

Dialogue as a Tool for Racial Reconciliation: Examining Racialised Frameworks

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In this paper, I draw on my experiences as facilitator of a seven-week intergroup dialogue on race to explore the role of dialogue as a tool for racial reconciliation, particularly in the context of domestic U.S. race relations. Additionally, I examine and raise questions about the cultural frameworks and assumptions that shape dialogue processes and methodologies: is the dialogue framework (as a conflict resolution tool) inherently racialised? How are power imbalances addressed in a dialogue setting, and how do these power imbalances influence opportunities for racial reconciliation? I posit that the dialogue framework has been constructed through a culturally/racially biased lens that privileges 'White Talk' characteristics, and does not adequately address power imbalances. As power imbalances are not effectively addressed in a dialogue setting, opportunities for genuine and comprehensive racial reconciliation (as defined by leading reconciliation scholars) are limited. Ultimately, I argue that dialogue alone is not enough to reach a genuine and sustainable process for racial reconciliation. Mechanisms to address structural inequality and power disparities at the societal level must be in place together with the interpersonal reconciliation that takes place within dialogue settings.

Keywords: Intergroup Dialogue, racial reconciliation, race relations, power imbalances, white privilege, conflict resolution.

In the autumn of 2008, I co-facilitated a sustained¹ dialogue series entitled, 'Beyond Black and White: Challenging our Assumptions about Race' as part of American University's campus dialogue programme, the Dialogue Development Group (DDG). The dialogue group consisted of American University students (both undergraduate and graduate) with a diversity of racial backgrounds, who were committed to participating in an engaging and challenging conversation about race. The dialogue endeavoured to examine our own racialised experience and assumptions about race in a supportive environment, while learning about the personal experiences of others. As facilitators, my co-facilitator and I strove for a truthful, meaningful look at how race functions in our daily lives.

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- 1 'Sustained dialogue' is a term coined by Harold Saunders. He uses it to describe dialogue series that take place over many months or years. DDG uses this term in quotation marks to indicate the dialogue group's seven-week commitment, but does so in recognition of Saunders' intended meaning for this term.

Over the course of our seven-week dialogue, several major themes surfaced which raised questions for me about the structures and dynamics of race dialogues. In this paper, I draw from my experiences in our DDG dialogue to explore the role of dialogue as a tool for racial reconciliation, particularly in the context of domestic U.S. race relations. Additionally, I examine and raise questions about the cultural frameworks and assumptions that shape dialogue processes and methodologies: is the dialogue framework (as a conflict resolution tool) inherently racialised? How are power imbalances addressed in a dialogue setting and how do these power imbalances influence opportunities for racial reconciliation?

White Privilege

A major theme that emerged during our dialogue was the topic of white privilege. White privilege is defined by Kendall Clark as ‘a right, advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by white persons beyond the common advantage of all others; an exemption in many particular cases from certain burdens or liabilities’ (Clark 1997, 1). In her article, ‘White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,’ now considered a ‘classic’ in anti-racist education, Peggy McIntosh describes the unearned privileges associated with whiteness: ‘As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege which puts me at an advantage.’ (McIntosh 1988, 1)

Over the course of several dialogue sessions, it became clear that most (though not all) of the white participants were aware of the theoretical concept of white privilege at an abstract level, but had not examined this concept at a personal level and had not previously acknowledged the unexamined benefits conferred on them as individuals due to their race. In fact, I believe that despite participating in seven dialogue sessions, most white participants still have much work to do when it comes to a critical look at their own racial privilege. For many participants, our dialogue is the first step on a much longer journey of self-reflective examination regarding racial privilege.

Towards the last few dialogue sessions, a common point made by white participants was, ‘o.k., I see that white privilege exists, and I know it’s a bad thing, but I don’t know what I’m supposed to do about it.’ My co-facilitator and I encouraged, and when necessary, pushed, the white participants to go deeper into their enquiry and ownership of their privilege as a first step toward a truly honest dialogue about race. As a facilitator, I found it interesting to note (my white co-facilitator was particularly frustrated by this point) that in most of our dialogue sessions, the people of colour spoke most often, taking risks in their personal sharing, while white participants did not engage or risk at the same level of emotional vulnerability. At one point, during

