the interlocutors had faced in pursuing racial reconciliation in their church. The responses that emerged from this question included discussions of why people in their congregation perceive it to not be a problem. However, future research would benefit from including the population of leaders from churches that do not pursue racial reconciliation.

Because discussion groups and interviews with church leadership (pastors in particular) was the primary method of data collection, this study could not compare what the leaders say the work of racial reconciliation is and how it is carried out in the church. However, one of the discussion groups included lay-leaders who added another layer to what their pastor had shared separately from them. This added depth and points of comparison to what he said. Including more discussions with lay-leaders, and congregants, would be beneficial for future research.

In the following pages, you will hear from these interlocutors. You will hear them attempt to define racial reconciliation. You will hear these men and women talk about building relationships as they encourage congregants (and themselves) to empathize with the “other.” You will hear them help their white congregants and leaders stumble through the learning process of

the politics of recognition (even as some of the white interlocutors themselves stumble through). You will hear pastors struggle with pushing for racial reconciliation that creates a feeling of equality while ensuring the church as an organization survives congregational resistance to this push. You will hear them talk about *failure* and finding *hope* to continue. You will hear how Protestant Christian churches in Rhode Island that pursue racial reconciliation identify intangible and tangible problems of racism. You will hear how they address these problems beyond the use of the diversity paradigm.

FINDINGS

Pursuit of Racial Reconciliation

Racial reconciliation was the term that I used to frame my research questions.⁷ However, several interlocutors expressed dissatisfaction with this term over the course of the study. They did not think that it captured what they felt to be the role of the Christian community in the betterment of race relations or what the true fulfillment of bettering race relations is. Discussions about the words used to describe racial reconciliation within and through the church demonstrated that this work extends over the long term without a perceptible end. It is a process that is shaped both by internal organizational culture as well as external pressures, translated through logics linked to the church's mission.

Defining racial reconciliation

One focus group discussion in particular brought these factors to the fore. It was the second gathering of this group of pastors to discuss racial reconciliation. Just like the first time we met, it was a rainy, cool afternoon. A dreary day, but everyone showed up anyway. They were excited to talk. At one point in our time together, they completed an exercise sorting words

⁷ The churches I grew up in were strongly tied to the racial reconciliation movements that happened in the 1990s. Thus, this is the term with which I was most familiar to describe the betterment of race relations within the context of the church.

from a poster board into two columns on an index card – “Use” and “Don’t Use.” This was meant to encourage them to feel more comfortable using a word other than reconciliation to describe their work if they desired. It also helped them more precisely define their racial reconciliation work. After giving them a few minutes to think and write, I asked Nolan, a white pastor of a predominantly white, monoracial church, to share a word that he does use. “Oh boy,” he chuckled. “So, reconciliation.” He went on to explain that the word reconciliation appears within the Episcopal church’s catechism – the document that outlines the mission of the Episcopal denomination – before saying,

So, that [reconciliation] is at the heart of what I think is the Church's⁸ call and vocation and mission, at the heart of my understanding as an Anglican of what the Church is. I think it is a holy term. I think it implies that something's not right, that there is some kind of rupture. Relationships have been broken, betrayed, not honored. There's work that has to be done. Healing is required. Justice is required. To me it's a full theological understanding of where we are, what is not right about where we are, and where we're called to be.

Nolan spoke of how racial reconciliation is part of the mission of the Episcopalian church denomination. It is defined within the catechisms of the denomination.⁹ This impacts Nolan’s church, since denominational policy has a role in shaping the scope of the mission and procedure within the local church. Nolan also mentioned that reconciliation is part of the mission of the

⁸ Here, Nolan uses the word church to refer to the global community of all Christians. When it is used in this way, the word invokes images of a unified, global Christian community. It encompasses the belief that Christians are bonded together by faith and by a spiritual familial connection. Wherever interlocutors statements invoke this meaning of the word church, I write “the Church.” This capitalization conveys a larger scope for the word. Otherwise, in my discussion and analysis of interlocutors’ actions and words, I use the phrase “the Christian community.” This is a context that transcends national borders. Thus, it is possible for some statements to envelope an international community of Christians. However, they also used this contextual meaning to refer to the nationally-bounded Church in the United States.

⁹ This is not to say that there is agreement within the Episcopal denomination on the use of reconciliation. One interlocutor in a separate conversation signaled her struggle with the term. “Sometimes I’m not sure that –” she paused, searching for the right phrasing, “reconciled is the right word. Sometimes we need to be called to terms. Sometimes we need to make amends. Sometimes we need to publicly acknowledge our sins and wretchedness in terms of what we’ve done. And maybe that’s all part of the process of reconciliation.” Neither does this mean that a denomination can do well in pursuing racial reconciliation. Interlocutors had various praise and critique for the ways in which their denominations address racism and engage (or fail to engage) in racial reconciliation.

Church, that is the global Christian community, as a whole. He was not just talking about racial reconciliation. He was talking about a two-fold reconciliation described in the Bible¹⁰ – the larger reconciliation narrative under which the sub-narrative of racial reconciliation unfolds. Essentially the larger narrative states that humans are far from God and living in a broken world that does not exist according to his original design. So, Jesus came to properly realign humans' relationship with God by offering the chance for forgiveness. In addition to reconciling the relationship with God, Jesus also came so that humans' relationships with each other are reconciled as well. The mission of the global Christian community is to live out this reconciliation and to bring others into the pursuit of reconciliation. Interlocutors and churches that I visited noted that, under this broader narrative, racism is a symptom and evidence of humans living life with broken interpersonal relationships as well as with a broken relationship with God. They felt that part of the mission of the Christian community and their churches is to pursue racial reconciliation.

Discipleship and interpreting Jesus – shaping the church's racial reconciliation response

This work of reconciliation is facilitated through a church's organizational philosophy and logic of discipleship – that is, the relational process through which people learn from one another, with God's guidance and support, what it means to feel and act as a Christian; they then go on to live what they learn (Piper 2016). Sermons and small group gatherings (e.g., bible studies, book discussion groups) are two common activities through which a church carries out the discipleship mission – both of which interlocutors commonly cited as the means by which a great deal of racial reconciliation work is carried out. Discipleship is a process that continues throughout life. It encompasses both moments of triumph in more closely resembling Jesus –

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

which are accompanied by feelings of *happiness* and *celebration* – and moments of failure to do so – which are accompanied by *painful* feelings of *shame* and *grief*. The moments of failure are of particular interest for this study because racial reconciliation is a process that focuses on addressing racism, which is a failure of people to resemble Jesus and systems to resemble a godly design.

