

The Dynamics of Contact:
Engaging Optimal Intergroup Conditions and Communication Practices to Lead Interracial
Conversations about Race

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A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2023

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
Communication

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Abstract

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Amidst a U.S. sociopolitical climate of interracial tension and unrest due to systemic inequity between white and Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, social justice organizations bring members of diverse communities together to talk about race, racial inequity, and injustice. Such social contact can be the site of reduction in prejudice toward other groups (Allport, 1954), and having a facilitator guide these conversations has been found to be an important part of making these conversations more effective in bridging group divides (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001). Scholars (e.g., Gaertner, 1996; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001; Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001) have theorized which conditions and communication practices are expected to support positive intergroup

contact, but they have not looked at what occurs when enacting them. Instead, previous research has emphasized the characteristics and outcomes of these conditions and communication practices. This dissertation examines the dynamics that facilitators describe when implementing both in communities. As conversations about topics like race are often complex, fraught, yet crucial to bridging divides, it is important to understand the realities of enacting the conditions and communication practices meant to support these conversations. Facilitators in this study described the dynamics involved in implementing seven conditions and six communication practices aimed, specifically, at creating a container for dialogue that supports participants in recognizing their shared humanity and disrupts negative racial assumptions.

Keywords: interracial communication, intergroup communication, contact hypothesis, dual identity model, intergroup dialogue

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale

U.S. Americans are in a sociopolitical moment saturated with issues of race and racial inequity. This moment was catalyzed in May of 2020 when George Floyd was killed by Derek Chauvin, a police officer who was later convicted of Floyd's murder. The verdict was an inflection point for the U.S. following numerous police acquittals that created calls for justice surrounding police brutality against Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). The conviction also occurred near the end of the racially tension-filled presidency of Donald Trump, who gave greater viability to groups of white supremacists with far-right ideologies (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2021). Trump's presidency ended amidst a social climate reverberating from racial prejudice in electoral politics, the continued mass incarceration of BIPOC, and rising racially motivated hate crimes (Bonilla-Silva, 2018), all exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Politicians like Governor Ron DeSantis in Florida endorse and perpetuate racial injustice and inequity by advocating for bills, such as the Stop the Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees (W.O.K.E.) act, to eliminate education and communication about race and identity.

In contrast to initiatives meant to stifle communication about race and racial history, a subset of people in the U.S., often with the help of community initiatives, are engaging in intergroup conversations about race to increase awareness of racial inequities, bolster empathy for members of other groups, and, in some cases, form coalitions for change in communities across the country (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001). These dialogues seek to, as Walsh (2007) writes, "revitalize the notion of citizens as active producers of civic life rather than as passive consumers of it" (p. 35). Examples of organizations that engage in such efforts are the Alluvial Collective, Coming to the Table, The Emmett Till Interpretive Center, and Huayruro.

Such conversations are led typically by facilitators who work for the organizations. When facilitators engage with communities to build members' critical consciousness (Freire, 1968) around race and society, they are part of intergroup dialogue, a process that Dessel et al. (2006) wrote "has the potential to harness extraordinary power toward the goal of achieving personal and community transformation, conflict resolution, advocacy, and social change" (p. 303). Not confronting these issues, conversely, leaves people at risk of conceptualizing difference as something that weakens democratic anchors and institutions instead of framing it as a means of strengthening and sustaining democracy (Allen, 2023; Stains, 2016; Young & Allen, 2011).

Interracial groups discussing critical issues around race are enacting the premises of Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory, which suggests that bringing people together under optimal conditions can help change the attitudes that they have towards other groups, reducing intergroup prejudice, uncertainty, and anxiety, and increasing intergroup knowledge, empathy, and perspective-taking (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Despite the promising potential of intergroup contact, however, scholars also identify its challenges. Walsh (2007), for example, writes that intergroup dialogues "are far from ideal. They are messy. In them, people attempt to be civil but find it necessary at times to disobey the mantra of 'dialogue, not debate'" (p. 8).

Scholars and practitioners alike posit interracial conversations about race as one of the most difficult conversations in which to engage. Dialogue that centers on sensitive issues of difference such as race is known to create tension, anger, silence, anxiety, and awkwardness among participants (Gayles et al., 2015). Orbe and Harris (2022) write that "some communication scholars believe that communication failures are the norm, especially when you involve people from diverse backgrounds" (p. 17). Scholars have traced this challenge to factors

such as community members' limited experience in interracial contexts and interracial bias (Orbe & Harris, 2022; Rothstein, 2017). As Markus and Moya (2010) write:

[e]ven though race and ethnicity pervade every aspect of our daily life, many of us become deeply uncomfortable whenever the conversation turns to those topics. The discomfort takes a variety of forms and affects people differently...[some] believe that U.S. Americans have not begun to talk seriously about these topics and that no one can understand society without analyzing how race and ethnicity are linked and deeply intertwined with wealth, status, life changes, and well-being in general. (pp. 3-4)

Given its inherent challenges, scholars such as Allport (1954), Pettigrew (1998), and Schoem and Hurtado (2001) have established conditions and communication practices that they suggest can improve communication across and about differences. Each condition (i.e., a conversational norm, such as equal status between groups or dialogue guided by interracial facilitators, implemented by facilitators to structure the conversation so that it reflects the tenets of the organizers) supports underlying communication practices (e.g., self-disclosure, empathic listening, or perspective-taking) that are responsible for the outcomes of intergroup contact (Nagda, 2006; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001).

The processes of implementing these conditions and using these communication practices, however, are not fixed. Intergroup processes are created by, with, and for people. As such, they unfold in unexpected ways (Berger, 2014; Braithwaite et al., 2015; Yeakley, 1998). How individuals interpret, share, and negotiate meanings with others is influenced by their subjective reality, which is shaped by their experiences, knowledge, perspectives, as well as their relational history, dispositional and emotional proclivities, and the context of their interaction

(Berger, 2014). This makes dialogue, and the conditions and communication practices constituting it, like all human interactions: unpredictable.

Despite a general understanding of the complexities of its enactment, intergroup contact research (e.g., Gaertner, 1996; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001; Pettigrew, 1998; Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001) has focused predominately on naming the conditions and communication practices meant to support positive outcomes such as prejudice reduction between participants and determining the outcomes participants experience from intergroup contact (e.g., Aldana et al., 2012; Pettigrew et al., 2011; Yeakley, 1998). That is, most research on intergroup interactions has centered on the “what” rather than the “how” (i.e., the dynamics) of these dialogues. To have a more complete understanding of intergroup contact *as a process*, it is important to reveal what occurs as facilitators create conditions and use and encourage participants to use practices, particularly in potentially challenging interracial conversations about race.

Ideally, this information should come from those working in communities. Allen (2016) writes that the choices we make as a society now will dictate if the nation’s increasing demographic diversity manifests in the future as an “egalitarian majority-minority country” in which current inequalities do not track racial lines or maintain and even worsen our sociopolitical conditions (p. 71). The practices of groups engaging in dialogue around race in communities are particularly important to examine because, as Walsh (2007) argues:

[they constitute] deliberate democracy in action...an attempt by real people in actual communities to confront the difficult public issue of race, and an attempt to enhance civic life in a context of cultural heterogeneity...Taking the time to notice how communities around the country are using dialogues on race can provide valuable insights into how deliberative democracy comes into being. (p. 3)

Walsh notes specifically that when community participants have an opportunity to “listen to and scrutinize each other, they hear that everyday life in their city can vary starkly by race” and begin to define how they want to live together (Walsh, 2007, p. 8; see, also, Allen, 2021).

Although intergroup dialogues typically occur in the specific context of geographic communities, whether a neighborhood, town, city, county, or state, extant research has been situated instead in largely academic and corporate settings primarily due to those institutions’ support and structure for studying intergroup communication processes (Dessel & Rogge, 2008; Frantell et al., 2019). Critical conversations are, however, widespread in community contexts. McCoy and McCormick (2001) assert that “[l]arge-scale democratic discussion is taking hold in hundreds of places, in neighborhoods, small towns, and medium and large-sized cities...diverse coalitions of community groups and individuals are bringing hundreds (and sometimes thousands) of people...to deal with critical issues” (p. 139).

Specifically, people come together in community contexts to dialogue and address pressing societal challenges. According to Walsh (2007):

[those] involved mention similar problems when explaining why they chose to pursue it—intractable race relations, a desire to know their neighbors better, a desire to invigorate participation in civic life...At this point in the history of race relations in the United States, people around the country are finding it necessary to dialogue in order to improve their civic life. (p. 6)

Given that interracial conversations about race are prevalent in communities across the country, the focus of existing research largely in academic or corporate settings limits its findings and applicability (Greisdorf, 2001).

As most communication about such critical issues takes place between members of different groups, living together in communities, who agree or disagree on issues (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001), communities provide the most realistic context to examine how the conditions and communication practices facilitators implement unfold. Moreover, the outcomes of these exchanges have implications for wider societal well-being. Dialogues across difference in communities “achieve something they perceive as necessary in their increasingly heterogeneous towns: improved communication and understanding across racial lines...this is not about individual self-fulfillment, but about concrete community change” (Walsh, 2007, p. 7). Many posit that intergroup dialogue, and specifically interracial dialogue about race in communities, is capable of fostering both (Walsh, 2007).

In these settings, trained intergroup dialogue facilitators are often tasked with creating and implementing conditions and using communication practices to guide the conversations among community members. As such, the facilitators are in an advantageous position to examine and speak to the intergroup dialogue process and how the conditions and communication practices constituting it unfold in the interactions. Moreover, facilitators often work with a multitude of groups over time. They, therefore, have the unique opportunity to experience the dynamics—the processes, setbacks, successes, hurdles—that occur when creating conditions and using communication practices with each group of people over time and social context.

Understanding facilitators’ experience with and observations of the processes involved in creating and implementing intergroup conditions and communication practices in community settings can help reveal the socially constructed and unfolding nature of intergroup contact, adding to our theoretical understanding of intergroup engagement. As well, learning from facilitators’ experiences can help others engage in more strategic, effective, and transformative

contact. Given this, the present research also has practical value in that it can inform assumptions about the best ways to bridge social connections and build the social capital critical for stronger communities and civic life (Allen, 2021) and it can inform the existing methods used—and typically championed—by facilitators engaging in these difficult dialogues (Walsh, 2007).

With these goals in mind, I lay the foundation of this project in the next chapter by first discussing societal discourse that impedes the national conversation about race (i.e., “colorblind” communication). I then detail the individual and societal need for more intergroup communication about race, and the need for research of intergroup communication in community contexts in addition to educational and corporate contexts. Next, I overview the conditions and communication practices scholars and practitioners of intergroup contact have thus far identified as optimal for more effective dialogue. Finally, I detail the role and experiences of facilitators in intergroup discussions and present the research questions I investigate in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Interracial conversations about race are an important moment of intergroup contact. As Schoem and Hurtado (2001) state, “[o]ne of the greatest challenges facing democracy in the United States is for its citizens to learn to live together across their different backgrounds without resorting to inequality, subjugation, and oppression” (p. 2). One way to learn how to co-exist equitably is to engage in dialogue across group differences. But this can be challenging, and there are many impediments to doing so. In this chapter, I examine the discourse of colorblind communication, review scholarship advocating for intergroup relationships (i.e., “bridging ties”), discuss practitioners’ efforts to increase participants’ critical consciousness, examine challenges of engaging in dialogue about race, and review the conditions and practices that arise from theories related to intergroup contact.

The Toll of Colorblind Communication

A significant contemporary obstacle to racial dialogues is colorblind communication. Individuals using colorblind communication avoid addressing the social inequity that generates healthcare disparities, educational barriers, and racial discrimination in employment and the judicial system (Sue, 2015; Tatum, 2017). According to Burke (2018), colorblind communication is an interaction form that became increasingly prevalent as overt racism became less socially acceptable. Colorblind communication, Burke (2018) wrote, “is the most popular way of talking and thinking about race in both major US political parties, in most schools, in our legal system, and in our conversations about race” (p. 2).

Many people encourage a “post-racial” ideology that denotes a society in which racial prejudice and discrimination no longer exist and colorblind discourse by purporting that the U.S. is a meritocratic, egalitarian society that does not need to address racial injustice (Sue, 2015).

Cultural norms, ideologies, and institutions (e.g., banks, governments, housing) reinforce communicative colorblindness by touting equity and meritocracy while engaging in communication practices that erase inequitable realities and constrain the opportunities and well-being of BIPOC (Coates, 2011). Colorblind communication, even when well-meaning, constitutes a fundamentally anti-dialogic communication practice that upholds and affirms the racial status quo and precludes a space where existing systemic inequities can be challenged (McPhail, 2004; Simpson, 2008).

Encouraging Contact

Instead of evading or silencing communication about identity, and specifically race, others advocate for the proliferation of dialogues about difference (e.g., Maxwell et al., 2011; Sue, 2015; Walsh, 2007). Allport (1954) claimed that prejudice is a result of overgeneralizations and assumptions that people make about other groups (i.e., outgroups, which include members not in one's own group) when they have few interactions with outgroup members or little contact under unsupportive conditions. Given this, Allen (2021) and Sue (2015) encourage bringing diverse communities into positive relations. Increasing connectedness among members of society helps cultivate the "bridging ties" necessary for equity and civic engagement (Allen, 2021; Walsh, 2007).

Bridging ties are defined as social connections between people who come from different social spaces and connect across demographic differences and social stratification (Allen, 2021). Societies emphasizing connections across difference are more egalitarian and experience greater health, educational, and economic outcomes (Allen, 2021). Compared to cities without connections across social groups, which often lack intergroup reciprocity and cooperation and

are more vulnerable to intergroup violence, those that engage in civic dialogue about race experience less intergroup conflict (Walsh, 2007).

Connection across difference at the interpersonal and small group level has a unique emancipatory and empowering potential (Dessel & Rogge, 2008). Specifically, communication during community intergroup dialogue is at the “self-other” level which “allows for a measure of direct and immediate feedback that has the potential to challenge people’s otherwise transparent and taken-for-granted assumptions” (DeTurk, 2006, p. 36). Bridging ties as a society requires intergroup dialogue that explores the political and social implications of the social construction of race and racism (Maxwell et al., 2011; Orbe & Harris, 2022; Ramasubramanian et al., 2017; Simpson, 2008; Sue, 2015).

Specifically, it necessitates collectively enacted communication of and about the lived realities of those marginalized (i.e., people denied involvement in economic, political, cultural, and social realms) and greater awareness and action by members of dominant social groups (Sue, 2015; Tatum, 2017). As such, bridging ties requires what Freire (1968) called critical consciousness, which involves “understanding structural oppression, awareness of how structural oppression and systems of power affect different social conditions, and participation in social change movements” (Frantell et al., 2019, p. 674) and is defined as individuals’ ability to understand, intervene in, and change injustices (Zúñiga et al., 2007).

Yet difficulties can arise when people of different races come together. Outside the dialogue context, Shelton et al. (2005), for example, found that BIPOC living in interracial housing reported more negative feelings and had increased concerns of prejudice when paired with a roommate of a different race. Within the dialogue context, BIPOC participants, report experiencing tokenism, discrimination, and disregard during interracial dialogues (Sue, 2015).

BIPOC also share struggling with white peoples' disbelief of their racial experiences and self-positioning as victims to racial animus akin to, or instead of, that experienced by marginalized populations (i.e., "reverse racism"; Livingston, 2021).

Given this, interracial dialogue about race can incite participants' anxiety and encourage social withdrawal (Stephan & Stephan, 2001). Moreover, social power differentials can create a vulnerable position for people of color to express honest thoughts and feelings, and intergroup dialogue is often critiqued as something that rarely leads to tangible actions and change (Schoem et al., 2001; Tatum, 2017). Further, whites tend to have limited knowledge regarding BIPOC's varied communication rules, behaviors, attitudes, feelings, values, and ideologies and thus might rely on stereotypes to guide their communication during intergroup dialogues (Gudykunst, 2004).

Scholars suggest that the combination of white people's overall social separation and unaddressed biases have led, in part, to many reporting a lack of self-efficacy or racial awareness in interracial contexts (Sue, 2015). As such, white participants often express discomfort and defensiveness during interracial dialogues and thus can attempt to dominate or control the conversation (Littleford et al., 2005; Plant & Devine, 2003). Individuals who participate in intergroup dialogue have reported positive outcomes from these exchanges, but the skepticism and inequity that can pervade these spaces are important to note.

Theorizing about and Modeling Intergroup Contact and Its Optimal Conditions

To help make sense of these processes and offer ways to increase the beneficial outcomes and decrease the potential harm of intergroup contact, scholars have worked to explain why societies are often constituted by identity silos (Turner et al., 1979) and discern how diverse communities can bridge their divides (Allport, 1954; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001). Several theories

and models, including Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory, Gaertner's (1996) dual identity model, social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974), and the model of intergroup dialogue, reviewed by Schoem and Hurtado (2001), identify some of the optimal conditions that can be used to address the challenges of intergroup contact and bring about better outcomes (see, also, Gurin et al., 2013; Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001). I discuss each of these in more detail, as they form the basis for many interracial dialogues about race.

Intergroup Contact Theory

In *The Nature of Prejudice*, Allport (1954) introduced intergroup contact theory, the primary theoretical heuristic for much of the scholarship in this area. Allport explained that a paradox of intergroup contact is that prejudice is the result of a lack of contact with members of outgroups (i.e., identity silos) and other times is the outcome of the contact itself (i.e., it can be created from interacting with outgroup members). Allport's intergroup contact theory, also known as the contact hypothesis, is based on the premise that, under optimal conditions, interpersonal contact is an effective way to decrease prejudice between dominant and minoritized groups.

Aware that individual anxiety is especially acute when contact is at the intergroup instead of the interpersonal level, scholars, beginning with Allport, identified situational qualifications that could lead to more favorable contact (Dixon et al., 2005; Durrheim & Dixon, 2005). These *conditions of contact* are thought to be effective because they help individuals engage despite their hesitancy, uncertainty, or anxiety about intergroup contact (Allport, 1954). They are thought to break down "barriers of communication" (Allport, 1954, p. 476) in pursuit of decreasing prejudice and improving attitudes between groups.

Allport and other scholars highlighted, Dixon et al. (2005) wrote, “the importance of contextual prerequisites in promoting meaningful change” (p. 698). Conversational conditions thus helped define criteria for change. Specifically, scholars and practitioners of intergroup contact endeavored to identify what conditions to implement to create a microcosm of harmony amongst those participating in the dialogue (Dixon et al., 2005). These conditions set a standard for the features or characteristics of intergroup interaction most likely to generate desired outcomes (Tal-Or et al., 2002). For example, conditions promoting equal status between groups create an environment that challenges inequitable social norms between dominant and oppressed groups. Pettigrew et al. (2011) clarify that, although equal status among groups might not exist at the social level, it should occur within the specific context of interracial contact with, for example, equal opportunities to participate, make decisions, and receive resources, as well as nonverbal indicators of equity such as sitting face-to-face and at the same level.

Allport (1954) also posits that institutional and social support for intergroup contact is important to cultivate positive intergroup contact. Ideally, the interaction should also be cooperative and not competitive in nature, and participants should share common goals. Additionally, close contact that is prolonged and frequent allows interactions that can, for example, enable intergroup recognition of common interests and the disconfirmation of stereotypes. Pettigrew (1998) extended the optimal conditions of the contact hypothesis by adding an additional condition: the potential to cultivate a friendship or the opportunity for individuals to engage in communication practices to develop relationships. The list of conditions that Allport (1954) and other scholars prescribed serve as a scaffolding for optimal intergroup conversations. These “qualifying conditions,” Harwood (2008) writes, tend “to focus on

structural features of the situation (cooperative task, equal status, potential for future contact)” (p. 2).

Dual Identity Model

Many theories about intergroup contact followed Allport (1954), each forwarding new ideas around intergroup dialogue and the putatively ideal conditions for that contact. In particular, Gaertner et al.’s (1996) dual identity model builds from Allport’s (1954) theory to specify how introducing group membership salience, or explicitly discussing the demographics of those participating the dialogue, at the right time, supports individuals in generalizing their reduced bias for members of other groups to the outgroup population more generally (Tal-Or et al., 2002). In a study investigating intergroup contact between Italians’ and immigrants in Italy, for instance, Voci and Hewstone (2003) found that the combination of positive contact with outgroup members and the well-timed introduction of group membership salience correlated with positive outgroup attitudes and reduced anxiety. Scholars suggest, however, that it is most beneficial as a form of bias reduction when group salience is not introduced too soon, such that intergroup anxiety increases, but also not too late that immediate outgroup members are seen as anomalies or exceptions distinct from others with a shared outgroup identity (Gaertner et al., 1996; Voci & Hewstone, 2003).

This model suggests that intergroup contact reduces intergroup prejudice by leading individuals to incorporate outgroup members into a superordinate group (i.e., one encompassing both ingroup—one’s own group—and outgroup members) that, importantly, does not require individuals to give up their own group identities (e.g., race). Indeed, if group salience is introduced to the group context at an opportune time, individuals can extend their ingroup favoritism to outgroup members and, simultaneously, respect their differences, seeing outgroup

members as both members of valuable cultural sub-groups and as part of a superordinate identity (Gaertner et al., 1996).

Walsh (2007) writes that public dialogue with a plurality of positionalities and perspectives “can create unity by helping people identify common ground such as a shared membership in a ‘new’ or ‘expanded’ social category or collective identity or uncover shared values or principles” (p. 19). Theorists encourage intentional and structured connection across difference to support participants in identifying shared consensus and values.

Social Identity Theory

After Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis, new questions about the possible extensions of intergroup research emerged, specifically promoting social inclusion and pluralistic communities (Nagda et al., 2006). Scholars continued their investigation into the effects and outcomes of diversification, often based in Tajfel’s (1974) social identity theory, which argues that group identities can foster ingroup solidarity. According to the theory, individuals’ social group membership demarcates their sense of identity and separation between self (“us”) and others (“them”). Additionally, people often report feeling less affinity toward those with identities that are disparate from their own in large part because their understandings of outgroup members are shaped by prejudiced cultural understandings (Hurtado, 2001). At the same time, social identity theory contends that marginalized groups might challenge others’ stereotypes and cultivate more empowering images for their own group; in this way, ingroup consciousness and solidarity can be a positive resource for empowerment and action (Gurin et al., 2013).

Although increasing individuals’ cross-group experiences is a strategy to diminish intergroup prejudice, contact under unhelpful conditions or between people who engage in unsupportive communication practices can exacerbate tension and conflict (Barlow et al., 2012;

Tropp & Mallett, 2011). Scholars argue that people coming together with “us” versus “them” mentalities in an inequitable social context in and of itself will not reduce intergroup prejudice, increase individuals’ awareness, or spur collective social justice action (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Tal-Or et al., 2002), but setting conversational conditions can help (Allport, 1954; Nagda, 2006).

Intergroup Dialogue

The study of intergroup dialogue (IGD) grew out of both Allport’s (1954) intergroup contact theory and Tajfel et al.’s (1974) social identity theory. IGD is positioned as an effort to “apply research-based knowledge about group interactions to real-world intergroup situations” (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 12). Intergroup dialogues about race are conversations across and about intergroup racial differences meant to cultivate, not necessarily agreement, but interracial understanding (Gurin et al., 2013). Nagda et al. (2012) write that intergroup dialogue seeks to “engage participants from diverse backgrounds to build relationships and enhance collaborative social justice actions to address intergroup conflicts” (p. 210).

Such dialogues evolved from initiatives and programs designed to improve intergroup relations after the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 outlawing segregation in American schools and again in the late 1980s, as universities were pressed to increase the number of professors of color and courses and programs that address diversity. This focus explains in part why intergroup dialogue research has largely centered on initiatives situated in education (Gurin et al., 2013).

Unlike a conversational debate or discussion, both of which can be oppositional, dialogue is meant to be a collaborative pursuit. “In dialogue, differences are not taken as points of division; rather, they serve as a means to identify assumptions, encourage inquiry, and develop

mutual understanding” (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 29). The IGD process is posited as capable of helping people acknowledge difference, inequities, and conflicts while fostering a capacity for collaboration (Gurin et al., 2013). Facilitators of IDG can achieve this, in part, by modeling deep personal sharing themselves and creating community agreements with the community to ensure each participant can articulate what makes the dialogue supportive and respectful for them (Maxwell et al., 2011).

Individuals engage in IGD with the aim of reducing implicit and explicit bias to foster greater awareness, collaboration, and a critical lens for inequity, oppression, power, and privilege amongst participants. IGD practitioners and scholars (Gurin et al., 2013; Maxwell et al., 2011; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001; Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001) have suggested numerous conditions for effective intergroup contact. Schoem and Hurtado (2001) advocate for the following: an extended commitment from participants to engage in face-to-face intergroup contact in an atmosphere of confidentiality so that the group will likely feel more comfortable with sharing vulnerably. Gurin et al. (2013) writes that IGD practitioners endeavor to understand “identity and inequality, to build relationships with and across differences, and to strengthen collaborative capacity for change” (Gurin et al., 2013, p. 43). To ensure the dialogue and its participants have a capacity for change, facilitators of IGD infuse topics of power and privilege consistently into the conversation. A primary focus of IGD practitioners is promoting positive intergroup relationships in a broader, inequitable, societal context.

Summary

Existing theories of intergroup contact purport that intergroup communication ideally occurs under optimal conditions that support desired, effective outcomes. Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2015) defined intergroup effectiveness as the extent to which socially constructed

meanings are agreed upon by members within and between groups. These meanings help communicators surmount interpersonal barriers to “assign shared meaning to the exchanged communicative behaviors in social contexts,” ultimately achieving “interactional goals such as instrumental and relational goals” (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2015, p. 509). The conditions ascribed by Allport’s (1954) contact theory, Gaertner et al.’s (1996) dual identity model, Tajfel’s (1974) social identity theory, and the model of intergroup dialogue (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001; Zúñiga & Nagda, 2001) emphasize the importance of creating fruitful opportunities for intergroup interaction for people in disparate groups to communicate more effectively and, ideally, develop rapport and mutual trust (Frantell et al., 2019).

Optimal Intergroup Communication Practices

After seeing encouraging results from the conditions derived from these theories, scholars began to raise questions concerning how and why contact, under certain conditions, resulted in more positive outcomes (Hewstone et al., 2014). They suggest that certain *communication practices* operate to support individuals as they learn more about an outgroup, reappraise ingroup norms, change their personal behaviors, and generate affective ties with outgroup members (Pettigrew, 1998). Researchers have specified that such communication behaviors can moderate intergroup contact and elicit more positive outcomes (e.g., Giles et al, 2010; Harwood, 2010; Turner et al., 2007). For example, the effectiveness of intergroup contact depends, Harwood (2010) writes, on “the extent to which participants can manage the flow of interaction to yield desired outcomes of mutual satisfaction” such as learning about outgroup members (p. 163).

Managing the flow of interaction in intergroup settings requires the use of communication forms that support interactions, especially across difference. Thus, scholars promote the identification and use of communication behaviors that support intergroup learning

and exchanges (Turner et al., 2007). Those leading and participating in interracial conversations about race, therefore, must be able to engage in communication practices that best enable them to recognize the messages others are sharing and how their meanings might differ across individuals' lived experiences and current social and cultural environment. In this section, I detail four categories of communication—self-disclosure (including perspective-giving), engaged listening (including perspective-taking), introspection, and emotional expression—that scholars have identified as useful, if challenging, intergroup dialogue practices.

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is the process of sharing intimate or personal information with others. Turner et al. (2007) found that, when individuals engaged in self-disclosure with outgroup members, the outgroup members' trust, empathy, and positive feelings for the discloser increased. When people from different groups share intimate or personal information with others, it can also increase their sense of closeness to one another (Miller, 2002; Swart et al., 2011). Harwood (2008) writes, "increased information refutes simplistic stereotyped notions concerning the outgroup, thus making it unlikely that straightforward negative perceptions of the outgroup can be maintained" (p. 2). As individuals share their experiences and reflections, their disclosures can challenge others' stereotypes and demonstrate their individuality and subjective experiences (Tropp & Mallett, 2011).

