

Representing Race in Basic Writing Scholarship

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ABSTRACT: Using Susanmarie Harrington's investigation of the presence and absence of basic writing students in articles in the Journal of Basic Writing as a starting point, this article investigates the visibility or invisibility of race in student-present articles from 1995 to 2005. The investigation reveals that the discursive practice of colorblindness still governs the representation of race in basic writing scholarship, particularly where teacher race is concerned.

KEYWORDS: race, basic writing scholarship, discursive practices, teacher-student relationships

In her 1999 *Journal of Basic Writing* article, "The Representation of Basic Writers in Basic Writing Scholarship, Or Who Is Quentin Pierce?," Susanmarie Harrington categorizes the topics of the articles in *JBW* volumes 1-17 to make the point that most articles focus on teaching techniques and programming while very few (only 17 among the 261 articles published in the journal through 1998) focus on student experiences and perspectives. She uses Wendy Bishop's term "student-present" to label these infrequently published articles, which she defines as characterized by "a serious attention to student voices" and as employing "methodologies [such as case study] that make students' perspectives on their writing experiences central to the analysis" (96-97). Harrington's investigation is a prime example of basic writing's ongoing self-reflective practice, which is often focused on *JBW* as one of the sites where basic writing is institutionalized (Harrington 95). Through classifying the articles since the journal's founding in 1975, Harrington finds that "there is a curious gap in the ways students are represented in basic writing scholarship" in that much of that scholarship represents students as the objects of teaching techniques and programmatic strategies and as the producers of written texts, but not as particular individuals with particular classroom experiences and particular subjectivities. The result is that "we know very little about the students who take our courses" (92).

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Harrington's findings lead me to ask what it is that we don't know about our students. What is the missing content of this "curious gap" and why does it exist? And, since I am particularly interested in the representation of race in composition studies, is racial identity one of the things that are missing? In the most recent set of student-present articles that Harrington identifies in her study (volumes 14-17 [1995-1998]), race is indeed missing, not only in articles where students aren't present but also in the student-present articles as well. Student race is represented in the descriptions of all the students in one of the six student-present articles (Linda Gray-Rosendale, "Revising the Political in Basic Writing Scholarship" [1996]), in the descriptions of some of the students in another (Jim Cody, "The Importance of Expressive Language in Preparing Basic Writers for College Writing" [1996]), and for the aggregate but not for individuals in a third (Candace Spigelman, "Taboo Topics and the Rhetoric of Silence: Discussing *Lives on the Boundary* in a Basic Writing Class" [1998]). Student race is invisible in the three other student-present articles (Gay, Miraglia, and Tinberg). Teacher race is invisible in five of the six articles: only Spigelman identifies her race. This absence of explicit identification of race seriously diminishes the value of these articles for the basic writing teachers who read them. In this article, I explore the discursive practices that prompt the authors to keep race invisible in these six articles as well as in the student-present articles published in *JBW* in the ensuing years.

Representing student and teacher race in student-present articles is beneficial, not because race is biologically real, but because it has real effects on the lives of whites (race privilege) and nonwhites (racial inequality). Race, as Krista Ratcliffe puts it, "is a fictional category possessed of all-too-realistic consequences" for individuals and for U.S. culture as a whole (13). Race, like all systemic differences that affect power relations, affects classroom relations, arguably having even more of an effect than other differences because of this country's ongoing history of unequal access to education based on race. Racism and the material realities that are the effects of racial and economic injustice continue to interfere with nonwhite students' opportunities to get into and stay in college. Race is a particularly significant identity feature for basic writing classrooms for several reasons:

- Nonwhites are placed into basic writing in disproportionate numbers. (Fox, "Race" 26; Shor 97; Gilyard 36; Agnew and McLaughlin 47)
- Basic writing status and nonwhite racial identity are often conflated. (Royster and Taylor 29; Lamos 26; Jones 73-74; Shor; Royster and Williams 79, 81)

- Since both basic writers and nonwhites are positioned as outsiders to the academy, to be both a basic writing student and nonwhite is a double whammy of marginality. (Royster and Taylor 29; Adler-Kassner, "Race" 69)

The benefits of making race visible in student-present articles focused on basic writers include the opportunity to more realistically portray the racial makeup of basic writing classes, to explore the effects of race on relationships between basic writing teachers, who are mostly white (Victor Villanueva estimates that 90 percent of college composition teachers are white ["Reading Rhetoric" 202]), and white and nonwhite students, and to explore the marginalizing effects of basic writing placement on students who are already marginalized by their race. A more general benefit is that, whether teachers are dealing with students in the classroom or reading about them in basic writing scholarship, they need to know where students are coming from. As Eric Miraglia states in a 1995 *JBW* article, basic writing teachers should "ask ourselves a myriad of 'where' questions: where our students are as students, where they are as writers, where they are as complex matrices of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, where they are [as language users]. . . [N]one of these questions is frivolous; if answered with any richness of detail, each would provide valuable information relevant to a writing teacher's task" (48-49). While this article focuses exclusively on race, it is important to recognize that race is but one of multiple identity features that intersect in a person's subjectivity, and that, for nonwhite students, racial status and lower socioeconomic status are often intersecting features with similar effects on access to and success in college.