Although discipleship is a guiding philosophy in the global Christian community, the interpretation of Jesus that defines discipleship is not consistent throughout the community. This varying interpretation impacts whether church leaders decide to guide their churches to pursue racial reconciliation, how they decide to pursue it, and whether congregants are able to accept this mission. It is through their interpretation of Jesus that they are able to frame this racial reconciliation work in the context of Christian teaching. “What Jesus are you talking about?” Interlocutors – all of whom are leaders that are committed to racial reconciliation work in some capacity – shared that questions like this one are what ran through their mind when they spent time speaking with congregants who did not see how dismantling power and privilege an appropriate sermon topic. “Have you read the Gospels?” is another question reflecting their occasional *frustration*. These leaders attempt to teach congregants to follow Jesus through the message of who he is and what his mission is based upon an interpretation they feel most accurately reflects the Truth. The most common picture of Jesus that the interlocutors have is this: he is the Son of God who was himself marginalized while on Earth. He empowers, prioritizes, serves, and loves the marginalized.¹¹ He speaks against systems of oppression – rebuking people who upheld those systems – and against other walls that divide humankind. His

¹¹ I use the present tense here because for the interlocutors God is a living, active participant in racial reconciliation work. They believe that God hears and answers prayers concerning justice. They believe that he causes events to happen that are ultimately for justice. They believe that he plays a crucial role and is actively concerned with what is happening.

ultimate expression of *love* was sacrificing his life for the sake of saving others. One interlocutor reflected with some dismay, “Sometimes I wonder if we are actually worshiping the same God when we worship because there's so many understandings of who Jesus is and what the Church is. It definitely deserves at least a conversation that most people are not willing to have, which is pretty sad in some ways.”

Interlocutors noted that this interpretation of Jesus was not diffuse in their churches or in their denominations. This meant that they received varying levels of support and opposition from the institution as well as local church leaders and congregants who could not see how the chosen method of racial reconciliation translated into the overarching mission of the entire Christian community. The racial reconciliation that these interlocutors envisioned meant that Christians should imitate the sacrificial Jesus that did not withhold anything required, even his life, to serve with love the racially marginalized and remove systemic racism, which divides people. Later in the paper, you will read the interlocutors describe different ways that they attempt to translate this facet of Jesus into the process of discipleship through sermons and small group gatherings in particular.

Racial reconciliation as life-long, ambiguous process

However, before moving beyond this section about the defining characteristics of racial reconciliation work, return to the rainy afternoon of the second discussion group to those pastors discussing which words they do and do not use. The words leaders use to define the racial reconciliation process direct action and shape thinking. For example, Rae shared, “For me, one of the first words I put that I don't use is reconciliation.” Rae’s response drew laughter from the group.¹² She went on to say that to her reconciliation suggests that a good relationship existed in

¹² It actually surprised me how often laughter was a part of the conversations throughout this study. I expected a weighty topic like addressing racism would lead to very serious interactions. As serious as the interactions were,

the past that has been broken. However, that does not reflect the context in the United States.

“We have nothing to go back to. We have something new to attain, in my mind. So, I can 100 percent sign on to that mission statement about God and reconciling people to Christ and so forth. But when it comes to racism in America, we never had that.”

Rae hit upon a major point of contention around this phrase that other interlocutors noted as well. Racism is at the foundation of the United States’ formation and has continued to be a part of its story to date. For some leaders, reconciliation was inadequate to encapsulate what it feels like this work should be. “For me,” Rae continued. “I don’t want to talk about reconciliation. I want to move right to reparation and say, ‘What does reparation mean?’ And, I don’t have a great answer. I don’t have any answer really. But I *feel* in my gut at this point that if that’s not part of the conversation, then is there really any meaning?” Others expressed a similar desire to move toward discussions of recompense for wrongs done and move away from an idea of everyone just getting along better. They, like Rae, used language that indicated that they *felt* or *sensed* that there is an intangible quality to racial reconciliation. They were attempting to describe a feeling of equality.

These discussions reveal that a defining element of feeling equality is ambiguity. For example, in no conversation I had with or facilitated among interlocutors did anyone define an ending for racial reconciliation work: What is the end result of racial reconciliation? What does it look like? What should it look like? Everyone used language of what a racial utopia *feels* like rather than what they could expect to see in it. They labeled various actions, initiatives, and programs as racial reconciliation work that could lead to an end. They knew when a result was

laughter and jokes were present just as often. The laughter was not irreverent. It did not make light of pain or suffering. However, it did convey the delight of companionship and an appreciation for the irony of mankind. I was glad for the laughter and like to think that the interlocutors were as well.

insufficient to be categorized as complete racial reconciliation – for example, having a multiracial congregation. However, none said, ‘When I see this, I know that the work is done. When I see this, I know that I can rest my weary bones where racism is concerned.’ There was only one end that they spoke of – the end of all things.

In organizations that are driven toward deliverable outcomes and goals, such ambiguity would be *uncomfortable* and untenable. Sustaining action toward something without a definable resolution is not conducive to an effective business model. However, for the churches in this study, racial reconciliation is a sub-narrative to a master narrative of God’s reconciliation and justice. This master narrative exists on a longer term and broader contextual scope. Rae, during the first rainy day meeting of our discussion group, mentioned this justice narrative. Her tone became fervent as she said, “There is this marvelous passage in the Epistle to the Romans that talks about the creation moaning and groaning in this cathartic kind of way, of moving towards some sense of God bringing ultimate justice.¹³ I mean, it’s a deep theological way of talking about the arc turning towards justice.”

There is no reference point for the end results, not for the master narrative of justice and reconciliation nor for the sub-narrative of racial reconciliation and justice. As Rae said, the relationship within the United States between white people (the racially dominant) and people of color did not have a harmonious beginning. The interlocutors noted that even though they can feel that just having a diversity of faces around a table is not enough; even though they can list results that feel like a fulfillment of racial reconciliation; they are unable to sense an end. There is no timeline to frame ambiguous results that depend upon a feeling of equality for fulfillment. The end of all things is the “deadline,” making this more than a long-term project. Racial

¹³ Romans 8:18-24

reconciliation becomes a way of life for the organization and its people. A church's discipleship mission helps translate racial reconciliation into a broader frame of individually and communally learning how to model action and thought after an interpretation of one facet of Jesus.