One particular form of self-disclosure that is relevant to the intergroup dialogue context is perspective-giving, which is the practice of sharing in a way that makes the speaker "feel heard" during interactions (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). Intergroup communication, according to Schoem and Hurtado (2001), "is not only eye-opening to the listeners...but it is equally valuable to the speakers, who almost always are struck by the difference that is made when another person

actively and seriously listens to one's words" (p. 9). Moreover, Bruneau and Saxe (2012) learned that, when Mexican Americans engaged in perspective-giving while interacting with European Americans, it led to more positive intergroup attitudes.

Engaged Listening

People are often ready to talk, including giving their perspective, but they might be less likely to listen intently to what the speakers have to say (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001). Gurin (2013) wrote "because estranged intergroup relationships are marked by lack of contact and lack of constructive engagement across differences, a primary task of intergroup dialogue is to create engaged interaction" (p. 45). When people listen to others in an engaged way, they endeavor to understand the perspective and experiences of another while withholding judgment (Floyd, 2014). This response is important, as Yeakley (1998) found that participants were likely to feel separated, resentful, and disconnected if their sharing was met with criticism, judgment, or stereotypes from others.

When listening, individuals in intergroup contact can engage in perspective-taking, which is the active consideration of the sharer's perspective, mental state, inner world, feelings, emotions, and subjective experiences (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001; Todd & Galinsky, 2014). As people listen to others' stories, they often "hear echoes of their journeys, their decision points, their struggles, relationships, and joys" (LeBaron & Carstarphen, 1997, p. 355) and identify shared values and beliefs. This process can help participants overlap their understanding of themselves with the sharer and heighten their recognition of intergroup inequities and disparities; it can also increase their willingness to act on behalf of outgroup members (Todd & Burgmer, 2013). Nagda (2006) suggests that when people listen to others' personal stories to learn about them and their disparate lived realities, they engage in the process of appreciating difference. In

support of this, Bruneau and Saxe (2012) found that the more effectively an Israeli or Palestinian participant summarized their outgroup partner's communications, a form of perspective-taking, the more positively the speakers' attitudes changed toward the outgroup member.

Introspection

Even though anxiety and uncertainty are common among participants of intergroup contact, especially for people engaging in interracial conversations about race (Sue, 2015), to be effective, conversations about and across difference require participants to be “cognitively, effectively, and behaviorally flexible and agile in attuning to each other's identity signals (and instrumental goals)” by, for example, remaining “mindfully attune in contrasting meanings of the symbols in different socio-cultural contexts and interpret its meaning accordingly” (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2015, p. 510).

Scholars describe introspection as a way for people to identify and grapple with their unconscious or deeply embedded feelings and beliefs. Maxwell et al. (2011) share that intergroup experiences that involve self-exploration can help conversational participants examine their thoughts and the roots of those thoughts. They recommend *critical* introspection, specifically, which involves reflecting on the “interconnected nature of structural racism with internalized dominance and internalized oppression” (Maxwell et al., 2011, p. 190; Nagda, 2006). This practice also allows people to examine and understand their positionality in society, especially in the context of societal inequity (Schoem et al., 2001).

Emotional Expression

Just as is true for anxiety and uncertainty, emotions can lead people to withdraw from intergroup conversation. But, just as does introspection, attending to and expressing their own and others' feelings can also enable better understanding and connection with outgroup members

(Sue, 2015). Given these dual outcomes, it is not surprising that scholars differ on the degree of emotion they believe should be included in conversations about race.

Livingston (2021) asserts that emotional expression can be productive if feelings do not derail a conversation. Following the murder of George Floyd, for example, interracial “sessions were 30 percent facts and 70 percent feelings, because people just wanted to process their emotions” (p. 142). Generally, however, Livingston suggests that participants shift their value and opinion judgments to testable, reputable statements that rely on science, data, and observable experience. Conversely, Sue (2015) argues that attempts to limit the expression of emotions leads to detrimental outcomes. Successful race talk, in this view, “must allow for the free expression of nested and impacted feelings, acknowledge their legitimacy and importance in dialogues, and be deconstructed so their meanings are made clear” (Sue, 2015, p. 144). In both of these views, it is clear that emotional expression may occur in interracial conversations about race. How it is engaged as a practice is, however, less clear.

Summary

Scholars assert that effective contact can enable intergroup dialogue participants to begin to include outgroup members in their conceptions of themselves (Aaron et al., 1991; Wright et al., 1997). Including the outgroup as a part of one’s conception of themselves, however, requires communication practices including self-disclosure—including providing one’s own perspective—and engaged listening—involving perspective-taking—by the community collective. Additional communication practices that have been found to increase the benefits of intergroup contact include offering opportunities for introspection and, potentially, the expression of emotions.

The Dynamics of Intergroup Conditions and Communication Practices of Facilitated Intergroup Contact in Community Settings

Intergroup research has largely centered on determining the best structural conditions for dialogue as well as some specific practices in which people engage (the “what” of optimal intergroup contact). Intergroup contact is, however, by definition a communicative event and “specific communication processes might yield different outcomes” (Harwood, 2008, p. 2). Yet, scholars who have identified optimal conditions and communication practices do not typically describe what unfolds when people engage with those conditions and practices. As such, what in this dissertation calls the *dynamics* of enacting the conditions of effective intergroup dialogue and the dynamics of specific communication practices are less understood (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001).

An edited volume by Schoem and Hurtado (2001) is an example of noting what conditions and practices are useful but not really addressing what occurs when they are implemented. The collection includes 12 case studies of intergroup dialogue initiatives in schools, communities, and corporate workplaces and details some of the challenges, successes, and outcomes of the intergroup initiatives. In their volume, although many tools and potential outcomes of intergroup dialogue are delineated, the process of intergroup dialoguing was still largely unrepresented. Likewise, in a review of intergroup literature, Dessel and Rogge (2008) assert that how the intergroup dialogue “approach, method, or process was implemented varied widely, and in most studies, the specific dialogue protocol was not delineated” (p. 223).

Frantell et al. (2019) suggest the need for more “rich data on what is happening within sessions...[Such] additional session-level research could help us better understand [how interactional experiences (such as conflict) are] both successfully and unsuccessfully managed in

the moment” (p. 687). In other words, scholars have called for more exploration of the dynamics that occur throughout the dialogue process as facilitators create and hold the space for the conversation.

Moreover, and as noted, scholars have called for research specifically on dialogue in community settings. They emphasize the need to investigate and understand how participants are engaging in interracial dialogue about race in their communities, specifically (Allen, 2016; Walsh, 2007). Intergroup communication that impacts social, political, and economic realities originated and remains pervasive in communities (Greisdorf, 2001; Martinson & Su, 2012). Allen (2016) writes that individuals effective at fostering connections across difference were engaging in an essential art, as bridging these racial boundaries is necessary to produce positive social relationships to constitute a strong, egalitarian, and pluralistic democracy.

Community-based interracial dialogues on race typically include trained facilitators. Overall, facilitators of intergroup dialogue are often seen as pivotal for positive intergroup contact, because they implement the conditions and use (and encourage participants to use) communication practices during intergroup interaction (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001). By emphasizing the importance of conditions and communication practices and, as Schoem and Hurtado (2001) writes, using “structured exercises that force and reinforce” that engage those conditions and communication practices, facilitators can encourage participants to optimize their intergroup experience. Indeed, facilitative guidance is a suggested condition for optimal intergroup contact.

Along with community organizers and mediators, facilitators are groups with “a tacit body of knowledge that might be tapped to flesh out the content of the art of bridging that requires cultivation in order for egalitarian social relations to arise in conditions of diversity”

(Allen, 2016, p. 101). Facilitators of interracial conversations about race in communities can likely identify the skills, knowledge, and capacity necessary for holding conversations about race (Allen, 2016). As little research has explored the facilitation of these dialogues in communities, little is known about whether facilitators are tasked with creating the conditions or use the communication practices that have been identified in intergroup literature.

According to Schoem and Hurtado (2001), “[d]ialogues are a difficult, complex social process, and without the careful attention of skilled facilitators, they can go badly” (p. 11). Facilitators often employ and monitor participants’ following of guidelines to ensure that participants interact respectfully within an environment of equal status (Allport, 1954; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001). They are considered imperative to the intergroup dialogue process because facilitators, ideally, guide participants through a constructive dialogic process while addressing individual anxieties or interpersonal divisions (Maxwell et al., 2011; Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003).

But facilitators do more than guide dialogues and help individual participants. They also have a particular vantage point to reveal what occurs within and across intergroup interactions. Researchers have therefore called for work that centers on facilitators’ experiences. Quayle (2012), for example, writes in a review of the book, *Facilitating Intergroup Dialogues: Bridging Differences, Catalyzing Change*, that “incorporating more personal storytelling from facilitators about the complexities and challenges of their facilitation process would add more depth and richness to complement the descriptive elements of the book” (p. 765).

In response to this, Ramasubramanian et al. (2017) examined the communication facilitators used to lead difficult dialogues on campus race relations and identified several common “design elements” that supported dialogues about race with diverse groups, including conversational ground rules, journal entries, prompts for guided small group discussions, a wrap-

up and call to action. Researchers have also found that facilitators of intergroup dialogues often use a co-facilitation approach and model the same alliance building that they hope to foster amongst the community (e.g., Maxwell et al., 2011).

These scholars indicate the necessity of understanding what creating and “holding” the dialogue process involves. In other words, research is needed that examines the dynamics enacted when implementing conditions and communication practices for and during the dialogues, including the challenges of implementing both. This dissertation aimed to engage with this exploration. Thus, the research questions for this study are as follows: RQ₁: *What conditions do facilitators report using when engaging with community members in interracial conversations about race (a), what dynamics occur when they do (b), and what challenges emerge as they do (c)?* And RQ₂: *What communication practices do facilitators use and ask the community to use when engaging with community members in interracial conversations about race (a), what dynamics occur when they do (b), and what challenges emerge as they do (c)?*

Conclusion

Interracial dialogue is notoriously difficult. Those coming together to dialogue have social identities with sociohistorical legacies “steeped in intergroup antagonisms due to unequal social relations” (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001, p. 4). Despite the challenges of coming together, however, scholars have identified constructive conversations about race as having the potential to be transformative for individuals and their broader communities (Paolini et al., 2016; Stokke, 2021). Fostering feelings of intimacy and friendship across group boundaries is well-established in generating the largest positive changes in intrapersonal and intergroup attitudes (Paolini et al., 2016). People, some scholars argue, are often motivated to cultivate meaningful interpersonal relationships with others who are different so that they can continue to grow, develop, and

expand as individuals by sharing new resources, perspectives, and identities (Paolini et al., 2016). At minimum, Allen (2011) advocates for “political friendship,” which is a willingness to engage with difference, consider others interests, and learn from those experiences (Walsh, 2007).

Intergroup differences, Paolini et al. (2016) state, “enhance the value that closeness can afford the self, by offering...self-growth and increased self-efficacy” (p. 453). In these close contexts, people have an opportunity to identify emotionally with each other and gain critical consciousness by “developing awareness which they translate into practice to enhance self-knowledge and achieve personal transformation” (Stokke, 2021, p. 1). Intergroup conversations can lead to the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup awareness and connection that cultivates the bridging ties that are critical to unifying stratified communities and empowering members in a socio-politically segregated nation (Allen, 2016).

Scholars have identified conditions and communication practices that can support intergroup conversations that can lead to transformative outcomes. Indeed, Orbe and Harris (2022) write:

[m]ore often than not, people experience this form of peak communication as dialogic moments—times when fully engaged, diverse individuals synergistically transform in terms of how they see themselves, others, and society as a whole...dialogue invents fuller, more complex meaning by integrating our own understanding with that of others” (p. 342).

Studies on interracial dialogue about race, however, have chiefly examined outcomes for students and faculty in school settings or corporate settings due, in part, to the established infrastructure and accessibility for conducting research within these contexts. Yet, intergroup

dialogue originates from and is particularly relevant to communities. Facilitators of community interracial dialogues have an especially unique and valuable vantage point, because they create and hold the structure for the dialogue process in the community and address challenges that arise.

Issues of race, including the silencing of historical and contemporary racial realities, the perpetuity of racial inequity, remain a central national crisis, and thus people continue to talk about race in their geographic and social communities. In these spaces, as Tatum (2017) wrote, “talk does not mean idle chatter. It means meaningful productive dialogue to raise consciousness and to lead to effective action and social change” (p. 193). These personal and political community spaces are some of the most promising for evoking and inspiring societal change and thus are rich contexts for dialogue to explore (Paolini et al., 2016; Stokke, 2021).

Intergroup research has largely centered on examining how intergroup contact can reduce intergroup prejudice (Allport, 1954). But scholars also call for research that examines the complexities and nuances of facilitated intergroup contact, such as what occurs when creating the conditions and using the communication practices meant to support a more effective conversation about and across racial difference (Dessel & Rogge, 2008; Frantell et al., 2019). This dissertation therefore examines interracial dialogues on race in communities by asking facilitators about the conditions and communication practices they used when leading such dialogues. In addition, this study also explores the dynamics—and the challenges—that facilitators described experiencing as they implemented each condition and practice.

Chapter 3: Method

Recruitment

After receiving approval from the UW Institutional Review Board, I reached out to the Chief Listening and Operations Officer at the Listen First Project, who connected me with organizations within their project's coalition who held interracial conversations about race. The criteria for my sampling frame were as follows: organizations with facilitators who are (a) at least 18-years-old who guide interracial conversations about race; (b) located in the U.S.; and (c) not associated primarily with an educational institution such as a university or school. Next, I searched the internet for additional organizations that met my criteria. Specifically, I searched using phrases and terms such as "facilitators of interracial conversations about race," and "organizations facilitating conversations about race," and then examined the search results to see if any of the organizations populating the search results met the appropriate criteria for this study. Namely, I examined each website to see if the facilitators worked in community contexts to lead interracial conversations about race within the U.S.

After viewing the websites of the potential organizations for any characteristics that would disqualify them (e.g., geographic location outside the U.S., not facilitating in community contexts), I reached out using a contact form on their websites or a listed email. I introduced myself, and described the study and my criteria for participation and asked members of each organization if they knew anyone, including themselves, in their organization who fit my criteria and might be interested in participating. Recipients of the email responded to confirm that I could solicit the participation of members from their organization and/or to express personal interest in participating in the study. I emailed people whose contact information was provided to me and, again, introduced myself, the study, and its criteria. I also sent a link to a brief

demographic survey (and first consent form) and asked that they also recruit colleagues to join the online focus group. I waited until a minimum of two facilitators working with the same organization had filled out the survey and then emailed them to schedule the focus group using When2Meet.

Participants

Using this method, I recruited 33 facilitators who led interracial conversations about race to participate in this study. Thirteen facilitators identified as white women, seven as Black women, five as white men, five as Black men, two as Hispanic women, and one as a Japanese woman. Some called themselves facilitators and others emphasized the importance of calling themselves “Circle Keepers” because they said that the term “facilitator” repurposed and reinforced normative power dynamics that they hoped to challenge using the Circle process. Several books (see: Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020; Pranis, 2005 for a more detailed description) detail what constitutes the Circle dialogue process.

The ages of participants ranged from 29-years-old to 80-years-old. The facilitators came from the following organizations: Essential, Coming to the Table, Common Ground, the Alluvial Collective, Hauyruro, Anti-racism Project, Luna Jimenez Institute for Social Transformation, the Center for Healing Racism, Ally Ring, Building Bridges, Gemini Group, National Civic League, Dinner and a Fight / 5-chairs, and the Emmett Till Interpretive Center. Facilitators identified themselves as living in Mississippi, Oregon, Colorado, Tennessee, Washington, Texas, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and California.

Data Collection

In this study, key data sources were facilitators of interracial conversations about race, the website of their organization, and any organizational documents that detail, for example, the

organization's intergroup dialogue process (i.e., the structured process by which facilitators lead each interracial conversation about race). Draucker et al. (2007) assert that "researchers must determine what data sources (e.g., groups of people, documents, bodies of literature) could yield the richest and most relevant data, and what cases (e.g., individuals, particular settings, specific documents) drawn from these sources are most likely to provide empirical indicators needed for categorical development" (p. 1138).

Organizational Documents

I asked facilitators to share documents containing organizational values, mission statements, desired dialogue conditions, practices, and outcomes, and any other materials that facilitators use to lead intergroup dialogues. Prior to each focus group, I reviewed each organization's website and organizational documents for information about their intergroup dialogue process. Organizational documents provided insight into the mission and values of organizations and the types of conditions they regularly created and communication practices they frequently used when facilitating interracial conversations. Many organizations had a set of community agreements that they titled, for example, "guideposts" or "touchstones." I collected the community agreements of nine organizations in this study and analyzed each for conversational conditions and communication practices and referencing it during interviews. I asked participants questions about the agreements, and in particular, any that featured conditions or communication practices to structure and support the dialogue.

Focus Groups

To collect facilitators' reports of their experiences with intergroup conditions and communication practices, I conducted 13 focus groups, each one representing a different organization. Focus groups are a type of interview but one in which the aim is to encourage

interaction and exchanges between group members. They are an ideal method if the researcher is examining group processes, meanings, and norms rather than outcomes and attitudes (Bloor et al., 2001). Additionally, as this dissertation examined the dynamics of facilitators' creation of intergroup dialogue conditions and use of communication practices during intergroup contact, I used focus groups because, in part, they enabled me to simulate a similar intergroup dynamic. With one organization, in fact, the Circle keepers asked that we engage in the Circle process, which included passing a talking piece (metaphorically, as we were communicating over Zoom) and communicating under other conditions and using communication practices like engaged listening.

Focus group interactions between participants are based, Tritter and Landstad (2020) explain, "on comments and challenges to prior statements within the group, generating deeper and more nuanced understandings, although this rarely leads to consensus" (p. 58). According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2018), the objective of focus groups "is not to reach consensus about, or solutions to, the issues discussed, but to bring forth different viewpoints on an issue" (p. 81). Creating an opportunity for facilitators to explore their experiences together can draw out their shared and divergent experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). As Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) assert, "the intention is that the discussion will be richer, deeper, and more honest and incisive than any interview with a single participant could produce" (p. 92). Participants might remind each other of otherwise forgotten moments during dialogue facilitation, rouse discussion of contrasting occurrences, or discuss the same moment but from a different point of view (Stewart et al., 2007). Uniquely, this method enables the interviewer to listen to study participants hear and respond to others who might differ in experience and opinion.

Mindful of the diversity of the focus groups and the potential complexities of the method,

I endeavored to ensure that the participants were not harmed by me as the researcher or by the research process. Liamputtong (2011) writes that, when participants reveal their private world, researchers must make sure that it is protected as much as possible. A core ethical concern when using the focus group method is that there is more than one participant in a group and, therefore, the researcher cannot ensure that the dialogue in the group will remain entirely confidential (Liamputtong, 2011).

To address this concern, scholars suggest beginning a focus group by asking participants to respect the confidentiality of their fellow group members by not repeating or relaying to others outside of the immediate group what is said during the focus group conversation (Liamputtong, 2011), a suggestion that I followed. I also told participants that I will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality in my research project (e.g., using pseudonyms and only repeating what is shared during the focus group during data conferencing with colleagues), but I could not ensure total confidentiality due to the nature of the focus group method. To create a space where group members felt comfortable sharing, I also conveyed to them that there were no right or wrong answers and that the expectation of the focus group was not to reach a consensus, consistent with focus group best practices (Litosseliti, 2003).

Each group included members of the same organization so that participants were more likely to convene with trust, camaraderie, or at least some familiarity. They were comprised of individuals who work together and have some shared experiences when facilitating interracial conversations about race, though they could also have potentially disparate assessments or understandings of those experiences. Although participants who already know each other might feel reluctant to speak frankly, “if members are total strangers they may be [more] reluctant to speak because of the somewhat false and artificial environment in which they find themselves”

(Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, p. 110). There were advantages and disadvantages to conducting both intraorganizational and interorganizational. Interorganizational focus group interviews might have made both similarities and differences between organizations starker, and provided facilitators with a space to share without any concern for what a colleague might think of their opinions and perspectives. Conversely, an interorganizational focus group might have lacked the depth of an intraorganizational conversation, as facilitators might have had to spend more time explaining their organizational differences instead of immersing into the details with colleagues who have a basic shared understanding of their organization's dialogue process.

The focus groups took place over Zoom and lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. Each group included at least two but no more than six facilitators. This size range was chosen to ensure that each facilitator would have ample opportunity to engage and have enough colleagues present for collective discussion. Throughout the focus groups, I endeavored to act as would a moderator of a seminar by choosing the initial topics and directing the discussion to address the research questions broadly but allowing "the predominance of comments emerging from the group participants" (Tritter & Landstad, 2020, p. 57).

As the moderator, I began the focus groups by welcoming each participant and endeavoring to put them at ease, asking each participant to introduce themselves, ensuring all participants could see and hear each other, outlining the purpose of the meeting, gaining their consent to participate for a second time (the first was part of the pre-interview survey that I used to consent and collect demographic information about participants), and asking the group if they had any questions (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). I endeavored to create an open, friendly, and non-threatening environment by addressing participants directly by name and encouraging everyone to be forthcoming if they were comfortable doing so.

I paused after each question to give each participant an opportunity to respond, endeavored to involve all participants by soliciting their answers to questions, and strove to remain neutral and impartial to what each participant shared (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). I was also alert to the facilitators' language and nonverbal cues so that I could address issues that arose (Litosseliti, 2003); whether, for example, someone needed more time to share or disagreed with something said but was hesitant to share. Before beginning the focus group dialogues, I emphasized that anyone could choose not to answer questions and that everyone was welcome to leave the Zoom call at any time.

I asked the focus group members several open-ended, in-depth questions in a semi-structured format. According to Stewart et al. (2007), such a non-directive approach "provide[s] more opportunity for group interaction and discovery and greater opportunity for the individual participants' views to emerge, rather than the researcher framing of the issues imposed on them" (p. 92). Further, as the main logic for conducting focus groups was to provide respondents with an opportunity to respond and build on what others share, using the semi-structured format provided the openness and flexibility for the "synergistic effect of the group" to generate ideas that "might not have been uncovered in individual interviews" (Stewart et al., 2007, p. 43). By using open-ended questions, I aimed to provide the focus group participants with a greater opportunity to share on their own terms and alongside others with some shared experiences facilitating conversations about race.

I had a list of questions for each group of facilitators but let the conversation influence what questions I asked, in what order I asked them, and if I asked each of them; some groups, for example, moved through questions at a slower pace because they were answering in more depth or more extensively than other groups. The questions I asked during the focus groups aimed to

examine the following: (1) the conditions facilitators created; (2) the dynamics and challenges of implementing those conditions; (3) the communication practices facilitators used and encouraged participants to use during intergroup dialogue; (4) the dynamics and challenges of facilitators using and encouraging participants to use the communication practices.

In this study, my process of collecting, coding, and analyzing the data happened both simultaneously and recursively so that I could follow the lead of my participants in answering my research questions more flexibly. I audio-recorded the focus groups using an online transcription service. I reviewed the transcriptions of completed focus group interviews as I continued to conduct additional interviews, and this enabled me to engage in theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling occurs when the researcher “collects, codes, and analyzes [the] data and then decides what data to collect next and where to find them” (Glaser, 1978, p. 36). This method of sampling allows the researcher to follow the research direction that seems relevant to the study, enabling the researcher to “maximize opportunities to discover variations among concepts and to densify categories in terms of their properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 201), and can illuminate differences, variations, and any gaps in the data or theory that require further exploration and elaboration (Charmaz, 2014).

Using theoretical sampling, for example, I examined the emerging results and made some slight changes to my interview questions, driven by the categories apparent in my data (Charmaz, 2014). Specifically, I shortened the number of questions I asked by leaving out questions that appeared confusing for the facilitators or that elicited repetitive or vague responses that related to the research questions but were too general to elicit specific meaning for this study. The final interview questions are listed in Appendix B.

After asking the facilitators my questions, I explained to them that I wanted to provide

time for any questions and concerns they might have about the process, what I was planning to do with their interview, etc. I then asked them to share or elaborate on anything they wished to discuss further. In response, the facilitators asked questions, shared additional insights that they didn't feel was discussed sufficiently during the interview, offered resources that might be helpful for my study, and agreed that they would reach out if any questions or concerns later arose. At the end of the focus group meeting, I invited the participants to contact me further, if desired. Barbour (2018) suggests that it is important to encourage participants to contact the researcher with any additional information and questions, as well as allow enough time for participants to share any concerns. I conducted follow-up interviews with five facilitators whom I wanted to ask additional follow-up questions for clarification or elaboration. These interviews were also automatically transcribed and used as part of the analysis.

Data Analysis and Verification

After conducting and transcribing the focus group and follow-up interviews, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and Owen's (1984) standards for reporting themes. Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure includes (a) familiarizing myself with the data, (b) identifying initial codes within the data relevant to the research questions, (c) combining the codes into themes, (d) reviewing the themes to ensure that they are responsive to the research questions, (e) defining and naming the themes, and (f) identifying evocative exemplars.

I began by familiarizing myself with the data by reading (or re-reading) the focus group excerpts numerous times in an active way (i.e., searching for meanings and patterns; Braun & Clarke, 2006). After reading the transcripts several times, I engaged in thematic coding by first developing codes that represent meanings and patterns in the transcript data. I engaged in an initial verification procedure, data conferencing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), by discussing a portion

of my data with my primary dissertation chair who had followed the same coding procedure, to compare our thematic analyses, discuss preliminary findings, and discern the theoretical implications of the data. We discussed any differences, any aspects of the data that one of us might have overlooked, and reviewed exemplars for each condition and practice from organizational documents and interview transcripts that best provided evidence, richness, and voice to the category so that readers could better imagine the quoted individuals' experiences.

I then grouped together all of the excerpts associated with a particular code and sorted them into revised themes before reviewing them to ensure that each theme has enough data to support it, and that each theme is unique. Krippendorff (2004) defines themes as "recurring systems of beliefs or explanations that address the research questions" (p. 110). Next, I created separate word documents for each research question and sorted the themes into the appropriate document so that the material relevant to each research question was together in one place. Finally, I created a third document with excerpts that included both conditions and practices.

Next, I compared the themes I identified against Owen's (1984) criteria of (a) recurrence, (b) repetition, and (c) forcefulness. Recurrence was noted when at least two excerpts shared the same thread of meaning. I also looked for repetition of the same key phrases, words, or sentences as participants described their experiences. Lastly, forcefulness was indicated by individuals' vocal inflections, volume, pauses, and detail, all of which indicated that they were accentuating what they were sharing. I identified recurrence when at least two conditions or practices had the same thread of meaning, or facilitators shared observing similar dynamics when implementing them. I also noted the repetition of the same keywords or phrases and kept an account of the forcefulness by noting when participants' voice pitch rose or got louder, or language was used to emphasize words or phrases.

I then undertook three additional procedures to verify the interpretations in this study: member checking, exemplar identification, and an audit trail (Braithwaite et al., 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I engaged in member checking, which is “not only a test for factual and interpretive accuracy but also to provide evidence of credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 374). This process helped reduce the risk that the findings from the study reflected any biases of the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1986) define member checking as “[t]he process of continuous, informal testing of information by solidifying reactions of respondents to the investigator’s reconstruction of what he or she has been told or otherwise found out” (p. 77).

After debriefing the analysis with a peer, I emailed ten facilitators (chosen randomly), who had agreed pre-interview to review my findings when the study was completed, a 3-page chart that detailed those findings. I shared with them that the findings were derived from interviews with more than 30 facilitators, and thus not every finding would likely align completely with their own experiences. I asked facilitators to read to ensure that, as I wrote in the email, “everything seems viable/reasonable for a facilitator of racial dialogue to share.”

The facilitators did not flag any serious misinterpretations or misrepresentation of their ideas, but they did offer helpful clarification and explanations regarding the dynamics enacted as they or others implemented the conditions and communication practices. I included some of the emails in the results because they added complexity and nuance to the different dynamics that were involved in implementing the conditions and communication practices. The member-checks highlighted the need for minor changes, which were mostly additions. I considered all input, including differing interpretations, as I finalized the study findings. Additionally, I utilized an audit trail by keeping detailed notes of the analysis process at each research step, from data collection to exemplar interpretations.