One drawback to representing student race in student-present articles is that if the race of the student(s) in a particular article is nonwhite, this may serve to reinforce the stereotyping of basic writers as nonwhite. However, this problem is not fixed by keeping race invisible; if basic writing scholars consistently represent student race (white and nonwhite), the tendency to construct all basic writers as nonwhite could be countered. Furthermore, it is not just *student* race that should be considered when the multiple subjectivities of the actual people in actual classrooms are discussed. As Jacqueline Jones Royster and Rebecca Greenberg Taylor argue in their 1997 *JBW* article, "Constructing Teacher Identity in the Basic Writing Classroom," making the teacher's racial identity visible is equally critical to understanding the racial dynamics of the power relations in a particular classroom because "we are all racialized, gendered, and political subjects in classroom space" (27).

The absence of race in composition scholarship has been made an issue for the discipline by a number of composition specialists, who have focused on what Catherine Prendergast, in her 1998 *College Composition and Communication* article, called the “absent presence” of race in composition studies (36). Closer to basic writing’s home, Royster and Taylor, in their *JBW* article, called for basic writing teacher-researchers to “think more consciously and reflectively about the implications of difference in the classroom” (43). The absence of race in so many student-present articles supports Prendergast’s assertion that “race remains undertheorized, unproblematized, and underinvestigated in composition research leaving us with no means to confront the racialized atmosphere of the university” (36). Even in basic writing, race is too often an absent presence. Thus, basic writing has yet to fully respond to Royster and Taylor’s call to think about the implications of difference in the classroom.

As a white American, I approach the subject of race with humility, trying to become aware of the way that racial privilege clouds and distorts my vision. I position myself with Krista Ratcliffe, who, in *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, and Whiteness*, advocates a “rhetorical stance of humility” for whites attempting to interrogate racialized relationships, one in which whites acknowledge “I don’t know what I don’t know about you” (73). In analyzing the ways in which race is represented or kept invisible in student-present articles in the *Journal of Basic Writing*, I recognize and respect the authors’ commitment to study students’ voices and experiences. I seek to understand the discursive forces that cause some of them to screen out race when representing classroom scenes.

Racial Visibility in Student-Present Articles

Student-present articles remain scarce in the issues of the *Journal of Basic Writing* published since 1998 (volumes 18-24 [1999-2005]). Race is more visible in these articles than in the articles from volumes 14-17, but no consistent practice of representing race is evident. In the list of student-present articles below, readers can see that instead of steady progress towards racial visibility, both student-presence and representation of race seem to fluctuate. There is tremendous variability in racial representation: an article in which a particular student is described in some detail but without any mention of race may sit next to an article in which the race of the teacher and the students is carefully interrogated. Given that two issues of *JBW* are published each year with a minimum of five articles in each issue, the list

documents both the small number of student-present articles and the even smaller number of articles in which race is visible among the ten or more articles published each year:

1999	3 student-present articles: race is visible in each (Sternglass; Gruber; Counihan)
2000	No student-present articles
2001	3 student-present articles: race is visible in 1 (Ybarra) & invisible in 2 (Tabachnikov; Eves-Bowden)
2002	1 student-present article: race is visible (Stenberg)
2003	2 student-present articles: race of some subjects is visible in 1 (Ashley & Lynn) and race of all subjects visible in the other (Gray-Rosendale, Bird, & Bullock)
2004	5 student-present articles: race visible in 3 (Bernstein; Crisco; Pavia) and invisible in 2 (Maher; Chaney)
2005	1 student-present article: race of some subjects is visible (Becket)

The designation of racial visibility in this listing applies only to student race. Teacher race is much less visible, reflecting both resistance to constructing whiteness as a racial category and teacher-researchers' resistance to focusing on their own contributions to classroom racial dynamics. Of the twelve articles listed above in which student race is at least partially visible, only seven of the authors, who are either the teacher(s) in the classroom or the researcher(s) observing the classroom, identify the teacher's race: Gruber; Counihan; Ybarra; Stenberg; Gray-Rosendale, Bird, and Bullock; Ashley and Lynn; and Bernstein. Even those who do identify teacher race don't typically analyze the effects of teacher race on classroom dynamics, but rather offer

a brief statement of identity. A detailed description of the teacher's race in relation to the students' races, such as Susan Naomi Bernstein's identification of herself as "a white Anglo Jewish northerner" teaching "Latino college students in Texas" (9), is the exception, not the rule.