Even for churches, which regularly pursue ambiguous goals with intangible emotional and spiritual results, pursuing racial reconciliation is not easy. All of the interlocutors noted that they have had to persevere through this contentious process. Pushing beyond affective obstacles with material consequences, which you will read about further below, takes imagination that is fueled by *love, hope, anger, and empathy*. Along the path of perseverance, however, there is also a great deal of *frustration, anger, fear, uncertainty, and pain*. This is particularly apparent in the politics of recognition.

The Learning-Unlearning Process of the Politics of Recognition

"I think it was Philando Castillo." Eli's forehead furrowed. He could not remember precisely when the changes began at his church. "There were so many incidents like that." He just knew that it was before the election of President Trump. "I can say, 'Oh, Rhode Island is different. My congregation is different.' But I just felt like, 'No I can't ignore this.' I think it could be like malpractice to not address this with my congregation. So, I started adjusting."

Fifteen of the sixteen churches to which interlocutors belong are predominantly white, which means that the politics of recognition was strongly present in discussions. The politics of recognition under the racialized emotion theory places the onus upon the racially dominant, in the case of this study that is white people, to engage in a two-fold recognition. One part of this is that they recognize the struggles of people of color, as well as their experiences' emotional and psychological impacts. The other part is that white people recognize their historical privilege and their personal complicity in systemic racism. Although the onus is on white people to act, conversations with and among interlocutors emphasized that white people do not go through the process in isolation. This is something that Bonilla-Silva did not address in his outline of the politics of recognition. People of color are involved in this continual process of learning-

unlearning for white congregants and leaders who embark upon racial reconciliation; they just experience and feel it differently. Even the leader of the predominantly Black church noted how his church and he himself experiences this process alongside white Christians and churches in Rhode Island.

Racial reconciliation as repentance – learning-unlearning in discipleship

In the quote at the beginning of this section, Eli, a white pastor of a predominantly white, monoracial church, made note of a common assumption that other interlocutors expressed. It is one that they themselves, other leaders in the church, and/or congregants have made – Rhode Island is different. That is, Rhode Island does not really have problems with racism. This assumption can lead to complacency and interlocutors suggested it may be one of the reasons why some churches in Rhode Island choose not to pursue racial reconciliation. Larry, a Black pastor of a predominantly Black, monoracial church, struggled to articulate the tension between hope for bettering race relations and the frustration with shortcomings of Rhode Island Protestant Christian churches in pursuing this. I leaned toward him across the tiny table in the overcrowded coffee shop to hear him over the noise.

“I think we’re in a state of delusion, actually,” he critiqued the churches in Rhode Island, even the groups he works with that specifically focus on racial justice work. “The tendency [is] not to get into the mud. We want to touch and say this happened in 1863, as if: it started then, this is what’s happened, let’s move on, let’s build together. But until we *weep* over what’s happened we can’t properly do that, really can’t build constructively.” Larry went on to describe the inner conflict of seeing the shortcomings but having *hope* for future work. “What *breaks my heart* a little is I believe there’s *hope*, but it’ll take an extreme move of God to kind of own stuff.”

Acknowledging *guilt*, *grieving* the wrongdoing, and then building afterward are key steps in the process of repentance. This is a facet of discipleship, the churches’ institutional logic that allows them to translate racial justice work into the church mission. Repentance is a process that begins with recognizing sin, that is, thoughts and actions that puts distance between humans and God. This recognition is followed by asking for forgiveness, making amends, and changing one’s

thoughts and actions so as not to commit the same sin (King, Jr. 1992). The change involves a degree of imagination. A conversation with one interlocutor in particular demonstrated this. Any intention I had of keeping our conversation to an hour had flown out of the window by this point of the afternoon. As long as Kaya, a Black pastor of a predominantly white, multiracial church, wanted to, I was willing to sit and talk. We had been discussing some of the difficulties she had faced in shaping the racial reconciliation mission in her church. In particular she was sharing her frustrations in getting certain white congregants and leaders to engage in the process in a way that *felt* meaningful. She said that part of the challenge was that racial reconciliation requires white people to “imagine a different way to be.” Here “to be” has a very robust meaning. This is not simply about imagining a different course of action. They need to imagine a different personhood, a different philosophy of life. This type of imagination is what lies at the heart of changing action and thoughts in the repentance process.

Repentance is understood to be a difficult and imperfectly executed learning-unlearning process. A person may continuously struggle with the same sin and have to go through repentance repeatedly. The process reaches its perfect conclusion at the end of all things – when God completes the two-fold reconciliation between Himself and humans and among humans. The link between repentance and the politics of recognition is key to understanding how churches are able to translate addressing white privilege, systemic racism, and personal complicity in systemic racism into the church fulfilling a racial reconciliation mission. The repentance process allows the churches to grapple with the inevitable failures and shortcomings in the process of racial reconciliation. It also allows the churches to link racial reconciliation work to discipleship. As I stated above, sermons and small group gatherings are two common

activities through which churches engage in the discipleship process and thus in the racial reconciliation process.

Sermons – the struggle of teaching about systemic racism in a predominantly white church

Through the formation of a sermon and the congregants' reaction to it, the church together is able to make sense of the problem of racism and the racial reconciliation response to it. As Larry expressed, it is difficult to balance *hope* and *discouragement* when considering what racial reconciliation requires and what humans seem able to accomplish. Other interlocutors echoed this sentiment when discussing the difficulty in navigating the emotions of their white congregants as they are confronted with the two-fold politics of recognition. Recognizing historical privilege and personal complicity were particularly touchy. Addressing this from the very public pulpit has particular consequences. The conversation among the second set of discussion group participants captures this well.

The four of us sat around the same table that the previous group did. Joining me this time were three leaders from predominantly white, multiracial churches: Isabel and Dell, white pastors, and Owen, a Black lay-leader. We were still within the first ten minutes of the discussion when they became comfortable enough to talk to one another and not just direct their responses to me. Isabel was building on comments Owen and Dell made, which I will share in a moment, as she reflected upon how she balances soothing the congregation and challenging them.