Conclusion

The focus group method was the primary source of data for this dissertation. Additional data sources included the organizations' websites and any documents used to facilitate the dialogue. After conducting 13 focus groups, one with each organization that participated in this study, I analyzed the interview transcriptions using thematic analysis to examine the data for conversational conditions, communication practices, and the dynamics of both (Braun & Clark, 2006). The methods in this study worked reciprocally; analyzing each organization's websites and available documents served to provide further detail on information facilitators mentioned during their interview, and analyzing the focus group interviews provided context for the organization's agreements, mission statement, and values. When using focus groups and analyzing each organization's website and available materials, I endeavored to garner information regarding (a) the conditions that facilitators create, (b) the communication practices they use, and (c) the dynamics and challenges of implementing both.

Chapter 4: Creating the Conversational Container

The first research question examined (a) under what conditions facilitators asked participants to engage in interracial conversations about race, (b) the dynamics that unfolded as they did, including (c) what challenges, if any, arose. For the first part of this research question, I identified seven conditions for intergroup contact: (1) interracial co-facilitators, who created (2) community agreements with or for participants, so that the participants (3) communicated equitably. Facilitators also (4) adapted to the needs of the community collective. Before facilitating or “keeping the space” for each dialogue, (5) facilitators ensured they were grounded and ready to hold the conversation, (6) welcomed everyone to the space, and (7) endeavored to increase participants’ critical consciousness. During my review of their organizational materials and in the interviews with facilitators of interracial conversations about race, and again while I was analyzing the transcript data, it was apparent that these conditions were central to the dialogue processes for many of the facilitators.

In this chapter, I first define and describe the conditions that facilitators reported using to lead interracial conversations about race and/or were in their organization’s documentation. Next, to answer RQ1, I discuss each condition, its dynamics, and, if it occurred in the data, any challenges to implementing the condition that the facilitators reported. A strong pattern emerged across interviews delineating the key conditions that participants of this study created. Although they described many of the same or similar conditions and dynamics, participants also differed in their views and experience of each condition, including which conditions they chose to use and what they observed when they implemented them. When this occurred, I provide excerpts to evidence it. I used pseudonyms for the participants in this study to maintain their anonymity.

Table 1: Conversational Conditions

Cond. 1	<i>Interracial, Trained Co-facilitation</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivating a relationship of mutual trust, respect, and support among co-facilitators • Utilizing facilitators' difference in positionalities <p>Challenges of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to co-facilitate
Cond. 2	<i>Community Agreements</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing community needs or sharing and moderating pre-created agreements with the community • Reemphasizing community agreements <p>Challenges of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pushback on community agreements • Enforcing community agreements
Cond. 3	<i>Equalized Communication</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sitting in a circle or semi-circle • Timing participants/passing a talking piece <p>Challenges of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants waiting their turn
Cond. 4	<i>Adapting to the Needs of the Community</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging participants to offer input • Underscoring participants agency in engagement • Relinquishing control over the outcome
Cond.5	<i>Facilitator-grounding</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounding exercises <p>Challenges of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining grounding • Extending grace or patience to participants
Cond. 6	<i>A Welcoming Space</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing imperfections • No blame and no shame <p>Challenges of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No "safe" spaces

Cond. 7	<i>Creating Critical Consciousness</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring Institutional and Interpersonal Racism • Determining how to be part of the solution <p>Challenges of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overextending

Interracial, Trained Co-facilitation

One key condition of the intergroup dialogue that facilitators discussed was the importance of working in a team, specifically a trained, interracial team of individuals with different lived experiences around race. Consistent with Allport's (1954) optimal conditions for intergroup contact, facilitators of intergroup dialogue are often paired with others based on differences in social identities (Frantell et al., 2018; Maxwell et al., 2011). Frantell et al. (2018) write that this difference "means co-facilitators need to both work on developing their own critical awareness of their social identities and experiences of privilege and/or oppression... This is especially important, as cofacilitators serve as a model of intergroup communication for group members" (p. 166). Thus, it is critical that facilitators develop a strong working relationship to be able to navigate and negotiate difference and conflict as it emerges.

This condition was apparent in the focus group conversations. Sara, a 65-year-old Black woman living in California, for example, spoke to the importance of interracial co-Circle keeping¹ when she shared:

I think there's a real value to bringing diversity into the spaces whoever's

facilitating... So, for everyone in your space, just visualizing and watching two very

¹ Some people that I interviewed used/preferred the title of "Circle keeper" instead of facilitator because they associated the latter as recreating hierarchical power structures. I therefore use that term when referencing those individuals. Many First Nations as well as other cultural capitalize a term that has special or sacred significance. The term "Circle," as Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2020) write, "embodies many dimensions of meaning beyond the spatial or geometric, including sacred meanings" (p. 30). I will use facilitator predominately because it reflect what the majority of participants in this study called themselves.

different people working together, appreciating each other is really powerful, especially if it's across race.

Candice, a Black woman living in Texas who did not disclose her age, explained the importance of interracial co-facilitation with facilitators of different racial positionalities.

Candice and Cynthia worked with the same organization and had co-facilitated together before.

Candice shared:

we always have a person of color and a person of European descent or a White person...because to be able to understand this, how can I talk about this, just [Candice], when this has affected and damaged so many people. So, I feel number one, that's one of the very first things that we did in order to make it safe, in order to make it fly, in order for it be accepted, when people can see a perspective...of two different people.

Facilitators also spoke to the importance of embodying the type of relationship and interaction they hoped to foster amongst participants. Co-facilitators in these contexts, Maxwell et al. (2011) writes, are not:

neutral or impartial but multipartial and balanced as a team in supporting all group members. Co-facilitators can support and challenge participants from their own identity groups empathically and, at the same time, model for participants' ways of connecting across social boundaries. (p. 9)

An interracial team, scholars pointed out, better support all group members while providing an example of how participants can interact and communicate together effectively.

Dynamics of Facilitators Working in Interracial Pairs

In line with this, facilitators in the focus groups shared that creating the condition of interracial co-facilitation involved training facilitators; cultivating an interracial relationship of

mutual trust, respect, and support with their co-facilitator; and utilizing facilitators' differences in positionality to navigate identity dynamics in the dialogue.

Implementing dialogue facilitation generally involved extensive preparation and the fostering trust between established facilitators and new facilitators. Facilitating a conversation this important, Cynthia, a 62-year-old white woman living in Texas, said, meant that each facilitator needed to be adequately prepared. She shared:

[t]here are no newbies at the center who facilitate. They have passed muster already that they're pretty trustworthy...Once a trusted person is identified, then the cultivation of that, to continue to uncover...Have they done enough work themselves? Are they ready? Are they... You know, all of that stuff. There is nothing casual about it.

Cynthia explained that the facilitation training occurs over the course of a full year because, she said, "this is too important work, it cannot go sideways...There are safeguards against it, but...that would be tragic for it to go sideways."

Cultivating a Relationship of Mutual Trust, Respect, and Support among Co-facilitators. Implementing interracial co-facilitation involved facilitators' fostering and maintaining positive relationships. Candice explained that co-facilitation was an intimate process that required a closeness and trust between facilitators to be effective. She shared:

you have to get to know that person and be as close to that person, almost like being in bed together. Because you see, when I'm traveling with the person that I'm working with, I have to know these people. I have to know that they have my back, all of this is done through relationships.

The condition of interracial facilitation, therefore, involved facilitators embodying the bridging of differences that they encouraged from their participants. Sara said that she and her

co-facilitator Sam, a 78-year-old white woman living in California, worked to better engage in effective interracial facilitation by learning “how each other works and what we were comfortable with.” Now years into facilitating together, Sara said that she and Sam had worked through some interpersonal hurdles while maintaining their commitment to “doing good work together.” Interracial facilitation involved fostering and maintaining mutual connection, support, and respect as facilitators navigated their relationship (especially when first starting to facilitate together) while holding interracial community dialogues, simultaneously.

Utilizing Facilitators’ Difference in Positionalities. Implementing interracial facilitation also involved utilizing facilitators’ differing positionalities and subjective perspectives to better respond to identity dynamics among the community. Different positionalities offered many benefits for facilitators. For example, Sara and Sam shared that, because of facilitators’ divergent lived experiences, they sometimes noticed difference-based nuances in their Circle, and they often weren’t affected in the same way by participants’ disclosures. Sara explained:

when you have at least two people, you’re the eyes and ears for each other and there are things that happen in the Circle that’s just a trigger for me. [Sam] knows that and vice versa. And so there have been times where there needed to be a response to something that was said or content that needed to be sharpened. And... we can just look at each other and we know, “Oh, okay, I’m gonna take this on because [she’s] triggered, or [I’m] triggered... ‘I can’t believe they just said that.’”

Facilitators said that the amalgamation of each person’s racial awareness as part of co-facilitation better helped them assess what was unfolding in the dialogue. As Cynthia shared:

I might be triggered as a white woman for something that somebody says and [my co-facilitator] then has got my back...Something might trigger [my co-facilitator] and either one of us can call time-out, like, “hold-up, let’s take a break.” Let everybody regroup. Also, if there’s an individual who’s having a real struggle and being triggered, there are two of us there to watch for that. ‘Cause that’s part of our role, is to watch what’s happening in the room, when one or the other of us is talking and listening.

Interracial co-facilitators, facilitators said,

A diversity of facilitators meant that they could better observe, notice, and respond to different happenings in the collective group. Their differing positionalities, facilitators shared, was a strength of their dialogue process. Yerwal, a 71-year-old Black man living in Washington, explained:

[t]he truth is that I get triggered as well and so that’s why we operate in a co-keeping model because when there’s something that’s said that causes you to kind of go off, then there’s always someone there to kind of keep holding that space.

Yerwal was a co-Circle keeper with several others. Co-Circle keepers, he shared, meant that no individual facilitator needed to hold the dialogue space constantly, because others shared that role.

Facilitators utilized their positionalities in different ways. Michelle, a 69-year-old Black woman living in Oregon, explained, “you really have to use strategies to understand how to get the message across knowing your audience, and what that’s going to mean.” Michelle shared, for example, that she and her team of co-facilitators would discuss who should initiate the dialogue session depending on the racial makeup of the community group they were facilitating. She explained that she knew that other organizations deferred to the facilitator of color throughout

the dialogue to set a precedent and send a clear message about racial equity. Michelle, however, said that she didn't think that was always the ideal approach to the conversation; if the room was constituted primarily by white people, she said, then the white facilitator should initiate the conversation.

Michelle said she believed that interracial facilitation involved using the facilitation approach that dialogue participants would identify with the quickest. She explained:

[y]ou can...speculate what is going to be best. So, if I walked into a room and it was 85% young white women and [a white woman] was my co-facilitator, I would have her talk first, because it's like, "Hey, this is your people," not that they are, but that's how we're conditioned to think.

She and her co-facilitators understood that participants are inclined to identify more closely with others who look like them (Currarini & Mengel, 2012) and took these identity dynamics into account when facilitating.

Facilitators differed in how they navigated and responded to identity dynamics. For example, one organization deferred to facilitators of color. Deferring, Candice and Cynthia explained, was meant, in part, to offset the dearth of BIPOC, and especially women of color, in positions of leadership. Candice explained:

[t]he person of color always starts first. I don't care how tired I am, whatever space I'm occupying at the moment, I recognize the importance that I have to start first. And that's also to offset the perception that the white person is always in charge, the white person is the leader...it's a very interesting way of showing up that the person of color will always start first to offset this country's perception.

Cynthia, Candice's co-facilitator, added, "And the last word belongs to the person of color also."

Candice continued:

[y]ou have to realize, this is not an individual thing, we're talking about everybody in this country. Yeah, it is a lot of weight, but I'm looking at the big picture, I'm not looking at [Candice]...you have to keep your eyes on the prize...this is not about me, this is about every person of color on this planet, really...everything I say is from lived experiences, I'm not making up stuff from watching a movie. I will say straight out...you're gonna depend on know-nothing white people to go and educate other know-nothing white people? And when they make a mistake, then you're gonna be all over them...well, no, I'm not gonna leave my life in that situation.

Interracial dialogues about race were too important, Candice explained, not to have the individual with the lived experience of racial injustice and inequity explaining the issues.

Additionally, Candice and Cynthia shared that, as part of their organization's conditions, if a participant of color is sharing, and facilitators needed to intervene, the facilitator of color will interrupt the participant. Candice explained:

for the [facilitator] of color to stop or interrupt the [participant] of color. It is best for the white person to interrupt the white person. And the reason for that, for [the white facilitator] to interrupt me, it's a pattern that I've had all of my life, white people always telling me what to do.

Candice and Cynthia noted that their organization endeavored not to replicate harmful patterns of white people interrupting and silencing BIPOC voices. They said that their method of facilitation involved deciding which facilitator would support a participant based on their race.

Cynthia said:

we may need to tend to someone. And if it's a person of color who's having the struggle, the [facilitator] of color needs to go leave and tend to that person most likely. If it's a white person who's coming off the rails, then the white [facilitator] needs to take him in another room and say, "Tell me what's going on with you."

Cynthia and Candice explained that, due to the greater likelihood that they would share similar lived racial experiences and understandings with participants of the same race, it was in the best interest of participants and the larger dialogue group for facilitators to provide support to participants that shared the same race.

Facilitators shared that it was their awareness of identity dynamics that influenced how they decided who would talk about each topic if their dialogue process included an education portion. This dynamic was meant to ensure, Candice explained, that only those who fully understood a topic from lived experience were speaking about that experience. She elaborated:

let's use for an example, white privilege. I've never experienced that. I know what it is. So I would never talk about white privilege in those dialogues, that's something that [the white facilitator] would talk about...I would not ever have [Cynthia, white co-facilitator] talk about internalized racism...about the negative stereotypes, all of the caricatures, all of the lack of information and sometimes no information at all people of color have received in this country, which caused us to turn it inward and act it out on each other in such a negative way...I do know for myself...all of the negative caricatures of people of African descent caused me psychologically to not be able to wear red lipstick...and don't eat watermelon...the damage done by growing up in the South and seeing this over and over again...So, these are some of the things that [Cynthia] know all about it. She's heard

me talk about it and everything else, but I would never put her on the spot and make her talk about that.”

Candice and Cynthia emphasized the imperative that facilitators speak from lived experience to best illustrate what they hoped to convey to participants.

Similarly, Sabrina, a 66-year-old white woman living in New York, shared that her organization emphasized that:

we are conscious of who is best to present. Toward that end a white facilitator would cover white privilege and on a subject such as internalized racism we would try to have a person of color discuss that. In an effort to get participants to better understand microaggressions we have gone beyond the topic of racism and deal with intersectionality. Therefore the facilitator could be a person of color or white.

Challenges of Interracial Co-facilitation

When implementing this condition, the facilitators described some “growing pains” while learning how to co-facilitate with their colleague(s).

Learning to Co-facilitate. Sara described interracial co-facilitation as involving some challenges as facilitators learned to hold the dialogue space together. She shared:

[w]e’re definitely not the same as we were four years ago...I think I was a little more verbal about it or I would bring it up more like when I felt like things weren’t working because when we first started working together...it was so important to her not to disrespect me, not to insult me, not to say something wrong.

Sam added, “It’s still important...incredibly important.” Sara agreed and continued:

I think we’ve had those moments where things just didn’t go well and we were able to work through them...I remember one of our first workshops that we did together, I

interrupted her and she basically, in front of people told me, “Be quiet and sit down.” I was mortified that my co-facilitator would treat me that way. But we talked about it and once I heard her story it was like, “I get it.” And once she heard my story, it was like, “Oh, I get it.” ...from day one, we’ve been committed...to doing good work together.

The condition of interracial, trained co-facilitation was a common condition across organizations. Facilitators described the implementation of this condition as involving the training of facilitators; the cultivation of an interracial relationship of mutual trust, respect, and support amongst co-facilitators; and utilizing the diversity of their positionalities to monitor and address identity dynamics in the dialogue more adeptly. Creating this condition could be challenging, and could take time to develop engaging with it effectively, but most of the facilitators emphasized that it was essential.

Community Agreements

Facilitators described implementing community agreements as instrumental for facilitating a community dialogue. Pranis (2005) writes that community agreements are “promises participants make to one another about how they will conduct themselves in the dialogue. The guidelines are intended to describe the behaviors that the participants feel will make the space safe for them to speak their truth” (p. 13). Facilitators in the focus groups called their community agreements different names, such as “guideposts,” “guidelines,” “touchstones,” and “ground rules.” Two of the guidelines used by the Center for the Healing of Racism included “sharing is about one’s own feelings, experiences, perceptions” and “we are not always going to agree or see everything the same way and that’s okay.”

Orbe and Harris (2022) note that common community guidelines include communicating with an open mind, engaging genuinely, listening deeply, and not fearing conflict—the dialogue

can be challenging in the moment and yet bring issues to light to benefit the collective long-term. Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2020) shared questions that those facilitating the conversation can ask participants as part of the process of developing agreements. They included, for example: “what agreements do you need from yourself or others in order to be at your best here in this classroom?” “Are there some of these agreements that you are not willing to try to keep?”

Some facilitators implemented community agreements by involving the community in a collaboration to co-create the agreements. Others described sharing (and sometimes moderating) pre-created agreements with the community. Some of the facilitators in the focus groups for this study said that they asked community members to brainstorm the community agreements they needed to co-create a space that addressed their needs. Dansen, a 71-year-old Black woman from Georgia, shared that, although the community agreements can feel “unnatural,” they “shift the atoms in the room so people can have the conversations that they say they’ve been wanting to have for years and years and years.”

Many if not most of the agreements were communication-oriented and used to foster intergroup understanding, connection, and racial awareness. As participants spoke, Dansen said, others in the circle listened without engaging in side conversations. Participants could “pass” or “pass for now” when it was time for them to share. One participant told Dansen after a dialogue that this was the first time she had felt comfortable contributing to an interracial conversation about race.

Janna, a 45-year-old white woman living in Washington, said that her organization’s guidelines “set the tone to help people understand what’s actually happening in terms of the power mitigation.” She also shared that generating agreements with the community—and

watching what dynamics amongst participants were enacted as they did—was her favorite part of the dialogue process. She explained:

guidelines [are] really important because it's actually just a microcosm of what's gonna happen when you...actually have a conversation...There's contradictions and there's fighting all within the guidelines alone [e.g., "It's okay to be angry. It's not okay to be angry"]. And we haven't even started yet...It's actually my favorite piece because I'm like, "Oh, here...This is the appetizer. This is the tasting." Because we haven't even gotten into it. But everything is out in the open already...People think that guidelines is like, "Oh, we're just deciding how to be together." But actually, the keepers are watching. "Oh, here's gonna be the conflict. Oh, this person is gonna have trouble getting engaged." It's like the trailer of a movie.

Janna emphasized that the brainstorming of agreements enabled her to observe interpersonal dynamics between participants before explicitly beginning to talk about race and using this initial insight to better navigate and address these dynamics.

Many facilitators said that implementing and discussing the community agreements were fundamental to fostering a collaborative structure to guide the intergroup dialogue process. Gwen, a 41-year-old white woman living in Massachusetts, shared that, in her organization, agreements needed to be observable behaviors. Community members could not choose agreements such as "interpersonal respect," she explained, because what counts as respect is largely subjective. Gwen reported:

[i]t's culturally specific...that means a lot of different things to different people. As a facilitator, I can't say, "...you're being disrespectful" because what I think is

disrespectful, what you think, right, that's not helpful. So, for us, we teach about communication agreements as observable behaviors.

Facilitators said that creating the guidelines took considerable time, often in collaboration with the communities they were working with, to foster an effective communicative structure for the dialogue process.

The Dynamics of Community Agreements

Implementing community agreements involved facilitators assessing community needs or moderating pre-created agreements with the community, and reemphasizing community agreements.

Assessing Community Needs or Sharing and Moderating Pre-created Agreements with the Community. Facilitators described collaborating with the community to establish collective agreements that address participants' needs, or sharing (and sometimes moderating) agreements with the community that facilitators' organizations had specifically created for interracial dialogues about race.

Some, like Patrick, a 52-year-old Black non-binary individual living in Washington, shared that by not asking for participant input when creating the community agreements, facilitators were repurposing normative hierarchical power structures. He explained:

[i]f there was ever a very simple power play move, it's when a facilitator walks in and goes, "Okay, here are our guidelines. This is how we're gonna be together." And the people who are participating in the conversation have had zero say in how we're gonna be together. Now that space...has not been cultivated by the participants. They're being forced to abide by somebody else's needs and their needs have not been heard and most

likely won't be addressed...And then to have a highly charged conversation without clear indications of who needs what in the space, it's just a recipe for disaster.

Patrick emphasized the importance of centering participant voices when deciding the community's collective guidelines. Boyes-Watson et al. (2020) write that it can be beneficial for participants to have the opportunity to co-create and mutually agree on the community agreements they plan to use. "This is especially important" the authors note "in difficult conversations. We urge keepers to take care to offer participants the opportunity to create, add, clarify, or modify guidelines" (Boyes-Watson et al., 2020, p. 34). Many facilitators asserted that a positive intergroup contact environment could not involve facilitators' enforcing agreements hierarchically.

Conversely, some facilitators shared a set of pre-created guidelines with participants. Often facilitators provided pre-created guidelines because, they explained, time together was limited or they had been using the same set of agreements for years and trusted that they best supported participants. Co-facilitators Candice and Cynthia, for example, use a pre-created list and ask participants if they want to make any moderations. Cynthia shared:

[t]hese are the established guidelines that are shared and are expectations and enforced. That said, we will often ask participants is there anything else you need to feel safe or brave in this space? I've not ever seen an example where someone brings forward something after we've gone through the original guidelines.

Cynthia explained that their organization has used these same community agreements for more than 30 years. Candice shared that dialogues she has facilitated have "never ever gotten out of hand" because of her organization's guidelines. She said:

we spend a good bit of time going over the guidelines that we created in order to keep that circle safe, and personally I've never had to stop a dialogue...we are not talking about Jack and Jill and Mary Had a Little Lamb, you're talking about some heavy stuff. And so to be able to spend that time, 15, 20 minutes on those guidelines and really explaining them, not just read over them real fast and think that people got it, okay? So really explain it.

Due to the centrality of the agreements in structuring the conversation, Candice and other facilitators, too, emphasized the importance of spending time to review the agreements intentionally and methodically with the community before continuing the dialogue.

Reemphasizing Community Agreements. Facilitators noted that implementing the community agreements involved re-reading and often reminding participants of the community agreements to re-orient them to communicating under the conditions and using the communication practices throughout the dialogue. As Sara emphasized, “[w]e use the guidelines, the touchstones, at every meeting.” Sara’s co-facilitator, Sam, added that, “the touchstones really help build community and...stop one person from dominating the conversation.” Facilitators said that implementing the community agreements was instrumental to altering how participants engaged in community conversations.

Angela, a 52-year-old white woman living in New Mexico, shared that she and her co-facilitators often reinforced different community agreements throughout the dialogue, namely the guidepost of confidentiality, which read:

[c]reate a safe space by respecting the confidential nature and content of discussions held in the circle. What is said in the circle stays here; what is learned in the circle leaves here. Everyone gets to tell their own story for themselves.

She explained that they reiterated the importance of confidentiality with community groups:

over and over again, so people truly believe that this is a confidential space...because we always talk about it being a space of learning, letting go of perfectionism...they seem to appreciate that very much. Like, “Oh, you’re not scrutinizing me, you’re not expecting me to be perfect now.” This is a learning space and people really thirst for that.”

Participants, Angela said, told her that they appreciated an opportunity to embrace being imperfect as they navigated a challenging conversation. Facilitators explained that, because structured dialogue processes deviated from normative ways of communication, they needed to reiterate the community agreements with participants. It was important that participants remember agreements like “speak your truth and respect the truth of others,” a guidepost of the Alluvial Collective, when deciding how to listen and what to share with the group.

Challenges of Community Agreements

Participants described two challenges when implementing community agreements. Some dialogue participants said they were reticent to focus so much energy on the community agreements, and facilitators also noted that enforcing the community agreements when participants deviated from using them could be tricky.

Participant Pushback on Community Agreements. Facilitators shared that they often received pushback for the amount of time they spent focusing on the community agreements.

Sam said, for example:

we read them every week, but we don’t just read them. One of us usually starts and then we pass it on to the next person who passes it on to the next person until we’ve read them all...there are people who obviously think the touchstones are a waste of time, and you can tell that by how they’re reading ‘em. But then other people you can tell are buying in

at some level and you can tell that, too. And the more people who are buying in, the less resistance you get from the other people.

Angela and others shared that the more they watched participants practice using the community agreements, the more participants endorsed them. Reading them during each community session, Sam explained, “is a form of the Stockholm effect...and when you see that somehow they’re working in the Circle, you start feeling more supportive of them.” Sara, who was co-Circle keepers with Sam, noted:

we had someone in one of our circles at the beginning, basically say he was not going to read them and refused to read them. But by the third [session] he was joining in and for the rest...[he] read the touchstones and you could see that he was into it...it is in the repetition.

The community agreements and the conditions more generally, facilitators explained, could feel “unnatural” at first, but that was expected when likely altering participants’ normative ways of engaging with a more equitable process. As Sara asserted, “there’s so much wisdom in each one that helps with having these brave conversations around race.” Thus, many facilitators shared that despite community resistance, they remained committed to creating and adhering to the agreements.

Enforcing Community Agreements. Dansen shared that in response to any resistance to the guideposts she would often ask the participants to abide by the community guideposts for a minimum of their first session together before modifying the collective guideposts (i.e., agreements). She explained:

I’m okay about that being rigid because from my experience, that works because there’s a lot of unlearning and undoing, if they could figure it out, they wouldn’t hire me, is kinda

how I look like. So I'm saying "try this on. You know, we have three sessions scheduled, let's do the first one and then we can negotiate that." But for me, it's important for people to try it on and then give me informed feedback, which allows for change. But I'm pretty much a stickler the first time.

If community members refused to abide by community agreements, facilitators might ask them to self-correct or leave. Dansen said that she asked a man to leave the Circle after he refused to follow the community agreement, "[w]e will speak for ourselves rather than on behalf of a group (as 'I' not 'we')." She shared that the participant told her:

"I'm sorry. I represent the voices of lots of people." I said, "If you remember, we actually talked about it on the phone, and I really need for you to express who you are because we want everyone here to talk about their own personal experience, and then we have other opportunities for you to be a representative." And he couldn't do it. And I thanked him very much for his being willing to try and he did agree to leave... Some people like ballet and some people like tap dancing. And so if you go to a ballet class and you wanna tap dance, it might not be the space for you, and that's okay. I'm okay with that. But we do generally spend quite a bit of time prepping people for the conversation and the importance of holding that space in the way everyone has agreed to.

Dansen emphasized the importance of facilitator enforcing the agreements; she and others described their organization's community agreements as essential, and therefore it was a priority of facilitators to reiterate and enforce them throughout community dialogues. The implementation of agreements for one organization involved using a "referee" who ensured everyone participating was abiding by the community agreements. Candice and Cynthia shared that, as facilitators, they did not intervene in the same ways that a referee intervened. The referee

ensured that each participant had the same amount of time to share and that participants asked questions to clarify and not debate. Across organizations, facilitators and referees enforced the community agreements.

Enforcing these agreements, facilitators said, was one of the most important aspects of their role and could have its challenges. Some facilitators discussed enforcing the agreements gently. Gwen shared, for example:

If there's like a little bit of a gray area, if there's like a little bit of a, it's probably better to step in. We teach people to do that, like with grace and with compassion...not making it about the person, but making it about the behavior and tying it back to the purpose, because it can be hard to hear that feedback...I think it's the thing that like takes the most practice and comfort in getting accustomed to doing and [facilitators] have a lot of anxiety about it.

By stepping in, Gwen explained that she endeavored to shift the collective back to their agreements. She also acknowledged that facilitators could find enforcing (or reminding, for those with a gentler approach) challenging.

Facilitators of organizations, such as Angela's, shared that it was very rare that she or her co-facilitators needed to step-in because, she explained:

people hold each other accountable...someone else in the group is going to say something or counter that or push back and usually in a very compassionate way. And so just, that's not a burden that we have to carry very often at all.

