Leadership

Weaving Color Lines: Race, Ethnicity, and the Work of Leadership in Social Change Organizations

Sonia Ospina and Celina Su

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://lea.sagepub.com/content/5/2/131

Published by:
$SAGE

http://www.sagepublications.com

>> Version of Record - May 1, 2009

What is This?

Weaving Color Lines: Race, Ethnicity, and the Work of Leadership in Social Change Organizations

Sonia Ospina, *New York University, USA*

Celina Su, *City University of New York, USA*

Abstract *For social change organizations working to address intractable social problems throughout the US tackling race may not only be unavoidable, it may also represent a way to fully engage stakeholders in social change work. We argue that illuminating the relationship between race and leadership can advance our understanding of how social change leadership happens in practice. We build upon scholarship that emphasizes the ways in which seemingly essentialist, intractable racial categories are actually mutable, and the simultaneous emergence of academic research calling attention to the constructed and collective dimensions of leadership. Using a constructionist lens to analyze narratives from 22 social change organizations and building six of these as in-depth cases, we document three distinct means of understanding race, explore how they help to do the work of leadership, and suggest ways in which they seem to move their work forward.*

Keywords *constructionism; ethnicity; race; relational leadership; social change*

Introduction

When the Cornerstone Theatre Company visited Port Gibson, Mississippi in 1988 (then population 2371) all of the town's black children attended the public schools, and all of the white children attended a private school. Cornerstone suggested that the town stage a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. It seemed so *apropos*, a play about two sets of kids who live in the same town but have never met one another. The production became even more daring when Port Gibson's African American high-school track star, Edret Brinston, was cast as Romeo, alongside a white Juliet. Brinston's high-school teachers were 'incredulous', stating that as an illiterate 'troublemaker', Edret would not be up to the task (Semple, 2000). Some of the town's residents voiced their objections to interracial marriage. Nevertheless, in the next two weeks, Brinston labored over his lines, learning to read along the way. The production received national press, including a review in *The New York Times* and the cover of *American Theatre*.

One would think that such a striking meeting of real-life African American Montagues and white Capulets would have constituted a success. After all, the first part of Cornerstone's mission statement reads, 'Cornerstone Theater Company is a multi-ethnic, ensemble-based theater company. We commission and produce new plays, both original works and contemporary adaptations of classics, which combine the artistry of professional and community collaborators'.[1] However, the Company's goals lie not in the productions themselves, but in the sustainability of the relationships developed backstage, as reflected in the second part of its mission statement: 'By making theater with and for people of many ages, cultures and levels of theatrical experience, Cornerstone *builds bridges between and within diverse communities* in our home city of Los Angeles and nationwide' (emphasis added).

At first, Cornerstone's director considered the Port Gibson project a relative failure because residents staged only one more play after Cornerstone left town. Years later, he discovered that Port Gibson had received an award to participate in the federal government's Main Streets USA downtown revitalization program. The town had received an honor for the most racially integrated Main Streets USA board of businesses in the nation, and the residents and board members credited *Romeo and Juliet* for laying the groundwork for their success.

In American society, race continues to be a key determinant of individuals and groups' fate in the social structure, as well as a key social identity construct to devise organizational, community and public policy interventions to combat inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Omi & Winant, 1986). Cornerstone's experience suggests that their deliberate strategy to name and tackle issues of race may be more than an unavoidable dimension for American social change organizations working to address 'wicked' problems – here defined as problems that lack objective definitions or 'correct' answers in diverse societies, in contrast to 'tame' problems in the natural sciences (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Tackling race may also represent a way to fully engage staff, constituents and other stakeholders to leverage the resources – material, symbolic, and cultural – that yield power to impact the world. In other words, it may be a critical ingredient of social change leadership.

We ask – how do participants in social change organizations understand and approach issues of race to advance their work? We argue that illuminating the relationship between race and leadership can help to advance our understanding of how social change leadership happens. This is an important task for the field for two reasons. First, the literature's treatment of this relationship has been limited and marginal to its theorizing goals; second, this limitation creates a blind spot in the scholarly literature, given the salience of race in influencing social relationships and life chances in US society (Marable, 1998; Omi & Winant, 1986). Critical race theorists have emphasized the ways in which seemingly essentialist, intractable racial categories are actually mutable, and have been socially constructed throughout history. Still, how is this done? How do groups and individuals actively contest racial categories, stereotypes, and their consequences? What do these processes teach us about the work of leadership?

These questions are particularly timely given the emergence of scholarly work that calls attention to the constructed and collective dimensions of leadership (Drath, 2001; Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Hosking, 2007; Ospina & Sorensen, 2006), what Uhl-Bien (2006) refers to as the *relational* perspective. This way of thinking about

132

leadership pushes the limits of the traditional *entity* perspective defined around the traits and behaviors of the leader–follower dyad in relation to organizational goals (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

The early leadership literature viewed race and leadership as relatively fixed attributes of individual actors. In more recent scholarship, race (and social identity overall) is viewed as fluid and constructed, and leadership as a 'multi-faceted, complex and dynamic form of influence' (Kark & Shamir, 2002: 86). A relational perspective suggests the need to go one step further, shifting the focus from the relationship between leaders and followers to the way both actors engage in the work of leadership itself (Heifetz, 1994), and to the system of relationships that gives meaning to the work and to the identities of those involved (Drath, 2001; Fletcher, 2004; Hosking, 2007; Ospina & Sorensen, 2006; Uhl-Bien, 2006). One way of doing this is by redirecting our analytical focal point from the leader–follower relationship to the meanings and practices that help to engage organizational participants and give direction to the work (Drath & Palus, 1994; Schall et al., 2004).

By exploring how race is understood and used collectively, rather than individually, and specifically in the work of social change leadership, we move the relational agenda one step further. Social change leadership is leadership practiced in grassroots contexts of resource scarcity, uncertainty, complexity, and even hostility, but driven 'to embody democratic values, pursue human dignity and citizenship, and work for the common good' (Ospina & Foldy, 2005: 6, citing Evans & Boyte, 1986; Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Terry, 1993). Working at a meso-level of analysis, we study a type of organization where issues of race are salient, and which has not been considered as a source to theorize about leadership (Steinberg, 2002).

Analyzing narratives from 22 social change organizations and building on six in-depth cases, we find important variations in how participants make meaning of race as they move forward their social change agenda. We document three distinct *means of understanding race*, explore how they help to do the work of leadership, and suggest ways in which they appear to enhance leadership capacity at individual, organizational, and movement levels of action.

Three caveats are in order. First, we treat race as 'an unstable and "decentered" complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle' (Omi & Winant, 1986: 68). Since racial identity formations are constantly reaffirmed or contested, our article is also an exploration of the ways in which leaders in these organizations take part in these struggles.

Second, in addition to exploring race we also investigate understandings of 'ethnicity'. While ethnicity tends to be associated with a greater emphasis on political-historical characteristics, race and ethnicity are both contested terms and have often been used interchangeably (Oppenheimer, 2001). For the purposes of this study, both ethnicity and race constitute 'raw materials' from which collective identities are made. Following Yanow (2003: viii), we have chosen to use the term 'race-ethnicity' in this article 'as a single referent for both' identities, unless we are specifically referring to one of them.

Our third caveat concerns the issue of intersectionality, whereby different social forces (such as race, class, disability, gender) intersect to produce unique sets of patterned oppression and social conditions (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Richardson & Loubier, 2008). Although our analysis focuses on

133

understandings of race-ethnicity, some participants spoke to the interplay between race and other potential collective identities (such as immigrant status or gender). Nevertheless, more about the potential explanatory power of such overlaps is left for future research.