a particularly tense dialogue session, my co-facilitator pointed this out: ‘why is it that the white participants are silent on this topic of white privilege?’ My co-facilitator and I saw this as another manifestation of white privilege, the choice not to speak on a topic that is uncomfortable: race. Although white participants offered the theoretical acknowledgement of white privilege, the largely unexamined and ignored aspects of white privilege in their own lives and their defensive ignorance (‘I don’t know what to do’, therefore I won’t do anything), this illustrates a key function of white privilege. Robert Jensen, the author of *The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism and White Privilege*, describes the rationalisation that many of the white dialogue participants made to deflect responsibility on this topic: ‘that’s part of white privilege—the privilege to ignore the reality of a white-supremacist society when it makes us uncomfortable, to rationalize why it’s not really so bad, to deny one’s own role in it. It is the privilege of remaining ignorant because that ignorance is protected’ (Jensen 2005, 10).

Who’s Responsibility?

As a facilitator of colour, I often struggled with ways to explore the concept of white privilege in a racially mixed group. I recognise that people of colour often carry the burden of responsibility (projected and assumed responsibility) when it comes to educating white people about race and racism. Indeed, many of our participants of colour expressed their frustration and exhaustion at constantly playing the role of the articulate and patient educator. Education often comes in the form of participants of colour sharing their personal experiences of race and racism, while white participants listen without offering or sharing experiences at the same level of emotional vulnerability. In an article on race dialogues in Richmond Virginia, Karen Elliot Griesdorf explains, ‘black participants tend to be put in the position of telling their stories, white tend to intellectualize the issue and react with either sympathy or disbelief’ (Griesdorf 2001, 161). In many race dialogue settings with a group of racially mixed participants, white people often benefit most from the conversation, as their awareness of race and the implications of racialised structures deepens (another aspect of white privilege: not to have to think about race unless a white person chooses to) and the people of colour (who, regardless of whether they choose to or not, face race and the implications of racism on a daily basis) leave the conversation feeling that they, yet again, occupy the role of educator, or that they are not being met at the same level of emotional vulnerability. The participants of colour gain little (compared to the white participants) that deepens their own understanding of race and anti-racism.

One particular dialogue session illustrated the challenge of responsibility in addressing issues of race and white privilege: a white participant said, ‘I don’t see any purpose to having a group of white people talk about race. We need

people of colour there to tell us about their experience, or what's the point?' His comment triggered an angry response from a participant of colour, who said: 'So it's my responsibility to teach you about race?!' Several of the participants of colour expressed frustration with the assumed responsibility that they felt was projected onto them by the white participants, to teach the white participants about race. I found this equally problematic, as the assumption was that the participants of colour were the 'experts' on all matters relating to race. This assumption leaves no room for personal exploration and critical reflection (for the participants of colour) of the nuances of race beyond a black vs. white binary construction. I felt there were certainly assumptions and issues of racism within and between communities of colour that could be explored further if the expectation of being an 'expert' on the topic of race relations were not present. Below is an excerpt from some candid evaluation feedback that we received from a participant of colour, which highlights the racialised dynamics in the dialogue circle and the unequal experience between white participants and participants of colour:

That dialogue group was not for the people of colour in the room. It was for the white people. I was asked to parade my pain around, like I'm some goddamned museum piece, so that white people could realize what their privilege really means. I did not volunteer for that and, frankly, it pissed me the fuck off. I almost didn't come back. I just want you to know what you are asking when you ask me to parade my pain so that others might suffer less. Race hurts for me. And, honestly, the black part of me didn't get anything out of that dialogue. It was not for me.

I grappled with how to create a dialogical environment that would equally benefit all participants in terms of their personal growth and learning. I am still left wondering how to create and facilitate this sort of dialogue, which effectively engages participants who are at very different places in their understanding of race and racial dynamics. My co-facilitator and I tried several specific dialogue methods and processes (race-based educational activities, 'fishbowl' exercises). However, these activities seemed to be unbalanced and ineffective in addressing the foundational power imbalance between dialogue participants (on the basis of individual racial awareness and structural issues of racial oppression and racial privilege) who were present in the dialogue. As I grappled with this challenge, I began to ask questions about the structural dynamics of interracial dialogues and the unexplored assumptions of dialogue frameworks.

A Culturally/Racially Informed Dialogue Lens

In their book, *Courageous Conversations About Race*, Glen Eric Singleton and Curtis Linton describe the challenges of facilitating interracial dialogue groups on race: 'historically and still to some degree today, racial discourse in the United States is

governed by the parameters of the dominant white population' (2005, 121). People of colour in the U.S. know more about white culture (because of the structural and institutional dominance of white culture) than white people know of communities of colour. This creates an inherent imbalance in power and information in any dialogue about race.