Some facilitators described asking participants to use "oops" and "ouch" to intervene if they ("oops") or others ("ouch") deviated from the community agreements. Michelle explained:

the “oops” is that you, when you catch yourself, you can literally say, “Oops, you know what, that came out wrong,” or whatever the case may be, so that you let people know in the room or in the process that you saw yourself do that. And so, it’s a really significant thing to be self-correcting, but in the public setting. And then the ouch is when something has happened that you have felt a sting from, the word “ouch” is kind of like, when you hurt yourself and you say ouch...it’s more like saying, “that stung, but I don’t want to cut your head off...I want you to know that something has taken place that I would like for us to have process around, so I’m saying “ouch,” so that we can stop and make space for what just happened so we can all participate in the healing.

Other facilitators, conversely, framed the use of “ouch” and “oops” as harmful. Dansen, for example, shared:

[w]e ask people not to respond to what people are saying...the “oops” and the “ouches” just are distractions and to me I don’t see how they lead to a different type of conversation in that you’re responding to people as they’re speaking, and oftentimes before they had even completed their sentence. So our purpose is to hear the perspective of the other side, which means you listen to the perspective of the other side without interruption. The “ouches” are from our perspective interruptions.

Dansen shared that people would disagree on what constituted as an “oops” and “ouches” because they each had their own subjective perspectives. “To me that totally takes me away from you hearing what I’m saying and trying to understand, but instead immediately judging me and silencing me.” She said that interrupting was not part of the space she and her co-facilitators were trying to create. She described, instead, that they relied on their community agreements to address any impediment to group progress that emerge. Maxwell et al. (2011) write, for example,

when the dialogue turns into debate “it usually means that the ground rules are not being followed. Facilitators will need to know how to revisit the ground rules and inquire if anything needs to be added.”

Others shared that they struggled with knowing if and when to intervene. Chester, a 29-year-old white man living in California, for example, reported that he had:

an inability to like really stay true to [the ground rules] and like kick somebody out if it got to that point...do you shut somebody down? ‘Cause what message does that send? It’s a dialogue, you’re supposed to like work through it. But in this case, if you can’t work through it, how do you respond to that?

Chester noted that his hesitation regarding how to react in that scenario was reflective of his lack of experience using the dialogue process. “I really think it’s coming back to the inexperience,” he shared.

Similarly, Thomas, a 44-year-old white man living in Texas, shared that he had upset people of color in prior dialogues when he intervened while they were sharing. In one instance, he said:

I remember like it was yesterday, when I tried to interject when [the pastor] was...telling an elongated story, all I said was something to the effect of, “pastor I don’t mean to interrupt you,” and he said, “yes, you did.” And so, I called him another day or two later and apologized and worked through that with him because I felt deeply concerned by the impact of my words on him and his words on me...He heard a white man telling a Black man to stop talking...I suspected that that was part of what was going on...when I interjected, that caused some pain.

Thomas illustrated that a lack of mutual understanding between facilitators and participants around racial dynamics could negatively affect the dialogue process.

Implementing the community agreements involved either asking participants to assess their needs to participate in a conversation about race or sharing pre-created agreements with the community, reemphasizing these agreements throughout the dialogue. Facilitators also described experiencing some difficulties as they established, sometimes got pushback, and enforced the community agreements.

Equalizing Participant Communication

Hindrances to everyday interpersonal communication include interrupting, failing to listen, listeners becoming distracted, and, critically, the power dynamics between individuals, shaped by positionality (i.e., race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, religion). Such behaviors can create a sense of inequality between communicators. In line with this, Walsh (2007) asks, “how can public talk...ever be free from power, because it is highly unlikely that those with and those without power are equally familiar and comfortable using the same language and set of symbols to convey meaning?” Facilitators aimed to utilize a dialogue process that countered the power dynamics in dominant public talk.

Sometimes this condition of equalizing communication was “built in” to facilitators’ dialogue process. The Circle process, Circle keepers explained, is inherently equalizing. Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2020) write that “everyone is included equally without regard to rank, status, or hierarchy. Shedding titles gives a further message of equality and of looking beyond outer roles to who we are in our hearts” (p. 524). Circle keepers and facilitators using a different dialogue process described providing participants with equal time or opportunity to speak their truths, in sharp contrast to normative conditions of communication.

Dansen was part of an organization that ensured each participant had the same amount of time to share. She shared that using the condition was “spiritual.” She explained, “the person who may have been homeless six months ago gets the same amount of time as the mayor, and there’s no attacking.” In the dialogue, everyone’s voices were equally valued. As Orbe and Harris (2022) wrote, “a layperson describing their own lived experiences is valued and appreciated with the same regard as a researcher’s or scholar’s perspective” (p. 19). Facilitators work to ensure that the traditional privileging and centering of dominant perspectives was interrupted by equalized communication.

The Dynamics of Equalized Participant Communication

To enact equalizing participant communication, facilitators asked participants to sit in a circle or semi-circle, timed participants to ensure that each member received the same amount of time to share, or passed a talking piece.

Sitting in a Circle or Semi-circle. As part of fostering equalized communication, facilitators of the organizations in this study described asking participants to sit in a circle or semi-circle so that they would be sitting at an equal height and able to see each other. It is important to note that a “circle” was both the shape that most facilitators asked participants to sit in and the intergroup dialogue process (i.e., the Circle process) that participants who identified as Circle keepers used to hold conversations across difference. As part of this Circle process, Circle keepers² would ask participants to pass a talking piece and place their values or meaningful objects at the center of the circle (among other elements of the process).

² Some of the Circle keepers participating in this study led, for example, racial Healing Circles and Peacemaking Circles. Gathering in a circle to discuss important issues was likely a part of the indigenous descendants of most people, and still exist among indigenous people globally (Pranis, 2005). Peacemaking Circles are active across cultural communities including African Americans, Hmong, Latinx, Cambodian, Native American and Euro-Americans (Pranis, 2005). As Pranis (2005) writes, these and other elements “mark the Circle as a sacred space in which participants are present with themselves and one another in a way that is different from an ordinary meeting” (p. 12).

Gabrielle, a 54-year-old Latinx woman living in Washington, shared that sitting in a Circle is part of the transition from everyday outside interactions to an intentional and slower-paced dialogue while sitting in a circle. She explained:

[i]t's really important to transition from our everyday regular lives, which is our normal, to moving to this different space that we are keeping for having the conversation or having the Circle happen. And in order to transition from that to here, we don't have these magical mirrors...right? But you have to create the conditions so that people feel like there's, "okay, so now I'm entering into a different space."

Physically sitting participants in a circle face-to-face, Circle keepers and facilitators explained, was meant to focus the group on the immediate dialogue. In part, this was to encourage participants to respect and listen to each other equally.

Whereas most facilitators asked participants to sit in a circle, a few required participants to sit in a semi-circle or used different formations at different times. Thomas, for example, described sitting participants in a semi-circle or closed circle when facilitating racial dialogues. He wrote:

I've used a few different formations, including "fishbowl," where folks on the perimeter listen to the conversation of folks in the middle of the room...but if I'm keeping everyone in the same group and encouraging each of them to participate, I like either a semi-circle or a closed circle.

Thomas emphasized the importance of the format of seating by recounting a time that the room for the dialogue impeded participants from sitting in a circle or semi-circle. A participant asked him, "why can't I sit in such a way that I can see the person I'm talking to?" A key purpose for sitting in a circle or semi-circle was that people were oriented toward each other.

The facilitators of one organization used five chairs, seated in a semi-circle, for their dialogues about race. Each chair indicated a different position on an issue, with a neutral chair in the center. Aimee, a 30-year-old white woman living in California, described the format:

We have five chairs from strongly agree to strongly disagree. You got neutral, undecided people in between. And once the seats are taken up, there's a chair in the middle that faces the five chairs. And the facilitator sits. And so that really creates this very intimate space.

The five chairs were positioned in a semi-circle facing an audience. Aimee's co-facilitator, Chester, explained that they sat in a semi-circle shape to be "physically turned toward people that you're engaged with but also psychologically, emotionally turn toward people, engage with people." The audience that the participants faced, Chester explained, could influence the direction of the dialogue. He shared:

[t]he five in the co-dialogue might only take the conversation to a certain extent. They kind of plateau. But then someone can come in from the audience and say, "Hey, you all are talking about this, but we really need to talk about this over here. But you all are talking about individual biases and prejudice, but we really need to talk about systemic racism. How it shows up in schools, how it shows up in prisons. What do you all think about that?" And then it just can snowball from there.

Chester and Aimee described sitting participants in a semi-circle and creating space for audience participation. Their approach was distinct from the other organizations in this study.

Timing Participants/Passing a Talking Piece. Some organizations provided each participant with the same number of minutes in which to share their answer to a prompt; others passed a talking piece to provide participants to clarify whose turn it was to talk. Cynthia's

organization engaged in the former. She explained, “people’s ability to bring their thoughts into the room are timed. They’re timed in two-minute intervals, and they can say whatever they want.” As part of one organization’s conversational conditions, if a participant did not use their full time the participant’s group sat in silence until the time ran out. This was not meant to penalize participants for not using their full time but, rather, committed the collective explicitly to creating the same space for each participant’s communication.

Other facilitators from organizations, including Coming to the Table and Huayruro, did not time participants as they shared. Instead, they equalized sharing by passing a “talking piece” around the Circle to allow each person to hold it along with the uninterrupted attention of the group. The talking piece, according to Pranis (2005) “allows for full expression of emotions, deeper listening, thoughtful reflections, and an unhurried pace” (p. 12). Janna explained that passing a talking piece could slow down the conversation and interrupt power dynamics in dialogue. She explained:

when the talking piece is in the person’s hand, they have the power. So, they’re not taking power away from anyone...No one can take power away from anyone because power is in the talking piece, and you have the talking piece in your hand.

Circle keepers and facilitators described endeavoring to equalize the elements of the dialogue that they could influence.

Challenges of Equalized Communication

A challenge facilitators described experiencing when implementing equalized communication was participants’ difficulty with waiting for their turn to share.

Participants Struggled with Waiting their Turn. As communicating in these interracial conversations about race often contrasted with the ways that many participants were accustomed

to conversing, equalizing participants' communication could prove difficult. Janna, for example, described an instance when a participant interrupted another Circle keeper, Patrick, who was holding the talking piece. She explained that the participant interrupting Patrick:

wasn't trying to get power, it was just his cultural background that like that's how he conversed...And then the talking piece got to him, he was like, "Oh, I'm so sorry I interrupted. I forgot that we had the talking piece." ...it takes getting used to.

Patrick discussed his understanding of participants' interruptions. He explained:

some people are just so trained by western modalities that they can't wait their turn... you can't have a conversation about race if you can't wait your turn. It's just not gonna happen. And as much as you want to have the conversation, you might really wanna question if you actually really want to have the conversation.

He shared that, if participants could not engage in the principles of equalized sharing, they likely were unprepared to engage in a dialogue about a social equity issue like race.

Implementing equalizing communication involved facilitators asking participants to sit in a circle or semi-circle and timing participants' communication or passing a talk piece around the circle. The challenge of implementing equalizing communication was participants' difficulty with waiting for their turn to share with the group.

Adapting to Community Needs

Many facilitators noted that communities had the knowledge, wisdom, and collective abilities to address the issues that they faced, and thus the facilitators described seeking to collaborate with the community in decision-making throughout the process. Stains (2016) writes "the collaborative process yields vital information about local needs and creates legitimacy and ownership in the process" (p. 1538). Facilitators' role, then, is to implement the conditions and

communication practices and hold the space with and for the community as members engaged in a necessary dialogue.

Facilitators structured the dialogue by introducing conditions that facilitators shared could adapt to wherever different stage individuals and communities were at in terms of engaging in a dialogue about race, adapting to participants and community needs in the conversation. Gabrielle, for example, shared that despite the differences in members' engagement—with some more ready than others to participate—the dialogue process adapted to individual needs. She recalled once instance in particular when:

some of the people in this space were very ready to engage in difficult conversation and cross-cultural conversation...Some of these Latinx artists were ready to sit in a Circle with white people to talk about historical cultural appropriation in the arts, and all of the things that came up, and other members in the Circle expressed not being ready for that. And I think that's something that says how the Circle was able to hold all of these different realities...holding so many different experiences.

The Circle keepers in her organization used this dialogue process in part because of its capacity to hold divergent perspectives, positionalities, and lived experiences concurrently.

The Dynamics of Adapting to Community Needs

Adapting to community needs involved facilitators' encouraging participants to offer input, underscoring that participants were in control of their engagement, and relinquishing control over the dialogue's outcome.

Encouraging Participants to Offer Input. Facilitators talked about their efforts to adapt to the needs of the communities that they worked with so that they could better support members

as they engaged in an often-challenging dialogue. Responding to the needs of the community required participants to elicit feedback and input. As Angela explained:

[w]e're laying that foundation, but then as we get a little further into the process, that's when we start being more responsive to like...they keep talking about this or they have a frustration around this or they're missing a connection here. And so we just have a lot of tools in our tool bag and so we talk about, what do we collectively as a team, like what do we think the most effective tool for this would be, and so we just adjust and sometimes we do it in the moment, like, "hey, what we're hearing is this. Would you like to go this direction? We had this plan, but maybe we could do this instead," and sort of let them make that decision for us.

Jada, who co-facilitates with Angela, added:

we pay close attention to the people that we are dealing with...we pay attention to the energy in the room, and so sometimes the energy might shift because people are thinking about, or they've experienced something. So those are the things that guide whether or not we need to change.

Jada and Angela explained that they monitored the collective's verbal and nonverbal communication to decide if and how they shift their approach as facilitators. Gwen, too, emphasized the importance of being transparent with participants so that they were co-creators of the process. She explained:

we often talk [about] transparently managing the dilemma...that's an anchor for us, a principle of how we work, which honestly is the greatest gift I've ever been given as a human, and as a professional facilitator, this idea that...we make...the implicit, explicit and not feeling like we need to be alone in figuring it out. It's actually really

inappropriate for us to go off to a corner to problem-solve by ourselves. That's not good. I'm not gonna figure this out by myself. I need the input and the buy-in and the wisdom of the people in the room, because if I come in with some solution, I'm probably not gonna be right as much as I like to think I'm always right.

Gwen emphasized that facilitators could not work on a community issue without the active engagement of the community. She explained that if facilitators were to adopt a top-down hierarchical relationship with the community:

we're just gonna be back at square zero in terms of whether or not the community feels like they can say yes to that because they weren't consulted... So that practice of turning it back over to the group and saying, "We started with A, we're sort of meandering over here to Z. How do we wanna make sense of that together? What's the right direction? What do people need? How can we find alignment?"

Instead of driving the process, facilitators said that they "walked alongside" participants and adapted to community needs. Theresa, a 43-year-old white woman living in Maine, for example, shared that the highlights of the dialogue often stemmed from facilitators pausing their plans and pivoting the dialogue to discuss participants' questions or concerns. She explained:

[t]hose feel to me like the jewels of teaching, of helping people connect with something and click with it, even if it wasn't part of our standard schedule. And giving the space for it. And part of that is also giving ourselves permission to be like, "Well, we're just gonna trash the plan for the next 45 minutes. We're gonna get rid of this thing that we thought we were gonna do" ...for the sake of what needs to be learnt by this group right now. It feels like that's where so much of the magic happens.

A number of facilitators emphasized that their dialogue process was highly adaptable and collaborative with the community, because they trusted members to know what their community needed.

Underscoring Participants' Agency in Engagement. Facilitators described an aspect of adapting to community needs as promoting participants' agency to engage in the conversation to whatever extent that they wanted. Facilitators emphasized the importance of the process adapting to participants' needs for the participants to feel included and accepted. Members of all identities, viewpoints, levels of engagement, and levels of experience with conversations about race were welcome, as long as they endeavored to communicate under the conversational conditions. Theresa shared, for example:

we do explain a little bit that you can just sit there and tell a story about fishing. That's fine too. And just kind of reassure them that like... "if you're stubborn enough to sit through this again, to stay for the rest of the workshop, you can spend your whole time talking about how much you hate this. And like, that's allowed too." And sometimes it doesn't work, right? Sometimes it doesn't work for people that spend the whole time talking about how they hate it and they're like, "Well, I definitely hated that," and then they never come back, or they do 20 years from now... Sometimes people are real grumpy for the whole time and then they leave the sweetest, most insightful comment as their final highlight and they drop it in the chat and then run away.

Facilitators created the space for the dialogue, introduced conditions meant to support the conversation, and described watching what unfolded. Theresa's co-facilitator, Jessie, a 61-year-old white woman living in California, shared that facilitators use prompts: "And the prompt is often a question that invites people to show some of themselves, to be vulnerable. But again, you

get to kinda enter that prompt from wherever you want to or talk about something totally different.” Facilitators described their dialogue processes as supporting participants in pushing the boundaries of their social comfort but doing so at their own pace and discretion.

Relinquishing Control over the Outcome. Facilitators shared that they trusted the dialogue process to generate the necessary individual and collective outcomes, and thus they described following the lead of the process and the community instead of attempting to force collective outcomes. Sakura, a 56-year-old Japanese woman living in Washington, said:

what happened is what happens and what needs to happen...The reason why it's going to happen beyond our expectation is that the Circle there is a space for us the people to cultivate community wisdom... So, it's not about kind of one person fix the issue or whatever, the Circle process help us to cultivate, nurture the community wisdom. And then that process is sometimes it's kind of surprising because the process make invisible visible... everybody has a kind of perspective, but it's nobody has kind of seen the things as a whole. Everybody has a lens. So that's why kind of we are sharing each piece and then the community as a whole can hold the whole...it's like a pressure cooker...we can cook at the end, open the lid, Wow. It's different taste we thought, but it is as it is...it's kind of very magical.

Sakura explained that the Circle process could strengthen bonds, but it could also bring to light harder truths, such as the need for people to discontinue their relationships. She stressed that both outcomes were viable and necessary.

The community dialogue, Sakura noted, also enabled participants to garner insights collectively. Sakura's co-Circle keeper, Yerwal, shared that Circle keepers:

initiated the Circle process to enable the process to provide what the community needed. It's amazing that sometimes you're shaking your head, you are just like I don't know what happened...all I know is I watched it happen but why it happened because these elements were there. You're not controlling the space, you're just there holding, I like a term that we used most recently is space creator. So that's not where you're, defining things in it, you're just creating that entree point for conversations to occur oftentimes conversations that you would anticipate would never occur.

Facilitators of several organizations revealed the importance of focusing more on the process than the outcome. Jarrod, a 64-year-old Black man living in Colorado, similarly described that the outcome was less important than the dialogue process remaining equitable. He explained:

the process is going to be inclusive; it's going to be equitable...Does it impact the outcome? I would absolutely hope it does, but am I wedded to an outcome? No, as long as the process that was used is equitable to get to the outcome.

Unwedded to the outcome, Jarrod said that he was chiefly concerned with creating an equitable and inclusive process and trusted the outcomes would follow.

Jarrod also shared that he adapted his dialogue process to fit the needs of the community by ensuring members had the information they required to make the best individual and collective decisions. Jarrod noted that he had no intention to tell the community members what the outcome needed to be, but it wasn't fair, he said, to ask:

community members to come in to offer thoughts on a process or a sector that they don't really understand...so I would offer examples of things in training, in policy, and other things that I've seen that I've engaged in for folks to think about broadly because maybe

they didn't know that that was something to think about...to get to the outcome that they want doesn't mean that I am an empty vessel as I facilitate. I'm offering what I know about the issues to give people maybe something else to chew on. And so...I'm in some sense, influencing at least the thought process and the sausage-making.

By adapting to community needs, facilitators shared that they hoped to support the community in accessing their collective wisdom. Adapting to the needs of the community effectively involved encouraging participants to offer feedback and input, underscoring that participants were in control of how much they engaged in the dialogue, and relinquishing control over the dialogue's outcomes to focus on creating an equitable dialogue process.

Facilitator Grounding

Facilitators discussed the importance of ensuring that they were mentally grounded, stable, and centered before entering a community and facilitating conversations about race. Many described the condition of taking care of themselves outside of the dialogue so that they could navigate the challenging topography of community conversations about race. Patrick, for example, stressed the importance of doing what they needed to outside of the circle to make holding the circle more sustainable. After sharing some of the challenges of holding the circle Patrick added, "I'm sure you can imagine we do shit outside the Circle to make sure we can sit inside the Circle." In addition to several other grounding exercises, facilitators described engaging in personal anti-racist work outside of the dialogue process to feel more prepared and centered while holding the dialogue for the community.

Dynamics of Facilitator Grounding

Facilitator-grounding, facilitators shared, required facilitators to center themselves through grounding exercises such as meditation, breathing, and singing. Enacting these, however, could be challenging.

Grounding Exercises. Facilitators described consistently engaging in their own grounding exercises, because they recognized that their energy set the tone for the room. Sara shared that she and her co-Circle keeper, Sam, also remain grounded by, “always engaging in personal transformational work...over the last four years, we’ve both been really intentional on our own personal anti-racism work.” To show up for the Circle as their best selves, Sara and many others determined what practices outside of the Circle would support them in the Circle.

Jill, a 29-year-old white woman living in Oregon, talked about engaging in singing outside of the circle so that she was more grounded when facilitating. She shared:

[a]nd then for myself, and the culture and the community here where I live, where we do this work, we do a lot of singing together. And that is really, really valuable, because there’s something magical that happens when we come together in song, where we’re all cohering together, we’re harmonizing our voices, and so there’s just like a magic that happens on an energetic level, but often what we’re actually singing about is why we’re doing this work, we just had a song... The words were, if I’m gonna learn, may it serve the future ones. So we’re reminding ourselves that when we make mistakes, when we fail, when we mess up, it’s not for ourselves, it’s really for this future world that we’re working towards. And then the rest of the song was, “I too deserve belonging, I too deserve to heal, I too deserve aliveness.” And I think I can speak for myself as a white person in this work, there can be a way of like not feeling like we’re worthy of healing,

because there's so much pain and trauma that other white people have caused, that our ancestors have caused...And so getting to sing about that together, it's really, really healing. And it opens up a lot more space for trust and for deeper work, deeper conversations to happen.

Challenges of Facilitator Grounding

Facilitators shared that grounding themselves involved the challenges of maintaining their grounding and extending grace or patience to participants.

Maintaining their Grounding. Remaining grounded could be difficult for facilitators, who described sometimes disassociating and feeling emotionally shaken or exhausted.

Facilitators said that they could tell when they were struggling to maintain a balanced headspace when facilitating. Jill, for example, stated that she noticed during some dialogues, she said:

all of a sudden, I'll start to disassociate, so it's all up to like how much I am tracking my own system, like taking care of yourself. The more present I am with my own awareness of my sensation and what's going on in the room, the better I am able to track those subtler layers of, "oh wow, [the collective is] starting to go over sideways."

Angela, too, described the challenges of facilitating a dialogue when she wasn't feeling grounded. She shared:

I think about a couple of times in the history of this work where I was like, I was so emotionally shaken or exhausted and probably I shouldn't have gone into that space, I should have just said, "Hey, co-facilitators, can you take this and let me sit it out?" Those were the hardest ones, when I wasn't feeling centered or I was dealing with something in my personal life that was really, really on my mind, weighing heavily on my mind where I just didn't feel like I had the grounding. And so that's why it is really important for us

to get grounded and to enter the space as clear as possible...in the last several years we've really integrated very intentionally a grounding with everybody in the group, like a breathing.

Angela explained how incorporating centering exercises like breathing could help both participants and facilitators maintain a balanced headspace for the dialogue. By ensuring those who set the tone for the dialogue were grounded, Angela said, the centering exercises seemed to create a domino effect of calming. She explained:

[i]f we enter the room or start off with anxieties, then that's just infectious with the groups. So, it's incredibly useful for us... The work is challenging, right? So it's not like it's, "Ooh, it's easy peasy, lemon squeezy." It's challenging but we know that that is just part of the work.

Conversations about race, facilitators said, could be emotionally taxing and difficult. Angela shared that one of the impediments she experienced to maintaining a balanced headspace was her difficulty with establishing a boundary between the dialogues she facilitated and her everyday life. She said that she found it difficult not to ruminate on different aspects of a dialogue after it ended and explained, "I internalize things so deeply and I was, I would be a mess... I'm thinking about a conversation I had with my mother once. She called me after a session, and I was just crying and crying."

Angela recalled that she was overwhelmed by what a participant had shared in the circle. "It was like all this intense emotion," she said. "And, of course, you feel...human connection with them, but I would just take it on so deeply and it was not a healthy thing." Other facilitators expressed that maintaining their grounding could be challenging if they struggled with ruminating post-dialogue on the minutiae of the conversation. Jada, Angela's co-facilitator,

conversely, shared that when the community dialogue was over, “that’s it” she said. She explained, “I can go back over a session sometimes in my mind just to see if there’s something we can improve on, but other than that...that change is something that, it’s an individual process.” Jada emphasized that she was not and could not be responsible for others’ growth and change, and thus she focused on what she could control, which she described as ensuring an inclusive and equitable dialogue process.

For some of the facilitators in this study, maintaining a balanced mindset required taking a break from the dialogue. This was especially pertinent for facilitators of color. Sara, for example, shared:

when Black folks come to these kinds of settings, it’s post-traumatic stress and it’s the re-triggering of trauma, and [Sam, white co-Circle keeper] knows this. I’ve had to take breaks, big breaks. I take breaks now. I’m constantly in self-care and there have been times when I’ve just retreated. [laughter] I’ve just retreated... And we’re both very intentional about our self-care. We’re not perfect human beings by any stretch of the imagination, things happen all the time, mistakes happen, but we both really try to show up as our best selves as facilitators, we really hold that our circles as being really sacred.

By engaging in practices to feel more grounded when they hold the circle, Sara explained, she and her co-Circle keeper were able to facilitate more effectively.

Holding the dialogue, facilitators agreed, was harder on facilitators of color than white facilitators. Several white facilitators shared a recognition of the increased toll facilitating could take on facilitators of color. As Gwen shared:

how I show up in that space, I need to practice all of the things I need to pull in all of my grounded, centered self in order to sit in and hear all of the different things that people

might think or say about whiteness, about race. I am certain that it is not as hard to be me as it is to be [Dansen and Pearl] in those moments...our identities are absolutely on the table when we hold a conversation about race.

Gwen emphasized that she recognized the facilitation experience as fundamentally different for her colleagues of color.

Extending Grace or Patience to Participants. Facilitators described remaining grounded and extending grace to participants when they asked questions or made comments that were difficult to hear. It could be challenging, facilitators said, to remain centered in those moments. Quinn, a 47-year-old white woman living in Oregon, shared that she and her partner would emphasize:

over and over, “there’s not a bad question” ...and I think we model that, because to be honest, we have received some pretty personally disconcerting feedback or comments from people that make me uncomfortable, and I know make [Mike, co-facilitator and Quinn’s husband] uncomfortable. And so we get to model that we are okay with that being asked and give space for like, “Okay, let’s talk through that.”

Quinn explained that instead of immediately reacting negatively to something disconcerting that was shared, she and Mike, a Black 60-year-old man, make an explicit effort to “work to assume good intentions.” Mike further shared that when people make, he said:

an offensive remark, or they make a bewildering remark, we don’t take offense to that. We understand that that’s coming from a position of conditioning. And so we then respond to that with, “have you thought about?” with a question for them to ponder that contains information that we know they’ve never heard before...That being said, we know sometimes that when people say things...they’re trying to stoke or they’re trying to

incense, and we understand that...at the end of the day, we're not letting those kinds of things get us off track.

Mike and Quinn endeavored to remain centered in the face of unnerving questions and comments.