In what follows we discuss how race-ethnicity has been treated in the leadership literature and we describe our methods, sampling criteria, and cases. We then present our findings of the three means of understanding race-ethnicity and develop in-depth narratives of how these play out in six case studies. In a discussion section, we link these insights to the received leadership literature, and discuss implications for practice and theory, as well as potential new directions for research. We conclude by stating that race is not only relevant but central to leadership in social change organizations: leaders must grapple with the 'raw materials' of socially constructed race-ethnicity to help constituents tackle and engage with collective identities in social change work.

Linking race and leadership

The experience of people of color has gained currency in the organizational leadership research literature, but more as a special side note than as a source for theorizing about leadership (Calas, 1993; Gordon, 2000; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Walter & Johnson, 2000). In early leadership studies, race was a 'variable' to assess style, motivation, and performance, or to compare minority and non-minority leadership orientations (Bartol et al., 1978). Contemporary studies offer more complex views. Social identity theorists (Hogg, 2001) and neo-charismatic scholars (Kark & Shamir, 2003; Shamir et al., 1993), for example, assign a key role to social identity for mobilizing followers. A specific focus on the role of race-ethnicity itself is, however, missing.

Relevant studies can be classified into three groups, according to the role assigned to race-ethnicity in the leadership process: it is either a constraint, a dimension to be 'primed' by leaders, or a resource that enhances capacity to drive change. These views move progressively toward more complex understandings of race-ethnicity as a constructed and collective reality, but a similarly fluid perspective of leadership is still missing. The emergence of a constructionist, relational approach to leadership promises to fill this gap (Drath, 2001; Hosking, 2007; McCauley et al., 2008; Meindl, 1995; Ospina & Sorensen, 2006).

Race-ethnicity as 'constraint': managing social identity

Social identity theory understands identity as 'multidimensional fuzzy sets of attributes' that influence perception, evaluation, and endorsement of leadership (Hogg, 2001: 187). It thus plays a key role in negotiating attributions of leadership (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Brewer & Gardner, 1996).[2] The behavior of emerging minority leaders, for example, can be predicted by their decisions to make their social identity more or less salient when they are in a minority or a majority firm (Slay, 2003). This view assumes that the race of minority individuals represents an obstacle to their leadership. Race-ethnicity and leadership are thus conceived as individual attributes to be strategically managed in the negotiation process, even if mediated by leader–follower cognition.

134

Race-ethnicity as 'tool': activating social identity

According to transformational and neo-charismatic theories (Conger, 1999; Conger et al., 2000; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Lord et al., 1999; Shamir et al., 1993, 1998), leaders use shared and collective identities to motivate followers to transcend their personal interests and to perform beyond expectations. Leaders implicate followers in one of the various levels of social identity – associated with a dynamic, multi-faceted and malleable self-concept – that encompasses individual, interpersonal (relational), or collective levels (Kark & Shamir, 2002).

Making salient 'collective identities in followers' self-concepts . . . increases the likelihood of collective-oriented behavior' (Shamir et al., 1993: 582; see also Yukl et al., 1999).[3] Leaders 'activate' or 'prime' different levels of the followers' fluid self-concept to influence how the latter perceive themselves, identify with the leader, and commit to work for the group (Lord et al., 1999). Some leader behaviors prime the relational self, while cultural artifacts such as 'symbolic, verbal and performance acts' – reflected in slogans, rituals, labels, metaphors, ceremonies and communication strategies emphasizing the 'we' – prime the collective self (Kark & Shamir, 2003: 80). Because the inquiry focuses on how leaders' behaviors help to prime followers' identities, other possible reciprocal dynamics that would help understand this activation mechanism are left unexplored.

Race-ethnicity as 'resource': constructing social identity

Scholars from women's studies, management, education, and social movements offer a different understanding of the links between *race-ethnicity* and leadership. Yielding a rich cultural view from within, these scholars highlight the meaning-making processes associated with the experiences of leaders of color. This approach stresses both the negative consequences of discrimination and exclusion, as well as the potential nature of identities as sources of strength and mobilization, even under stressful circumstances.[4]

These studies share a critique of the cultural bias in traditional leadership theories (Bordas, 2007; Wong, 1995). They also share the value of recentering a body of knowledge located at the periphery of the leadership field (Fitzgerald, 2006), and a belief that context matters in leadership research (Jansen, 2005). Three perspectives (culture, standpoint and/or positionality, and social movements) make distinct contributions, progressively drawing deeper from social and critical theory. While leadership also becomes progressively more relational, scholars continue to privilege experiences of individual leaders over collective dimensions of leadership.

The cultural perspective

Some scholars highlight the cultural manifestations of social identity as a source of strength. Since culture informs leadership styles and models, these scholars explore 'unique' characteristics of racial-ethnic groups, such as morality for Chinese leadership (Wong, 1995), context for indigenous, American Indian styles (Warner & Grint, 2006) and family for Latino immigrant community leaders (Chahin & Rodriguez, 2005; Pardo, 1998). Culturalists thus argue that leaders of color can choose to use the strengths of their culture to their advantage and to that of their organization (Alire,

2001; Bordas, 2007). But they downplay the power dynamics within which these choices are embedded.

The standpoint and positionality perspectives

A critical theory framework surfaces power and stresses the intersections between race-ethnicity and other social identities, like gender. *Standpoint* studies articulate how social identities (such as race-ethnicity) create communities with collective grievances and aspirations that must be addressed from within (Fitzgerald, 2006; Muller, 1998; Prindeville, 2003; Wilcox, 2001). Deepening this approach, *positionality* scholars claim that leadership worldviews and styles emerge as situated responses to the consequences of interactions of multiple identities in particular contexts (Kezar, 2000). Marginalization in intersection systems results in an outsider perspective often at odds with the dominant-culture systems within which performance and interpretation take place, affecting views and responses to the world (Parker, 2001; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996), and giving meaning to power relations that affect how we react to them (Kezar, 2000).

Yet, scholars taking these perspectives suggest that leaders of color are not prisoners of these structures, as illustrated by studies of black women executives in majority white, male-dominated organizations (Parker, 2001). Negotiating at the intersections of control and empowerment, they draw simultaneously from Anglo male, female, and women of color-specific standpoint models of leadership (Parker, 2001).

Research on black leadership follows a similar logic, highlighting the responsibilities of black leaders in systems of oppression (Childs, 1989; Marable, 1998; Walters & Johnson, 2000; Walters & Smith, 1999). Instead of stressing the impact of oppression on black leaders, however, they emphasize the effect of their strategies and behaviors in their own community (Allen, 1997; Dickerson, 2006; Ladner, 2001; Robnett, 1997; Walters & Smith, 1999; Williams, 1998).

From these perspectives, the scope of inquiry about leadership broadens beyond styles and behaviors to include leaders' intentions, actions, and strategies in relation to community and broader society. Nonetheless, the units of analysis continue to be individuals – either leaders, followers, or targets of influence in the social system. Left unexplored are the mechanisms by which social actors draw – individually and collectively – on cultural and symbolic resources at their disposal to produce the desired changes.

The social movements perspective

Social movement scholars have renewed interest in culture, identity, and the microdynamics of movement work (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995; McAdam et al., 1996; Meyer et al., 2002). This approach offers potential tools to broaden the study of leadership beyond individual leaders, given their concern with practices like political activism as identity politics (Bernstein, 2005; Wood, 2002) and the role of collective identities in movement creation (Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

Asserting that interests and identities do not stem linearly from structural positions, Polletta and Jasper (2001: 299) point to 'the historical construction of what seem like "natural" identities such as . . . "black"', and invite more research to better understand this process: 'We should learn more about how intellectuals and

136

group leaders . . . construct a past for a group' (p. 299). They specifically ask, 'What are [the] tools and raw materials of identity work?' (p. 299). Emphasizing the cultural micro-dynamics of social movement work, these queries can illuminate the complex relationship between race-ethnicity and leadership. They thus converge with the view of black leadership and positionality leadership scholars, while underscoring the collective and meaning-making dimensions of the work. These queries also point to what constructionist leadership scholars suggest must become the focus of leadership research.