In their research on interracial dialogue groups, Singleton and Linton have identified eight patterns of characteristics that are common to white participants and participants of colour, which they label 'White Talk' and 'Color Commentary' (2005, 123):

| <i>White Talk</i> | <i>Color Commentary</i> |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| -Verbal | -Nonverbal |
| -Impersonal | -Personal |
| -Intellectual | -Emotional |
| -Task oriented | -Process oriented |

The authors don't imply that *all* white people, or *all* people of colour, behave according to these patterns that are based on their racial affiliation, but these characteristics typically emerge as patterns of racial discourse in interracial dialogue settings. Singleton and Linton's characterisation of communication patterns in interracial dialogues reflects my own observations in facilitating race dialogues, where participants of colour expressed emotional vulnerability in their sharing of personal stories, whereas white participants tended to intellectualise those of their experiences that were related to race and racism.

Singleton and Linton's research identifies valuable patterns in interracial dialogue, but their findings also raise some important questions about the dialogue framework itself. They suggest that without careful monitoring and intervention, 'all four characteristics of White Talk will be dominant in the dialogue' (Singleton 2005, 122) because of the over-representation of white dialogue educators and facilitators. I suggest that, beyond the racial affiliation of dialogue facilitators, the dialogue framework itself has been constructed within a cultural framework that privileges 'White Talk' characteristics. In my experiences in participating and facilitating dialogues (particularly dialogues on race), I began to ask: is the dialogue process and methodology inherently racialised? What assumptions are being made about dialogue as a conflict resolution framework, and which cultural/racial lenses inform the foundational notions of dialogue? In order to address these questions, I turn now to an exploration of dialogue as a conflict resolution process.

Dialogue–Racialised Assumptions

Intergroup dialogue, as described by David Schoem and Sylvia Hurtado, is a form of ‘democratic practice, engagement, problem solving, and education involving face-to-face, focused, facilitated, and confidential discussions occurring over time between two or more groups of people defined by their different social identities’ (Schoem and Hurtado 2001, 6). Schoem and Hurtado go on to say that ‘intergroup dialogue is a positive and powerful process in which different groups come together to discuss issues of community and conflict’ (15). Dialogue, at its foundation, is thus a form of intergroup understanding and conflict resolution. Dialogue has increasingly become recognised as a method and process in the International Conflict Resolution field (Saunders 2001). Amy Hubbard describes dialogue as a ‘form of conflict resolution aimed at bringing ordinary people together at the grassroots level for discussion and possible reconciliation’ (Hubbard 2001, 275).

David Bohm, who is frequently seen as a founding thinker of dialogue processes, outlines several logistical guidelines for dialogue. According to Bohm, dialogue takes place in a circle, involves direct communication and is inherently a verbal engagement where a group creates a ‘common consciousness.’ Bohm also underlines the importance of giving space in dialogue for each person to talk (no interrupting) and where emotions like anger and fear are suspended in order to move towards collective understanding. Hubbard describes the aim of dialogue as to provide: ‘a safe space where participants can work through carefully structured confrontation with each other’ (Hubbard 2001, 275). She continues, saying that dialogue and similar conflict resolution methods involve: ‘bringing people together to talk about the complexities of a situation in a quiet, safe place where they can confront each other successfully, work through that confrontation together and then formulate a plan for peace’ (Hubbard 2001, 279).

Bohm and Hubbard’s descriptions of dialogue include several core assumptions: 1. Dialogue participants sit together in a circle; 2. Dialogue is a verbal and direct form of communication; 3. Dialogue is structured within a safe, quiet space. Verbal, as opposed to non-verbal communication, quiet and safe (which seem to be synonymous with controlled or quickly transformed emotions), as opposed to loud and emotionally expressive, are the key factors that are privileged in a dialogue setting. Additionally, there is an assumption that all participants are equal in their ability and in their expectation to contribute to a collective dialogue process. This is underscored by the expectation that participants will give space to one another to speak, without interrupting. Many of these assumptions are problematic. Returning for a moment to Singleton and Linton’s findings regarding eight key patterns for white participants and participants of colour in race dialogues, we see that the main assumptions of dialogue (as outlined by Bohm, Hubbard, and others)