Jarrod, who co-facilitated with his wife, as well as others, warned about facilitators focusing on intent instead of impact in the dialogue. "Assume good intentions":

[I]t sounds wonderful, humanistic, and enlightened. However, for folks who have experienced trauma, abuse, microaggressions, discrimination, etc. for a consistent period of time, often from the same person, department, demographic, organization (govt. as an example), etc., asking that person to assume best intentions is placing the burden on the most impacted. In doing so, the person can continually be re-traumatized or burdened when similar actions occur to them while they are expecting or hoping for the best in someone or something. Entering with an open mind is different than asking me to make an assumption...Our absolute focus is on impacts, not intentions. POC and other marginalized groups have been "suffering through" good intentions for generations...certainly when addressing micro or macro micro aggressions, intent is irrelevant. The impact is what should be addressed otherwise the focus shifts to the offending party.

Facilitators had to decide at what point participants lost the privilege of participating or sharing in a dialogue process that was meant to be inclusive and equitable. It was imperative, many shared, that the dialogue process not further marginalize facilitators or participants of color. Others asserted that, as long as participants were abiding by the collective agreements, they could speak their truth. Sometimes, however, what they shared was hard to hear.

Facilitators discussed the challenges of maintaining their grounding and extending grace or patience to participants. Some described engaging in breathing, mindfulness, and listening to their bodies and boundary-setting/taking breaks from facilitating to make their work more sustainable.

A Welcoming Space for Dialogue

Scholars and practitioners of intergroup dialogues describe fostering spaces that made participants feel invited and welcomed to engage in the community conversation as a vital condition. Stains (2016) writes:

[i]t is possible to cultivate a better environment within which our public conversation can grow. With focused intention, participant preparation, and collaborative, responsive design, it is possible to invite the stories that animate perspectives and beliefs and that leave people feeling seen, hopeful, and willing to courageously engage in community life. (p. 1545)

Facilitators said that everyone, and they emphasized *everyone*, should feel welcome to participate. One of the guideposts for the Alluvial Collective included, “be present and welcoming,” which the collective defined as:

100% present. Set aside the usual distractions of things undone from yesterday, things to do tomorrow. Bring all of yourself to the work. Practice hospitality. We all learn most effectively in spaces that welcome us. Welcome others to this place and this work and presume that you are welcomed.

As part of creating a welcoming space, facilitators discussed two requisites for participants to engage in the dialogue. First, participants needed to be willing to communicate under the conversational conditions by, for example, sitting in a circle and abiding by the

community agreements. Second, as Theresa shared, participants needed to at least be curious in engaging in a dialogue about race. She shared:

[e]veryone's coming from somewhere different, and that place is good. Wherever they are right then is good... They don't even have to take a step in our direction, but if they're willing to glance in our direction, we will give them some encouragement for where they are. Whether it's a glance or a step or a leap or a full-throated dive. And that all of those things are correct and helpful and we wanna create space for everyone.

Participants needed to be curious, "if not enthusiastic" Theresa said. "If they're not even a little bit curious, then it's like well, it's not the right time for you." If participants met those criteria, they were welcome to participate in the community conversation. By creating a hospitable and welcoming environment facilitators endeavored to set a tone that was conducive for participants to share.

Dynamics of Providing a Welcoming Space for Dialogue

Facilitators relayed that providing a welcoming space for dialogue involved embracing their own and others' imperfections and not engaging in shaming or blaming,

Embracing Imperfections. Facilitators recognized that many participants held anxieties about connecting across difference or had fears of exposing their biases publicly. By fostering a welcoming space for dialogue, facilitators hoped to assuage fears and cultivate valuable connections across members. Michelle explained that a:

feeling needs to be established in the room, the feeling of "we're starting a connection here," the feeling that "we're working together here," the feeling that "I want to know how to respect you better," the feeling that "I know that I have blemishes, but I'm gonna show up anyway." The feeling that "I'm going to embrace you with those blemishes, and

I'm going to get to love you because of them," all of that you have to generate from human contact, human contact.

Welcoming spaces included supporting participants in their imperfections. Angela shared that she and her co-facilitators will often remind participants, "[r]emember, we are extending grace to each other. Nobody is perfect here. We're in a learning space, learning and self-reflection." By describing the dialogue as a space for learning Angela gave participants permission to make mistakes and to learn from those mistakes.

No Blame and No Shame. A dynamic of shame, Angela clarified, is not entirely useless, but is not the ideal method of inciting growth and change in a community context. She shared: as facilitators and as a circle group, we don't want them to stay in their place of shame. We want them to move past it. We want them to grow. And so, we can indict and blame systems, we can indict and blame policy, we can scrutinize history. And we know that there are actors who made that happen. And so, we're not gonna say Ross Barnett wasn't wrong or he... We can pick that apart and keep and shame him as a leader and a historical figure, but people in the room—that is not useful.

Angela explained her team's decision to embrace imperfection and foster an environment of grace by describing the space as one for learning and not shame or blame.

Mike and Quinn shared, too, that their approach was not to shame and blame. Mike noted that:

[a]nd all of this process opens up that environment of familiarity and trust and ability to say whatever is freely on your mind... We don't label people. We're not telling people to be anti-racist, nor are we saying that they are racist... We're not saying we need to retrain your behavior... We don't come with that kind of dynamic.

Quinn added, with emphasis, “We are co-learners.” Facilitators reported that they found a welcoming, community-oriented approach to be most effective in encouraging participants to engage in the dialogue.

Candice shared that one of the guidelines of her organization was that “We will surely make mistakes in our efforts, but mistakes are occasions for learning and forgiving” and “it is important to avoid criticism or judgement about an individual’s sharing, point of view, and/or feelings.” She asked:

Can you imagine a person sitting in a circle with all of these strangers? They don’t know each other. They all come from different backgrounds, different walks of life, they have different views and everything else. And somebody said, we will surely make mistakes, but mistakes are occasion for learning. Isn’t that interesting and forgiving?”

Joseph shared a saying that he had heard and shared with participants and validated their feelings by saying:

“Nobody in this room created racism, and nobody in this room created the systems that allowed for whiteness.” So, we can all take a deep breath, right? That this fear that you’re gonna say the wrong thing or this anxiety that you’ll be labeled a “racist,” like nobody in this room created those systems... “let’s just take a deep breath.” And so acknowledging that feelings might be anxious, but then it’s fine, we’re gonna move through that feeling.

Many facilitators discussed their objective to foster a “trusted, warm, welcoming and safe” space for the dialogue.

Challenges of Providing a Welcoming Space for Dialogue

Many participants discussed ways to make the dialogue more inviting and welcoming. Some, too, stressed not overpromising or failing to intervene due to a desire to value all voices equally.

No “Safe” Spaces. It is important to note that, whereas many facilitators shared the idea of endeavoring to create a “safe” dialogue for participants, others positioned safety as an unachievable feature for the dialogue. Sofia, a 57-year-old Latinx woman, shared:

we used to think about safe spaces, and something that evolved...and it started with a reading that one of the facilitators introduced to us to, the notion of brave spaces, and so now we really think about brave spaces and not safe spaces because...What is a safe space? We’re really talking about brave spaces.

Jarrod also questioned the validity of “safe” spaces when he said:

[e]veryone always says, “Well, this is a safe space.” No, it’s not ‘cause safety is different for everybody. You have no idea what safety means. So, all I say is...I’m gonna try to create a comfortable enough space where we can be uncomfortable.”

He also offered a clarification regarding what he considered welcoming everyone to the conversation to involve. Jarrod noted,

[a]ll are welcome, but not all perspectives are worthy of discussion. Subtle but important point for me. Once explained or examples given, I’m not going to engage in a continuing discussion of whether systemic racism exists, or whether it’s all about personal responsibility. One’s individual experiences don’t create the rule.

Ensuring the conversation to be truly welcome for all, Jarrod argued, involved ensuring the conversation was not further oppressing already marginalized communities. Instead, the community space was meant to enable racial truths to emerge.

Facilitators' objectives were greater and more meaningful than exposing a participants' biases: They trusted the dialogue process itself to reveal those truths to individuals. Creating a welcoming space for an insightful dialogue meant, facilitators explained, participants embracing their own and others' imperfections as long as they weren't causing harm.

Critical Consciousness

"A whole body of literature," Sue (2015) writes, "supports the belief that encountering diverse racial points of view, being able to engage in racial conversations, and successfully acknowledging and integrating differing perspectives lead to an expansion of critical consciousness" (p. 17). Scholars and practitioners of intergroup dialogue often aim to raise critical consciousness by requiring participants engage with chosen materials, and then allowing the community dialogue to illuminate individual and collective racial realities. According to Gurin (2013), dialogues reveal "how power and privilege influence [participants'] lives, and the power dynamics that emerge during the dialogue. This joint focus on person and structure means that [participants] reflect on their social identities and on the larger systems of inequalities" (p. 44). Increasing participants' critical consciousness, therefore, meant offering insights that could alter how they thought about race at both the individual and societal level.

According to the facilitators, in these interracial dialogues about race, participants were often learning the historical and contemporary information about race and racial disparities that facilitators shared for the first time, in part due to the nation's attempts to stifle of truth-telling around race. Organizations across the country communicated their objective to counter this

attack by disseminating historical and contemporary racial realities. The first guideline for sharing for the Center for Healing Racism reads, for example, “we have come together to try to learn about the disease of racism.” Specifically, facilitators discussed focusing on analyzing institutional and systemic racism with communities to support members in seeing the full picture and symbiotic relationship between interpersonal and institutional racism.

Dynamics of Creating Critical Consciousness

Creating critical consciousness involved facilitators exploring institutional and interpersonal racism with participants and determining ways to be part of the solution.

Exploring Institutional and Interpersonal Racism. Facilitators discussed a multitude of ways that participants could garner critical consciousness, including listening to the facts and figures shared by facilitators or the stories shared by others in the circle. Jarrod and other facilitators explained that they provided ample examples to detail and illustrate, for instance, how race and racism function at an institutional level. He explained that he and his co-facilitator:

[g]ive them examples that they’ve never considered about what institutional racism looks like, ‘cause they’re gonna respond with examples of interpersonal dynamics. “Well, so and so, we just need everyone to be a better person.” That’s great, that’s not gonna change whether I can still be fired or disciplined because nobody likes my locks, or whether the kid’s expelled from school ‘cause he has locks. That’s not an interpersonal conversation. And so giving folks examples of what it looks like is often new to them, it’s just they’ve never thought of it that way...so you have to zoom out, this isn’t about the one cop. It’s about what is the environment and the culture that lets this cop think he can get away with this? That’s a cultural, institutional conversation, not about the one cop.

And so absolutely, it's getting people to think outside of the interpersonal bigotry to the institutional racism.

Facilitators also shared that it was important for participants to understand how deeply entrenched racism is in all institutions. Quinn and her husband Mike, for instance, both noted that, during their dialogue sessions with communities, they talked how systemic racism operates and what participants can do to interrupt it. Mike explained:

across the racial panorama of demographics, white supremacy is enacting some sort of impact on all of our lives...this country was founded upon a bedrock foundation of white supremacy by white supremacists as a whites-only citizenry. There were no Black citizens, there were no native citizens, there were no Asian citizens. It was for whites only... And we let you know, this is not our telling, our decision, or our characterization of the country, here's who said it, here's who reinforced it...from laws to systems, to public policies, to private sector practices, throughout the entire country, it was ubiquitously a white supremacist nation...And when we get to our era, we now realize what we inherited...as we continue to move through the historical timeline of the American history, people are learning along that path, and they're responding, not to personal stories of what happened to me or what happened to [Quinn]...So, it's not personal, it's about our society.

Quinn, Mike's wife and co-facilitator, differed in perspective, however. She responded:

people really do connect with personal...They connect with hearing that you cannot, in our small community, often walk into a bank and cash a large check. And people are like, "Oh my gosh." And it's like, "well, this is it" ... people connect to hearing, I have to go into the bank with Mike right now in 2022 to cash a big check because the banker will

receive me better than him and people will go, “no way.” And stories about how we integrate teaching in our home, people love that. So, I think even as you say not personal, I weave in personal.

Facilitators described sharing both institutional and interpersonal examples of racism to illustrate its pervasiveness. Facilitators also discussed and illustrated how racism historically and enduringly mutates to remain insidious. Candice explained:

racism keeps changing. And I often use the analogy of the shapeshifter in the Star Trek type of movies that the shapeshifter can shift into anything at any time, totally unrecognizable. Racism is the same way. Even though we will use more up-to-date information, the latest information, and everything else, but everything else stays the same.

Facilitators said they endeavored to “connect the dots” in the nation’s history so often erased and censored from history books by examining how racism has remained the same and yet transformed over time: from the enslavement of millions following the nation’s inception to present day incarceration numbers that are the second highest in the world. This engagement is consistent with Orbe and Harris (2022) who wrote about the need for participants talking about race and racial history to recognize how the past, present, and future are linked inextricably.

As participants learned about institutional and systemic racism in tandem with hearing the stories and lived experiences of participants in the community, the dialogue process supported participants in making connections between macro sociopolitical forces of privilege and oppression with participants’ individual and interpersonal experiences. Maxwell et al. (2011) write, “facilitators encourage participants to both personalize and contextualize and issues vis-à-vis systems of power, privilege, and resistance/empowerment.” One organization’s maxim is:

“accurate information plus engaging conversations equals empathetic transformation.”

Facilitators endeavored to hold the space and provide the tools for participants to see each other and the larger social structures that they occupy.

Determining How to be a Part of the Solution. Facilitators described first describing the problem and then asking participants how they planned to invoke personal and political change. Feagin (2020) asserted that “[w]ell into this century, racial segregation and separation along the color line are still a major part of our physical and psychic geography” (p. 11). As Mike shared:

that’s one of our sayings. We inherited a society that we didn’t have a hand in creating. But we do own responsibility for the society that we pass on to future generations. So how do we work together to change the status quo, reform, redesign, and reconstruct America to be the kind of equitable inclusive society for a multicultural landscape that we’re proud to pass on to future generations? How do we do that together?

Facilitators discussed the importance of guiding participants from participating in dialogue to engaging in action, and the reciprocal relationship between the two. Schoem and Hurtado (2001), for example, write “[d]ialogue involves talking, but taking action often leads to good talking, and dialogue often leads to action” (p. 14). The scholars assert that dialogue often leads to catalyzed people working together to enact change, and the experience and commonality of working together can enrich the dialogue and allows for more interpersonal authenticity and honesty that then enhances the work.

Sam and Sara also discussed a desire to move participants to action. Sam clarified, “action might just be telling Uncle Ernest at Thanksgiving dinner, ‘Please don’t tell us jokes.’ But that’s action. We want people to be more aware about racism. We want people to move

toward being allies and advocates and co-conspirators.” Facilitators invited participants to gain more awareness and understanding, and then to enact the level of action they were ready for, with an ambition toward further engagement in social justice.

Challenges of Creating Critical Consciousness

The challenges involved in creating critical consciousness amongst participants included facilitators’ overextending the reach of the dialogue too soon and participants stalling between dialogue and action.

Overextending. Although participants of racial dialogues can be eager to tackle topics such as whiteness and institutional racism immediately, many facilitators cautioned against that. For those using the Circle process, Circle keepers shared that the dialogue process “intentionally does not ‘get right to the issues.’ [Instead, keepers take] time to create experiences of shared space and connection in the group increases the level of emotional safety” (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2020, p. 88).

Circle keepers and facilitators underscored the importance of easing into more potentially charged or fraught topics of dialogue. Joseph, for example, offered a word of caution. He encouraged against:

jumping into the deep end at the get-go. I think that people wanna get into systems, race, institutional racism, or white privilege or internalized racism and into the heavy issues or in police violence or whatever is going on. And so I would warn against that. I would advocate [for] allowing the group to guide the conversation in some ways, hearing the group and figuring out where they’re going with the conversation, so that they’re leading...And you’re letting them, the truth will reveal itself, especially if you have a diverse group of community members and if they’re actually listening to each other.

Facilitators like Joseph discussed the importance of creating space for racial realities and truths to emerge. Jarrod, too, discussed deciding to alter his facilitation approach after he observed participants disengage when he addressed some issue directly. Jarrod explained:

as soon as white folks generally and white men specifically hear “white supremacy,” they’re done listening. Because they’re feeling like they’re being accused of being a racist now. Because they personalize it. And so we’ve changed how we do it and give all the examples [of white supremacy] first from the soap dispenser and the water faucets that don’t see darker skin to any number of things...So take them through all the examples and then go, “This is an example of white supremacy.” Whiteness as a default. And then I ask questions about, “How does the phrase make you feel?”

Facilitators advocated for pacing the conversation intentionally and easing into the more challenging topics. Jarrod shared that he has a quote hanging in his office, “I’m not gonna censor myself to comfort your ignorance.” Jarrod and other facilitators emphasized that their approach was not meant to coddle or cater to white people, but to engage participants in the conversation in ways that they have found work best to elicit participant engagement and learning in the dialogue.

Stalling Between Dialogue and Action. Some facilitators shared that a challenge involved in creating critical consciousness was that some participants were reticent to progress from dialogue to action. Maxwell et al. (2011) write that facilitators in intergroup dialogue push to connect participants’ critical analysis to “actions that promote diversity and social justice” (p. 16). Facilitators in the current study shared similarly that dialogue was a positive beginning for participants engagement in racial justice, but it wasn’t sufficient for social change. Joseph explained:

I think one of the challenges is, where do we go from your conversation? So, I think it's really important to build the trust [but] I think you can sometimes get lost in that...stuck in the trust building process and not moving towards any actual steps, and so, I think it's turning the conversation from that trust-building to the vulnerability and then the vulnerability into truth-telling, and then the truth-telling into action. And sometimes you're not gonna see that, sometimes the action is purely [the dialogue] experience and maybe that's okay, but for me, it's helpful if the group can galvanize towards something they're gonna do together, a collective action.

Facilitators revealed that having a shared external project could provide a collective purpose to work toward fulfilling together. Similarly to Joseph, Jarrod shared:

conversations aren't enough. Conversations without an effort to make change happen for better outcomes aren't enough... You do a facilitated conversation, a session and then there's no description of what do I do differently when I walk out of here? So I go, "Now what? That's a waste of my time." So unless you can give folks a tool or tools to begin to do something differently, think differently, you've wasted your opportunity. And so conversations aren't enough. Being able to talk about race is absolutely important, but that's not enough.

Creating critical consciousness involved increasing participants' understanding of how racism operates and supporting participants in determining how they can be a part of the solution. The challenge of increasing participants' critical consciousness was intentionally pacing the dialogue to keep participants engaged and ensuring participants moved from dialogue to action.

Discussion

Identifying Conditions and Their Dynamics and Challenges

Facilitators discussed seven conditions that they created for the dialogue. These conditions are (1) trained, interracial co-facilitation, with facilitators who shared or co-created (2) community agreements with participants who were required (3) equalize their communication. Facilitators also (4) adapted to the needs of the community by, for example, consulting with and assessing the needs of the community. Facilitators (5) ensured they were grounded and ready to facilitate, (6) provided a welcoming space for dialogue, and (7) endeavored to increase participants' critical consciousness.

Allport (1954) originally suggested four core conditions to reduce intergroup prejudice: equal status between groups, a supported conversation by social and institutional authorities, a cooperative environment, and shared goals. The first condition, equal status between groups, corresponds most readily to equalized communication in this study. This condition, in addition to providing a welcoming space for dialogue, are akin to Pettigrew's (1998) condition of creating a dialogue space that has a potential to cultivate a friendship between group member with extended commitment from participants engaging in face-to-face communication in an atmosphere of confidentiality. All three of these were present in how facilitators described encouraging participants to engage in intergroup dialogue in this study.

Allport's (1954) condition of a cooperative environment is most reflected in the current study's dynamic of creating interracial relationships of mutual trust, respect, and support that was part of the condition of trained interracial co-facilitation, and in community agreements, equalized communication, adapting to the needs of the community, and providing a welcoming space for dialogue. Facilitative guidance was another suggested condition for optimal intergroup

contact, and it most closely matched the current study's condition of trained, interracial co-facilitation. Facilitators in this study also emphasized the importance of the facilitators having different lived experiences racially, consistent with previous research (e.g., Maxwell et al., 2011; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001).

Two additional conditions identified in this dissertation that had not been discussed in previous literature were facilitators adapting to the community's needs and ensuring that they were personally grounded to hold the space for the community dialogue. Prior scholarship, while not tied to facilitation conditions specifically, suggests that grounding could be beneficial for facilitators. Leppma and Young (2014), for example, found that counseling graduate students who engaged in meditation reported more empathy and perspective-taking than the study's control group.

Facilitators described some challenging moments as they learned to facilitate together, but they described the advantages of working in a diverse team as incomparable. It was meaningful, some said, for facilitators themselves to embody and enact the relationships and communication that they sought from participants. Specifically, they provided a proximate and clear example of the trust, respect, and support they hoped to foster amongst participants.

Implementing community agreements required facilitators to either assess community needs or share and moderate pre-created agreements with the community. Again, facilitators differed in what they believed was the most effective method for enacting the community agreements. Some, particularly Circle keepers, underscored the importance of co-creating the agreements with the community to enable participants to assess how to engage most authentically in the dialogue. Others shared that they had been using and honing their agreements for more than 30 years, and thus trusted their list to support the dialogue.

A seemingly fundamental aspect of several facilitators' dialogue processes involved following the communities lead by soliciting feedback and input from participants throughout the process; directing participants without their involvement and contributions in the decision-making process, facilitators said, would lead to pseudo-solutions. The community, facilitators stressed, could generate their own solutions, and thus facilitators created and held the space for participants to convene to begin what several facilitators described as healing and edification, consistent with previous research and practice (see, e.g., Pranis, 2005; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001).

Circle keepers, conversely, emphasized that they did not change their dialogue process. Circle keepers used the Circle process, which models after indigenous approaches to wrongdoing. Yerwal shared:

[t]his indigenous practice, this goes back literally thousands of years. Every continent there was, there has been Circle before there was government, before there were cops, before there was any of that. There was a process of community-based dispute resolution. And we've deviated from that.

Circle keepers said that they trusted the process more than any one person to generate the necessary outcomes for participants and their community. As Patrick shared:

there is the Circle process. There is a process. We follow the process and we're clean with the process, we don't... You know how there's always like, "Well, let's innovate with this thing, no." Do the process, period.

Circle keepers co-created the community agreement with the community but relied on more sacred and reliable practices to structure the dialogue.

Facilitators described identifying the conditions and dynamics that attracted participants to the conversation and satisfied individual and social cravings that kept them in the conversation; facilitators offered a new way of engaging that was more equitable and inclusive than normative interactions. By keeping participants in the dialogue, the process had more time to influence participants: Participants listening to others share their lived experience, for example, seemed to challenge participants' assumptions about others, and thus their understanding of themselves. Bringing participants to the circle also fostered opportunities for the bridging ties that Allen (2016) identifies as critical for a healthy democracy.

The dialogue also offered participants opportunities to learn from fellow participants' disclosures and by reading materials and information facilitators shared with participants about racial inequity. Some emphasized participants' mutual self-disclosure and listening as key to building the trust, mutual understanding, and connection for participants to foster greater awareness, something that I return to in the next chapter. But, intentionally, they did not "teach" or offer information as facilitators.

For example, as part of member-checking, I sent a summary of the study findings to Gwen. In Gwen's response she shared that one of the conditions did not align with her organization's approach: "creating critical consciousness amongst participants." She explained that this condition "leans more toward education than [our organization's] focus on storytelling and understanding." Conversely, for several other organizations, infusing the dialogue with educational segments to increase participants' critical consciousness was a main feature of their dialogue process.

Focusing on creating and maintaining the container for the dialogue, and not the conversational outcome, was facilitators' primary focus; they centered their energy on

monitoring the intergroup dialogue as it unfolded, enforcing the community agreements and adapting to community needs. The outcome of the dialogue, they explained, was less of the focus, because the “effectiveness” or “value” of the conversation was largely subjective. Patrick, for example, shared that he didn’t know if a conversation went well until it finished, and even then, the effectiveness of the outcome could be different for each Circle keeper and community member. He explained, “everybody’s got their own experience and some people hated it...other people are like, “that was the best thing ever. We need to do more of this.” Both, he said, can be considered a success because “things got to where they need to be.”

Patrick and others emphasized that they trusted the process to foster the necessary outcomes. Boyes-Watson et al. (2020) wrote that “sometimes it may feel as though the Circle dialogue made the problem worse. That can be a good sign. Circle makes visible what is not seen or acknowledged. Acknowledgement is a first step toward healing...*in the cyclical nature of life, there is always another change*” (p. 25, emphasis in original). Facilitators created a multitude of conditions dynamically in an effort to create a container for transformation.

Implementing the conversational conditions involved a multitude of dynamics, including some that were challenging. For example, facilitators experienced some pushback from participants when implementing the community agreements and some also struggled with knowing when or how to best enforce community agreements. Many facilitators described participants’ difficulty with communicating under the condition of equalized communication, and specifically listening to others without interrupting. The challenges that facilitators experienced when implementing the conditions seemed to reflect participants’ friction with a new conversational structure, a co-created container in which they were asked to communicate in new ways. Michelle, for example, shared:

If you're not having pushback you're not doing the work. So, all of us are in an unlearning process, no matter who we are, whatever our identity is. When we learn, there's always going to be some kind of, I call them growing pains...when you're transforming, there's always a process, there's always some movement afoot in transformation. And usually it's a kind of labor, if we use that as a metaphor of birth, because you're rebirthing something so there's some kind of discomfort that happens because birthing is not all that pleasant, I know I've gone through it. [laughter] Yeah. But it's worth it. [laughter] What you get from the birthing is definitely worth it so that's what I would say.

Michelle and others shared encouraging participants to move from an intellectual understanding of identity and community to a more physiological engagement with the dialogue. When they did, she shared, growth and transformation could begin to take place.

Constructing the Container for Change

When assessing these conditions, their dynamics, and their challenges, an overarching theme that emerged across the focus groups was how facilitators described their intergroup dialogue process broadly. Many defined it as analogous to what several organizations called "constructing the container." Specifically, facilitators described implementing various conditions in the intergroup dialogue meant to supplant dominant Western patterns of communication, such as the prioritization of dominant voices at the expense of the voices of those more marginalized. Constructing the container was similar to what organizations with Circle keepers called holding or "keeping the space" for the Circle process. For many, building the container was facilitators' way of undercutting normative interpersonal power dynamics amongst the community by, for

example, asking participants to sit in an equalizing circle and giving each community member an equal opportunity to share.

Facilitators noted that the conditions often felt “unnatural” to participants at first, but they often began to feel more comfortable with practice, especially as participants discovered the benefits of different methods communicating. Dansen’s colleague, Gwen, explained “we’re asking people to shift the way they communicate in these unnatural ways...and that is what allows people to see each other, to hear each other, to understand each other in new ways.” Facilitators shared that the conversational container that they created made it possible for participants to reach across difference in new ways. Dansen and Gwen’s colleague, Pearl, a 44-year-old Black woman living in Massachusetts, explained that after “you create this container, you’re in this together with those people for that amount of time, and it impacts people. They change when they’re in it.” The dialogue process had the potential, some said, to be transformative.

The origins of facilitators’ intergroup dialogue processes in this study shared in common a critique of normative power dynamics that privilege some voices at the expense of others. Facilitators, therefore, discussed creating conditions to cultivate an equitable and inclusive dynamic. They varied, however, in how they implemented some of the conditions because they had different ideas about how to create the most equitable conditions. For many, fostering an inclusive conversation included participating alongside community participants in the dialogue. For others, it involved serving as a supportive, objective, neutral moderator of the intergroup interaction.

Some asked participants to pass a talking stick so that everyone had an opportunity to share, and others timed participants to ensure that each community member had an opportunity

and the same amount of time to share. Some stressed the importance of Black facilitators beginning and ending each community dialogue to counter centuries of BIPOC exclusion from positions of power. Others said that it was more important to be mindful of the racial and gender dynamics of the community group (i.e., a Black facilitator would address a predominately BIPOC group initially, and a white facilitator a predominately white group). In other words, facilitators implemented interracial co-facilitation in different ways, utilizing facilitators' diverse positionalities to navigate the identity dynamics in the dialogue in different ways. Across organizations, facilitators lauded interracial facilitation, and specifically cultivating a relationship of mutual trust, respect, and support among interracial co-facilitators, as an influential element of their interracial dialogues about race.