Discursive Practices Around Race

This failure to consistently identify race reflects both the dominant discursive practices of colorblindness and denial of racism in U.S. culture as a whole and the particular issues around racial identification that have arisen in basic writing. As a reflection of the dominant racial ideology, the continuing invisibility of race in *JBW* articles is no surprise given that the white privilege of ignoring race and constructing white selves as raceless is "doggedly unacknowledged" (Shor in Prendergast and Shor 380) and that the work of scholars in whiteness studies and critical race theory documents that racism is consistently denied. As Vershawn Ashanti Young recently wrote, both blacks and whites act in public as if race doesn't matter (695), reflecting the dominant ideology that we are in a post-Civil Rights era of racial harmony and equal opportunity. This ideology allows whites to ignore race and racism by constructing themselves as raceless, by denying the persistent negative effects of racism on the lives of nonwhites, and by taking the attitude that "race has nothing to do with me" (Frankenberg 6). When a teacher-researcher leaves out race in the description of a student or a teacher, he or she is acting in concert with this dominant ideology. Since most basic writing scholars and teachers are white, our use of this discursive practice reflects white people's investment in perpetuating a discourse of racelessness that keeps race, racism, and our own race privileges invisible: "White America . . . has had the unearned privilege to remain 'blind' to non-white America's discursive fields" (Ratcliffe 75). Students and teachers are embodied, raced presences in classrooms. We may often misread the racial texts that other bodies represent, but we do, nevertheless, read them and form assumptions based on our readings/misreadings. Our denial of this racial reading does not prevent it from happening. Instead, as Shari Stenberg argues in "Embodied Classrooms, Embodied Knowledges," our denial "only naturalizes those assumptions, cloaking them in silence and making them unspeakable" (59). Colorblindness functions by denying that race is seen and by maintaining that even if race is seen, it is impolite and/or impolitic to mention it.

Risks of Racial Identification

At the same time that the dominant ideology allows whites to ignore race, it also warns them away from making race visible by constructing that practice as risky. Studies in critical discourse analysis have found that whites believe that “[n]aming minorities . . . is morally and interactionally risky” (van Dijk et al. 174). This risk exists because the predominant discursive practice for whites is colorblindness rather than naming or discussing race, leaving whites with “few terms and even fewer protocols” for talking about race (Ratcliffe 95). The riskiness of making race visible is amplified in basic writing scholarship by the critique of the construction of the typical basic writer as nonwhite. In their attention to the politics of race, basic writing scholars, often writing in the *Journal of Basic Writing*, point out the many instances in which students who are placed in basic writing classes are constructed as nonwhite and/or different from the undergraduate norm in other areas of identity. Royster and Taylor comment that marginal writing performance is consistently conflated in composition scholarship with “issues of identity (race, class, gender, age) and issues of good character or ethos” (29). Steve Lamos, after exploring articles in the *Journal of Basic Writing* and published responses to Open Admissions at CUNY, concludes that “minority status and remedial status become one and the same” (26), with white basic writing students acknowledged, if at all, as “bystanders who happen to derive benefit from a program not intended for them” (26). William Jones declares that “*basic writer*, the term itself, was used with notable frequency, as euphemism and code for minority students” (73-74). Ira Shor indicates and indicts this conflation when he provocatively uses “Our Apartheid” as the title of his influential article arguing for eliminating basic writing programs. From Shor’s point of view, conflating basic writer and nonwhite contributes to the trend of ghettoizing basic writing programs. Royster and Jean Williams in an article in one of *College Composition and Communication’s* fiftieth anniversary issues, later reprinted in NCTE’s *Trends and Issues in Postsecondary English Studies* (2000), assert that “the connections we have made in the field in conflating ethnicity, otherness, and basic writing are strong and remain compelling” (79). This conflation “has become deeply embedded in the literature, despite lengthy histories that demonstrate other realities” (Royster and Williams 81).

These concerns should not deter basic writing scholars from identifying race when studying students and teachers in classrooms. Studying race does not “reify its existence” but exposes the way that race functions

as a marker that determines individuals' opportunities and privileges so as to perpetuate racial stratification (Ratcliffe 15). When race is visible in student-present articles, readers can further their understanding of the effects of race on students' and teachers' experiences in basic writing classrooms. Ironically, the attention to race and racism in basic writing scholarship, particularly to the conflation of nonwhite racial identity and basic writer status, may further promote colorblindness. Teacher-researchers who don't want to be misread as racist may protect themselves from that reading by not naming race, particularly if they are portraying a student's deficits or outsider status.