“I know there were some weeks when I kept saying, ‘Black Lives Matter and this is what it means.’ I had to break down: ‘What does this not mean?’ and ‘This isn’t saying this.’ And I realized that people were coming in like –“ Isabel dramatized for us the internal attitude of congregants. *Whimpering*, she slumped down in her chair, hands above her head as if to ward off a blow. “Like all right,” she chuckled. “I got to hit them the stick of justice, so we got to love them up. I just needed to have some ‘love-them-up’ Sundays because they were like, ‘Eh. Okay!’” She cringed in her seat again. “But you have to kind of always hold that *tension*.”

Church leaders pursuing racial reconciliation missions are likely to face resistance from white congregants. This involves a balancing act. In for-profit firms, leaders can link participation in diversity management initiatives with incentives or make it a requirement for employment. However, church leaders cannot force attendance to services. Without people in the pews, there is no local church organization. Without people donating with tithes and offerings, there is no local church organization. The concern of congregational resistance is another reason interlocutors noted for some pastors of predominantly white churches to hesitate to introduce (or continue) a racial reconciliation mission. When they do introduce it, these leaders strive to balance a *forceful* and *gentle* approach to ensure that all congregants associate racial reconciliation neither with punishment alone nor with a *placid kumbaya* attitude. The interlocutors considered this balance important to the survival of the church as an organization but also considered it important in defining racial reconciliation. It is not meant to be punishment nor is it meant to just be togetherness. The possibility of deep relationship across races requires recompense on the part of white people, forgiveness on the part of people of color, and empathy from both. However, getting this message across to the congregation is a difficult task.

Before Isabel shared her balancing act with the discussion group, Dell was reflecting on the difficulties he had navigating resistance in his own congregation. His face displaying *chagrin*, *disappointment*, and *hurt* at different turns, he told us:

After the Charlottesville thing went down,¹⁴ I...wrote a piece on it, put it out there on social media, and then also kind of gave a Sunday version of it. Just laid it out. I mean I tried to not make it a democrat-republican thing. It's not about- I voted throughout the years on

¹⁴ Interlocutors noted that national events are often a very important point of flux that introduces the conversation of racial reconciliation to their congregants. For example, when Nolan arrived at his church, he heard something that troubled him. His church lies at the border of the community where one side is inhabited by poorer people of color and one side is inhabited by richer white people. The people of this predominantly white, middle- to upper-class congregation told him that they never go to the other part of the neighborhood because it is not safe for them. "Well, that's all it took," Nolan asserted. His preaching focused on power, privilege, and what divides us from one another. "Then events in our in our nation happened... It's after Ferguson that they really began asking that question, 'Is there anything we can do?' Or, 'What can we do?' Or 'How can we not respond to this in some way?'"

both sides. I don't really have a big loyalty.... It was so interesting that probably the first ten to twelve people who emailed me after were all people of color saying thank you. Paragraphs just talking about how meaningful this [was]. 'This is why we're part of this church.'

It was crickets from the white people in the congregation.... I was *disappointed*, just to be quite honest, with the segment of our congregation that is white, which is probably the half at least. Just crickets. On top of it, I got one of the meanest emails that I've ever gotten in my life from somebody... [They wrote that] I don't get it; I'm just completely out of bounds. So, they left the church...probably by far the wealthiest couple in the church. Very, very wealthy. They're gone because they basically thought that I was saying that they were stupid for supporting Trump, which I wasn't saying that at all. Well, maybe I kind of was in so many words, but not meaning to attack that necessarily. Because I understand why people voted Republican, but I just had to call things out.

Owen sympathized with Dell and hit upon the core of his struggle.

"So, then that puts you in this situation where after that experience [you think,] 'Do I keep having these conversations? Or [if I do,] my budget's going to decrease. My church is going to decrease.' So, now you're stuck between, 'Do I care more about the viability of the thing that I built, my people, my church -'"

"Right," Dell interjected.

Owen continued, "-or if I *feel* like God is calling me-'" Once again Dell *emphatically* agreed. "-to say something about this thing? How many other voices will say-? Oh, what's this person going to think? Oh well what's this person going to do? But if I say this-'" Owen grunted, highlighting the *uncertainty* and *strain* of the internal dialogue. "I just *hate* that position."

"I *hate* it. Yeah," Dell agreed.

Dell and Owen together captured a very common struggle for pastors: choosing between a sense of calling, a sense of pastoral duty in teaching discipleship that does not fail to highlight wrongdoing, and the practical concerns of running an organization. Addressing racial reconciliation will likely cause white congregants to take offense; pulling racism out of history and into present reality means that white people must face their complicity in systemic racism. This offense is only aggravated by the fact that discussions of racism and political identity have become so intimately connected.

All of the interlocutors contextualized their racial reconciliation approach in a national scope, none restricting it to Rhode Island. Their view of racism is that it is a national problem¹⁵ that throughout history into today is intimately tied with government. (This is why the racial justice prerequisite of feeling equality includes political activism as part of the response to racism.) Politics in the United States have become increasingly partisan over the years (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008). Couple this with the racist rhetoric from and affiliations of President Trump that the interlocutors noted, racial reconciliation conversations tend to have the flavor of or tend to be interpreted through a lens of partisanship. How does one point out President Trump's wrongdoings and encourage Trump supporters to remain active in the racial reconciliation conversation? How does one express support for movements that espouse racial justice and equality while at the same time navigate the partisan language that many of them use and also navigate the partisan language that those who oppose the movements use? Doing so requires more than a sermon from the pulpit.

The white pastors giving the sermons also have to work through politics of recognition. I do not want to suggest that it is solely white congregants and lay-leaders who need to do so or that the interlocutors believed that. Every one of the white interlocutors noted their own struggles in the process. One interlocutor, a white pastor of a predominantly white, multiracial church, shared how feedback from congregants of color after a sermon of his pushed him to dig deeper. A Black couple invited him to their home after he delivered a message on a passage of scripture that includes the statement "slave obey your masters."¹⁶

¹⁵ Two interlocutors, both Black, noted the international impact of racism. Their understanding of racism was global. This echoes the writing of Du Bois (1903): "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, - the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (13).

¹⁶ 1 Peter 2

The wife *with tears* communicated how *disappointed* she was that I did not take the opportunity to condemn slavery. The week before I had defended women and strongly condemned domestic abuse—probably because I have two daughters—but I said nothing about slavery. As *uncomfortable* as her schooling was[,] I have to say it was good for me. I was *flabbergasted*, *blindsided* and actually pretty *hurt* by her words. But it caused me to grow. Experiences like that have shown me how deeply flawed my thinking still is and how far I need to go.