Chapter 5: Our Common Humanity

The second research question explored (a) what communication practices facilitators reported using and encouraging participants to use when engaging with community members in interracial conversations about race and (b) what dynamics occurred when they did, including (c) what challenges were involved in these dynamics. I identified six communication practices that facilitators used before and while leading intergroup dialogues to support increased connection and awareness. These practices included facilitators welcoming participants to (1) self-disclose, (2) use engaged listening, (3) express emotions, and engage in (4) introspection, all consistent with previous research. I also identified (5) community-grounding and facilitators engaged in the practice of (6) modeling the conditions and communication practices. During the focus groups with facilitators of interracial conversations about race, and again while I was analyzing the transcript data, it was apparent that these practices were central components of facilitators' dialogue process. Additionally, facilitators expressed hope that participants would continue to use these practices in their everyday interactions after the dialogues were over.

In this chapter, I define and describe each of the communication practices and the important dynamics and challenges of implementing communication practices in a community dialogue. As with the conditions, facilitators differed in their method of using—and encouraging participants to use—some communication practices and in what they described happening when they used and encouraged participants to use each practice. Strong patterns, however, emerged across interviews delineating the key communication practices and the dynamics of using and encouraging others to use them.

Table 2: Communication Practices

Practice 1	<i>Self-disclosure</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizing participants' agency in disclosing • Engaging in storytelling and perspective-giving • Restricting crosstalk <p>Challenges of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants' lack of willingness to disclose
Practice 2	<i>Engaged Listening</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging the suspension of judgment and listening with curiosity and wonder • Encouraging perspective-taking <p>Challenges of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants' poor listening skills
Practice 3	<i>Expressing Emotions</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving participants from their head to their heart • Validating participants' emotions <p>Challenges of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intervening interruptions of participant expressing emotions • Uncertainty around coping with emotions
Practice 4	<i>Introspection</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming vulnerably <p>Challenges of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging in critical introspection • "Sitting in their own chair" and "no fixing"
Practice 5	<i>Community-grounding</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounding exercises • Slowing down and embracing silence <p>Challenges of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impatience with the process
Practice 6	<i>Modeling</i>
	<p>Dynamics of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitators engaging authentically and vulnerably <p>Challenges of implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitators struggling to model vulnerability

Self-Disclosure

Scholars define self-disclosure as the sharing of intimate or personal information with others and describe it as critical for fostering mutual trust and attraction, perceived similarities, and positive feelings between sharers and listeners (Gudykunst, 2004; Miller, 2002). Facilitators emphasized the importance of providing participants with opportunities to disclose and “speak their truth” with the group. The Alluvial Collective guideposts, for example, included “speak your truth and respect the truths of others,” which the collective define as:

[s]ay what is in your heart, trusting that your voice will be heard and your contribution respected. Your truth may be different from, even the opposite of, what another in the circle has said. Speaking your truth is not debating with, or correcting, or interpreting what another has said. Own your truth by speaking only for yourself first, using “I” statements.

Facilitators described encouraging participants to, specifically, share authentically and bravely, speaking as others listen and listening respectfully as others shared. Asked to “speak their truths,” facilitators revealed that it seemed to be liberating for some participants to have an opportunity to express themselves in the ways that they wanted and needed. Candice, for example, shared:

[y]ou could go to some of the best lectures in the world and receive some of the best education, but if you are not allowed or able to process what you’re really feeling, not what you think, what you’re really feeling, to be able to get those feelings out to a true listener in itself is very healing. You see, what a lot of people don’t realize is that we are born with natural ways to heal the hurts.

Facilitators like Candice said that the opportunity for community members to be witnessed and heard as they processed and disclosed could be healing.

Community members were invited to answer questions with as much or as little of personal and intimate information as desired. Gwen, for example, noted:

[w]e did a lot of work to design the questions to make sure that they felt like something that everyone could answer regardless of who they are, what their background is, identity culture, what their level of experience engaging with that particular topic is. And keep it rooted in their personal experiences.

Facilitators reported that they worked to ensure that their questions could serve as entry points for participants to join the conversation and were equally accessible to everyone.

The Dynamics of Self-Disclosure

Supporting participants in self-disclosing involved highlighting participants' agency in the dialogue process and encouraging participants to engage in storytelling and perspective-giving.

Emphasizing Participants' Agency in the Dialogue Process. Encouraging participants to engage in self-disclosure involved framing the dialogue as an invitation. A guidepost for the Alluvial Collective was, “[y]ou will be invited to share in pairs, small groups, and in the larger group. The invitation is exactly that. You will determine the extent to which you want to participate in our discussions and activities.” Facilitators explained that by ensuring participants that they had control over the nature of their engagement in the dialogue they were able to bring more people to the conversation. Dansen, for example, illustrated the agency participants had in deciding their level of engagement when she asserted that, “[e]veryone gets an opportunity to either speak, ‘pass,’ ‘come back to me later,’ ‘pass for now,’ or [share] ‘I don’t want to speak.’”

And so it provides a lot of space.” That space, Dansen said participants told her, made contributing easier.

Theresa shared a swimming metaphor to represent the need to make the conversation one in which everyone can participate, regardless of how vulnerable or uncomfortable they are willing to become. If, she described, she is teaching something in the deep end and only provides a way for people at that end of the pool to participate, the conversation is exclusive to those participants. She explained: “I feel like that’s what a lot of social justice work is like. It’s like, ‘I hope you’re ready to be in the deep end because this shit’s hard.’” She continued:

[s]ome people are ready to be in the deep end but as soon as you leave, they’re like, “Okay, not safe here anymore,” and they’ll go back. But what if you decide to project your voice, so people in the shallow side can hear you also? If you make it clear that it’s okay to sit on the edge and just dip your feet in the top step, right?...One of the...prompt[s] we give people is “What is your life story?”...Some people are like, “Okay, I’m ready.” And other people are horrified by it. And we do a little bit of explicit explaining that you’re in charge. You can tell a story about your pet from your childhood. You can tell a huge story about your family history and how you came to live in the place you live...You are the expert and where you are willing to engage is the right place.

Ensuring all participants can engage in the dialogue means, Theresa said, “finding a way to make it okay for people to engage wherever they are able to that day.” One way that facilitators described supporting participants in self-disclosing was emphasizing participants’ autonomy in the conversation.

Scholars and practitioners of intergroup dialogue posit that participants’ self-disclosure is a positively reinforcing cycle (Ensari & Miller, 2002). Consistent with this, Joseph shared, “if

there's really gonna be a good exchange, hopefully at least one party is being vulnerable. And I don't think that one party's gonna be vulnerable if they don't think the other party is gonna be vulnerable." Other facilitators shared that it seemed as though participants experienced some peer pressure to match the vulnerability of others' disclosures. Sara noted that there was a collective "social pressure to share something more vulnerable." With this social incentive and encouragement, she said: "It seems to me that over time, except for a couple individuals—and we've worked with hundreds—everybody's been able to move to a vulnerable place."

Facilitators emphasized supporting participants to engage at their own pace and allowing the social dynamic of the dialogue process to motivate participants to be braver and bolder when sharing with the community.

Storytelling and Perspective-giving. Facilitators shared that encouraging participants' self-disclosure involved asking participants prompts that illuminated their shared humanity through telling stories about their lives and giving their perspectives. Michelle explained:

it can be something as silly as, "what was your most favorite game when you were a kid and why did you like that one," or something as deep as, "when was the last time you cried and what was that about?" But whatever it is, it's very humanizing.

She shared that the first step in building a relationship is having the opportunity "to tell each other about something about the inside of ourselves."

Facilitators explained that, as participants disclosed, they had the opportunity to share the nuanced nature of their human experience. Gwen explained:

the questions that we use bring people from story to value to complexity, which works against our stereotypes and assumptions about the other. Because they rehumanize people

as people who have stories and experiences, who have values that might even be shared by other people, even if they disagree.

Facilitators posited storytelling as providing important opportunities for participants to glimpse into the differences and similarities of others' lived experiences. Pranis (2005) writes, "[b]y sharing our individual stories we open places for others to connect to use, to find common ground with us, and to know us more completely...Storytelling strengthens a sense of connectedness, fostering self-reflection and empowers participants" (p. 40).

After reading a quote from Pranis, Sam shared: "and so, when we're in circle, we're not answering yes and no questions. We're telling our stories from our lives that are relevant to the prompt. And that makes all the difference." Sharing, often in the form of storytelling, provided an opportunity for participants to connect with individuals beyond their social silos, expanding the reaches of their community and, ideally in the process, their understanding of themselves.

This is consistent with Stains (2016), who wrote:

[o]ne way we fashion meaning out of our experiences is to weave them into coherent narratives: stories. Stories help us make sense of our own experience and also that of others. Told in groups, they can help us refine our identities...we seek ways of engagement that leave people safe enough to risk seeing beyond the narrow stories they carry about others and to share more of the complexity of their own lives. (p. 1531)

Other scholars assert that disclosure of intimate information, as storytelling often incites, can generate reciprocal disclosure and interpersonal intimacy (e.g., Tam et al., 2006).

Perspective-giving is defined as feeling heard while sharing lived experiences and perspectives (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012). For disempowered groups especially, scholars posit that sharing experiences, perspectives, and opinions and feeling heard to be empowering (Bruneau &

Saxe, 2012). Facilitators appeared to feel likewise. Sara shared an example of a Black female participant who disclosed a story to the collective; she had been held at gunpoint by a white man at a gas station. Telling that story, Sara believed, was likely healing for her. Sara explained:

I think it's important in healing because once it's out, once it's named, it loses its power. I mean, the power to hurt you, the power to frustrate you, the power to sabotage you...she described her family being so traumatized by it that they couldn't even discuss it. That was healing for her. It didn't take the story away, the pain of it. But there's something that's very healing about sharing those painful moments, having the opportunity to share them, being in a group of people who are not judging you, who are open to hearing it.

Some participants, Sara noted, were more reticent than others to self-disclose in a vulnerable way, but a majority engaged openly to some degree by the end of their time together. She recounted a participant who was initially very hesitant to engage in the dialogue. Sara said the participant came to the circle conflicted, "almost like":

"[c]onvince me that this is gonna do anything to change the world. Convince me that this is gonna be an effective way for people of different races to have conversations"...He came to the Circle with a lot of resistance...And I think the magic of the circle was when he saw and experienced and felt the connection over the next couple sessions he was like, "Hmm, I'm gonna stay. I get to tell my story. People are listening to me."

After the participant experienced perspective-giving, sharing his story to an attentive audience, he appeared to become more supportive of the dialogue process. Facilitators emphasized the importance of creating a space for people to feel heard. Jarrod emphasized that people:

need to feel heard. I mean, that's half the problem with communities, they don't ever feel heard... You have to do it consciously. There are folks who aren't gonna raise their hand, they're not gonna step in, and so consciously and strategically giving them the space to engage or to bring themselves into the conversation.

Facilitated conversations about race provided a platform for participants to share their perspectives, and facilitators endeavored to remove normative communication power dynamics like interruptions or crosstalk from the conversation.

Joseph talked about community members who persistently returned to have conversations despite formidable obstacles to participate in the dialogue. Some participants, he shared, had to choose between taking another shift at work or participating in the dialogue. He said, “[i]t just takes a lot of risk and vulnerability just by showing up, but something caught them at the early meetings that kept them there.” The makeup of the group grew to be comprised predominately of Black women after several white participants stopped showing up. Over time, Joseph said, many of the members began sharing “very personal stories of... racial trauma.” Joseph shared that he didn't think the group would have shared “those super vulnerable stories had they not felt safe and trusted that people in that community group were gonna listen to them... there was something validating there that got those people to come back.” Self-disclosure, and perspective-giving especially, appeared to give participants the opportunity to speak their truths.

Restricting Crosstalk. To protect participants' agency to self-disclose and share their stories and perspectives, facilitators asked participants not to engage in crosstalk. Facilitators defined crosstalk as commentary, feedback, or advice about what another had shared, during or after their disclosure. After someone shares with the group or a partner, any comment or remark

beyond silence or “thank you for your share” could be considered crosstalk. Jill described the potentially negative impact of crosstalk when she shared:

[y]ou feel the whole energy of the space just shift completely when someone is just witnessed in their deep feeling without reflection [from the listener] because reflection can get messy if someone’s like, “Oh wow, I love it when you said that piece about this deep trauma that happened to you,” and then the person’s like, “I don’t know you well enough and I’m too vulnerable,” but just, yeah, just the simplicity of being witnessed without the back and forth can also help build that trust.

To dissuade crosstalk, some facilitators asked participants to follow a community agreement in which the sharer must explicitly grant permission for anyone to ask about their disclosures. For example, Candice shared that she asks participants to:

refrain from going up and asking anyone to comment on anything that was said in that circle without asking for permission. And if permission is denied, you walk away...for many people, they come up with stuff they had never thought about before, and they don’t want to talk about it again. They’ve shocked themselves.

By removing the threat of crosstalk, facilitators hoped to remove barriers from participants engaging in self-disclosure.

Challenges of Encouraging Self-Disclosure

Facilitators shared the challenge involved in encouraging participants to engage in self disclosure was some participants’ lack of apparent desire to share with others.

Lack of Willingness to Engage. Some participants seemed unwilling to disclose, especially when prompts elicited vulnerable self-disclosure. Theresa shared that, when her organization holds racial dialogues over Zoom, she watches the number of participants drop off

the call when facilitators ask participants to sort into breakout rooms to engage in self-disclosure. She said, “it regularly happens in the Healing Together gatherings. As soon as we are like, ‘Okay we’re gonna start going into breakout rooms,’ 14 people will drop off and be like, ‘I did not sign up for this.’” Due to the often-difficult nature of the topic of race, facilitators said that some participants, especially at first, could struggle with self-disclosing to the group.

Facilitators described a preference, and sometimes an organizational requirement, that participants of the racial dialogues choose to engage in the dialogue voluntarily. Otherwise, facilitators reported that initiating an enriching dialogue amongst participants could be more challenging. Grace, a 49-year-old white woman living in Mississippi, shared her experience facilitating a group required to engage in the dialogue. She said:

[t]his one time in particular...was a nightmare for me...it was when we were meeting with the group and obviously many of them didn’t want to be there, and I literally sat, ‘cause we were in breakout rooms, and so we sat in silence. And I would try everything to engage, and they didn’t wanna do the prompt...one of the men who finally did engage said something that was so, it was almost like he was baiting me to react, because it had to do with how white men are the most repressed group in the country.

Facilitators described that, if participants of the racial dialogues do not choose to engage in the dialogue voluntarily, that initiating an enriching dialogue amongst participants could be more challenging. Shelby, a 76-year-old white woman living in Tennessee, shared:

[b]ack in the day, when we were recruiting police officers and getting people in government and their supervisors were telling them you need to go...They weren’t always happy to be there, but it’s the South. And when people aren’t happy, they just shut up. They don’t act out.

Gemma, a 67-year-old Black woman living in Tennessee who works with the same organization as Shelby, added, “[y]ou could tell who was a cop just by the fact that they would never really look at people. They just always look straight ahead.”

Shelby and others emphasized that they could not control participants’ engagement, but they could increase the likelihood of working with people willing to share and use engaged listening by working with willing, and ideally eager, participants. Encouraging and enacting participants’ self-disclosure in dialogues about race involved facilitators’ emphasizing participants’ agency to choose their level of engagement in the conversation, encouraging participants to recognize their shared humanity and engage storytelling and perspective-giving, and interrupting any crosstalk. A challenge that facilitators faced when they encouraged participants to self-disclose was some participants’ resistance to share.

Engaged Listening

Participants who self-disclosed could not experience feeling heard without good listeners. Scholars and practitioners discuss the meaningful relationship between storytelling and listening. Pranis (2005) writes, “[t]o listen respectfully to a person’s story is to honor that person’s intrinsic worth and to empower the storytelling in a constructive way” (p. 41). As an example, facilitators like Gwen asked communities to share stories of their lived experiences because it seemed to prompt participants to engage in a different kind of listening.

This attentive, engaged listening provided benefits for both the listener and the sharer. Candice, for example, explained the significance of a fully receptive listener to the participant sharing. She said:

whenever a person is truly listening to you, enabling you to get out your deepest secrets, what is happening has a lot of impact on the body, it aids the cardiovascular system, it

boosts the immune system...When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving me advice, you haven't done what I've asked. When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to just solve my problems...we're not looking for a problem-solver, we just need someone to sit with us...really getting people to listen has been one of the most valuable tools you can use when you're talking about something as toxic, as heavy, as threatening to a lot of people.

Self-disclosure and listening were mutually reinforcing and interdependent. Without one, the capacity of the other could be lessened. A guidepost used by the Alluvial Collective illuminated this relationship: “[L]isten deeply to learn” instructed participants to “listen intently to what is said, listen to the feelings beneath the words. Listen to yourself also. Strive to achieve a balance between listening and reflecting, speaking, and acting.” To cultivate courageous communities, Stains (2016) writes:

One of our core tasks is to craft questions that invite thicker, more complex, and nuanced stories. It is in responding to these questions that participants have the opportunity to be seen as more fully-dimensional people, to understand their opponents at greater depth and breadth, and to discover areas of common experience, values, and concerns that would otherwise remain invisible. (p. 1540)

Facilitators described using community agreements and dialogue prompts to encourage participants to focus their full attention on the content and emotions of the speakers' narratives. Pranis (2005) asserts that, when participants are telling stories, listeners relax and are more open and less anxious: “[W]e take in the story before screening the content. We are engaged emotionally as well as mentally. The different kind of listening allows information to be exchanged more thoroughly leading to a greater understanding between people” (Pranis 2005, p.

39). Engaged listening is defined in this study as attentive, present, and mindful listening without immediate judgment or “othering.”

Scholars and practitioners of intergroup dialogue positioned listening as an indispensable element of interracial conversations about race. According to Nagda et al. (2012), “suspending judgement, deep listening, identifying assumptions, and reflection and inquiry encourage deeper and more positive relationships as people learn to talk about paradoxes, misunderstandings, and conflicts” (p. 12). Scholars list listening as one of the foundational elements of dialogue to fostering relationships between individuals seeking to increasingly understand each other as multifaceted and nuanced instead of as simplified stereotypes (Nagda, 2012).

Facilitators shared a desire to build participants’ listening capacity and awareness of the significance of listening to support interpersonal connection both within and beyond the community dialogue. Patrick shared the story of a participant who complained about and criticized the facilitators’ intergroup dialogue process throughout the dialogue but then at the end of the conversation demonstrated a greater awareness of the implications of engaged listening. Patrick said that he felt that the participant’s engagement ultimately had an auspicious outcome. He explained:

homeboy was like, “I don’t understand what the fuck this is. This doesn’t make any damn sense. Why are we doing this.” Up to the last checkout, he’s still like, “I think this was a waste of time. But you know what, I really think that I need to start listening to people a lot better.” Done. Sold, sold... I don’t need you to know that the medicine works, just...get the medicine and we’re good.

Each session, facilitators reminded participants of the centrality of listening for understanding and communicating with each other better.

The Luna Jimenez Institute listed listening as the “most powerful political tool.” It was also important to facilitators. Listening, Lee, a 68-year-old white woman living in New York said, “is of primary importance. I mean, I don’t think you can do any of it without listening.” Lee listed listening as an antidote for participants’ harmful assumptions and judgments. Candice shared that she would rather “stop a dialogue, send everybody home, walk out of the room, than to recreate something that would have people yelling and screaming at each other and where listening is not the primary objective. Learning by listening.” Listening, and engaged listening especially, was posited as critical for interracial conversations about race.

The Dynamics of Engaged Listening

Encouraging the community to use engaged listening involved suspending judgment and listening with curiosity and wonder and encouraging participants to engage in perspective-taking.

Suspending Judgment and Listening with Curiosity and Wonder. A guidepost used by the Alluvial Collective included “when things get difficult, turn to wonder.” The guidepost instructed participants that:

[i]f you find yourself disagreeing with another, becoming judgmental, shutting down in defense, try turning to wonder: “I wonder what brought her to this place?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me?” “I wonder what he’s feeling now?” You do not have to agree with another’s story, but you do have to respect their right to tell their own story.

Facilitators explained that by encouraging participants to approach the dialogue with curiosity instead of immediate judgment or defensiveness, they hoped to prevent participants from tuning-out what might challenge their assumptions or increase their awareness and understanding.

Instead, facilitators said that they endeavored to create plentiful opportunities for participants to discover mutual similarities and differences in values, perspectives, and lived

experience. The more receptive and open facilitators could encourage participants to be, the better. One guidepost of the Alluvial Collective includes “suspend judgement and assumptions and seek understanding”:

[b]y creating a space between judgements and reactions, we can listen to the other, and to ourselves, more fully, and thus our perspectives, decisions and actions are more informed. Our assumptions are usually invisible to use, yet they under-gird our worldview and thus our decisions and our actions. By identifying our assumptions, we can then set them aside and open your viewpoints to greater possibilities.

Instead of asking participants to “suspend judgment,” the organization Essential Partners used the agreement, “we will check out assumptions by asking questions.” They write, “rather than asking people not to judge, this agreement invites people to get curious in those moments and check out those assumptions.” By emphasizing curiosity and not allowing participants to engage in crosstalk, facilitators hoped to reduce distractions for speakers and listeners to share and listen.

Facilitators worked with participants on how they listening. Mike explained that he had observed that participants’ use of engaged listening created a positive feedback loop. As listening to others with curiosity paid off, participants seemed to garner new reasons to listen in intentional ways. Mike explained that when participants gain new awareness of racial realities they become, he said:

more malleable, they begin to become more aware, a little more aware of at least their limited knowledge, their limited perspective. And so that opens-up an opportunity for them to listen with active ears and an empathic heart to what others are saying because

that's a symptom of the challenges we need to address in our society...you have populations that are out-crying.

Mike shared that he and his co-facilitator encouraged participants to focus on increasing their awareness and understanding instead of finding fault with what another participant was sharing. Mike said he asks participants:

not to say something that is in dispute of something that someone is saying, to not even think that way. You're solely thinking of understanding, I need to understand this person. So that's where your brain has to be focused, and so that's a different way of thinking when you're listening to someone, because you're not waiting for them to stop so you can just jump in and refute or dispute, but you now have to regurgitate. That's your focus.

Facilitators encouraged participants to engage in a curiosity-based and intentional listening to better hear and understand within and across racial groups.

Encouraging Perspective-Taking. Perspective-taking is defined as the practice of trying to “step into the shoes” of a member of a different group to imagine their lived experiences; it is perceiving a story or situation from the point of view of the individual(s) who experienced it (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Todd & Galinsky, 2014). Facilitators shared using an exercise to encourage the community to listen to each other fully such that they can hear the other's experience. Specifically, they asked participants to get into pairs, and take turns speaking while their partner listened intently without interrupting. They understood that they would summarize the information back to the speaker to demonstrate how closely they could paraphrase them. Facilitators often asked the listener to share the speaker's story in the first-person, as if it had happened to them.

Used in this way, the practice encouraged perspective-taking. Sara shared that listening, especially for white people, was an opportunity:

[t]o be more self-reflective. And of course, the opportunity to build that empathy muscle, because as people we're all unique, but there's also these unique lived life experiences within a racial group in this country...One thing that happens for white folks is they get to hear the authentic stories of Black people, and they're horrendous stories. The stories of racial oppression are mind-boggling. When you're Black, you're so used to it. It's your reality. "That happened to Uncle Jim, that happened to Sara, that happened to my son." And when you're white and it's so outside your range of reality, hearing people sharing these stories can be mind-blowing and life-altering."

Similar to Mike, who encouraged participants to engage with "active ears" and an empathic heart, Sara said that perspective-taking could strengthen participants' ability to empathize.

To ensure participants were perspective-taking, facilitators described asking participants targeted questions to encourage them explicitly to imagine others' perspectives. Jarrod shared that he asks participants after they listen to others share:

[d]oes that make sense to you? ...How does that make you feel if you were on the other side? What are you hearing when you hear this? And does that in any kinda way give you a different perspective of the person you're sitting across from? So, just trying to reframe and shift and give them the opportunity to see it, 'cause I'll describe it. I mean, you can't just tell folks, "Here's how you need to think from this point forward." It doesn't work. So I mean, how are you helping them see that side as you're describing maybe some quality of that other perspective?

Facilitators encouraged participants to listen well, and particularly to consider the perspectives of others, as part of cultivating shared understandings and meanings when communicating about and across difference.

Challenges of Encouraging Engaged Listening

Facilitators described the poor listening skills of some participants as a challenge when encouraging participants to use engaged listening.

Poor Listening Skills. A challenge that emerged as facilitators encouraged participants to use engaged listening was community members' struggle with effective listening. Jada explained:

people recognize, without us telling them that they're poor listeners, they recognize at that point that, "maybe that's something that I really need to work [on]." ...just knowing from the data that most people are poor listeners...they recognize something about themselves and then it's a matter of giving respect and attention to someone else.

When participants did not appear to recognize their difficulty with listening, or failed to correct their limitation, facilitators said it could impact the broader collective negatively.

Gemma, for example, explained how the focus and energy of a conversation could be monopolized quickly by individuals resistant to listening. She reported that:

there are people who are good listeners and people who aren't...that kind of affects the whole group dynamics because people will keep trying to talk to this person and keep trying to break through. But it's kind of like you eventually have to give up on the person because they're just not a good listener. And they're just not gonna hear.

Facilitators discussed the importance of not allowing anyone resistant to the process to slow down the growth and progress of the collective.

Encouraging participants to use engaged listening involved asking participants to suspend their judgment, listen with curiosity and wonder, and engage in perspective-taking. This was not always easy, as a challenging dynamic many facilitators shared experiencing was the impediments presented by participants' poor listening skills.

Expressing Emotions

Both when speaking and listening, dialogue participants often experienced or expressed strong emotions. The facilitators in the focus groups welcomed emotional expression from participants; one facilitator said that expressing feelings could be akin to turning a pressure release valve for community members. Coming to the Table's "Circle process" is a way, the organization writes, "of bringing people together where everyone is respected, everyone talks without interruption, people tell their personal stories, everyone is equally important, and spiritual and emotional aspects of a person are welcomed." Facilitators discussed participants' emotional expression as probable and often beneficial for the individual and collective.

Jarrod discussed participants' emotional expressions during dialogues when he said: [t]his is about emotion. This is a visceral conversation. And so, I expect people to be emotional and respond on some level emotionally....my goal is to give everyone space, to speak their truth and then try to ensure that their truths were heard.

Facilitators shared that emotions were a standard element of interracial conversations about race, in part because of the issues' deeply fraught nature. Jada shared that she has been in circles, she said, "where everybody cried. And we've been in situations like that, but you know just tears is a form of release anyway. So those kind of things happen... if they wanna cry, that's fine." Scholars like Sue (2015) argue that limiting people's emotional expression can lead to

detrimental outcomes and that progress in talking about race is futile without the expression of emotion. Orbe and Harris (2022), too, assert that:

[t]he mind may be where logic and reasoning are located; however, the heart and soul are where emotion, commitment, accountability and responsibility reside. Attempts to isolate some aspect (fact, logic, reason) with no or little consideration of others (emotions, experiences, intuitions) does not contribute to a healthy communication environment. (p. 19)

Some facilitators described actively encouraging and soliciting emotional expression from participants, whereas others shared holding the space and watching emotions unfold.

The Dynamics of Expressing Emotions

Prompting participants to engage authentically by expressing their emotions involved moving participants from their head to their heart and validating participants' emotions.

Moving Participants from Their Head to Their Heart. Theresa encouraged participants to experience and express their emotions instead of trying to “squish them down.” She shared, “I’m just like, oh, what if I let tears happen? Or like, what if I let sweat and anger fill up my body instead of being like, ‘I have to be professional, like squish it all down.’ So, it’s like having emotions with a witness.” Candice said she often encouraged participants to move from their head to their heart, “where you’re truly feeling it and talk about your own emotions. Don’t just talk about it from the top of your head.” She shared:

we give them history that they have never gotten anywhere else and to be able to emotionally react to that history of what has happened to us...it really doesn't matter how white your skin is or shades of brown, we've all been damaged in this country around

racism. And that's the reason we put these circles together 33-years-ago, to heal those hurts.