One of the student-present articles in which race is visible, Beth Counihan's "Freshgirls: Overwhelmed by Discordant Pedagogies and the Anxiety of Leaving Home" (1999), an ethnographic study of three nonwhite, female students at Lehman College, may be read as an example of what teacher-researchers are attempting to avoid when they keep race invisible. Using an irreverent tone throughout, Counihan describes these nonwhite students' school behaviors in terms that could easily be read as disrespectful, even racist. As described by Counihan, these students "clomp" (93), "saunter" (94), and "waltz" (95) into class late, eating Twinkies or potato chips as they come. Counihan emphasizes their disengagement, reporting that they do as little assigned work as possible, more interested in playing the teacher than in learning. Counihan makes no attempt to mask her own dismay at their antics, reporting, "I want to go over and twist Monique's ear" (96) when Monique mocks the teacher. Her disapproval of her research participants extends to belittling their literacy, calling their reading and writing "little literate acts" (103) and declaring that they live in "an oral/technological culture" outside of literate culture (100-101).

Taken in isolation from the rest of Counihan's discussion, in which she explores the material conditions that account for these students' estrangement from college culture and the failure of higher education to find a way to welcome them, these observations could very well lead Counihan's readers to label her a racist. Reflecting on her qualitative research on urban high school students, Deborah Appleman, a white educator, worries that her portrayals of nonwhite students have constructed them as "raced" to an unnecessary degree and may have inadvertently reinforced stereotypes of young black males as gangbangers and young black women as defiant and difficult (77). Her self-doubts are compounded when workshop participants accused her of misrepresentation and racism (75). I could easily see Counihan's work receiving the same accusatory response. Afraid of receiving similar criticism,

basic writing teacher-researchers may shy away from making race visible.

Composition has, unfortunately, a “long history of negative representations of students and their texts,” as Lily Sun comments (47), and Counihan’s exasperation at the failure of her student participants to fulfill her hope of chronicling their “triumphant segue into college culture despite such serious obstacles as poverty, fear, and instability” (92) leads her to portray these students negatively. In addition to expressing exasperation, however, Counihan also analyzes the material realities and feelings of not belonging that cause these students to resist a college culture from which they feel “deeply estranged” (99).

Counihan, who, along with identifying the students’ race, identifies the race of the teachers whose classrooms she studied, locates the students’ estrangement in the huge differences between their experiences around education and their white teachers’ experiences, experiences that are linked to race and class (99). By identifying the teachers’ race, she is able to contrast the experiences of a white teacher growing up “groomed for brilliance” with the experiences of his nonwhite students “often kept home from school to babysit their younger sisters and brothers” (98). The white teacher has rehearsed for college all of his life; the nonwhite students are hazarding new territory as the first in their families to attend college. Thus, by making race visible, Counihan demonstrates not only the material realities that act as barriers to college success for the students, but also the divergence in experience that prepares many whites to expect to go to college while leaving many nonwhites unprepared.

When Race Is Visible

Like Counihan’s article, other student-present articles in which race is visible are valuable on a number of fronts. They discuss much “information relevant to a writing teacher’s task,” particularly information about the issues of authority and relationship building that are so important in student-teacher relationships across racial difference. They introduce models for successful college completion that are different than the paths that many white, traditionally aged students follow. They can help to concretize and personalize the material conditions that, as the effects of racism and economic injustice, interfere with college aspirations for many nonwhite students. As a result, they can work against denial of the negative effects of racism on nonwhite students’ access to and graduation from college.

Student-present articles in which race is visible also make visible

the barriers to college success that many nonwhite students face. At the same time, these articles can provide evidence of the kinds of classroom relationships and experiences that can help nonwhite students overcome such barriers, as Marilyn Sternglass does in “Students Deserve Enough Time to Prove that They Can Succeed” (1999). Sternglass’s article, based on her six-year longitudinal study of basic writers at CUNY’s City College of New York, describes an African-American student, Joan, one of the focal students in the overall study (one white, four African-American, three Latino/a, and one Asian-American).

Sternglass details Joan’s academic progress in a fashion that emphasizes Joan’s competence and serves as an antidote to the deficit model of constructing basic writers. Sternglass’s description of Joan’s multiple subjectivities, including her race and class, is rich with details of the way that her social position serves as a source of many of the obstacles she faces. Because Sternglass identifies Joan’s race, she is able to discuss her six-year college career in the context of the longer college careers typical of nonwhite students. Because Sternglass details the complex social forces and material conditions that affect Joan’s learning, readers can trace the effect of the number of hours that Joan is working or the educational support she does or does not receive in any given semester on her school performance that semester. According to Daniela Liese, whose review of Sternglass’s book *Time to Know Them* was published along with Sternglass’s article in the issue, this work is “the first longitudinal study of writing and learning at a college level that takes into account not only students’ academic lives but also their personal lives” (21). Sternglass amply demonstrates that race is one of “a complex network of factors” that construct the conditions that govern nonwhite students’ participation in higher education (Liese 24).