New trends in leadership scholarship: from entity to constructionist perspectives

The reviewed literatures emphasize leaders' styles, behaviors, motivations, and actions to achieve goals in relationship with followers. Whether they view race-ethnicity as a constraint, tool, or resource, these leadership scholars view the leader–follower relationship as an exchange between separate entities, a relational view that Uhl-Bien (2006) has labeled the *entity* perspective.

By contrast, leadership can be considered from a relational perspective that views the work of leaders and followers as a *process of social construction*, so that specific understandings of leadership emerge in practice and become dominant over time (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Specific meanings and practices can help groups to produce *collective* achievements through concerted work (Alvesson, 1996; Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Drath, 2001; Drath & Palus, 1994; Hosking, 2007; Ospina & Sorensen, 2006). The shift from an entity to a constructionist perspective represents an important recent development in the leadership field. The role of race-ethnicity in this emergent process has not been explored. Our research develops this perspective by exploring how participants in social change organizations, even those not designated as leaders, understand and approach issues of race to advance their work. A relational, constructionist perspective of leadership poses important implications for the empirical study of leadership.

Method

When leadership is considered only in relation to formal positions or when it is defined as a fixed quality, the inquiry may be closed 'prematurely' by ignoring the organizing context that allows the work to happen and the way relations are formed and reformed in this context through sense making, attribution and negotiation (Alvesson, 1996). A constructionist view cannot consider 'leaders' in the foreground and 'contextual factors' in the background, because it is impossible to separate the study of leadership from 'the study of the process in which flexible social order is negotiated and practiced so as to protect and promote the values and interests in which it is grounded' (Hosking, 1997: 315).

Since structure is itself negotiated and emergent, understanding leadership requires observing the work organizational members do to construct, through everyday practices, the very 'rules' that they follow, which represent nothing else but 'the generation and emergence of social order' (Uhl-Bien, 2006: 42). Analytical attention thus naturally shifts from the agents through which leadership is carried

137

out, to 'processes' of organizing (Hosking, 1997) and/or to practices that respond to the challenges of the work that calls forth leadership (Drath, 2001).

A focus on the experiences associated with 'the work of leadership' (Foldy et al., 2008) requires inviting actors engaged in the work to inquire about its meaning, thus studying leadership phenomenologically, from the inside out. Rather than focusing on the experience of *leaders* or their relationship with *followers*, we explore the experience of *leadership*, as it is manifested collectively in particular organizational contexts to achieve common purposes. The unit of analysis shifts from the micro-level of individuals to the meso-level of organizations as settings where individuals define, negotiate and give meaning to work. Narrative inquiry becomes an appropriate methodology to capture this experience by engaging organizational participants in conversations that generate stories describing and explaining their work.

The interpretive study reported here included two distinct phases of inquiry. First, in-depth interviews with members of 40 social change organizations were used to develop 'analytical memos' about their leadership work. These were used to classify organizations according to the ways its members addressed race-ethnicity. An inductive analysis of 22 organizations whose leaders mentioned race-ethnicity as a key dimension of their work yielded three distinct means of understanding race. In the second phase, we selected a sample of six organizations for in-depth exploration. Each phase of the inquiry is described separately.

The research setting

The organizations selected for this study can be defined as *social change organizations* (SCOs), that is, grass-roots, non-profit organizations that serve marginalized groups, communities or interests by addressing systemic problems in a way that will increase their power (Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2007). Their work combines in different degrees strategies of service delivery, organizing, advocacy and community building. These features distinguish them from other social service non-profits and from social movement organizations or professionalized non-profits working in mainstream politics.[5] SCOs have been ignored in the literature as a potential source to develop leadership theory (Ospina & Foldy, 2005; Ospina & Sorensen, 2006). Yet, as Chetkovich and Kunreuther (2006) argue, they represent a key component of today's US socio-political environment and an important force for change.

The organizations were part of a five-year leadership-recognition program.[6] Awards were granted to leaders of 20 organizations each year. Regional and national selection committees annually screened between 1000–1500 nominations to choose the awardees.[7] Besides 'bringing about positive change', the leaders met selection criteria of 'tackling tough social problems with effective, systemic solutions', being 'strategic', and bringing 'different groups together'.[8] A high nominee-to-selected ratio and the rigorous selection process, which included an assessment of the leaders' organizations, makes them exemplars of success in advancing their missions and suitable subjects to pursue our research question.

138

Phase 1 of the inquiry

The study draws from a rich qualitative data set about organizations from the first two cohorts of the leadership program. The data set includes: (a) transcripts of in-depth interviews implemented during site visits; (b) analytical memos developed from the analysis of the transcripts; and (c) short profiles of the award recipients and their organizations' accomplishments.

Data collection and analysis

Two rounds of interviews per organization elicited narratives on meaning-making processes and leadership practices, rather than on attributes of individual leaders (Ospina & Dodge, 2006; Schall et al., 2004). For each case, leaders were interviewed first and then joined an additional structured group conversation with other stakeholders, including staff, board members, constituents, funders, allies and public officials. On average, between eight and nine persons per organization were interviewed.

A fluid, interpretive technique allowed participants freedom to move the conversation as needed to describe their experiences about how the work was done to achieve successful milestones, considering conflict, obstacles and sometimes failures in the process.

Analytical memos based on interview transcripts and substantively describing key dimensions of each organization's work were canvassed to identify references to race or ethnicity. The organizations were classified as those where: (1) data did not mention race-ethnicity (11 organizations); (2) data mentioned race or ethnicity but did not reveal organizational practices centering on race or ethnicity (3 organizations); and (3) data suggested that race or ethnicity was central to organizational work practices (22 organizations).[9] See Appendix for a list of all organizations considered.

Transcripts from the 22 organizations in the group where race-ethnicity was central to the work were coded into emergent themes. The analysis yielded three separate ways of understanding race-ethnicity: 'multiple narratives', 'cultural traditions' and 'lived experience'. These were not ideologies per se, but sets of practices or activities through which leaders and members of an organization come to understand issues of these social identities. These themes became the base for a sampling frame to further select six case studies for additional in-depth investigation of the relationship between race-ethnicity and leadership in social change organizations.[10]

Phase 2 of the inquiry

The cases represent a theoretically driven sample (Quinn Patton, 2002), as shown in Table 1, depicting two sets of triptych case studies.

We chose three organizations that allowed comparisons within the same policy issue (immigration), each showing a different means of understanding race-ethnicity. We then added three organizations from other well-represented policy clusters in the data (environment, arts and poverty/juvenile justice), to ensure paired comparisons within each category. The selected cases were not meant to be representative,

139

Table 1 *Selected case study organizations*

Means of understanding race-ethnicity	Multiple narratives	Cultural traditions	Lived experience
Approach to issues of race-ethnicity	Forges alliances among groups previously divided along racial-ethnic lines	Addresses racial-ethic marginalization of constituents in politics	Connects individuals via a racial-ethnic political identity
Organizations working on immigrants' rights	**Coalition of African, Arab, Asian, European, and Latino Immigrants of Illinois** Engages immigrants' groups to enter the political arena, hold governmental agencies accountable and work towards reform, and stand up for citizenship rights, for a greater quality of life for immigrants/refugees	**Laotian Organizing Project** Works with members of various Laotian groups to overcome multiple language barriers, assert immigrants' rights in social services and environmental justice campaigns	**EVS Communications** Engages Latino immigrants to form peer networks, access social services, forward stories about their struggles, and assert social and political rights
Organizations working on other campaign issues	**Cornerstone Theatre Company (arts)** Engages members of divided communities, often separated along racial lines, to come together and develop leadership skills, engage in deliberation, and collectively solve seemingly intractable discord via theatre productions	**Gwich'in Steering Committee (indigenous Americans' rights)** Works for indigenous Americans' rights, especially regarding the preservation of caribou, wildlife land, and Gwich' in culture in coastal Alaska	**Center for Young Women's Development (criminal justice)** Engages pre- and post-adjudicated or incarcerated young women to promote youth advocacy, economic self-sufficiency, and community safety, and to work towards criminal justice reform

140

but to showcase the richness and complexity of the relationship between race-ethnicity and leadership in organizations working in several policy areas, and to surface themes that merit further research.