The politics of recognition is not accomplished by the individual white person learning alone, recognizing their shortcomings alone, and then changing their actions and thoughts alone. As this interlocutor experienced, recognition is a communal process. This is why discussion groups are a location where it unfolds.

Discussion groups – communally working through recognition

Discussion groups are a common method by which church leadership and congregants go through the process of discipleship. These are formal spaces the church creates that are designated for congregants and leaders to engage in discipleship through community relationship. Therefore, using them to pursue a mission of racial reconciliation – a process that is part of the larger discipleship process – is an approach that would be familiar to congregants to collectively delve deeper into understanding the problem of racism, particularly white privilege, and what racial reconciliation means. They also learn how to have the *uncomfortable* race conversation. They learn how to recognize when the conversation needs to happen. Nolan noted the way that multiple discussion groups within his church built one on top of the other. The church's first group addressing racism and racial reconciliation centered around a book interlocutors commonly referenced – James Cone's (2011) *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.¹⁷

¹⁷ James H. Cone (1938-2018) was an American theologian who was one of the key figures to develop Black liberation theology in the 1960s. During that time, Cone struggled to reconcile his faith with the need he saw to confront however possible the injustice of racism. He heard some groups of Black people describe Christianity as the white man's religion. This he strongly rejected. He is quoted as arguing: "I wanted to say: 'No! The Christian Gospel is not the white man's religion. It is a religion of liberation, a religion that says God created all people to be free.' But I realized that for black people to be free, they must first love their blackness" (Fortin 2018). Thus, he became one of the founders of Black liberation theology, which he described as "an interpretation of the Christian

Written in the Black liberation theological tradition, Cone's book analyzes the symbolism of the cross in Christianity and the lynching tree in Black life. He argues how both point to darkness in humanity while also being reminders of the power and *love* that cannot be quenched by that darkness. This book, as the centerpiece of discussion, forced white congregants (and Nolan) to face the *discomfort*, *shame*, and *guilt* of the racial reconciliation conversation.¹⁸ Nolan shared with the first meeting of our own discussion group (the four white pastors and one Black activist) how *painful* those sessions were. A racial reconciliation discussion group is where congregants of all races voluntarily submit themselves to *vulnerability* and *discomfort*. White congregants in these type of discussion groups reveal themselves and submit to collectively talk through their shortcomings. However, as I will address below, white congregants and congregants of color experience this process differently, especially discussion groups that center on white privilege.

During the second gathering of those four pastors to continue the conversation on racial reconciliation, Nolan updated us on the most recent discussion group that some congregants were doing. This time it centered around *The Church Meets World* by Winnie Varghese (2016).¹⁹ Varghese frames within Episcopalian doctrine the current issues of social justice, including racial justice, and the role of the Christian community, particularly those in the Episcopalian church, in addressing them. Nolan was excited to share how he had seen growth in his white congregants.

Gospel from the experience and perspectives and lives of people who are at the bottom in society — the lowest economic and racial groups" (Fortin 2018).

¹⁸ This conversation was only possible because the congregants were willing to take part. Because discussion groups are voluntary, they require buy-in from the congregation for them to be able to occur. For example, one of the original plans for this study was to seek permission to conduct participant observation at a six-week discussion on racial justice that a Rhode Island church had proposed to its congregation. However, after several weeks waiting for confirmation that the discussion group would be happening none came. There was not enough interest from congregants to make it happen.

¹⁹ Winnie Varghese is an Episcopalian priest who regularly speaks about the topics of justice and reconciliation across multiple matters – race, gender, sexuality, class, the environment, etc.

He gave an example from a conversation that emerged because Varghese referenced *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.

“So, we talk a little bit about James Cone and *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* – James Cone wondering, ‘Well, is there salvation for white people?’; and [that] really ticking off the group, not surprisingly.” Nolan chuckled, then went on to tell us about one congregant in the current discussion group who had also been a part of the previous group centered around *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. “[She] said, ‘So, I want to come back to this James Cone guy and talk about this book... I’m starting to think maybe he’s right. That makes me really *scared* and I don’t know what to do about it.’

“...That led to a conversation about gentrification, which has actually been a thing in [our neighborhood] even though a lot of people don’t think that about [it]... One person goes, ‘We’re a rich congregation... How can we use our privilege-’” With a look of shocked *delight* he expressed his *excitement* that this other woman in the group used the word ‘privilege’ correctly. The group chuckled as he went on with her words, “‘How can we use our privilege to start helping people? Because it’s not fair that houses get foreclosed on because of [un]paid utility bills. We can certainly find some money to help cover that.’... So, slowly it’s kind of those cracks....The other priest and I regularly- regularly might be too strong of a word, but we talk about this kind of thing. We talk about issues of justice and I’m like, ‘Oh, you’re starting to make some connections here.’ And that is really *exciting*.”

The congregant who had been a part of *The Cross and Lynching Tree* discussion group pulled those conversations into *The Church Meets World* discussion group. She engaged in politics of recognition in the process of racial reconciliation through reflectivity – remembering and re-rendering the past discussion – and reflexivity – questioning her own complicity in systemic racism and the consequences of doing so (Bolton 2010). The possible jeopardy to her immortal soul, as far as one can tell from Nolan’s recounting of her comments, was the shock to her system that forced her to reflect. This was not altruistic. However, framing the recognition of white privilege in the context of repentance allows for such imperfections. As stated above, repentance is understood as an imperfectly executed process of learning and unlearning. *Fear* motivating a change in action and thought, while not ideal, still leads to change. It is possible for *empathy* to drive the process as well. For example, over time Nolan’s white congregants learned

how to identify their own privilege. They then turned around, through *empathy* for a Black congregant who had lost her home, to help their community.

Key to what Nolan shared with our discussion group is that the “cracks” took time to appear. There was no single discussion group or sermon these white congregants walked away from being radically transformed, fully recognizing their privilege or the struggles of people of color. Recognition comes with continuous reflectivity and reflexivity both individually and collectively. Individually, white congregants consider their personal experiences and question their personal responsibility in perpetuating systemic racism. Collectively, the congregants share their personal experiences, consider the experiences of the church, learn how to put it all in a frame of systemic racism, and question their collective role in perpetuating racism as well as how they pursue racial reconciliation. The white congregants’ conversation on racial reconciliation, for example, led them to consider ways in which they could use their privilege to benefit those in their community struggling economically (who tend to be people of color).