Sternglass carefully details the classroom experiences and relationships that were the most helpful to Joan. Like several of the authors of student-present articles, she focuses a good deal of attention on student responses to teacher comments on their writing. Unlike some students who resist teacher authority as it is represented by their comments, Joan seeks such input and prefers writing assignments to multiple-choice exams because “she could learn from the responses of her instructors to the writing. In exams, students only found out whether they were right or wrong but not always why” (11). There is considerable evidence that nonwhite students respond differently to teacher comments than white students do. Claude Steele, for example, in his work on stereotype threat has found that an approach to commenting that combines high expectations with ability affirmation (“a strong belief

that all students can learn”) counters stereotypes of nonwhites as inferior and enables nonwhite students to overcome their mistrust of teachers and engage with their assignments (126). In *Time to Know Them*, Sternglass provides multiple examples of relatively harsh comments to which nonwhite students respond positively (118, 132). When, in their student-present articles in *JBW*, teacher-researchers such as Pamela Gay, Jane Maher, and Sara Biggs Chaney offer rich analyses of students’ reactions to comments without making the students’ or teachers’ race visible, readers are unable to make use of this research to understand how race may influence the power relations that underlie students’ responses to comments.

Sternglass shows the importance of supportive and encouraging teacher-student relationships in promoting nonwhite student success by detailing the extraordinary help that Joan receives from two women teachers who function as important role models for her. Both research and anecdotal evidence suggest that nonwhite students are particularly invested in relationships with teachers (Ogbu and Simons 257; Greene 208-212; hooks 13; Fox, *Defending* 113). Based on her study of the communication between white faculty and black male students, Lisa Gonsalves concludes that “[f]aculty who work well with Black males use strategies that allow them to cultivate relationships with the students . . . by seeking their acquaintance and nurturing them as they proceed through the academy”(455). Like the male students in Gonsalves’s study, Joan benefited from her relationships with specific teachers, one with high expectations and “stringent reading requirements” who impressed Joan as “warm and worldly” (11) and a second whose “comments and suggestions provided the kind of help that Joan needed in order to improve her papers” (12).

In *White Teacher*, white elementary school teacher Vivian Paley discovers that when she pictures a competent student, the student she pictures is white. I imagine that this is true for many teachers, who, like Paley, show in subtle ways that they lack faith in some of their students’ abilities: “You don’t introduce them to certain activities, or if you do you stop at the first sign of trouble. You avoid giving them time and attention in certain kinds of discussions” (70). By describing Joan in rich personal and academic detail, Sternglass provides an alternative image of a competent and thoughtful nonwhite student that supplements and partially supplants the normative white image.

Student-present articles in which both student and teacher race is visible undertake the work of exploring the effects of race on teachers as well as on students, constructing that relationship as a two-way dynamic. In

enacting mutual responsiveness, basic writing teachers can think not only about how to best respond to nonwhite students' needs, but also about how we can best "adjust our own needs when we encounter students who seem unfamiliar to us" (Royster and Taylor 43). As Taylor asserts in this article,

basic writing teachers and researchers must begin instead to question our own identities, examining critically the relation between who we are and the work we make possible for our students. This work is necessary for all teachers, but for white, middle class teachers of basic writing, who may find themselves, as Royster reminds us, feeling different from those who occupy the other side of the desk, the work is especially crucial. (31)

While it is discouraging to find that representations of teacher race are not yet routine despite Royster and Taylor's call to make teacher identity a focus of interrogation, it is encouraging to find articles such as Shari Stenberg's "Learning to Change: The Development of a (Basic) Writer and Her Teacher" (2002), which, in describing Stenberg's experience with an African-American basic writing student in two successive writing classes, provides a model of a student-teacher relationship marked by a high degree of mutual responsiveness and racial visibility on both sides. Stenberg seeks a "two-way" relationship with her African-American student, Linda, in which "both subjects [herself and the student] undergo 'revision' as we learn together" (38). In this teacher-research project, Stenberg, self-identified as white, moves towards Linda by revising her initial view that Linda, a community college transfer student, is not as competent a writer as her classmates, a misreading based on Linda's "body" [her race] and "her texts" [surface error] (40). Stenberg allows Linda's writing and behavior in the class to disrupt her low expectations: "She [Linda] did not locate herself on the outside of our curriculum at all; her work as a writer and thinker, in fact, seemed to be a perfect fit for the program" (42). Stenberg reminds us that "[n]one of us live outside of dominant ideologies, including racist ones" (50), and then applies that insight to her relationship with this student. This article serves as a model of what a teacher and student can learn from each other in a fully dialogic relationship in which they are willing to confront race and the effects of race on judgments and expectations.