privilege the 'white talk' category of patterned dialogue: verbal, impersonal, task oriented. Cultural/racial bias is thus embedded in dialogue as a communication framework, based on the core assumptions that are outlined in the explicit goals of dialogue processes. When viewed through a non-Western and/or a non-white lens, dialogue may demonstrate very different structural foundations: non-verbal forms of communication, moving together in dynamic space, as opposed to being stationary and static (seated), loudly expressive, as opposed to quiet and polite. Additionally, when analysed from an intercultural communications framework, the assumptions underlying the foundations of dialogue processes highlight key assumptions regarding high and low context communication styles. Low context cultures, as Edward T. Hall describes them, display meaning through direct forms of verbal communication, whereas high context cultures value indirect and often non-verbal forms of communication (Hall 1976). Current dialogue frameworks and methodologies fall within a low context framework. Dialogue participants who locate themselves within high context cultural frameworks are therefore at an inherent disadvantage in dialogue settings.

I believe a more in depth study of the culturally and racially embedded assumptions in dialogue methodologies is important, and is needed in order to advance our understanding of the value of dialogue in settings of racial reconciliation. Additionally, I suggest further research be conducted in the area of racial and cultural bias within dialogue frameworks, research that includes an anti-racist critique of dialogue. For the purposes of this paper, I will not expand on the research that is needed to apply a comprehensive anti-racist critique of dialogue. Rather, I hope to offer questions in an attempt to explore and problematise some of the underlying assumptions of commonly used dialogue frameworks.

Power Disparities within Dialogue

The assumption that all dialogue participants are equal in their role as participants in a collective dialogue process is a common assumption in many forms of conflict resolution, and particularly in mediation and negotiation (Fisher and Ury 1991). In their book, *Intergroup Dialogue*, Schoem and Hurtado state the assumed equality within dialogue processes explicitly: 'within the confines of the dialogue, all participants have equal status' (Schoem and Hurtado 2001, 16). However, I believe this assumption is limiting and perhaps even detrimental in a dialogue process relating to race and race relations. Within the structures of U.S. race relations there exist deeply embedded notions of racial hierarchy, such that participants are *not* equal in their structural access or in the privileges afforded to them that are based on their racial background. Although it might be possible to achieve a sense of equality among individuals within a dialogue circle, I find it somewhat dishonest to premise a dialogue on a sense of equality when inherent power imbalances

and structural inequalities continue to exist outside the dialogue circle. What happens when dialogue participants leave the circle and return to their homes and communities? Does dialogue, in fact, do a disservice to the 'minority' communities by attempting to equalise the dialogue space when, in the 'real world' outside the dialogue where power imbalances and discrimination will continue? In this regard, dialogue fails to directly and adequately address the power imbalances between racial identity groups. Participants of colour, in the case of race dialogues, will be at a disadvantage. The same DDG participant of colour, quoted earlier, highlights this inherent imbalance in her evaluation feedback:

I think they should have a race dialogue group that is just white people. I really do. I think it's fucked up to pretend like the dialogue is for everybody and then have it really just be about educating white folks. I think to have people of color there is reductionist, and oppressive, and sadistic.

This participant's feedback illustrates a frustration faced by many dialogue participants of colour who enter a dialogue setting that structurally perpetuates an unequal power dynamic.

Jonathan Kuttab, a West Bank human rights lawyer, describes some of the limitations of dialogue in regard to power disparities. His findings derive from his work in Israel and Palestine, but can be applied to racial dialogue in the U.S. As Reena Bernards notes, 'Kuttab states that a key pitfall in dialogue is the assumption of a false symmetry between groups where there is actually a large power imbalance. The basic condition of the oppressor and the oppressed is ignored and members of the group are subtly pressured into an acceptance of the status quo' (Bernards 2000, 197). In his article, 'Conflict Resolution Approaches: Western and Middle Eastern Lessons and Possibilities,' Mohammed Abu-Nimer describes some of the assumptions in Western conflict resolution approaches and frameworks (Abu-Nimer 1996). As dialogue has emerged from a Western model of conflict resolution frameworks, his analysis is valuable in examining the shortcomings of dialogue to address power disparities. Abu-Nimer describes the assumption that conflict resolution 'can benefit both parties, and has the potential to satisfy conflicting interests and needs of the parties, particularly those of the underdog parties' (Abu-Nimer 1996, 39). As I have previously noted, the assumption that conflict resolution methods (in the case of dialogue) equally benefit 'both parties' in a conflict (particularly the party with least power), does not hold true. Abu-Nimer goes on to say that: 'the Western model calls for a direct method of interaction and communication. Also the language of emotions and values is perceived as an obstacle to reaching an agreement' (Abu-Nimer 1996, 40). In the case of dialogue that takes place in the West that addresses U.S. domestic race relations, Western models (namely, models developed through a white cultural lens) privilege white participants to normalise

a white cultural communication pattern over the communication patterns that Singleton and Linton describe as ‘Color Commentary.’