Interview protocols did not include any questions that explicitly mentioned the concepts of race or ethnicity, nevertheless, these emerged in the stories.[11] Table 2 offers a description of the demographic compositions characterizing the chosen organizations.

Within- and across-case data analysis

Through case analysis, we further explored patterns grounded in the data. Original interview transcripts were analyzed to explore understandings of race-ethnicity within the narratives of social change work, and how these understandings helped participants to move the work forward. The method was interpretive, with systematic and recurrent readings of the narratives.

Findings: the role of race and ethnicity in the work of leadership

Findings from Phase 1 of the inquiry describe the three means of understanding race-ethnicity in social change organizations. Findings from Phase 2 document their role in the work of leadership by way of the case studies. Unless otherwise noted, quotes are from interviews of members of social change organizations, as described earlier.

Three approaches to understanding race-ethnicity

The approaches that emerged as a means of understanding race and ethnicity in the studied social change organizations seemed to include a distinct set of processes enacted by members in the organizations. These are summarized in Table 3.

Organizations that understand issues of race-ethnicity via *multiple narratives* are careful not to forward any one specific storyline about how race-ethnicity operates in American society. Rather, they explicitly focus on bringing racially and ethnically diverse groups together. Organizations like the Coalition of African, Arab, Asian, European and Latino Immigrants of Illinois (CAAAELII) and Cornerstone Theater encourage the diverse groups they recruit to engage in deliberative conversations, build trust, and perhaps even form a new collective vision, one that encompasses contributions from every participant. The leaders of these organizations collectively create and cultivate specific 'raw materials' of participants' respective identities, using Polletta and Jasper's (2001) term, in order to bring together multiple narratives under a collective vision.

In some ways, organizations working under the *cultural traditions* category operate in a manner almost contrary to those in the first category; they are very careful to cultivate and forward specific race- or ethnicity-based narratives. Specifically, they draw upon articulated rituals, values, ceremonies, tales, and other 'ways of life' traditionally associated with their race-ethnicity. In fact, these traditions are exactly what help participants in these social change organizations to give meaning to the race-ethnicity with which they identify. Case study organizations like the Laotian Organizing Project and the Gwich'in Steering Committee already possess cultural traditions to draw upon. Using the metaphors, languages, rituals, and values revered

141

Table 2 *Racial-ethnic composition of the case study organizations, at the time of the study*

	Leadership	Staff	Constituency
CAAAELII	Filipino executive director, multi-ethnic board	Multiethnic	Multi-ethnic immigrant community in Chicago
Cornerstone Theater	White American executive director, multiracial-ethnic board	Multi-racial-ethnic (including white Americans)	Multi-racial-ethnic communities nationwide
Laotian Organizing Project	Laotian and Asian American leaders	Loatian and Asian American organizers	Loatian groups in the northern California area (with internal linguistic and cultural diversity)
Gwich'in Steering Committte	Gwich'in spokesperson, multi-ethnic Native American steering committee	N/A (no staff)	Gwich'in community in Alaska
EVS Communications	Latino co-directors	N/A (only one staff, Latino)	Latino immigrant community in Washington, DC (from various Latin American countries)
Center for Young Women's Development	Young African American executive director, multi-racial-ethnic board	Multi-racial-ethnic (all young women)	Multi-racial-ethnic young women at risk in Oakland

Table 3 *Framework of means of understanding race-ethnicity*

Means of understanding race-ethnicity	Multiple narratives	Cultural traditions	Lived experience
Primary processes by leaders	1. Draws from narratives of established groups, participating in organization 2. Develops a collective vision and trust amongst individuals from diverse, segregated, sometimes antagonistic groups/organizations	1. Draws upon pre-existing cultural traditions 2. Develops analyses, strategies, and language, in individuals from a group traditionally marginalized/excluded from the mainstream political process	1. Draws upon present-day lived experience of individuals 2. Builds trust among individuals sharing similar lived experience, develops race-ethnicity-based collective identity via the lens of lived experience

143

in their communities, they ground their work on the analysis of the social and political positions they hold vis-à-vis others in American society. Cultural traditions highlight and throw into sharp relief the very different raw materials those in the other two categories use to understand issues of race-ethnicity.

In the framework's third category, leaders collectively create and interpret meaning from their *lived experience*. Of the raw materials used in constructing collective racial and ethnic identities, these can be argued to be the rawest. Often, leaders in these organizations did not identify themselves as Latino or black, for example; at the very least, they did not identify with or participate in Latino or African American organizations. Here, organizations work with the premise that many experiences in everyday life – where we live, how we are treated in schools and workplaces, our brushes with the law – are marked by race-ethnicity. Organizations such as EVS Communications and the Center for Young Women's Development, then, bring together or highlight the experiences common to certain groups, that is, Latinos in the former and young women of color in the latter. Through the lens of these intense, real-life experiences, participants begin to critically analyze how others 'like them' share a common fate, and what this pattern says about social and political issues of race-ethnicity.

Race, ethnicity and the work of leadership

The case studies, two at a time, illustrate how multiple narratives, cultural traditions and lived experiences, as distinct means of understanding race-ethnicity, were used to advance the work of leadership. In each of these categories, social change leaders helped to reframe how constituents saw themselves, potential allies, and potential targets in different ways, via the lens of racial-ethnic identity. These reframings did not simply adhere to abstract ideals, and they were not *ad hoc*; rather, they were part of strategic work that also helped their organizations to tackle social change problems colored by American racial inequality. Key characteristics, including the official policy fields and missions, are presented in Table 4.

Multiple narratives build a sphere of interdependence

The Coalition of African, Arab, Asian, European, and Latino Immigrants of Illinois (CAAELII) and Cornerstone Theatre Company serve as case studies in the multiple narratives category. In these organizations, social change leaders helped to reframe how constituents saw and interpreted members of other racial-ethnic groups, from potential rivals into potential allies.

Creating a public sphere of interdependence
CAAAELII works with social service agencies and community organizations of immigrants of every race-ethnicity in the Chicago area to strengthen their grassroots power and impact public policy. CAAAELII's very name provides a good first point of analysis. The organization's leaders could have chosen a shorter name, like 'Coalition for Illinois Immigrants'. More than a superficial moniker, CAAAELII embodies several layers of identity: geography by state, immigrant status, and

144

Table 4 *Key characteristics of in-depth case study organizations*

Case study organization	Main policy field	Mission/focus and website
Cornerstone Theatre Company, Los Angeles, California	Arts	Cornerstone commissions and produces ensemble-based plays in community collaborations throughout the United States. Website: http://www.cornerstonetheatre.org
Coalition of African, Arab, Asian, European, and Latino Immigrants in Illinois (CAAAELII) Chicago, Illinois	Immigrants' rights	CAAAELII aims to strengthen immigrants' democratic participation and grassroots power, and to impact public policy. Website: http://www.CAAAELII.org
Laotian Organizing Project (LOP) Contra Costa County, California	Immigrants' rights	LOP engages diverse Laotian ethnic and tribal groups to articulate community needs and pursue campaigns for environmental justice, especially regarding local industrial sites and toxic hazards. Website: http://www.apen4ej.org/organize_lop.htm
Gwich'in Steering Committee Fairbanks, Alaska	Environment	The Gwich'in Steering Committee aims to protect the dignity and ways of life of the Gwich'in people; this includes protecting local migrating caribou from extinction and Arctic National Wildlife Refuge lands from oil drilling. Website: http://www.gwichinsteeringcommittee.org/
EVS Communications Washington, DC area	Immigrants' rights	EVS is a non-profit television production company that provides media for and by the Latino community. Website: http://www.evstv.org/
Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD) San Francisco, California	Poverty/juvenile justice	CYWD works to empower young women who have been involved in the criminal justice system or underground street economy. Website: http://www.cywd.org/

145

racial-ethnic and cultural ancestry, more or less by continent. The Coalition's partner agencies appear, at least by name, to be organized in terms of nationality of origin; there were El Salvadoran, Korean, and Cambodian groups in the interviews.