When Race Is Invisible

When one is interested in the racial dimension of student-teacher relationships, reading student-present articles in which race is invisible is an exercise in frustration. In contrast to the racial visibility in Sternglass's article that allowed readers to reflect on a nonwhite student's reaction to teacher comments, other student-present articles that explore students' reactions to teacher comments keep race invisible. Pamela Gay's "Dialogizing Response in the Writing Classroom: Students Answer Back" (1998), Jane Maher's "'You Probably Don't Even Know I Exist': Notes from a College Prison Program" (2004), and Sara Biggs Chaney's "Study of Teacher Error: Misreading Resistance in the Basic Writing Classroom" (2004) would be even more valuable explorations of the struggle over the teacher's authority to comment on student writing if race were visible. Unlike Joan, the students in these articles actively resist that authority. Maher reports that her student, Robin, "was furious that I had 'messed up' her essay with 'all that shit you wrote'" (96); Gay similarly finds students angry and frustrated in response to teachers' comments in her ethnographic study. Chaney becomes embroiled in a power struggle with a student who seems at first to be remarkably responsive to her teacher's suggestions, but who then plagiarizes in her final paper, an act which Chaney reads as a deliberate resistance to her pedagogy (33) and a "betrayal" of the "unspoken promise between us" (31). If the race of these students and teachers had been visible, these articles would provide rich fodder for thinking about the effect of race on the "unspoken promises" that underlie the expectations that teachers and students bring to their interactions, particularly when the teacher's authority to comment on student writing and the student's ability to resist that authority are at stake.

I was similarly frustrated when reading "Taboo Topics and the Rhetoric of Silence: Discussing *Lives on the Boundary* in a Basic Writing Class" (1998) by Candace Spigelman. Since Spigelman identifies race in the aggregate ("more than three-quarters of the eighty basic writing students I taught that semester were white, sixteen students were African-American, three were Hispanic" [44]), I felt that I "knew" that the students she focuses on are white even though she does not identify the race of individual students. Not only did I want to know for sure that these resistant students were white, but I also regretted the lost opportunity to publicly identify *some* basic writing students as white. Perhaps race is coded in Spigelman's identification of her focal student, Brian, as "from the working class Frankford section of Philadelphia" (45). For readers familiar with Philadelphia, this identification

may be a code for a white neighborhood, but for most readers, who are not familiar with Philadelphia, this identification leaves race invisible. Is she hiding his race or not specifying it because it's so obvious to her? Since so many of her students are white, is whiteness the default norm that doesn't merit identification?

The omission of race in Spigelman's description of her students' resistance to identifying with the students Mike Rose describes in *Lives on the Boundary* is particularly striking when she compares her students to the students in a study by Bridget Murphy and Roberta Pierce Trooien and mentions twice, in the space of two sentences, that Murphy and Trooien's subjects are white male students (48). While this leads me to assume that Brian and his classmates are white, there is no way I can know that for sure.

Colorblindness is particularly perplexing when it occurs in an article, such as Eric Miraglia's "A Self-Diagnostic Assessment in the Basic Writing Course" (1995), in which the author explicitly touts the value of knowing all we can about students' subjectivities, but then doesn't reveal their race. Miraglia declares in the opening paragraph of the article that knowing where students are "within the matrices of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation" provides "valuable information relevant to a writing teacher's task" (48-49). But after making this declaration, Miraglia goes on to report on a case study involving two students' self-diagnostic assessments and doesn't identify their race or sexual orientation. He does give a long biographical introduction of each student, including their work, school, and writing histories, and he does tell us that they are native speakers of English, but race is kept invisible. Similarly, Linda Adler-Kassner in "Just Writing, Basically: Basic Writers on Basic Writing" (1999) refers approvingly to Peter Mortenson's argument against using student participants anonymously in composition research without noting that she is following just such a practice by using pseudonyms and keeping her subjects' race invisible in her article. Like Miraglia, Adler-Kassner, in this analysis of interviews with two students, Tom and Susan, gives readers a wealth of biographical detail on each student, including their parents' employment status, literacy practices, and education as well as the students' school and home literacy practices, but not their race. Both students are described as "from inner-ring suburbs of Detroit" ("Just" 72) and perhaps someone from the Detroit area could read that description as a code for race. But why would Adler-Kassner choose to leave race coded when she carefully decodes Tom's report that his father worked at "Ford's," a construction that she explains indicates a blue-collar position since professional employees call the company "Ford" ("Just" 87)? The absence of race

is highlighted by the amount of detail about other aspects of these students' social positioning in these articles. In both Miraglia's and Adler-Kassner's articles, it appears that the discursive practice of colorblindness negates the authors' intentions to fully explore their students' social identities.