On the other side of recognition – the people of color in the process

However, white congregants and leaders do not experience the politics of recognition in isolation. Congregants and leaders of color are present as their white counterparts are going through this. They experience it differently. For white congregants and leaders, it is about revealing hidden assumptions, pinpointing complicity in systemic racism,²⁰ unlearning mindsets and behaviors, and learning a new way to be. For people of color it becomes about dredging up trauma, naming and reflecting upon the different ways racism has impacted their life, and healing from those hurts. If leaders are not deliberate in properly navigating these different experiences

²⁰ The interlocutors tended to put more weight on discussions of systemic racism. This is in part because focusing on individualized racism would allow white congregants the opportunity to quickly say, ‘Well, I am not racist.’ They would not then see how racism goes beyond that to a systemic issue and how they can be complicit in that system.

while pursuing the racial reconciliation mission, the process can leave congregants of color in *pain* that is not addressed.

Kaya shared how she has had to intervene in discussion groups made up of white congregants and congregants of color. While the white congregants learned (and unlearned) a lot over the course of the discussion, the congregants of color were *retraumatized* as they thought through times they were impacted by white privilege. When she heard that this was happening, she *angrily* took on her mantle as pastor in order to push the facilitators of the discussion to do better protecting the congregants of color. She also used her pastor mantle to provide those congregants with the care that they needed afterward. Pastoral care for congregants of color is an important facet of the racial reconciliation process in a predominantly white church. Nolan shared with our group about the need for pastoral care during his church's discussion of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.

"We have one parishioner of color who- he came every week. God bless him." The rest of the group made sounds of agreement, commiserating with how the discussion likely impacted the congregant. "He and I then did a separate debrief after and I just- The *pain* he experienced was palpable because as he said, 'I grew up with these people. I thought they were farther along.'" Rae and Eli both empathized with the congregant's assessment. "He was so *pained* by that experience, but he came every week as these, you know," Nolan chuckled, "well-intentioned, progressive, loving white people just stumbled their way around."

Separate debrief sessions became regular with the one congregant of color that joined the discussion groups in Nolan's church. They were necessary for the man to process the discussions because *people of color feel the politics of recognition right alongside white people*.

The repentance process is a guiding philosophy by which interlocutors help white congregants and leaders (and for those white interlocutors, help themselves) navigate the painful emotions associated with the politics of recognition. This is a process that involves white people being vulnerable with people of color, asking for forgiveness. It involves them recognizing their

failure to follow Jesus, and changing their thoughts and their actions that support systemic racism. It involves them reflecting on past actions and thoughts. It includes them taking an inventory of who they were yesterday and who they are today. It then involves them turning toward the future, imagining who they can be, and trying to live in that way. They need, in every sense, to imagine a new subjectivity. In developing a feeling of equality, this new subjectivity is only attainable through a process of deracialization that depends upon deep cross-racial relationship.

Deracialized Subjectivities and Building Deep Relationship

I know we've done films, discussions, conversations. Obviously, we will address things from the pulpit every Sunday. MLK Sunday we do something to talk about these things. So, I think those are more catalysts that will carry on and get people to have conversations. But I think there's no substitute for just breaking bread with someone who has a different experience, regardless of what that may be...I think there is no substitute for building friendships.

-Dell

The interlocutors placed great emphasis on the importance of building relationship in order to build *empathy* across races. This is what Bonilla-Silva phrased as deracializing subjectivity, a prerequisite in racialized emotion theory for feeling equality. Through deep cross-racial relationship built upon empathy, the racial other becomes less foreign, more relatable, and more human even. Like the politics of recognition, deracialized subjectivity is experienced and felt differently by people of color²¹ than white people. For example, *self-love* is an emotion that people of color attend to in this facet of feeling equality. *Empathy*, however, is the key emotion

²¹ The people of color mentioned most often by interlocutors, the interlocutors of color themselves, and the people of color whose experiences appear most often in this study are Black people. Thus, the anecdotes that demonstrate the ways that people of color experience deracialized subjectivity are a facet of how Black people may experience it. However, this does not mean that other non-white races were not mentioned throughout the study. This also does not mean that only Black people experience deracialized subjectivity in this way or that theirs is the only experience that can define what happens. However, these anecdotes best demonstrate the role of emotion in the racial reconciliation mission that churches pursue. Also, there is growing literature – like Haritaworn (2016) – on the way that people of mixed race experience racialization because race is not a mutually exclusive identifier.

that all races cultivate in order to decrease and eventually eradicate the walls separating understanding and the ability to feel together.

Feeling distinctly – differing facets of deracialized subjectivities for white people and people of color

For people of color, the racial other is people of color from other races and white people. The Black interlocutors, though, did not focus on the racial other as the other races of color. The other was white people, the racially dominant group in the United States. As we saw in the anecdotes on the politics of recognition, for people of color these were painful experiences. White people as well as systems that privilege whiteness and punish nonconformity with it – these both have been the source of varying degrees of *pain* and trauma. One defense against and healing emotion for the pain and trauma is *self-love*.

In Larry's church (predominantly Black, monoracial), empowerment is how he said they pursue racial reconciliation. "Just having talk sessions – that has a value," he said. "But unless I am personally developing, I may never be seen as your equal." That is, the philosophy they follow in his church is that unless there are certain economic and educational skills and accomplishments Black people have, white people and a white system are never going to view them as equal.²² Communal development is at the core of their empowerment philosophy as well that involves community service and political activism. Establishing personal pride and self-worth, taking time to invest in oneself and one's community – these are acts of *self-love*. If they were to enter deep relationship with the white racial other before *self-love* is established firmly, they run a greater risk of becoming hurt as white people engage in the politics of recognition.

²² This approach to pursuing racial uplift (Drake and Cayton 2015) is common. However, an ongoing debate exists around the cost and benefits of viewing economic and educational accomplishments, even in part, as prerequisites to being considered as equally human by white people (Gaines 2010; Reed 2009).