Since many of CAAAELII's campaigns deal with funding cuts for different neighborhoods and social services agencies, how does the Coalition enable these groups to join forces, rather than struggle separately to keep their respective slices of political and economic pie? As one of the co-founders observed, it is 'counter-intuitive' for these agencies to work together, since, 'our clients have similar challenges and so we need to . . . sell it to the funder that, well, my problem is bigger than their problem'. The organization's leaders work to reframe their constituents' understanding of race-ethnicity so that collaboration, especially in immigrants' rights campaigns, is no longer counterintuitive.

CAAAELII's director began his work by collecting and disseminating citizenship lesson plans in the Chicago area. As he noted about the various organizations, 'they don't have to reinvent the wheel . . . The talents and the resources are already there among us'. In addition to very practical curricular outcomes, this exchange helped to begin processes of 'break[ing] the isolation' and building relationships, as a co-founder phrased it. The director of a member organization, Centro Romero, added that before this, '[Members who had] been living here for 14 years didn't have a meeting with anybody'.

Still, 'community members . . . were very hesitant that they could really break down more barriers than . . . food and dance'. One of the catalysts that coalesced CAAAELII's partner agencies was a workshop with all of their respective citizenship coordinators. There, they were compelled to establish rapport and build trust. One participant in the workshop recounted,

> We had to give each other time . . . Everybody speaks a different language . . . and we went through stereotypes . . . Seeing people from different races and ethnic groups get to know each better . . . People felt connected.

Much of what was achieved did not immediately bear on specific immigrants' rights agenda per se, but nevertheless helped leaders to collectively process the raw materials that constituted their respective understandings of race-ethnicity. In a way, immigrant rights issues remained relatively abstract until CAAAELII leaders shared stories about their struggles; participants now had feelings of interdependence and pleasure guiding their joint work. Another CAAAELII leader observed, 'that's what it means, a coalition. Sharing and being together'.

This multiplicity of viewpoints helped member organizations to build capacity at the movement level. As one leader stated, 'the idea that . . . we can get people together who have varying viewpoints and varying agendas . . . the synergy of many organizations working together is what makes CAAAELII successful'. For any project to go forward, each partner agency must sign on and delineate its specific contribution. For a cable TV show, rotating hosts and guests were selected before CAAAELII produced 12 episodes. In this way, multiple narratives are complementary rather than antithetical to efficiency. The roles of each partner agency are equally valued, but not interchangeable. To maintain a diversity of voices is an overt act.

In doing so, CAAAELII allows individuals and partner agencies to air publicly struggles that, because of language and cultural barriers, may have otherwise

146

remained within the confines of racially or ethnically bound communities. To insist upon multiple narratives as a means of understanding race-ethnicity, then, is to address issues of inequalities, and to ensure that CAAAELII's public sphere is defined by, not just accentuated by, diversity. Along the way, CAAAELII leaders develop a notion of interdependence where none existed before.

Meeting on a public stage

Like CAAAELII, Cornerstone Theatre Company operates with the assumption that most people probably have some way of identifying themselves by race or ethnicity. In Port Gibson, Mississippi, for example, Cornerstone worked with groups of people who definitively viewed themselves as white or black. How did the work of leadership in staging *Romeo and Juliet* allow Port Gibson residents to form sustainable relationships?

Around the country, the plays give different communities the opportunity to be together in a focused setting. Two characteristics of the stage production process may be significant here. First, the project is a limited-run theatrical production; it thus appears more palatable than some sort of mandated integration policy, and it captures the allure of stage lights. Second, once actors and stage crew assume their respective roles, they are expected to deliver a production at the end. Thus, whoever takes part in the production is compelled to reap the rewards of their hard work, and to stay put through rehearsals, script adaptations, and publicity work. These activities are the Cornerstone equivalent of the hours of 'being together' described earlier by CAAAELII leaders. Along the way, participants in Cornerstone's stage productions become leaders as they, too, deliberate over storylines or stage directions. The actors and crew are anything but passive.

Cornerstone's activities may appear to be race-neutral at first glance, but the conflicts that do arise often center on issues of race and ethnicity. For example, one Los Angeles production included real-life white police officers bursting onto stage to arrest a group of men of color, played by residents of nearby low-income neighborhoods. The staging of a play, especially one from the literary canon, may not seem to be controversial. Yet choices of casting and storyline are rife with controversial decisions about who plays the good guy, what real-life conflicts from the community are reflected, and how sympathetically protagonists or villains are portrayed.

When some critics assert that Cornerstone gives unsympathetic groups as much say as sympathetic ones (Brady, 2000), leaders assert that painstakingly presenting multiple narratives is, in fact, more radical than forwarding theses typically perceived as progressive. For instance, one idea for a production in the Watts section of Los Angeles was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, with a female Korean grocer playing the role of the Jewish character Shylock in a community of African Americans in lieu of the original play's 16th century Venetians. One ensemble member strongly dissented, and because the theatre company endeavors to make major decisions via consensus, this particular project was nixed.

This attention to multiple narratives by race-ethnicity means that Cornerstone members consistently *name* the racial criteria for diversity they hope to fulfill. Unlike CAAAELII, whose criteria for diversity are suggested by the organization's name, Cornerstone brings differently categorized groups of people together for each production.

147

Two key tensions arise through the process. First, the leaders who work on a production – whether official Cornerstone members or newly burgeoning actors – must be willing to tackle issues of representation and tokenism. One ensemble member recalled, 'whenever we talk about . . . black [perspectives], [that] we need a black person here . . . it is like, [the ensemble turns to someone who appears to be black, for instance, and asks] "What are you?"' Confirming the person's racial identity, the ensemble then asks that person to contribute his or her perspective. The tension here lies in the extent to which multiple narratives require, and are fulfilled by, racial-ethnic diversity in play production. This ensemble member expressed some ambivalence towards the process, but also noted,

> We have to look at ourselves as a company and . . . say, look, we are missing this element . . . In order for the discourse to happen, that voice needs to be within the circle that makes the decisions. Now I know very clearly that I am a token . . . [but] I have shaped this company as much as this company has shaped me . . . that is ownership that I can take . . . By naming it, there is an ugliness to it, but also there is this incredible beauty.

These reflections support the idea that no individual can be the ultimate representative of his or her race-ethnicity. Nevertheless, the dialogues that take place via Cornerstone productions can only occur by paying attention to race-ethnicity.

Second, Cornerstone Theatre Company is plainly willing to use different definitions of 'community' for different productions. These definitions designate eligibility for participation in the organization's plays. In Port Gibson and Watts, Cornerstone defined the community in geographical terms. The organization has also defined 'community' by age, working with residents of the country's largest low-income housing complex for seniors in English, Spanish, Mandarin, and Korean. That meaningful and unexpected relationships develop among all of the productions' casts, then, is significant. They illustrate how groups of people can transgress pre-made boundaries by sharing multiple narratives. Implementing a new version of 'community' does not supplant old communities, but it may expand and enrich them.

The leaders who participate in the theatre company's productions pay attention to questions of diversity in casting, eliciting multiple storylines, and being good neighbors. In doing so, they transform temporary stages into public spheres of storytelling and interdependence. Even after the productions are over, these relationships last, and new public stages for multiple narratives and inter-group dialogue remain – via pool parties and schools, via new community theatre groups, and in the case of the Mississippi town where *Romeo and Juliet* was performed, via day-care centers and business improvement districts.