Candice said that she believed people have been conditioned not to share or express their feelings and, consequently, are often ready to talk about what they are thinking and are less inclined to express or discuss their feelings and emotions. Yet, as an inherently charged and deeply emotional topic, facilitators recognized that the most effective dialogue about race would need to stir authenticity and truth-telling amongst participants that often also would lead to participants' emotional expression and release. Orbe and Harris (2022) write, "[a] central element of dialogue is the desire, ability, and commitment to 'keep it real' even when such an endeavor may result in some tension or hostility" (p. 19).

Thus, when people do begin to release "deep pain at the core of their being," Candice explained, "that type of crying I will never interrupt. Because you will do more damage to a person that is really in a space of deep hurting and they're getting their emotion and their feeling out, you have given them permission to do it." When people express their emotions, she explained, "you don't stop." Welcoming participants to experience and express emotions required not interrupting participants or allowing others to intervene during participants' expression of emotion unless participants deviated from the community agreements in doing so.

Validating Participants' Emotions. Facilitators emphasized that emotions like anger and fury were very viable in a conversation about race, and they hoped to validate and support participants in channeling that energy in a helpful direction for themselves and the collective. Joseph discussed facilitating recently with a group that he said started the dialogue with "strong feelings." He and other facilitators said that directing participants' emotions effectively involved first acknowledging and validating the emotions and sentiments of the group. Emotions were not

framed by any facilitator as negative but, instead, as an inevitable and even essential element of dialogues about race. The objective, facilitators said, was not to silence or distract participants from their emotions, but to support participants in channeling them. Joseph shared that he told the recent group:

“you guys have a fire in your belly”...[one of] the cousins of Emmett Till talks about, “you wanna make change, you gotta have a fire in your belly. I hear that you guys have a fire in your belly. I really appreciate you all bringing that for me into the space,” and so not ignoring that...but maybe trying to redirect [it] into a space where that turns to curiosity, it turns to creating the conditions for people to listen...I think that the idea is to get back to that sequence of events, so that you’re like, “Yeah, hold on to that.” I validate that feeling. And that is how change gets done, it’s partly because you have this anger and then kind of redirecting back into, “right now we’re really trying to listen to each other. We’re trying to build some trust so that we can really hear each other and we’re just gonna practice for a little bit,” and so, oftentimes it is a question that you’re asking. So, if you’re telling the story of your name, there’s less opportunity for someone to drop a truth bomb while they [share].

Joseph described validating participants’ emotions. He also noted that facilitators could influence the emotion in the room by choosing their prompts intentionally. Candice also discussed validating the feelings of specifically participants of color engaging in interracial dialogues about race. She shared:

I have heard and I’m very well aware of how tired people are of color are educating white people, I’m very well aware of that. Because I get tired too, and I know “Gee-whiz, you’re tired now, you better go take a nap.” So I will say and validate the feelings of all

people of color that say they're tired. But I will also say to them, you have to keep your eyes on the prize, you have to look at the big picture...this is not about me, this is about every person of color on this planet, really. And so, yes, I'm tired. And the other thing that I will say also because I know this is to be true, and everything I say is from lived experiences, I'm not making up stuff from watching a movie. I will say straight out, "so you're tired and so you're gonna depend on know-nothing white people to go and educate other know-nothing white people. And when they make a mistake, then you're gonna be all over them, but you are tired. Well, no, I'm not gonna leave my life in that situation."

Challenges of Emotional Expression

Participants described some challenges involved with encouraging participants to express their emotions. Facilitators shared that they had to intervene if others tried to interrupt a participant's emotional expression and observed participants struggling with uncertainty around expressing themselves emotionally publicly.

Intervening Interruptions of Participant Expressing Emotions. Facilitators provided several reasons why it is important not to interrupt or allow others to intervene when a participant was expressing emotions. Gwen explained that one reason she doesn't react and engage with participants about their emotions as they are expressing them. Everyone, she said, has different wants in the moment when they are emotional publicly, so "I can't know what that person needs and prefers. The reality is there's no right or wrong in how to show up." She explained:

I don't wanna take away people's agency in that moment to feel like I need to take care of them or others need to take care of them when they're perfectly capable of taking care

of themselves. So those are the like trip wires about how we respond to emotion in the room. And like less is more in terms of my response as a facilitator.

Gwen shared that it was entirely appropriate and acceptable for people to be “in their own emotions” during dialogues about race. Cynthia, too, said that emotions were welcomed in the dialogue, but underscored that no one should interrupt the individual expressing their emotion (unless they digressed from the community agreements). Cynthia explained:

[i]n a circle when a white woman begins to cry, she’s overcome with what she’s learning...It happens almost every time, and this is where one of the dialogue facilitators almost always has to step in. People will go, “Oh, it’s okay, you’re doing the right —” They’ll start to talk, and that’s when we’ll quickly say, “don’t hand them a Kleenex, let them cry. Let them manage their own emotions, let them. If that’s what they need, it’s not your job, [Bob], to help Mary, for example, pull herself back together.” ...It’s very off-putting to some when they’re told they can’t put their hand on someone’s shoulder or sometimes people wanna get up and go find a Kleenex and bring it to the person. No.

Facilitators described not reacting or allowing others to react to participants’ emotional expressions. Participants, they said, could regulate their own emotions without the focus and attention of the larger collective.

Uncertainty Around Coping with Feelings. Facilitators shared observing participants sometimes struggle with how to feel and express emotions, especially in a public space. Theresa, for example, explained:

feelings are terrifying and there is nothing in our society that supports you feeling them out in the world...depending on your own background and your family history and your current family setup and your current day-to-day stressors, it can feel like...dangerous, I

think. I think that's actually what it always is, is that there's some sense of danger that comes to that, whether it's deep old danger or current acute danger. And then it's just straight fear reaction like fight, flight, freeze.

Angela, too, shared that participants could feel uncertain about expressing emotions publicly amongst strangers. She asserted:

[t]here is the vulnerability of being in sort of a group of people that they either don't know or that they have never revealed that part of themselves to. And so tears are pretty common in our work. Not every time by any means, but, and even if it's not tears you can tell when someone's feeling something really deeply. And anger...there is definitely a space for anger in this work. That does not mean that you get to yell at someone else in the circle, that you get to lash out and externalize the anger towards someone else...But anger, there's a lot of room for anger where people are talking about injustice. Like I get angry. I try to think about how do I channel that anger in this context, right? And it's hardly ever that we see people get angry at another person in a group, but certainly anger at injustice or anger at history or anger at something that happened to them earlier in their lives or something that they're dealing with now is present.

Emotion in the circle was common, she shared. As well, Angela, along with other practitioners and scholars of intergroup dialogue, posited participants' emotional expression as an essential element of conversations about race:

[I]f we didn't bring emotion into this work, I don't know how far we would get...This is painful stuff that we're talking about. And so it's kind of, we make the distinction that we are not a therapy circle, we are not therapists, we are not trained psychologists, we're not trauma experts, but that stuff will show up and we'll do our best as facilitators to help

individuals and the group navigate that...we always encourage people to feel okay with their emotions and we also encourage other people not to intervene.

Facilitators shared that some participants seemed uncertain about feeling and expressing their emotions publicly. Many posited, however, that emotional release was expected and even necessary when discussing such a fraught and emotionally charged topic.

Encouraging participants to feel and express their emotions involved facilitators' endeavoring to move community members from their head to their heart and validating participants' emotions. The challenges of enacting emotional expression included facilitators needing to intervene when community members attempted to interrupt someone expressing their emotions and observing participants experience uncertainty around coping with their feelings.

Introspection

Facilitators encouraged participants to self-reflect throughout the dialogue process, which, facilitators said, was not always easy or comfortable. Nagda (2006) wrote that, as participants engage in intergroup dialogue, they practice critical self-reflection, which he defines as:

the examination of one's ideas, experiences and perspectives as located in the context of inequality, privilege, and oppression. In intergroup dialogue, there is a purposeful analysis of intergroup issues through an intergroup conflict analysis of power inequalities and differential positionalities. (p. 563)

Facilitators shared that they endeavored to support participants in engaging in self-reflection. Facilitators also described engaging in their own introspection. Sakura, for example, noted, "at an individual level, I encourage us to constantly practice introspection, deeply examining and observing our own mental and emotional processes."

Other facilitators stated that introspection was, as Dansen said, “core to the work.” She explained how self-reflection requires:

[looking] inward, look into your heart, your brain, your spirit. Hear your mama’s voice and your daddy’s voice. Who are you and why is this important to you and speak the words and listen to others’ words and see how that changes that inner voice in you guides you and tells you what’s right and what’s wrong.

Facilitators described engaging in their own introspection and encouraging participants to do the same throughout the dialogue process.

Dynamics of Introspection

Encouraging participants to engage in introspection, facilitators shared, involved welcoming vulnerability.

Welcoming Vulnerability. For facilitators to engage in introspection and encourage participants to engage in self-reflection required fostering a space in which people were willing to be vulnerable. Some facilitators described it as a learning environment. Centering the dialogue as a place for learning, facilitators said, could ebb participants’ anxieties around engaging in sometimes difficult conversations. Angela, for example, explained:

[t]his is a learning space and people really thirst for that. And we often hear people say, “Oh my gosh, I never get the opportunity and never have these kind of spaces in my life where I can just reflect on this kind of stuff and where I can feel like I can be vulnerable, and that it’s okay to be imperfect.”

Facilitators described asking participants to engage in exercises and respond to prompts that encouraged participants to engage in introspection.

Jill shared that an activity she would lead with to support participants in thinking introspectively included “shadow writing.” She explained:

[they’ll] have a prompt that’s like, “I’m so sorry that,” or “my tears are for,” ... people write for like five to 10 minutes, just on their own so that they can sort of prime the pump of deeper vulnerability, and then...reading them to each other but just reading what you wrote, there’s no dialogue.

She noted that this writing often supported participants in digging deeper and potentially sharing more vulnerably. Facilitators described creating intentional opportunities for participants to engage in introspection.

Challenges of Introspection

Facilitators described the challenges of encouraging participants to engage in introspection including dissuading participants from attempting “fix” others in the dialogue and focus, instead, on self-reflecting and introspection.

Sitting in your Own Chair and “No Fixing.” Patrick, wrote that throughout the Circle process, participants are called to work on the ““contents of their chair”” as opposed to focusing on or trying to “fix” other people. Many stressed the importance participants experienced when they were asked to “sit in your own chair” by reflecting, exploring, changing, and growing internally instead of focusing outward and on finding faults and flaws in others. Circle keepers and facilitators shared that it was easy for participants to prioritizing judging and evaluating others rather than personally self-reflecting. Yerwal expressed:

I wish I could say it was an easy or simple process. I say that when you point to the faults of others, there are actually three pointing back at yourself. You are the source of the

work that is to be done. You cannot expect others to change unless we focus on changing oneself.”

Organizations’ community agreements often included one similar to the Alluvial Collective’s guidepost of “no fixing”:

Each of us is here to discover our own truths, to listen to our own inner teacher, to take our own inner journey. We are not here to help right another’s wrongs, to “fix” or “correct” what we perceive as broken or incorrect in another member.

Similarly, a guideline for sharing at the Center for the Healing of Racism was “[w]e can only fix ourselves. Our change and growth may, however, inspire someone else to change.” Facilitators emphasized that participants must focus on personal change and growth around issues of identity, race, and human connection and hope those around them are doing the same.

One of Yerwal’s co-Circle keepers, Janna, explained:

[p]eople struggle sitting in their own chair. And so, they’re just like, “This is hard.” And then they get pissed, because it’s hard. And then they’re just like, “I don’t like this.” And we’re like, “Cool, don’t come back. It’s cool.” The biggest thing about circle is willingness, are you willing?...the only pushback that I feel like I’ve ever felt is [when someone says] the Circle process doesn’t work, because they’re mad, ‘cause they had to do the work and they had to sit in their own chair...but people usually come back.

For introspection to be possible, participants needed to be willing to do the sometimes challenging uncomfortable: self-reflect. Not everyone, as Janna said, was prepared to do the internal discovery work that the dialogue involved rather than trying to “fix” others. But many facilitators said that it was important that participants of the dialogue focus on doing their *own* work, work which looked very different for BIPOC and white people.

Community Grounding

Just as there was a condition for facilitators to engage in grounding, facilitators described different practices of setting the tone for the dialogue preemptively to direct energy that participants brought into the room, such as the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness, Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2019) write, “means attending to one’s own internal assumptions, arising emotions, intentions, cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors” (p. 3). Facilitators described endeavoring to support participants in become more mindful so that they could engage more authentically. Participants’ mindfulness in dialogue requires paying attention to the process of communication instead of the outcome and endeavoring to interpret others’ messages using their frames of reference (Gudykunst, 2004).

Several facilitators shared that they offered a meditation practice for participants at the start of the community dialogue. Angela, for example, said that she and her co-facilitators:

[t]alk them through kind of a typical centering guided meditation with eyes closed, feet on the floor and remind them to breathe deeply into their belly and to relax their shoulders and to bring their attention into the moment, into the room and to try to let go of things that they have on their to-do list and the distractions and to really be present.

She said that most participants express appreciation for breathing, relaxing, and focusing in the moment. Participants often told her that it helped them feel calmer and more present for the conversation.

Dynamics of Community Grounding

Facilitators described implementing community-grounding practices by leading participants through grounding exercises, slowing the dialogue down, and embracing silence.

Grounding Exercises. Several facilitators called racial dialogues the hardest conversations to have. As Jarrod said pointedly, “[i]t’s not an easy conversation, it’s the hardest conversation to have period.” Facilitators described engaging participants in meditative exercises to foster a calmer dialogue. Sara explained:

the breathing and the meditation, the intention, the thoughtfulness, it supports moving your brain state into a state of calm. And when you are calm, we can use our higher executive function...when you’re feeling anxious and fearful, you’re restricted in your ability to think and definitely to think creatively...when you’re in a higher brain state, you have more self-awareness, you’re more aware of what’s happening around you. You can hold different opinions at the same time without a lot of cognitive dissonance...if I’m sitting in a circle and someone’s from a different race than I am, and they say something that for me is outrageous. If I’m starting in this state of calm, I can hold those thoughts, and hear more easily without retreating into fear or anger.

Sara discussed a type of meditation called “loving kindness meditation,” a Buddhist meditation that can be used to foster a loving and kind atmosphere within which people engage, Sara said, and show up “more open at the top.” The Circle process that Sara uses is itself, Boyes-Watson and Pranis (2020) write, a mindfulness practice “because it encourages participants to slow down and be present with themselves and others” (p. 42). Facilitators described leading participants through mindfulness practices before and during collective conversations and moving mindfully and intentionally from participant to participant.

Facilitators discussed creating opportunities throughout the dialogue to lead participants through grounding practices. For example, Angela explained:

if we've done a story circle and everybody has told their story and it's come back to me as a facilitator and some of these stories were excruciatingly painful to hear...I'll take a couple of breaths and I'll be like, "That was really raw, and I appreciate you sharing and let's all sit with that for a minute and take three deep breaths"...We remind people to return to the breath...in a room that's gotten very tense I will just say, "Hey, can we all just take a couple of deep breaths and reset. The energy is, I'm feeling my energy getting up here and I need to bring it back down." And so people usually are like, "Okay, yeah, that was happening." So that's a very powerful tool.

By focusing on breathing, those facilitating the conversation ensured that participants engaged together with a care and thoughtfulness that could make the exchanges more intentional and meaningful. To build community, Gudykunst (2004) writes, we must be more "mindful of the processes occurring in our interactions with strangers" (p. 368).

When asked about the ideal context and methods for holding conversations about race, many facilitators were quick to talk about mindfulness. Joseph described endeavoring to shift the energy in the room by emphasizing the importance of communication practices like listening and sharing. Joseph explained that "setting the space" for the dialogue is paramount. He shared:

I generally see people being just very anxious and about walking into a space where they're gonna discuss race, possibly for the first time, or angry...holding on to some strong feelings. And so, I think one of the more important things is to really have a calming effect, to not ignore those feelings of anxiety or anger, but to try to redirect those into a more compassionate, peaceful space.

Joseph and others advocated for fostering peace and calm amongst the collective.

Slowing Down and Embracing Silence. Facilitators and their organizations spoke of the value of slowing down as they talked as a collective. As an example, the community guidelines for the organization Essential Partners includes, “[w]e will pause between speakers and take a breath.” The guideline:

helps people take in what others have said. It also helps create a slower, more reflective conversational pace, and invites the facilitator to step in if the conversation begins to speed up in ways that silence people or make it hard for others to speak.

By moving slowly, facilitators shared that they were able to help participants foster trust to share and listen more vulnerably.

Joseph noted the importance of slowing down the dialogue process and the communication itself. He talked about the importance of:

just being very intentional, savoring every word, trying to create the conditions that people are validating each other, hearing each other ‘cause I think a lot can get lost if we’re not doing that. And I think that you want people to feel safe enough to talk very vulnerably. And in those vulnerable spaces, I think is where a lot of learning can take place.

Slowing down, he said, could support participants in communicating more intentionally with each other.

Jill shared the importance of slowing down the dialogue to enable learning. She described slowing down the conversation to allow participants to ground themselves and reflect in community, especially after a transgression is made. She encouraged:

really uplifting moments of rupture to get to learn together so when there’s bravery in the space, when there’s an “ouch” that’s made, like slowing it way down as much as possible

to see what are the parts that are happening for folks internally, and getting to have those deeper conversations around shame and guilt or fear or projection. Yes, slowness, pausing or like deep breathing, doing that somatic tracking work.

Relatedly, and a form of slowing down, one of the guideposts of the Alluvial Collective is to “respect silence.” Silence, the organization writes, “is a rare gift in our busy world. After you or someone else has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words. Look inward and listen to yourself in the silence.” Angela shared that participants recognized and appreciated the silence as an opportunity to be present and to interrupt the normative frenzy of life. She shared:

if I sit there really in silence waiting for someone else to speak...often the jewel of what people will say happens after that awkward silence. And like you'll get an even richer response...having space in our world to be silent and to be calm and to be still and to interrupt the usual chaos in a more chaotic temperament that we have in our world is really important, but also because we can be more pensive and we can dig deeper in our minds and our memories, use that silence as an opportunity to go a little bit deeper.

Challenges of Community Grounding

Facilitators implementing community grounding shared that grounding the community involved the challenge of participants' impatience with the dialogue process.

Impatience with the Dialogue Process. Facilitators stressed the centrality of not rushing but moving slowly and intentionally through the dialogue process. In contrast to the often high-paced interactions of everyday life, facilitators encouraged participants to marinate in what is shared, and take the time to really examine what was coming up personally throughout the process.

Joseph shared empathizing with participants who wanted to move through the dialogue process at a faster pace. He described a community dialogue in which participated. The dialogue process was so slow, he said:

[a]nd I was really frustrated because it's like, Jesus Christ, like, we need to move this conversation forward. It was so slow and intentional that it felt like we weren't going anywhere. Right? And that was good, because it allowed for these breakthrough moments in week 9 or week 10 where had we not been so slow, just getting to know people's names, just getting to know people's family stories, just learning how to listen, just activities around, okay, you're gonna listen to somebody for 10 minutes and then you're gonna repeat back to them in five minutes, what you heard. And that set the stage for where a community member broke down in tears...She's a very reserved community member. And I don't think she would've said that in week 10, had she not been there for those meetings leading up.

Facilitators emphasized the importance of using practices that they observed help ground participants in the present and support them in feeling more interconnected and centered. They accentuated the use of slowing down the conversation, and other practices, as a way to aid participants in drawing insights from the dialogue.

Modeling the Conditions, Dialogue Prompts, and Communication Practices

Each organization had a process for facilitating. Some facilitators, for example, participated alongside community members in the dialogue, responding to the same prompts. Others acted as a separate second party that did not participate but focused on maintaining keeping the space and holding the conversational container.

Facilitators who participated alongside the community—answering the same questions and prompts as community participants—said that their purpose in participating was to “walk alongside” the community in their work, supporting them by demonstrating the behaviors and the equitable and inclusive dynamics they hoped the community would foster collectively. Additionally, facilitators shared that a purpose of modeling the communication practices was to demonstrate to community members that the facilitators were not solely observers of participants’ vulnerable self-disclosures but sharers as well. As Jenny, a 61-year-old white woman living in California, shared:

[a]ll of what we’re offering is just an invitation. And I think that the biggest thing goes back to anything that we’re inviting people to do, we have to be willing to do ourselves...there’s a constant checking ourselves on that, I think. Because what is it? Like 93% of all communication is nonverbal? We can say all sorts of stuff, but we show it from our bodies if we really have embodied these ideas that we’re talking about and people right away can pick up on inconsistencies.

Many facilitators, like Jenny, described endeavoring to embody and modeling how they hoped participants would engage in the conversation. Participating with the community, facilitators said, had an equalizing effect between dialogue facilitators and participants that was meant to flatten some of the power dynamic between those facilitating and those participating in the intergroup dialogue.

The Dynamics of Modeling

Facilitators modeling of the conditions and communication practices involved facilitators engaging authentically and vulnerably in the dialogue.

Engaging Authentically and Vulnerably. Modeling involved facilitators' engaging vulnerably and authentically as they communicate under the conditions using the communication practices to embody and inspire what they hope to foster amongst participants. Facilitators shared that by modeling answering the prompts and other communication practices they hoped to reduce participants' uncertainty and anxiety about the intergroup dialogue and provide an example for how to engage. Facilitators recognized that community members were likely observing their behaviors for cues on conduct in this less familiar environment. As Sakura explained:

[l]eading as an example, as "a keeper," we need to show how we are doing because if I would like everyone in the participants to be authentic, I need to be authentic... I cannot pretend I just want to be a kind of nice person in the moment. If I am so angry and if I'm frustrated and so messy inside, I need to show...because I want people to show it...And if I cry, I'm sad, I have to be sad in front of people.

Facilitators said that they hoped by modeling vulnerability and authenticity they could foster some social pressure amongst the collective to match each other's depth, self-reflection, and genuineness when sharing. But it had to be real. Sam, for example, shared:

[d]on't be inauthentic. Yeah. People can call bullshit on you really easily, so you need to come from your heart and not just be intellectual but be authentic. Do it because you care, not because you think you should or because somebody told you to.

Sam described endeavoring to self-disclose in a vulnerable and authentic way to support others who might be ready to do the same but who are holding back. It was important, facilitators said, to provide participants with a helpful blueprint for engaging in the dialogue. Part of that blueprint

was modeling authenticity and vulnerability facilitators hoped to foster amongst participants.

Angela shared:

[the community] will only go as deep as the facilitators go. So we're showing them that we're going deep with this and that it's giving them permission to be vulnerable and to dig into deeper stuff than they're used-to in a group setting like that. And so we model that kind of vulnerability and that honesty and that, our own self-reflection, and those kind of things.

Facilitators recognized that they were setting an example for participants and thus wanted to demonstrate the ways that they hoped participants would engage in the conversation. Joseph encouraged facilitators "model what learning looks like, model what silence looks like, just take a deep breath when people enter the room. Right? Just kinda holding that space...it's [creating] that kind of countercultural space by modeling it." Facilitators' modeling of the counter-normative conditions and communication practices required facilitators modeling how they hoped to encourage others to engage in the dialogue.

Challenges of Modeling

Facilitators shared that sometimes they struggled with modeling the same vulnerability and engaged listening, for example, that they asked for from participants.

Struggling with Modeling. Facilitators shared that they sometimes found it challenging to model authentic and vulnerable self-disclosure. Sara, for example, shared:

there have been times where I feel like I've gotten into... How do I say this? That I've been triggered emotionally or my ego has been bruised and so it'll be my turn. And I'll share something and I'll think, "Aah, Stacie. On some level, yes, you're telling your story, but on another level you're... The story that you're telling and how you're telling it

is more of a frustrated response to something that you've heard as opposed to coming from that vulnerable place." It's hard for me to explain it, but when it happens, I know it's happening.

Sam, Sara's co-facilitator, agreed. She added:

I think that happens for both of us. There are times when you think, "I can do better than this. This is not my A-game today. I don't know why. Somebody may have pissed me off in this circle, but this is not my A-game."

When facilitators struggled to model vulnerably they described asking a fellow facilitator or a participant likely to share vulnerably to share their story next. In other

Patrick shared that the Circle process requires facilitators to engage in the same ways that they asked their participants to engage. He said, "as a space creator, we have to be the thing. There is no other way. We can't invite people to do what we won't do." Patrick highlighted that the Circle keepers modeled in various ways, such as using engaged listening, even when vehemently disagreeing with what others shared. Patrick explained:

[i]f that means listening to somebody who's not my racial identity say some shit that just makes me go fucking bonkers, then that's what it means. And that's what I'm called to do as I sit in this chair, in this circle with this collection of people.

It was important that facilitators model the dialogue process diligently, especially in the more challenging moments, as the community looked to them for direction.

Discussion

Identifying Practices and Their Dynamics and Challenges

Scholars have identified communication practices that facilitators of intergroup dialogue use during these dialogues (Schoem & Hurtado, 2004). Key practices identified include self-

disclosure of intimate or personal information, engaged listening, or listening to hear another's experiences without holding judgment (Floyd, 2014), emotional expression, introspection and perspective-taking, or the active consideration of the sharer's subjective experiences and perspectives (Todd & Galinsky, 2014). In this study, I identified these and three additional practices. Specifically, in this study, the first overarching finding for research question two is that facilitators used and encouraged participants to engage in (1) self-disclosure, (2) engaged listening, (3) expressing emotions, (4) introspection, (5) community-grounding and facilitators' (7) modeling of the communication practices.

In this study, I identified the dynamics involved in implementing each communication practice. These dynamics supported facilitators and participants' use of the practices and, facilitators noted, could seemingly augment their effectiveness. For example, the dynamics involved in encouraging facilitators and participants to engage in self-disclosure involved facilitators emphasizing participants' agency in deciding their level of engagement in the dialogue, restricting any crosstalk as participants shared, and encouraging participants to engage in storytelling and perspective-giving. Without self-disclosure there is no dialogue, and thus the amalgamation of these dynamics was meant to bolster participants' ability to self-disclose effectively.

The dynamics involved in implementing engaged listening amongst the community collective involved encouraging participants to suspend their judgment and listen with curiosity and wonder. Listening with wonder and curiosity, as Jada shared, "opens [participants] up to understand that whatever it is that they have believed about whomever or whatever, it might not be true." The dynamics of enacting self-disclosure and engaged listening in a community,

facilitators said, enable participants to share and listen in intentional, focused ways. Sara, for example, expressed that:

[m]y job as being part of the Circle is to listen to the stories that everyone is sharing. So even if...someone shares a story and I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh, I wanna share... I wanna say something right now," my job is to just sit with their story and to just listen to their story. And then when it is my turn to speak, to share my authentic stories out...It gives people the opportunity to share their personal stories uninterrupted without obvious judgment...The opportunity to be self-reflective.

Facilitators described racial dialogues as opportunities for participants to share space together in a grounded environment with less distractions and an inclusive and equalizing dialogue structure. Engaging in mindful communication helped participants develop more nuanced understandings of each other.

Facilitators also highlighted the importance of modeling the communication practices in authentic and vulnerable ways in hopes that participants would follow their lead. According to Sara, her organization was "in the business of doing what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. encouraged us to do, which is building the loving community." Building the beloved community required engaging in the often uncomfortable and challenging work of "saying what you don't want to say and hearing what you don't want to hear."

Jenna referred to her organization's dialogue framework as three-fold. She explained:

Are you willing to say the thing you don't wanna say? Are you willing to hear the thing you don't wanna hear? And are you willing to sit in your own chair and do your own work?...that is something that feels really foundational to our work. Because if people aren't willing to say the thing and people aren't willing to hear the thing, then the thing is

not gonna be tended to... “are you ready to say the thing? Are you ready to hear the thing?” And most people are like, “No.” We’re like, “Okay, cool. Just to be clear where you’re at. Cool.” But it’s I think a good way to surface what’s really in the room.