However, *self-love* without *empathy*, especially *empathy* that is involved in the deracialized subjectivity, can undermine feeling equality. Bonilla-Silva discusses *self-love* in the racial justice prerequisite. However, a conversation with an interlocutor demonstrates why only placing it there can undermine feeling equality. I asked Larry about what words he uses to talk about the improvement of race relations and if he felt like reconciliation was the right word. He talked through some of his *discomfort*, which was very similar to Rae's that I included above. However, he said that he would have become militant in his commitment to bettering the Black community and fighting injustice if it were not for his perspective of "Jesus as a reconciler." He continued

"[Within reconciliation] there's a willingness to say, 'Listen, it's wrong. So, how can we make it right?' Before I start saying, 'Well, what about me? What about what happened to me?' You lose me when you start talking about that; it's on both sides [i.e., both white people and people of color].... But if it wasn't for the love of Jesus touching my heart," we laughed, commiserating on the struggle, "I'd be stone cold.... I'd just be- *hatred*."

Empathy with those who have *hurt* them or who represent a system that *hurts* them is akin to letting in the enemy. However, *self-love* without the *empathy* that builds understanding through developing cross-racial relationships can feed on a destructive form of *anger* towards injustice.

White people, on the other hand, experience deracialized subjectivity through building *empathy* for people of color whose struggles they did not perceive before. The final discussion group I facilitated highlights the perception factor for white congregants and leaders. One interlocutor invited me to his church to hold a discussion group²³ with a group of lay-leaders.

²³ The set-up of this discussion group was slightly different than previous discussion groups. There was no section during which they discussed the various words that they do and do not use to describe the process of racial reconciliation. The meeting I had prepared for was a follow-up interview with their church's pastor, so I had not brought the poster board that is necessary for that prompt. Also, the questions I asked were slightly different. They were meant to dig deeper into their reflections on the relationship between racial reconciliation and the ways they serve in their city. The questions were also meant to reveal another perspective (that may be similar or different than their pastor's) on how their church addresses racial reconciliation. The pastor was a part of the discussion, which I was originally concerned might stymie critiques of church practices. However, the interlocutors of this discussion

These five men and women, in addition to serving within the church, all volunteered around the community in various ways as representatives of the church. Over the course of our conversation they reflected on the fact that the church implicitly addresses racism. However, they wanted to more overtly address it as well. One lay-leader, a Black woman, said,

[W]e go to a church which is predominantly white, educated, middle- to upper- class people. The cool thing about [this group of lay-leaders] is that we are a part of [this church's] leaders. Then we're also the leaders who intentionally go out to [this] community that we are surrounded by and interact with the people who make up this community. And so, I feel like, at least for this group, it's probably important within the group to have conversations about racial divisions, and how it impacts or- yeah, how it impacts our work. Because then we can also take these conversations, take these observations and what we're doing and bring it back to the people inside of the church. *[The congregants] probably don't have to think about it or face it on a regular basis because they probably live in also predominantly white, or at least homogenous suburban environments...* I think that a lot of people have the heart and *passion*, but they don't have the same level of saturation as we do.

Deracialized subjectivity for these white congregants would be strongly intertwined with the politics of recognition because in order to understand the racial other, one must see the other. For people of color in America, they live within a system privileging white people and thus constantly experience whiteness. This is not the same for white people who do not have saturation with people of color. These white people do not see them in the way that people of color see them. Without that seeing there is no way for one group to understand another. However, seeing the other is not enough for feeling equality. Different races must feel together, developing *empathy*. This is where deep relationship enters, undergirding *self-love* and the politics of recognition.

group were surprisingly open in their comments about the church. Also, the post-discussion reflections they submitted offered them an opportunity to convey anything they might not have felt comfortable sharing in the group, in addition to the reflections' purpose of allowing them to share additional thoughts that they would have liked to share in the group had they thought of it then.

Being present

To build relationship that evokes a feeling of equality, racialized emotion theory suggests that people must intertwine their lives over an extended period of time. This is not just different races meeting together in the same space. This is not just different races meeting for a discussion group series. It is people intentionally building connection. Eli recognized this as he continued to guide his congregation through racial reconciliation.

Here I am encouraging my congregation to be a little *uncomfortable*. Maybe get [their] news from a different source. Try to seek knowledge from another perspective. Reach out. And I'm like, 'Am I doing that?' Then I just had the thought one day: 'Maybe I could find another pastor I could just be friends with. Someone I could see on a regular basis, talk to on a regular basis.' And if our churches end up doing some together – great. But it was really just like, 'Hey can I be friends with you?'"

Eli felt the responsibility that he had to do this. He was *uncertain* about how to go about doing it properly, without it becoming tokenism. He has friends of color. However, none of them live nearby and so he is not in consistent contact. He laughed as he remembered his process of finding someone – Googling Black pastors in his city. He found a pastor that seemed to be a man with whom he would enjoy friendship. So, he reached out. The pastor responded to Eli, saying that he had been praying for something similar. He also had been wanting to build relationship intentionally across races and hoped that his predominantly Black congregation would do the same. Over time, as they continued creating relationship, their congregants created connections as well. The relationships extended beyond individuals feeling together to the organizations feeling together as well.

Before the focus groups began, while I was visiting churches to personally understand the landscape of the Christian community around Rhode Island, I visited that predominantly Black church. I happened to be there when the pastor announced the beginning of the relationship between their congregation and Eli's congregation. The two churches would have events together, the pastors would visit one another's congregations to preach, and the pastors expected

the congregants to mingle. The good reverend said, looking down and around the room, “Some of y’all are sayin, ‘Why we got to go over there?’” Some of the congregants chuckled at the way he mimicked the probable indignation of church members. He continued, “You got to go over there because they’re family... [When we get to heaven,] Martin Luther King is going to preach right [after] Joel Olsteen, and I’m gonna shout for both.”

These two congregations had not interacted before. These two congregations are from different denominations. The only link that ties the two organizations together is that they understand themselves to be a part of a larger Christian community. Thus, they began building relationship. However, interaction alone is not enough. There is a depth and significance that interlocutors placed upon a certain type of interaction. Rae said,

I'm not sure I see a lot of examples of that, of really people saying, 'I'm going to be here and I'm going to be present on a consistent basis: day in and day out, month in and month out.' But if we're ever going to reach that deep theological sense of justice that just is so rich and so powerful, I think that's a key element.²⁴

Relationships between churches, especially those with congregants of predominantly different races like Eli’s (white) and the other pastor’s (Black), is a tool other interlocutors identified as a way to build relationship. However, for churches where the congregation is multiracial, like Isabel’s church, building relationship within the congregation is where the leaders placed a great deal of emphasis: eating together, visiting each other’s homes, looking after one another’s children, learning the differences until the differences become the norm.