Based on the case studies of CAAAELII and Cornerstone Theatre Company, then, social change organizations using multiple narratives as a means of understanding race-ethnicity build a public sphere of interdependence where none existed. Along the way, these new ways of constructing understanding of race-ethnicity helped constituents to see members of different racial-ethnic groups in multiple new ways; as a result, they not only pooled resources in a way they did not before, but they also began to jointly articulate shared visions of social change.

148

Cultural traditions as sources of organizational strength

Whereas Cornerstone Theatre Company prompted discussions on the tensions between democratic and tribal governments by adapting a Greek tragedy to produce *The House on Walker River* on the Paiute Indian reservation in Nevada, the organizations in the second category of our framework would have taken an almost contrary approach. Rather than using canonical plays to share multiple perspectives, the two organizations in this category draw upon their own indigenous cultural norms as a means of commenting on mainstream political institutions.

The Laotian Organizing Project (LOP) and the Gwich'in Steering Committee (GSC)[12] serve as case studies in this category. Here, social change leaders help constituents reframe themselves as potentially powerful political actors.

Weaving a counter-narrative

A good number of the Laotians living in Richmond, California are refugees from before or after the Vietnam War. The Laotian Organizing Project (LOP) works with them on environmental justice campaigns, especially those regarding more than 350 toxic hazards in the local area.

According to one of the LOP community organizers, these refugees 'have been torn between their own governments and the leaders . . . So, it has been difficult for them, [determining] who they feel that they can trust, and [who] they can work with'. Yet, even after their move to the US, these refugees must mobilize to protect their rights and attain physical security. In reaction to an explosion at the local oil refinery, for example, warning signals and emergency messages were only broadcast in English and Spanish. The LOP's challenge, then, lay in helping the community voice their concerns in the policy-making arena, and to secure campaign wins such as warning signals in their own languages.

In tackling this challenge, LOP strikes a delicate balance between preserving traditions from Laos and building upon them in the immigrants' new context. In campaigns, LOP leaders first drew upon what enabled refugees to survive in the first place. According to the head organizer, after so many 'terrible things, family and community is . . . the only thing people have left . . . If there were other celebrations or tragedies in the community, you kind of pull together'. Another leader spoke of the joy in participating in an official ceremony marking the end of a campaign. These rituals evoked respect for tradition and helped to build trust in the community.

By using metaphors familiar to immigrants and refugees, LOP staff were able to elicit critical analyses and campaign proposals for the obstacles at hand. One of the community organizers recounts asking,

> 'Back home, if your weeds have grown so big in your back yard; how are you going to take care of that problem?' You're not going to be able to take off one leaf and take care of the problem. So, we have to really look at what the root is.

Another staff organizer added that the metaphor 'totally resonates, and people get . . . really excited'. The LOP allows refugee leaders to feel comfortable in their new political surroundings and has, in effect, 'transferred to the US . . . the traditional leadership infrastructure [from] the villages in Laos'.

149

Yet, transferring leadership infrastructures requires more than replicating them. LOP leaders draw on cultural traditions to build capacity in two significant ways. First, as described earlier, leaders use them to engage in political campaigns, but they also work to change certain norms, such as the role of women in decision making. Second, in speaking in their own languages and using traditions as a foundation, these Laotian leaders create an alternative, hybrid vision of collective identity to that forwarded by mainstream American society.

Perhaps because of an appreciation of the various cultures of different ethnic groups within the Laotian community, some LOP leaders lament a 'general . . . lack of understanding for . . . different kinds of cultures and experiences that people bring' to the United States. This colors the organization's understanding of issues of race-ethnicity. The head organizer elaborates, 'because of race, [assimilation] would never completely happen, even if we wanted it to, and we don't. And, so [LOP] really is about an alternative to that mainstream society'. She, for one, believes that 'there's a tax on immigrants, a tax on people of color, really, people – regular people being shut out of participation in the decisions that impact their lives'. While leaders do not duplicate Laotian norms wholesale, neither do they reject them.

This was literally and physically manifest in a storycloth embroidered by LOP youth. Storycloths are a traditional art form in Laos, usually depicting farming and village scenes. The head organizer described how,

> when they came to the US, [the storycloth illustrated] the camps . . . showing airplanes coming here, and depicting the war . . . The youth did one depicting . . . a Laotian girl . . . her village being bombed . . . and then coming to the camps, and coming to the US, and then a panel about the future. And, then all the girls did . . . a little square on their own.

The resulting quilt, 'this really beautiful thing', incorporated both their elders' stories and their own 'hopes and aspirations'. The quilt actualized the refugees' struggles in a way the organization as a whole could stand behind, and present to the outside world. As one community leader put it, the Laotian Organizing Project's means of understanding race-ethnicity compels 'other communities, but also . . . most important[ly], [the] government to understand our community . . . our need[s] . . . our culture, and the way we function'. Along the way, the organization's leaders also help constituents to contest and reframe how their racial-ethnic identity is seen in the mainstream American context.

Articulating the politics of a way of life

The Gwich'in Steering Committee (GSC) aims to protect the dignity and ways of life of the Gwich'in people; this includes protecting Arctic National Wildlife Refuge lands from oil drilling. In interviews, Gwich'in tribal members of Alaska also emphasized that the caribou were not just animals, however majestic, but an entire way of life. Oft repeated, this statement reflects that race-ethnicity may be genetically insignificant, but it can also represent a positive and empowering way of being, full of details about caribou migration patterns, wood-cutting, and long winters. The Gwich'in depend on caribou meat for over 75 per cent of their caloric intake, and when caribou are not around, they can barely afford to eat, as supermarket meat is

150

more expensive and of lower quality. GSC leaders speak of hunting caribou as sacred, deeply valued, and a human right.

Although the Gwich'in are not immigrants like the Laotian community described earlier, mainstream American political institutions also marginalize them. For example, a line literally divides the caribou's traditional lands into the US and Canada. In the 1960s, official assimilation meant that the Bureau of Indian Affairs forcibly took the GSC spokesperson out of Alaska and placed her in a beautician school in San Francisco. Even in the federal government's past efforts to help Native American tribes, budgets were 'hamstrung' so that indigenous-friendly policies could not be properly implemented.

In the GSC's current fight to preserve their land and way of life, GSC's spokesperson wondered how her tribe could counter President Bush's aggressive tactics in his campaign for oil drilling: 'What are the Gwich'in going [to] do? It sounds like the President was just going to go ahead and do it. We should go out in the street and put our life on the line'. For GSC leaders, this form of protest seemed like their only choice at first. The protest would also be difficult to execute for several reasons. Gwich'in and not English is their native language, funding to fly to DC would be scarce, and GSC leaders would literally be on President Bush's turf.

The Gwich'in ended up protesting Bush's agenda, but not as expected. GSC's spokesperson recalls, 'the elders . . . said if we go out in the street and somebody gets hurt or even gets killed . . . Gwich'in is going to get blamed . . . Finally we came up with the idea we should come up here where it is isolated'. Holding the protest at home allowed the GSC to receive media attention and frame the event with their own words, rituals, and symbols. The Gwich'in engaged in the political campaign on their own terms, drawing upon cultural traditions.

The Gwich'in experienced a 'rebirth of a nation' in gathering and writing public policy proposals. In the late 1980s, for the first time in 'maybe 150 years', the elders called for all of the caribou people of both Canada and the northwestern United States to gather and 'bring in an elder, youth, and a chief from each village, and from all the villages'. The 15 chiefs 'went up on the hill, around the campfire. They wrote up a resolution to protect the Caribou campaign ground'. At first, the elders resisted a written agenda, choosing instead to use a traditional talking stick. The chiefs, however, successfully convinced the elders to articulate a resolution to present to the larger world.