In a chapter entitled ‘Understanding Majority and Minority Participation in Interracial and Interethnic Dialogue,’ Amy Hubbard argues that majority and minority dialogue participants have different perceptions of dialogue and use dialogue groups differently to pursue their respective goals.² She suggests that the difference in the perception of dialogue has to do with the different power dynamics between minority and majority participants, the structural inequalities between participants, and their interest in peace and social justice. She posits that: ‘majorities are more likely to use the conflict resolution frame when describing race relations. Minorities are more likely to use the social justice frame’ (Hubbard 2001, 282). The conflict resolution frame, according to Hubbard: ‘suggests equality between the participants, in that everyone must change in some way in order to bring about peaceful race relations.’ She continues to say that the social justice frame suggests that: ‘peaceful race relations can be best achieved if those in power change their ways and justice is secured for minorities’ (Hubbard 2001, 283). Minority participants (participants of colour) thus enter a dialogue with an expectation of social change and/or political action as a result of the dialogue process. Majority participants (white participants), on the other hand, enter a dialogue in the hope of meeting and communicating with people different from themselves. They tend to view the dialogue process as a useful process in itself, without an expectation of change to social structures outside the dialogue. Hubbard’s argument rings true with my experience of the DDG race dialogue; white participants saw value in meeting new people of different racial backgrounds, whereas the participants of colour wanted to see tangible social change. In fact, during our last dialogue in the closing go-around, one of the participants of colour specifically asked the group to share the tangible and concrete action towards social change that they were going to commit to as a result of their dialogue experience. If white dialogue participants and participants of colour enter a dialogue setting with different goals, and enter into a process that has an inherent cultural/racial bias, how effective is such a process for racial reconciliation?

Racial Reconciliation – Applying Theory to Practice

According to scholars in Peace and Conflict Resolution, Reconciliation is, by most accounts, a process of redefining relationships between conflictual parties to move from what was primarily a destructive relationship to one that is primarily constructive. At its core, reconciliation processes, according to Andrew Rigby,

2 ‘Majority’ refers to participants whose people or community occupy a position of power, while ‘minority’ refers to participants whose people or community carry less power.

involve: 'the preparedness of people to anticipate a shared future. For this to occur they are required not to forget but to forgive the past, and thus be in a position to move forward together' (Rigby 2001, 12).

John Paul Lederach defines reconciliation as both a perspective and a social phenomenon that seeks to create an encounter where people can focus on their relationship and share their perceptions, feelings, and experiences with one another, with the goal of creating new perceptions and a shared experience (Lederach 1997, 30). Lederach's framework of reconciliation outlined in *Building Peace, Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, focuses on the development of reconciliation through four key concepts: truth, mercy, justice and peace. In the case of racial reconciliation, the same elements of truth, mercy, justice and peace remain key elements in ongoing reconciliation processes.

In the U.S. context, interracial dialogue regarding race relations has long been a process to achieve greater intergroup understanding and empathy. More recently, the concept of dialogue as a tool for racial reconciliation, with an awareness that moving beyond intergroup understanding towards racial reconciliation is imperative to heal the wounds of racism and racial oppression, has begun to take root. Hope in the Cities is a pioneer in recognising the value of applying dialogue as a means of reaching racial reconciliation and justice (Greisdorf 2001). Abu Nimer argues that dialogue is an influential means for reaching sustainable reconciliation between conflicting groups: 'carrying out or engaging in a genuine dialogue is a necessary condition for parties to reconcile their relationships' (Abu-Nimer 2001, 341).

In applying the reconciliation theory to the DDG race dialogue, many white participants began a journey towards reconciliation (at an individual level) during their dialogue experience. For many of the white participants, the DDG race dialogue was the first time they had considered the concept of white privilege. One participant said, 'I have never heard of this before, let alone thought about how it relates to my life as a white person.' Through the course of the dialogue, she deepened her understanding of structural racism and unexamined racial privilege. Ultimately, she chose to re-design a final paper for one of her classes so that she could continue her theoretical and personal exploration of white privilege and racism. Additionally, she has begun to engage her family in conversations about white privilege. Dialogue, as a methodology, has thus helped to raise her awareness (truth) and deepen her capacity for empathic understanding (mercy), aspects of dialogue which are key to any reconciliation process.