Deracializing subjectivities in the church is not an interpersonal experience alone. This is an important factor – person-to-person interactions like inviting someone home for dinner on a regular basis. Deracializing is also a communal experience within the church, for example, everyone of different races looking out for each other’s children. However, this is also an

²⁴ Rae’s reflections on this concept of being present were drawn from Brian Stevenson’s *Just Mercy*.

interorganizational experience. Eli and the other pastor began to intentionally weave their churches together. They encouraged an interweaving of discipleship. The leaders themselves made plans to preach at each other's churches. Congregants participated in discussion groups together. Even as they began learning to live together, they were learning how to feel together as they walked through discipleship with a racial reconciliation mission. Although the racial groups of each church likely felt deracialization differently, they were feeling it together.

CONCLUSION

The racial reconciliation approach in the Rhode Island Protestant Christian churches is a response that is outside of the diversity paradigm even as it shares characteristics with it. As Thomas and Ely suggested was central to the learning-and-effectiveness paradigm, *leaders are key to emphasizing the value of different perspectives and recognizing the opportunities to bring different voices together*. This was seen, for example, in Isabel encouraging her predominantly white, multiracial church to build relationship. *The leader is also necessary to help the organization persevere the challenges associated with learning about racism and overcoming its barriers to an inclusively diverse community*. Dell faced this first hand when he had to decide to continue pursuing a racial reconciliation mission when he faced tacit and explicit congregational resistance from white congregants. That example presented an interesting contrast between churches and other firms that use a diversity paradigm in their organization – *the fact that participation in the process is entirely voluntary for congregants can make developing church-wide buy-in a delicate balancing act for predominantly white churches*. Thomas and Ely also emphasized the importance of an organizational culture that expected the same standard from everyone. *Discipleship – put simply, the lifestyle of following Jesus – is the standard that everyone within the church is expected to follow*, which is a process that *leads in part to personal*

development. The leaders of these churches also emphasized an *open organizational culture in which the people feel valued.* For example, the lay-leaders in the final discussion group felt comfortable enough to critique the church practices while the senior pastor sat within the group and felt that their opinion would be considered. That discussion group was also an indicator of something that these churches tend to value – a *relatively nonbureaucratic and egalitarian structure.* Finally, these *organizations clearly articulated the racial reconciliation mission from the pulpit and re-emphasized it through activities like discussion groups.*

However, the scope of the racial reconciliation response goes deeper than the practices and policy getting to the emotion that influence and are influenced by them. The interlocutors often talked about an *intangible quality to racial reconciliation work* that is similar to how Bonilla-Silva theorized feeling equality under racialized emotion. These emotions are *not just individual feeling but communal feeling as well.* The *communal feeling links the local church organization to the larger field of Rhode Island Protestant Christian churches and even the entire Christian community in the United States.* Larry’s comment that unless “we weep over what’s happened” reconciliation is not possible extended to the Rhode Island Protestant Christian churches as well as the entire Christian community in the United States. However, *communal feeling can also be an interorganizational feeling.* This is something experienced by churches that intentionally build relationship between each other, like Eli’s church did with the predominantly Black church.

Exploring the activities that facilitate communal feeling reveal how *people of color and white people experience feeling equality differently but not separately.* For example, the learning-unlearning process of the politics of recognition for white congregants and leaders involves feelings of guilt, shame, and fear over or even anger and denial of complicity in racism.

For congregants and leaders of color there is grief, anger, and trauma in actively exploring white privilege. The process is painful for all races. In a similar vein, deracialized subjectivity is felt differently but not separately. For white congregants, this process that is so informed by the politics of recognition involves shocks to the system as they learn to perceive that racial other and their struggles. For congregants and leaders of color, in contrast, self-love is an important emotion to develop as they intentionally create relationships with the racial other to help decrease the risk of pain. Together, the races experience and feel empathy in order to strive for deracialization. The trouble with analyzing emotion in the racial reconciliation response of these organizations is that it can seem to overemphasize emotion and de-emphasize action. However, the *interlocutors did not separate emotion from action*. Organizational practices, like pastoral care, are features that help alleviate the pain associated with the racial reconciliation process. Organizational philosophy guided by field (that is, the global Christian community) logics, like repentance, pulls white congregants and leaders from simply feeling pain (guilt, shame, and fear) but changing thoughts and action so that they are not complicit in systemic racism.

Pursuing intangible racial reconciliation results, like emotion, also emphasizes the *ambiguity that is a part of all attempts to eradicate racism*. America does not have a reference point in its history for a racial utopia so the end result cannot be fully defined in tangible terms. The ambiguity is present but dormant and hidden in theory of the diversity paradigm; however, analysis through racialized emotion engages with it. The churches grapple with this in part through actions guided by discipleship. Discipleship, which is a process without end, and the master narratives of God's justice and two-fold reconciliation allows the interlocutors to accept a more ambiguous timeline of attaining the intangible feeling of equality. *The timeline of attaining the intangible is inefficient for business since it extends beyond long-term into life-long for*

people and organizations. However, the narrative and the process are both accepted as part of the churches' culture, which relieves some of the tension that the churches experience in pursuing intangible goals. Discomfort, uncertainty, and the tension never fully go away for the churches. However, they have a way to make sense of the intangible, pulling it into language and actions with which they can engage through discipleship. Throughout, *they strive to maintain hope and faith for something that they have never seen.*

I close with a part of the reflection written by Lynn, a Black lay-leader, after the final discussion group. The conversation helped her think through the relationship between the global Christian community, her church, and addressing racism in America.

For me, my lived experiences and 'education' about racism in America has always been separate from the church and my faith... [Any] attempts in the past to make reconciliations would feel insufficient, therefore I ignored Christian racial reconciliation, and more specifically how the church [can] join in the efforts towards ending or bettering institutionalized and systemic racism in America. Our conversation changed that for me[.] I don't necessarily feel like I have a new-found confidence that real change can happen, but I think I'm getting there through these conversations. I am trying to be brave enough to be a part of [them] and even initiate.

After that day, she and a white lay-leader who was a part of the conversation began working with an organization in their community that, in part, helps the Christian community pursue racial reconciliation.

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