In interviews, GSC leaders make declarations that, at least superficially, appear to run counter to progressive rhetoric. They emphasize, for example, that their spokesperson is a 'traditional woman'. This does not mean that she stays in the kitchen. Rather, according to a radio producer who has worked with GSC, it means that she lives communally and 'speaks her own language. She lives in the village. She is as traditional as they can get'. Like LOP leaders who wish to participate in American politics without being forcibly assimilated, she 'absolutely is not . . . aspiring to be non-Native'. Tradition lends GSC's spokesperson the legitimacy and authority to determine next steps, and why they must propel forward. A Gwich'in administrator in the city of Fort Yukon remarked that 'the elders . . . tell us the stories about . . . why we need to keep this land sacred to us . . . and they are the ones that gave us the direction to do this'.

151

Using cultural traditions as a means of understanding race-ethnicity allows the Gwich'in to have a more nuanced relationship with the environmentalist movement as well. While GSC shares some interests with environmental groups, the leaders are careful to note that they are not against development per se, and 'all these environmentalists, they have a right to say "no" to development . . . but they cannot speak for us. We are [for] human rights and we speak for ourselves because we already got accused of . . . [being their] foot soldiers'. By evoking traditions in discussions about land and caribou, the Gwich'in hold their own.

The Gwich'in Steering Committee's spokesperson recalled how, in Washington, DC, her people were put on the defensive,

> You have all these cameras . . . CNN . . . pointed right at you, and then you have these people sitting up on this platform . . . looking down at you in more ways than one. You just have a few minutes to defend your culture, which has successfully survived in one of the harshest climates in the world, for thousands of years, and you just have a few minutes to defend the people.

Yet, by placing themselves as the protagonists of a cultural narrative, the Gwich'in articulate how Washington insiders are, in this case, the outsiders, the ones who are less knowledgeable about the Gwich'in way of life. In doing so, they begin to turn the policy-making table around.

The LOP and the GSC suggest that social change organizations drawing upon pre-existing, articulated cultural traditions as a means of understanding race challenge current policy-making institutions by harnessing and utilizing their own theories, assumptions, and values in the mainstream system. In both organizations, participants would not have known how to engage in politics without drawing upon their own cultural traditions, speaking in their own language(s), and developing their own leadership models. Doing so was not a matter of simply deciding to do so; it was an iterative process of examining constructions of race-ethnicity, and re-examining one's own race-ethnicity-specific cultural traditions in a different light.

Harnessing lived experience transforms individuals

For the final category, EVS Communications and the Center for Young Women's Development serve as the case studies where patterns of lived experience form the basis for their means of understanding race-ethnicity. Here, social change leaders must help constituents to construct political understandings of race-ethnicity, almost from scratch.

The transformation is televised

EVS Communications is a non-profit television production company that provides media for and by the Latino community in the Washington, DC area. When EVS first began to produce and air public service announcements in 1987, there was no other source for local news relevant to immigrants. At the time, EVS's executive producer recalls, 'the local Spanish language station had no local content . . . No newscast . . . It was just . . . restaurant commercials, lawyer commercials'. Substantive information rarely reached immigrants because they mostly appeared in the form of pamphlets or public agency reports; this was not very helpful when many within their intended

152

audience could not read, and when materials rarely reached even those who were literate.

EVS leaders do not speak of being Latino in the abstract. The gritty details of lived experience were what bound these immigrants together by race-ethnicity, and what would inform their understanding of racial and ethnic relations in the US. The executive director quipped, 'imagine that today you are here in Washington, DC and . . . they put you tomorrow in Beijing . . . It was . . . tough to teach . . . guys who came from Harvard or those universities, to understand this . . . reality'. Newly arrived immigrants had little knowledge of how to navigate American society on a day-to-day basis, and they did not have a ready source to access such information.

According to the executive producer, 'a great number of Latino parents did not take their children to school because they were afraid of being turned in to immigration authorities'. Children were often left unattended in apartments, sometimes getting in trouble with children's welfare authorities. Less than a month after an EVS commercial about this issue aired on television, public-school enrollment of Latino children in the DC area increased dramatically.

There was little initial trust of American governmental institutions among the Latino immigrants arriving in DC during the 1980s and 1990s. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that, as the executive producer explains,

> [these] were not traditional immigrants . . . [who] dreamed . . . and worked to come to the United States. These were people who had to leave with one night's notice because their brother was murdered . . . Or . . . the army was going to be coming through their town and they knew that they were going to be forcibly recruiting their children . . . Even . . . my cousins . . . opened the door and there was a headless body right . . . on their doorstep.

Furthermore, despite worldwide sympathy and official United Nations refugee status, the immigrants were fearful of their newfound home because the Reagan Administration was involved in the war and not supportive. The specificity of the Guatemalan and El Salvadoran experiences, marked by 'epidemic proportions [of] post-traumatic stress disorder' only added to the drama of transitioning from coffee picking in the fields to living in the DC metropolis.

This sort of bewilderment came to a head on 5 May 1991, when an African American rookie police officer approached an El Salvadoran man on a street in a primarily Latino neighborhood. She warned him that drinking alcohol in public was illegal and then proceeded to arrest him. Another man jumped out and attempted to stab the police officer, who then shot the assailant. Rumors 'spread like wildfire that this police officer had killed this Salvadoran . . . in cold blood', riots ensued, and by that night, 11 police cars had been burned. EVS's executive producer explained that 'obviously the DC police had absolutely no experience with this community' and in response, arrived on the scene with sirens blaring, 'think[ing] people would be intimidated'. They were wrong: 'this community had just come from a real war, so . . . they would just run at the car and overturn it'.

In response, EVS moved quickly to convince all concerned to appear in a one-hour special, in which then-Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly addressed questions from Latino community leaders. The result was 'the most-watched Spanish language show ever in the history of our community. Ah, and it is credited with helping to diffuse a

very tense situation very quickly'. This show also proved to be a turning point for many individuals in the audience, who began to 'see themselves as a community' and as people who could publicly voice their opinions.

Almost every episode of EVS's show, *Linea Directa*, jumpstarts similar processes of personal transformation, according to both EVS leaders and staff of DC area social services agencies. This is partly because each show is based on issues raised by focus groups, and each one is the result of a collaboration 'with a community-based organization. So for example, if we're doing a show on AIDS, we work with Clínica del Pueblo or we work with the Whitman-Walker Clinic'. On days after program airings, EVS sees the impact of their stories via the number of calls flooding local clinics and community-based organizations.

The form of EVS shows is as informed by lived experience as the topics pursued in them. Via conversations with the women who were supposed to be offended by frank discussions on sexuality, for instance, EVS leaders learned that dramatizations with the tone of Latin American soap operas, called *telenovelas*, would help these women encourage their husbands and sons to watch the public health programs with them. Therefore, by including a tasteful 'little bit of nudity', EVS communicate public service messages more effectively. A final aspect of drawing from lived experience in EVS is simply to cast real-life Latinos and air real stories. As the executive producer noted, the 'majority of our community is . . . black hair, brown eyes, beautiful. But they never see those faces reflected on the screen. So in all our . . . dramatized vignettes and in all of the testimonies, the experts, they reflect the face of the community'.

Social workers and community leaders outside of EVS also identify the medium itself as important. As one health promoter put it,

> these peasants have taken control of their lives and have become leaders in their communities. And that is thanks to [the fact that] they are also seeing [these messages] on the television, and the television validates it so much for these people. Because this is our culture, what happens on TV is true.

Fortunately, what people see on *Linea Directa* is drawn from real cases and supported by researched facts.

Each episode helps EVS constituents to air the concerns that affect them most, to relate their experiences, and to connect with others. Over time, a picture of the Latino American experience is formed. Audience members begin to see themselves not only as El Salvadorean refugees or Mexican migrant workers, but as Latino Americans with rights and responsibilities.