Dominant discursive practices are those ways of speaking and writing that dominant class members "experience as natural, normal, inevitable, and unremarkable" because they intuitively feel right (Stygall 321). The authors cited above left race out of their descriptions because it felt like the right thing to do. Conversely, putting a racial label on teachers and/or students, if even considered by these authors, felt wrong, gratuitous, perhaps even risky. In addition to keeping race invisible because it doesn't feel right to make it visible, the authors of student-present articles sometimes face special circumstances that make revealing race feel acceptable or unacceptable due to the context itself. It appears that the context of discussing ESL students is one in which making race visible seems acceptable. On the other hand, a context in which personal details about the student(s) might lead the audience to racially stereotype is one in which making race visible seems particularly unacceptable. Similarly, a context in which the author is discussing students' deficits or their status as outsiders risks the reading that the author is racially stereotyping and thus signals the need for colorblindness. Several examples of making the race of ESL students visible and keeping invisible the race of students who might be racially stereotyped can be found in these student-present articles.

The authors of articles in which students are non-native speakers of English seem to have less hesitation about revealing their race. When there is a mixture of non-native and native speakers in the same article and the authors mention the race or ethnicity of individual students only when it is relevant to students' multiple languages, then some students in the article are identified racially while others are not, creating an uncomfortable imbalance. Articles that follow this practice, which include Howard Tinberg's "Teaching in the Spaces Between: What Basic Writers Can Teach Us" (1998) and Jim Cody's "The Importance of Expressive Language in Preparing Basic Writers for College Writing" (1996), reveal that the risk of making race visible may be somehow neutralized by linguistic difference. In another example of this practice of partial colorblindness, Diana Becket in her 2005 article, "Uses of Background Experience in a Preparatory Reading and Writing Class: An Analysis of Native and Non-native Speakers of English," compares the classroom experiences of three native English-speaking students with three non-native students who are from India and are native speakers of Punjabi.

Becket identifies the race of the Indian students but not of the native speakers of English. When readers are told a large amount of information about Rahul, Vijay, and Meera's racial, linguistic, educational, and immigration backgrounds while only being informed of the educational histories of Marian, John, and Ian, the treatment of the students in this article seems unbalanced.

Colorblindness comes into play when authors seek to shield the student research participants from racial stereotyping by the article's readers. In Jim Cody's article, he discusses three students, Maika, Lydia, and Anthony. Maika is an ESL student and Cody identifies her racially as a Latina (97), following the pattern discussed above. Lydia and Anthony are native speakers of English. Cody describes Lydia as a student whose "writing changed as a result of a growing awareness of the power behind her marginality . . . [and] the political, social, and economic reasons for her marginality" (102), but does not give the specifics of her marginal social position. Perhaps Cody keeps Lydia's race invisible to protect her from his audience's projection of racial stereotypes since, in the writing excerpts that Cody includes in the article, Lydia reveals personal information that might activate stereotypes of nonwhite unwed mothers on welfare. Similarly, Cody does not identify Anthony's race when describing him as a survivor of "the pain, temptation, and danger that go with being raised in the inner city" (105). However, he does identify Anthony as an African-American later in the article when describing the increasing power of his written expression (107).

In another situation in which colorblindness comes to the fore, authors of student-present articles who employ a discourse of deficit, in which they construct students as inferior or alien to college culture, have a further reason to keep race invisible. In these student-present articles from the *Journal of Basic Writing*, there is little evidence of the construction of students, whether or not their race is visible, as inferior, supporting Adler-Kassner's contention that the field has found "a way of talking about basic writers and their abilities [that] works against the deficit model" ("Just" 76). However, those authors who do construct students as deficient or alien, such as Anmarie Eves-Bowden and Ann Tabachnikov, may keep race invisible in order to avoid the appearance of stereotyping students of a particular race as either intellectually inferior or as permanent outsiders to the academy.

In her teacher-research project, described in the article "What Basic Writers Think About Writing" (2001), Eves-Bowden interviewed seven of her basic writing students about their writing processes and abilities. While she doesn't identify the students' races and tells us that the students' names

are pseudonyms (75), she assigns first and last names that suggest whiteness (Colleen O'Brian, Jennifer Parson) while others suggest nonwhiteness (Adam Sarzefhed, Monica Cortez). According to Eves-Bowden, none of these were ESL students (75).

In her discussion of the students' self-assessments, Eves-Bowden emphasizes the students' writing problems, seeing them as less able than they see themselves. For Cortez, Eves-Bowden says, "I sense she needs help with a much wider range of problems than she acknowledges" (77), following this declaration with a list of nine of Cortez's writing weaknesses. With Sarzefhed, she hypothesizes that "either laziness or time constraints" account for his writing weakness (79). "Lazy" is a key word indicating the construction of the student as inferior. Only Jennifer Parsons is praised for her writing efforts as "a conscientious worker, steady and determined" (80). If Eves-Bowden had identified the races that may be encoded in the pseudonyms she employs, her discourse of deficit would appear to uphold racial hierarchies by constructing nonwhite students as lazy and less competent while at least one white student is constructed as a superior writer and student.