I think it is important to note the difference between forms of reconciliation (racial or otherwise) that take place at an individual level versus those that take place at a collective level. There are numerous documented cases of racial reconciliation

taking place at individual and interpersonal levels through the process of dialogue (Schoem and Hurtado 2001). Many dialogue practitioners believe that personal transformation and reconciliation through intergroup dialogue will implicitly lead to change at a societal level (Schoem and Hurtado 2001). However, in the realm of Peace and Conflict Resolution, peace practitioners must be intentional in applying dialogue as a process for reconciliation at a collective, community or societal level, beyond implicitly assuming that greater interpersonal understanding across racial groups will generate societal change. Racial reconciliation approaches at a collective, societal level carry different methodological dynamics than interpersonal reconciliation approaches.

As mentioned, there are many cases in which racial reconciliation has taken place in intergroup dialogue settings through personal and interpersonal transformation. Yet racial reconciliation at a societal level will remain elusive if structural and institutionally oppressive systems remain in place. The process of achieving racial reconciliation at a collective level and moving toward social justice, social change, and addressing power disparities thus remains the core challenge in interracial dialogues about race. This challenge continues to be especially relevant when, as I have previously discussed, cultural/racial bias is embedded within dialogue frameworks. As Abu-Nimer reminds us, 'reconciliation is associated with the value of symmetry and equality. The outcome of a reconciling interaction ought to promote full and unconditional equality between the parties' (Abu-Nimer 2001, 246). Genuine, sustainable racial reconciliation is thus not possible if symmetry and equality do not exist at both an individual and collective level. Given the assumptions that are at the core of dialogue frameworks and processes, achieving racial reconciliation (not that racial reconciliation can be achieved as an end goal, indeed, it is an ongoing process and state of being) requires additional methodologies. Dialogue alone, as a tool for racial reconciliation, will not ultimately address a core component of reconciliation: equality effectively.

Conclusion

Through this paper, I have drawn from my experiences in facilitating a DDG dialogue on race to explore and problematise the underlying assumptions and challenges within dialogue frameworks. There are several key assumptions that shape dialogue processes and methodologies; assumptions that I believe are racialised. I suggest that the dialogue framework has been constructed through a culturally/racially-biased lens that privileges 'White Talk' characteristics. Additionally, dialogue processes highlight key assumptions regarding high and low context communication styles, current dialogue frameworks and methodologies fall within a low context framework. Dialogue participants who locate themselves within high context cultural frameworks are therefore inherently at a disadvantage in dialogue

settings. Such disadvantage mirrors the power imbalance that exists outside the dialogue setting. As these power imbalances are not directly or adequately addressed in a dialogue setting, opportunities for genuine and comprehensive racial reconciliation (as defined by leading reconciliation scholars) are limited. Ultimately, I believe that dialogue plays an important role in the process of racial reconciliation at an interpersonal level, particularly in the context of domestic U.S. race relations. However, dialogue alone is not enough to reach a genuine and sustainable process of racial reconciliation, symmetry and equality need to exist at both an individual and collective level. Mechanisms to address structural inequality and power disparities at the societal level must therefore be in place in addition to the interpersonal reconciliation that takes place within dialogue settings. As processes and methodologies for reconciliation at both a collective, societal level and at an individual/interpersonal level are unique, peace practitioners must be intentional in applying specific mechanisms and processes for reconciliation that are mutually supportive of the overarching goal of racial reconciliation.

I believe a more in depth study of the culturally and racially embedded assumptions in dialogue methodologies is needed to advance our understanding of the value of dialogue in settings of racial reconciliation. Additionally, I suggest the application of an anti-racist critique of dialogue as a future area of study and research.

Through my experiences in facilitating intergroup dialogue, I have seen the possibilities for greater intergroup understanding and personal transformation, particularly regarding racial assumptions and biases. I offer my critique of the power imbalances and the racialised assumptions within dialogue frameworks to deepen our collective understanding of dialogue methodologies. In so doing, I hope to highlight the need for additional thinking and research in order to strengthen the applicability of dialogue as a valuable tool in conflict resolution and reconciliation processes.

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