In a book about the Circle process they co-authored with others, Janna and Patrick wrote that these questions “lie at the heart of what it means to have meaningful conversations about race and racism.” If people are not willing to engage with these questions, they wrote, conversation will be shallow and fail to address the issues. Further, Janna and Patrick explained that the question, “are you willing to say things you don’t want to say?” was meant to center the perspectives of participants of color. The second question (“are you willing to hear things you don’t want to hear?”) was meant more for the white participants. For participants of color:

[to] step into Circle and hear more shit without feeling empowered to say what needs to be said—what [BIPOC] must often in our lives leave unsaid—merely amplifies an already oppressive air and space. For White people, particularly those who do not have a lot of experience in talking about race and racism, it can be a challenge to listen deeply and to resist the urge to defend, explain, or justify...therefore, it is important for white people to first focus on listening, on RECOGNITION...then, when the time comes to speak, the words must be considered carefully. White folks are not always willing to share deeper vulnerabilities, fears, or feelings in cross-racial spaces.

Creating a Sense of Common Humanity

Just as there was an overarching theme to the conditions, there also appeared to be one for the practices facilitators discussed as part of their interracial conversations about race: The communication practices that facilitators used and encouraged participants to use supported participants in illuminating their shared humanity. When people refer to their shared or common

humanity, they are describing the commonalities all humans share, including that humans are inherently social and cooperative beings. Michelle, for example, shared that she often “sets the tone” at the start of the dialogue by:

talking about and representing humanity, our humanity, what it’s like to be a human being, what it’s like to be with others who are also human beings. What does this work mean for us as human beings? Our humanity is all mixed up in the work, ‘cause it is about our humanity, that’s what the work is about for me.

Facilitators described their intentionality around modeling first whatever they asked of participants. Facilitators modeled communicating under the conditions and using the communication practices. In doing so, facilitators said that by modeling engaging with authenticity and vulnerability they hoped to embolden others to share their stories, experiences, feelings, too. The process, facilitators explained, enabled people to recognize their shared humanity in a transformative way. Michelle, for example, shared that she often tells a very personal story at the start of facilitating a dialogue about race. She shared:

In 1994, my only child, my son, Sean, committed suicide or died by suicide death. And part of that story was is that he felt like the United States of America—he lived in Detroit, that’s where I’m from—didn’t really have a place for him, that there was no future for him, that there was no way for him to take care of his family, my granddaughter, his daughter, [who] was six months old at the time, and so he just decided to leave the planet. And there are many young Black men who leave for all kinds of reasons but a lot of it can be tied back to racism and what racism does to our humanity. And so I tell those stories at the beginning so that people know that I’m not showing up as a book learning facilitator, that I’m a human being that’s invested in the work. And

that's one thing that I do, there's a lot of things that I do but I think that's probably the most important context set to let people know that I am like them. I have my own personal reasons for being here and that they are strong and powerful in me.

By expressing their stories and feelings vulnerably, facilitators endeavored to speak directly to the humanity in others and set the tone for a less traditional dialogue centering connection and truth-telling. Facilitators endeavored to support participants in recognizing both their shared humanity and disparate racial experiences.

Circle keepers and facilitators encouraged participants to be open to what could happen both individually and collectively if they moved from their "head to their heart," engaged in grounding exercises, and listened as others shared stories before authentically sharing their own.

As Michelle asserted:

there's a way that when my humanity touches your humanity or vice versa, things will open. And when that happens, we start to become responsible for each other. That's what the bridge building is about, 'cause that's what community is about, when we can start to be trusting enough ...I can bring a horse to water but I can't make them drink. That's true. But once you're there at the trough, and I'm standing next to you, and I'm drinking, you might decide you want to check out that water too."

The communication practices, facilitators said, in large part were meant to help participants recognize their shared humanity.

Chapter 6: The Third Reconstruction

Black feminist scholar-activists in America—Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Dr. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor—have long employed an abolitionist vision to describe a world in which, to be collectively free, “we finally turn to each other rather than on each other...where harm is met with restoration, justice is not confused with punishment, and safety is not measured by the number of human beings we imprison” (Taylor, 2020, p. 113). For this to occur, interpersonal healing, connection, and equity are essential. This view centers on the cultivation of a world in which we “work together to meet one another’s needs; a world built on communities of care and networks of nurture” (Taylor, 2020, p. 114), one that is empowering for everyone and particularly mindful of securing equity for those most marginalized historically. An egalitarian future requires the maximizing of bridging ties across difference (Allen, 2016). Building friendships and connection across social identity groups is an important part, but it is only a component of a much larger initiative to redress inequalities and promote social action and change (Maxwell et al., 2011).

Despite the need for community connection and equity, both continue to be obstructed by the stifling of historical truth-telling. In his book, *The Racial Reckoning of the Third Reconstruction*, Joseph (2022) writes that the nation began its Third Reconstruction—a national struggle for the citizenship and dignity of Black Americans—in 2008, with the events of 2020 marking its climax. As it was during the first and second reconstructions, Joseph asserts that radical Black feminist thought, and the larger tradition of Black political radicalism, worked to reshape American democracy. “Black women,” he wrote, “saved democracy through storytelling that simultaneously critiqued and created. They pointed to long-forgotten wounds as well as

newly festering ones, and they exalted fugitive democratic spaces and places” (Joseph, 2022, p. 182).

Imperative to the nation’s democracy is an honest telling of its racial history, yet many people have struggled with agreeing on the American narrative. The outcome of stifling national truth-telling is due, in part, to the nation’s enduring difficulty with talking about or addressing issues of race, racial history, or its effects on contemporary racial inequity. Enduring geographical segregation and ideological separation have compounded this problem, further siloing society along socially constructed lines. Stains (2016) writes that, increasingly,

we have vanishing opportunities to engage others who are different from us in everyday, relational, and complex ways. When people do gather to wrestle with civic challenges, many do as relative strangers. This raises barriers to clear communication, mutual understanding, and willingness to collaborate. (p. 1523)

Yet, scholars assert that collaboration across difference is essential for social progress. Allen (2016) writes that achieving a just democracy and egalitarian society in a climate of unprecedented diversity and polarization requires a movement of bridging ties (i.e., connection across group differences) led and taught by “individual people who have learned how to practice the art of bridging” (p. 105). Allen asserts the need for cultural work within and across groups to achieve egalitarian forms of civic agency so that resources related to education, economic opportunity, and health are distributed equitably (Allen, 2016).

In the face of the challenges of facilitating dialogue between social groups with sociohistorical legacies, Schoem and Hurtado (2001) write, “steeped in intergroup antagonisms due to unequal social relations,” organizations across the country have made it their mission to support communities in navigating conversations about race that cultivate mutual understanding,

connection, and awareness (p. 4). Practitioners and scholars of intergroup dialogue recognize the importance and even essentiality of bridging social divides for a healthy society and democracy (Allen, 2021). Allport (1954) identified the capacity for intergroup contact to reduce participants' anxiety and uncertainty while increasing intergroup empathy and knowledge. Following Allport, researchers have identified conditions and communication practices that can support these positive outcomes (e.g., Nagda, 2006; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001).

A primary focus of intergroup research has been on demonstrating the efficacy of intergroup contact theory, specifically the creation and use of conditions and communication practices that can contribute to positive outcomes, chiefly prejudice reduction (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). Scholars and practitioners endeavoring to foster more efficacious interactions call for research that examines what implementing or enacting conditions and communication practices for contact involves in practice (e.g., Dessel & Rogge, 2008; Frantell et al., 2019; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001; Nagda, 2006). This dissertation took up that call and sought to create better understanding the dynamics of conditions and communication practices that occur in conversations about race. Further, as noted, most research on intergroup dialogue has been conducted in educational and corporate but largely not in community settings. Scholars have suggested that research move into the community (Frantell et al., 2019; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001), a foundation of the present study.

Conditions of Dialogue

Facilitators in this study described implementing seven conditions for the dialogues in which they took part, and some of these were aligned with one another. Consistent with prior research (Frantell et al., 2018; Freire, 1968; Schoem & Hurtado, 2001; Zúñiga et al., 2007), facilitators told me that they implemented the conditions of (trained, interracial) co-facilitation,

community agreements, equalized communication, and critical consciousness-raising amongst participants. They described implementing interracial co-facilitation in tandem with community agreements and equalized communication as central to reducing normative power dynamics like interrupting and, instead, fostering a more inclusive and equitable dialogue. Indeed, facilitators in this study shared that one of their primary roles throughout the dialogue was reinforcing and maintaining the integrity of the community agreements by intervening when participants deviated from them.

In addition to the conditions identified in prior research, facilitators in this study also described grounding themselves and adapting to community needs. Specifically, they described engaging in meditation and breathing exercises, outside of the context of the dialogues, so that they could maintain the challenging dynamic of being patient with participants. They also described adapting to the needs of the community, which involved soliciting feedback and input from the community, underscoring members' agency to engage in the dialogue to their desired extent, and relinquishing control over the outcome to focus on creating an equitable and inclusive dialogue process. Facilitators acknowledged that conversations about race could be difficult, but they would counter portrayals of their dialogue process as hostile or antagonistic.

Indeed, part of fostering a space in which participants were willing to engage was focusing the dialogue on interpersonal connection, understanding, and racial awareness rather than critiquing, convincing, or seeking to come to a consensus. The goal of interaction, as expressed by facilitators in this study, was not to foster conformity or flatten intergroup difference to homogeneity. Rather, it was to embrace a philosophy of pluralism, positioning the authenticity of diversity and its multitude of identities as enriching and empowering, a "basis for excellence" in the diverse community (Gudykunst, 2004, p. 368). Facilitators described fostering

a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable space for dialogue intentionally and methodically. Most facilitators shared that conflict rarely if ever occurred in their dialogues. Anger, for example, was most often directed toward the oppressive sociopolitical system rather than another individual in the group.

By implementing these two conditions—adapting to community needs and facilitator-grounding—facilitators expressed a desire not to enter a community and implement a “top-down” approach; instead, they described seeking to empower the community and its members to access both their individual and collective wisdom. Both conditions reflected facilitators trust in their dialogue process and desire to collaborate and co-create the process with the community. Facilitators described creating and holding the container by enforcing the conditions and community agreements and staying, as Angela said, “out of the way as much as possible.”

Her co-facilitator, Jada, shared their mantra that “there’s a leader in every chair and everybody is responsible for the wellbeing of the circle.” In pursuit of social justice and equity facilitators described creating a process that would not reproduce the normative power inequities constituting intergroup interaction. Scholars specify that the enactment of conditions and communication practices in a dialogue, especially about issues of equity and race, should be “democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change” (Bell, 2007, p. 2).

Many facilitators explained that conditions such as adapting to the community, co-creating community agreements with the community, and equalized communication were in stark contrast to the conditions implemented during a traditional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training. Patrick shared:

I've watched that happen over and over and over again in different DEI workshops, it's crazy...It has not been cultivated by the participants. They're being forced to abide by somebody else's needs and their needs have not been heard and most likely won't be addressed... And then to have a highly charged conversation without clear indication of who needs what in the space, it's just a recipe for disaster.

Conversely to DEI workshops, Patrick explained, his organization's dialogue process adapted to the needs of the community by holding space for participants to ask for what they needed to share authentically (i.e., community agreements).

Sometimes that authenticity was difficult to hear but it was a part of the process of truth-telling. As Joseph shared, "I think it's turning the conversation from the trust building to the vulnerability and then the vulnerability into truth telling, and then the truth telling into action." Hearing someone's truth could change the way people sitting in the circle saw themselves, others, and the world. Other times, however, hearing someone's truth meant hearing "stupid shit." As Patrick explained:

when the race conversation starts, stupid shit is gonna be said from everybody. And so, can you handle it? Can the person who's holding the Circle handle hearing stupid shit? And if not, then they shouldn't keep that space. And if so, then they're allowing other people to show up as they need to show up in order to hear what they need to hear and say what they need to say...But that's where the change can occur...It's fun shit.

Despite it being a challenging dynamic, Patrick shared that being patient with participants required remaining grounded so that what needed to happen could occur in the Circle. Circle keepers did not claim to have the answers for the community, but they co-created the space and supported the community through their process of discovery and change.

Communication Practices

In addition to asking participants to communicate under the conversational conditions, facilitators in this study also described six communication practices that they described using and encouraging participants to use. Facilitators shared that the use of the communication practices could support participants in recognizing their shared humanity and grappling with, for example, their internalized privilege and oppression. Four of the communication practice—introspection, self-disclosure, engaged listening, and emotional expression—have been identified in prior research (e.g., Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Gurin, 2013; Livingston, 2021; Orbe & Harris, 2022; Sue, 2015) as important elements of intergroup dialogue about race.

In addition to communication practices identified in prior research, I also identified the practice of community-grounding, which involved facilitators engaging participants in grounding exercises such as meditation and breathing, as well as slowing down and embracing silence. Grounding the community, facilitators said, helped set the tone for more intentional, empathetic, and mindful interactions amongst participants. Facilitators in this study emphasized, especially, the capacity for intentional and mindful self-disclosure and listening to support participants in accessing community wisdom, especially when engaging in storytelling.

Pranis (2005) writes that “by sharing our individual stories we open spaces for others to connect to us, to find common ground with us, and to know us more completely... [after listening] it becomes much harder to hold someone as the distant ‘other’ and not feel connected to that person through our common humanity” (p. 40). Facilitators said that when community members listened to others and expressed themselves authentically—dropping layers of protection and revealing vulnerabilities—their prior assumptions and generalizations about them and even their understandings of themselves were often contradicted, revealing new truths.

Laman et al. (2012) write that dialogue participants:

draw on and share their own narratives—perspectives constructed through and informed by their social, cultural, and lived experiences. Those narratives are shared by other participants and include texts that may lead participants to deconstruct status quo discourses, reconstruct their understandings in more complex ways, and construct new ways of being and understanding the world...we see critical dialogue as potentially transformative for individuals and society. (p. 199)

Facilitators described the reciprocal relationship between intentional and mindful listening and self-disclosure as foundational to facilitators' approach and, in particular, the social pressure that these exchanges seemed to elicit amongst participants to express themselves more and more vulnerably in the circle enough, facilitators said, to realize new truths.

Facilitators also described the dynamics involved in enacting each communication practice. For example, fostering engaged listening amongst participants involved encouraging participants to suspend and replace their judgment with curiosity and wonder, and engage in perspective-taking. Facilitators said that they encouraged participants to engage in listening with the primary purpose of mutual understanding and introspection instead of "fixing" or changing anyone else. By emphasizing participants' agency in disclosing, encouraging participants to engage in storytelling and perspective-giving, and restricting crosstalk, facilitators worked to use and encourage participants to engage in an intentional and mindful self-disclosure in community.

Facilitators shared that participants' self-disclosure in the circle, due to the implementation of the conditions and communication practices, was less likely to be forced, interrupted, or judged and more likely to be authentic. Facilitators emphasized that not just any type of self-disclosure, listening, emotional expression, or introspection could foster meaningful

and effective dialogues. Thus, the dynamics of enacting each had been considered by facilitators extensively.

Theoretical Contributions

A primary objective for this research was identifying the dynamics involved in facilitators' implementation of each condition and communication practice in community in order to build our understanding as intergroup dialogue as an unfolding process. In reviewing the data, however, I also discovered important interconnections between conditions and practices.

The Dynamic Nature of Implementing Conditions and Communication Practices

As the conditions and communication practices constituting facilitators' dialogue processes are all socially constructed, I examined the common and unique (mentioned by few) dynamics that facilitators described as instrumental in enacting each. Identifying the dynamics enacted across myriad organizations across the country working to bridge ties elucidates ways in which people can come together to more effectively listen and share about and across difference. As Allen (2016) writes, it is integral to learn from individuals who have discovered the art of bridging.

Scholars of intergroup dialogue have found that intergroup contact can increase mutual knowledge and empathy while decreasing uncertainty (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In line with these findings, facilitators in the current study shared that participants seemed to be incentivized to continue bridging differences after gaining individual, interpersonal and intergroup insights and ease during intergroup dialogues, even if it meant sometimes experiencing discomfort and difficulty. Nagda et al. (2017) write that, throughout the intergroup dialogue, participants tend to frame the community dialogue increasingly:

as an opportunity to deepen learning rather than something to be feared or avoided.

Disagreements and differences in experiences and perspectives that emerge in intergroup dialogues are seen as opportunities for further exploration and greater understanding of the personal, social, and political influences, but not with a goal of coming to agreement or consensus. (p. 382)

The Interplay of Conditions and Communication Practices

The focus of this research is on the conditions, communication practices, and the dynamics (and challenges) of enacting them. As I was coding, unsurprisingly, I identified some conditions and patterns that appeared alongside each other. For example, Gabrielle shared:

You can equalize...the circle doesn't really have a beginning and an end, right? It continues and everybody has a chance to talk and everybody's listening to the person who's talking...so there's all these things that make the Circle process and make the people who are participating in the Circle process, listen, slow down.

She noticed that conditions such as equalized sharing (sitting in a circle and passing a talking piece) alongside three communication practices that facilitators described as fundamental to effective interracial dialogue (engaged listening, self-disclosure, and community grounding).

Jada similarly explained that equalized sharing seemed to happen alongside participants' use of communication practices. Jada shared:

[w]e take them out of their normal way of doing business, we take them out of their normal way of interacting with people. Because we put them in a circle and a circle is an inclusive type of environment. And once you put them in a circle and take them out of their normal way of dealing and they understand that there's a leader in every chair...it kinda levels the playing field...[and] you get a different thing from them...Because if

you're dealing with people, the way they are seated in a room determines what you get from them in a way. So, because we use that kind of format, which is one of the oldest forms of counsel that exist...and center them to be present in that space...then that's how the walls come down.

Specifically, Jada said that the creation of conditions such as equalized sharing co-occurred with participants increased and expressed openness with each other.

Facilitators described creating conversational conditions such as equalized communication and community agreements involved using communication practices including introspection, engaged listening, self-disclosure, community grounding and emotional expression. Jada, for example, shared:

the guidepost are setting up the whole experience for them, getting them to be present, and then they're gonna speak one at a time and they're gonna listen to whoever's speaking, that kind of thing, and it works...It's not as if you have every single person is a good listener, that's not the case. And because they are doing that, they recognize something about themselves...it's a matter of giving respect and attention to someone else...it's the guideposts and how we set it up, the whole container.

As the community communicated under the conditions of equalized communication and collective agreements, she explained, co-occurred with participants use of communication practices including engaged listening, self-disclosure, and introspection (specifically regarding how they participate).

Sara, too, revealed that creating the conditions of equalized communication and community agreements co-occurred with various communication practices. Sara explained:

we go around the Circle...one of our ground rules is that...we tell our stories individually going around the circle. And my job as being part of the circle is to listen to the stories that everyone is sharing. So even if I'm like...someone shares a story and I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh, I wanna share... I wanna say something right now," my job is to just sit with their story and to just listen to their story. And then when it is my turn to speak, to share my authentic stories out. So, we'll do that round and then go to the next question, which usually goes a little deeper and is about emotions...It gives people the opportunity to share their personal stories uninterrupted without obvious judgment. I mean, we don't know what people are thinking in their heads, but at least in the space, there's no judgment. It's just like, "Please share your story." The opportunity to be self-reflective.

Sara described the creation of equalized communication and community agreements as occurring alongside communication practices including engaged listening, self-disclosure, introspection, and emotional expression.

Joseph shared that his implementation of the condition of creating a welcoming space for dialogue could co-occur with participants' self-disclosure. Joseph shared that he was:

trying to create a space that's not made for TV, not a space that is this, you know... "I wanna look smart by criticizing." But instead, just being very intentional, savoring every word, trying to create the conditions that people are validating each other, hearing each other 'cause I think a lot can get lost if we're not doing that. And I think that you want people to feel safe enough to talk very vulnerably. And in those vulnerable spaces, I think is where a lot of learning can take place.

Joseph emphasized that instead of creating combative conditions, he aimed to create conditions to support practices such as community-grounding, engaged listening, and self-disclosure.

Limitations

This project involved rich data from engaged facilitators and organizations to allow for a description of what occurs in interracial conversations about race. At the same time, several limitations should be considered. First, several facilitators in this study worked in corporate and educational spaces in addition to communities. Thus, although the study and the questions I asked were focused on facilitated dialogue in community contexts, facilitators sometimes mentioned experiences in educational and corporate settings. Although the study remains community-focused, participants answers were not resourced solely from their experiences in communities, but in other environments as well.

Second, the use of focus groups is a major strength of the study because it presented opportunities to identify the nuance and complexity of each condition and communication practice as discussed, disagreed, and elaborated on what their colleagues shared. This interplay between facilitators, Gibbs (1997) writes, “enables participants to ask questions of each other, as well as to re-evaluate and reconsider their own understandings of their specific experiences” (p. 3). In some focus groups, however, some facilitators shared more than others. This made it challenging to hear the perspectives of each participant. I endeavored to be sure everyone had an opportunity to answer each question that I posed to the group, but some participants were more likely to share than others. In some cases, I asked a facilitator to engage in a follow-up conversation to elucidate on initial points they had made briefly or hear more about their experiences or perspectives. The focus group format didn’t allow for the same level of an in-depth exchange with each individual facilitator that a one-on-one interview.

An additional challenge of using focus groups was the challenge it posed in recruiting participants. Several individuals inquired about participating only to be unsuccessful in finding

colleagues interested in participating. Thus, there are facilitators who were willing to share their voices, and the nature of the method restricted their participation. There was one focus group with a group of six co-Circle keepers, but that was a rare instance, most focus groups were typically with two to four facilitators.

Stamina and Community-Building

The emphasis of this study was on examining the dynamics of creating the conditions and using communication practices. But the excerpts, in discussing conditions and practices, also revealed facilitators' goals when facilitating. Two primary objectives emerged: community-building and stamina. After initial intergroup experiences gaining individual, interpersonal and intergroup insights and ease, participants seemed to cultivate a stamina or resilience for engaging further in interracial conversations about race. Cynthia, for example, shared an example of the former when she shared: “[s]omething in the experience has given them...some new resilience, some new curiosity to stay in the difficult conversation more humbly, I think when I see a greater humbleness that feels to me like it’s working.” Indeed, Tropp and Mallett (2011) suggest that when people believe that they more personal resources to respond in interracial interactions they are more likely to view interracial interaction as a beneficial challenge instead of an intimidating endeavor.

Similarly, Dansen shared, “[t]hey create a sense of resilience is, I think, it was part of what I see in dialogue when you could ask someone who has said something that was hurtful to you, a question that says to them, “I wanna get how you got there. I’m curious about how you got there.” And in your soul, you may be saying, “You racist MF.” But that’s not what you’re expressing...And it’s not that people *will* change. It’s not a naive thing, but this is an opportunity for people to change.

This is America

In this current sociopolitical moment, truth-telling around racial history, justice and equity is under attack by politicians endorsing and even mandating a colorblind nation. The notion of colorblindness, as discussed in the literature review of this study, has been detailed by scholars (see, for example: Bonilla-Silva. 2018; Burke, 2018). A colorblind political framework positions whites as victims of reverse racism; under constant threat of the criminality and terrorism they portray as characteristic in minoritized populations (Ioanide, 2015). This disillusionment, scholars agree, has egregiously dangerous consequences. As Bonilla-Silva (2018) argues:

if we do not work toward the development of a social movement to stop this tactic of social control, our collective chances for racial redemption are null. Unless this situation is reversed, the racial practices of ‘new racism’ will continue to be institutionalized and minority folk will continue enduring a second-class existence in a seemingly color-blind America. (p. 52)

Misinformation about minoritized populations continues to be leveraged politically. Ioanide (2015) writes that it has “been essential to manufacturing consent for military-carceral expansion and the retreat from social welfare goods” (the latter despite whites’ heavier reliance on welfare) (p. 1; Katznelson, 2005). Whites’ fear of losing their white cultural dominance and/or desire for control manifest in bills such as Florida Governor Ron DeSantis’ Stop W.O.K.E. Act, which requires that topics of race be discussed in an “objective manner.” This political rebuke of racial truth-telling is not new historically and stands in stark contrast to facilitators and Circle keepers’ call for dialogues about race, which they posit as vital to addressing the country’s enduring and pernicious racial injustice and inequity.

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Appendix A

Background Demographics Survey

NAME:

DEMOGRAPHICS

1. What is your racial identification? (you may pick more than one)

- 1 = Black/African American/Afro-Caribbean/African
- 2 = Asian/Asian American
- 3 = Hispanic/Latinx/Latino/Chicano/Mexican American/Latin American
- 4 = American Indian or Alaska Native
- 5 = White/European American (non-Hispanic)
- 7 = Middle Eastern or Arab American
- 8 = Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 9 = _____

2. What is your gender identification?

- 1 = Female
- 2 = Male
- 3 = Nonbinary
- 4 = Trans Man
- 5 = Trans Woman
- 6 = _____

3. What year were you born? _____

4. What is your religious background?

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 = Evangelical Protestant | 6 = Muslim |
| 2 = Mainline Protestant | 7 = Buddhist |
| 3 = Catholic | 8 = Hindu |
| 4 = Other Christian | 9 = No affiliation |
| 5 = Jewish | 10 = Other _____ |

5. Last year (2021), what was your total income from all sources, before taxes? Please choose the appropriate category:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 = Less than \$10,000 | 5 = \$75,000 - \$99,999 |
| 2 = \$10,000 - \$24,999 | 6 = \$100,000 - \$249,999 |
| 3 = \$25,000 - \$49,999 | 7 = Over \$250,000 |
| 4 = \$50,000 - \$74,999 | |

**6. Would you like to be contacted to examine the findings after the study is complete?
(circle one)**

Yes

No

Appendix B

Introduction and Purpose of Focus Groups

I am conducting this focus group as a part of a communication research study at the University of Washington. I am interested in learning more about the experiences you have had as a facilitator of interracial conversations about race. I'm hoping my research will help people better understand and make sense of how organizations facilitate conversations about race specifically in community contexts. First, I want to ask, would you mind if I recorded this interview and took brief notes? ***click record*** Thank you for your verbal consent, the recording starts now. I want to emphasize that your involvement in this focus group is completely voluntary: It's also okay if you do not understand a question, want me to repeat or rephrase a question, or you do not want to answer a question. You can stop your involvement at any time if you so choose. After the interview is over, I will use the emails you provided to send you a \$25 gift card – it might take a while to show up in your inbox.

Before we begin there are a few more things I want to say about the focus group interview process. First, the expectation of this conversation is not to reach a group consensus, but to hear everyone's perspectives. The information you share will not be shared with your organization, except in potentially very general terms to discuss findings across the full study if you're interested in seeing the study outcomes. Your name will not appear in the data. Pseudonyms will be used in any papers written for this project. Additionally, I, as the researcher, will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality, but I can't guarantee total confidentiality because of the nature of this method with multiple people involved. But I ask that everyone keep whatever is said in this space confidential. I want to take this time to see if you have any questions. Do you have any questions about the background information survey or consent form?

Finally, before we get into the interview questions, I know you likely know each other, but I was hoping we could all introduce ourselves, and I'd also like to hear briefly how you got involved in doing this work with your organization [introductions]. **Thank you, wonderful to meet you all. Let's start with our first question.**

- Can you talk me through an interaction/dialogue in a community context that you facilitated that went well? What did participants do that helped it go well?
 - What does it look like when an interaction goes well? In other words, what is your idea of an effective or successful interaction?
 - What do you think contributed to it going well?
 - Has there been a time when doing these same things (that in this instance led to a positive outcome) actually led to a different outcome?

- If you were to tell someone about the “best practices” of facilitating interracial conversations about race in communities, what would you say?
- Can you talk me through a facilitated interaction that didn’t go as well?
 - What do you think led it to not go as you hoped?
- What do you think about as you’re choosing how you’re going to conduct these conversations? (What guides how you put these conversations together?)
- What would you caution someone against doing if they were facilitating these types of conversations?
- What have been some of the key challenges of facilitating these conversations?
- [Reference any organizational documentation shared before the interview]
- Are there some guidelines and/or protocols that your organization uses that you find more effective than others?
 - Does using this protocol ever lead to memorable outcomes?
 - Does using this protocol ever lead to outcomes you weren’t expecting?

Conclusion

- Is there anything that you would like to add?