Tabachnikov, who, in "The Mommification of Writing Instruction: A Tale of Two Students" (2001) does not identify students' race, consequently runs no risk of being read as racist when she constructs her focal student as an outsider who is not yet ready "to commit to being a [college] student" (31). Colorblindness allows her to discuss an "outrageous" example of this student's immature behavior without risking an accusation that she is constructing nonwhite students as "regressing to some kind of third grade mindset" and thus behaving as outsiders to college culture (29).

Conclusion

Making race visible in scholarly writing, particularly in classroom-based research in which students and teachers are present, can help basic writing teachers to reflect on the implications of difference. Perhaps someday we can disregard race as an identity feature, but that day will only come when we have dismantled the present racist social structure. As Toni Morrison says in *Playing in the Dark*, "[t]he world does not become raceless nor will it become unracialized by assertion" (46).

In the eleven volumes of the *Journal of Basic Writing* investigated (14-24), only two of the students whose race was mentioned were identified as white, a student in Catherine Matthews Pavia's "Issues of Attitude and Access: A Case Study of Basic Writers in a Computer Classroom" and another

in Hannah Ashley and Katy Lynn's "Ventriloquism 00r: How to Throw Your Voice in the Academy." This finding supports the contention that basic writer status and nonwhiteness are too often conflated, but it should not discourage basic writing teacher-researchers from representing race in their scholarly articles. Unless basic writing scholars work against prevailing discursive practices to identify both whites and nonwhites as raced bodies, they will miss opportunities to counter the assumption that all basic writers are nonwhite.

Teachers' bodies are also read as racial texts in the classroom. Whether my white body is read as one of "us" or one of "them," it is read, and the reading affects my relationships with my students. *JBW*'s readers cannot "think more consciously and reflectively about the implications of difference in the classroom" (Royster and Taylor 43) unless teacher and student race is visible. Nor can readers think more consciously and reflectively about the implications of racial sameness without articles where race is visible to help us think about whether we have different expectations and interactions with students who share our racial identities. Attention to the particularities of students' subjectivities and classroom experiences is only valid if it is coupled with an equal attention to teachers' subjectivities, including their race.

If we agree, with Royster and Taylor, that "we are all racialized, gendered, and political subjects in classroom space" (27), then we must enact that understanding by developing an ethic of representation in which authors of articles in the *Journal of Basic Writing* in particular, and basic writing scholars in general, know that it will be acceptable, even expected, that they reveal the races they see in the classroom (preferably as self-identified by the research participants). The "Guidelines for the Ethical Treatment of Students and Student Writing in Composition Studies," approved by the Executive Committee of the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2000, do not give a rationale for making race visible, but rather caution researchers to check their interpretations of students' spoken and written statements, especially "when the students are from a cultural, ethnic, or other group different than their own" (489). The implication of this directive is that white composition specialists should be especially wary when identifying students as nonwhite or interpreting the words of nonwhite students. Such wariness adds weight to the discursive forces that produce colorblindness. But if basic writing is to be, as Deborah Mutnick and many other basic writing teachers wish, "a location in which alliances between teachers and students could subvert the margin-center hierarchy" based on race, class, and gender (xii), then basic writing teacher-researchers cannot afford to indulge

in colorblindness, acting as if race (and other systemic differences) don't matter. Therefore, basic writing teacher-researchers need to understand and resist the discursive forces that prompt them to keep race invisible in their published work. Linda, the student in Stenberg's article, says, "I sometimes feel that society sees us as they once saw children that they should be seen and not heard. Black women are like an invisible race, our voice is not heard enough, and when we began to speak out on issues it is often misunderstood most often in a negative way" (qtd. in Stenberg 43). Such invisibility should be unacceptable in basic writing scholarship, where student identities and voices should be seen and heard in all their complexity.

Note

1. Please note that in some issues there are more student-present articles than indicated on this list. I have not included articles that focus exclusively on ESL/ELL students in my study since those students' issues are so different from the issues of native-born nonwhites, as John Ogbu has shown by distinguishing between the school experiences of voluntary and involuntary minorities (Ogbu and Simon 165). This distinction parallels a difference in composition specialists' ability to talk about student race. Composition scholars can talk about voluntary minorities (second-language writers) and their linguistic and cultural issues; they find it much more difficult to talk about the issues of involuntary minorities, who are native born but racial strangers. As Tom Fox has long argued, composition scholars, through their emphasis on dialect differences, have sought to construct nonwhite students' problems as language-based because that is something about which composition teachers can talk and deal. What can't be talked about are the barriers to access and success based on power, privilege, and racial stratification that impede nonwhite students.

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