Social change, from the inside out

Like EVS, the Center for Young Women's Development (CYWD) in Oakland, California, works with people who lived through traumatic experiences and who may not have a sense of community marked by neighborhood, race-ethnicity, or otherwise. Specifically, it seeks to empower young women who have been involved in the criminal justice system or underground street economy. At least at the beginning, there is little discussion of theories about race-ethnicity. Rather, CYWD leaders simply give these young women, almost all black or Latina, the support and safe space they may have never had before. What allows CYWD leaders to work

154

successfully with the women is the fact that they have lived through these same experiences themselves. Although not every one of the Center's leaders has been adjudicated, they 'all come from the street', know what it is like to be homeless, or have relatives dealing with the criminal justice system. They have 'each other's backs'.

Unlike leaders of most social change and service organizations, CYWD leaders feel that 'service and organizing . . . go hand in hand'. One of the co-directors stressed that these women could not simply show up at the Center and expect social justice to happen: 'Being poor . . . is not cute or it is not fun . . . Oppression isn't . . . ughh! You need to have a house . . . child care . . . a pay check'. The other co-director added that, having shared and collectively processed similar experiences, the organization leaders 'know that . . . all your experiences are a part of who you are, and they also build strength in you'. It is via the concrete details of real-life experience that these young women begin to analyze their place in the larger world. At the Center, these women contemplate 'lived experiences. We just might not have the words to articulate [it] . . . but we know racism, we know capitalism, and homophobia, and oppression'.

For most CYWD participants, to even talk to other women about the trauma they have gone through is a major step. The program director stated that to protect themselves, most of CYWD's leaders previously developed great suspicion of other women, especially those of color, viewing them as rivals – for partners, jobs, and affection – rather than potential allies. A long process of support and self-realization enables the leaders to share stories about being female, poor, of color, and 'of this group'. CYWD leaders, in working through their experiences, tackle the similarities they face together.

They then construct public policy proposals addressing issues of race-ethnicity, using analyses of race and ethnicity based on their experiences. The resulting proposals by CYWD leaders reveal insiders' knowledge of the criminal justice system and bolster the legitimacy of their goals. At first glance, some even appear to be counterintuitive, at least to outsiders. For example, CYWD leaders worked to implement a policy that kept young women incarcerated for *longer* periods of time if these women did not have safe homes to go to upon release.

Another campaign worked to improve the services available to lesbian inmates and end harassment by supervisors and counselors. This campaign, too, grew out of the fact that leaders had either witnessed or experienced counselors harassing women during showers, or strip-searching girls for no apparent reason. They also knew that lesbian women were not allowed to have roommates, and that roommates provided everyone else with some camaraderie and alleviation from loneliness. This latter example is striking not only because of the compassion displayed by the women, but because it was developed in a context where, according to one woman, 'our families are so homophobic'. Yet, their lived experiences trumped the fears they were taught, and it was via these experiences that they constructed a harassment policy that explicitly mentioned and addressed race, sexual orientation, and religion. Along the way, they became the ones to tell the experts what could 'keep a girl out of juvenile hall'.

Participants begin to see themselves as individuals in a society with social forces that greatly affect them. It reaches those who may not have previously self-identified as members of a racial or ethnic group. These are isolated from existing social networks, among the most vulnerable, and those hardest to reach by social change

155

organizations. Rather, the bonds of real-life experience, often traumatic experience, lead participants to seek solutions once they have been empowered by envisioning themselves as agents facing a larger problem.

Based on the Center for Young Women's Development and EVS Communications case studies, we suggest that social change organizations that develop their means of understanding race-ethnicity by drawing upon the lived experience of specific groups help to transform individuals to see themselves as empowered citizens with rights and responsibilities. After participating in collective approaches to understanding issues of race-ethnicity in their respective organizations, constituents then helped to shape new policy proposals and political strategies for social change.

Discussion: the contributions of a constructionist perspective

The achievements of leaders of color like King, Gandhi, and Mandela, who stand tall in the annals of leadership, tend to be interpreted through the traditional great-man theory of leadership (Carson, 1987, cited by Calas, 1993). Most studies have downplayed the connection of race-ethnicity to the systems of oppression that defined their leadership. Yet, the racial-ethnic identities of these leaders and of their followers might not just be relevant, but *central* cultural resources of their work. The symbolic and cultural sources of meaning activated through their 'embeddedness' in particular relational networks have been sidelined or ignored.

Moreover, the logic and leadership practices of actors outside of the mainstream remain obscured in the leadership literature (Calas, 1993; Murtadha and Watts, 2005). At best, leaders of color have been studied as a 'type' whose styles are still considered special cases. Thus, it is unfortunate but not surprising that the rich scholarship on black leadership in the USA has not permeated canonical leadership studies (Gordon, 2000; Murtadha and Watts, 2005). The cost of these blind spots is the loss of potential lessons for leadership theory. Our research question about the relationship between race-ethnicity and leadership addresses this gap in the literature.

A constructionist lens justified our decision to explore this question by analyzing stories about social change work that yielded collective achievements in contexts where race-ethnicity was mentioned as salient to the work. Elicited through in-depth conversations with participants of social change organizations, these stories offered a window into the meaning-making process of their work, as constructed by leaders and followers together. These stories represented instances of participants' understandings of how race-ethnicity helped to advance their goals, and they revealed details about the role of these social identities in the work of leadership. Our findings both challenge assumptions and elaborate on insights from scholarly traditions of leadership research that have studied the relationship between social identity and leadership.

Constructing race-ethnicity as leadership work: from constraint to resource

Our findings surfaced the constant subtext of race-ethnicity in leadership work, at least in the context of social change organizations. More than half of the sampled organizations paid explicit attention to race-ethnicity, even though racial justice

156

per se was not their mission. Claiming a key role for race-ethnicity occurred independently of policy areas targeted (such as immigration, juvenile justice, and environment), or racial-ethnic composition (multi-racial and mono-racial). All six case studies shared the multi-racial community-organizing ethos of 'democratic engagement by linking racial identity to grassroots political work' (Wood, 2002: 89).[13] The salience of social identity required leadership work to address the paradoxical challenge of affirming and celebrating racial-ethnic identities as potential mobilizing resources, while transcending them in the name of universal social justice (Wood, 2002).

This contrasts with earlier conceptualizations of the relationship between leadership and race-ethnicity. For example, scholars of social identity theory consider individuals' race-ethnicity as a key determinant of their organizational experience and leadership potential, depicting it for non-whites as a potential obstacle to be managed strategically (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Hogg, 2001; Slay, 2003). In the case of the studied organizations, race-ethnicity was culturally invoked as a collective source of unity and strength and thus, a potential resource to be leveraged for the group's benefit. It was referenced in the context of broader systems of oppression, shared fates of entire groups, and real-life sources of cultural meaning and strength. This work considered the broader dynamics associated with distributive processes that constitute and reconstitute social order (Hosking, 2007) at the organizational and social levels of action.

The relationship between race-ethnicity and leadership is more complex than originally assumed by 'culturalist' leadership scholars. The identification of 'unique' characteristics of particular racial-ethnic groups (Chahin & Rodriguez, 2005; Pardo, 1998; Warner & Grint, 2006; Wong, 1995) has led culturalists to imply that leaders of color can automatically use the strengths of their culture constructively (Alire, 2001). This ignores the collective work required to turn a negative legacy into a positive resource. Similarly, the suggestion that any leader, independent of their social identity can draw from the 'unique' leadership styles of non-white cultures to enrich her repertoire of dispositions, competencies, and skills (Bordas, 2007) ignores that social identities are always implicated and embedded within power structures.

Standpoint and positionality leadership studies have stressed the impact of the intersection of systems of oppression in leaders' experience. These leadership scholars have pointed to the double and triple binds surrounding women leaders of color in various cultures (Fitzgerald, 2006; Muller, 1998; Wilcox, 2001), highlighted the differentiated impact of various identities (Prindeville, 2003) and explored in depth the consequences of their complex interactions.

Evidence does suggest that leaders of color do have the strategic capacity to find ways to transcend the negative outcomes associated with the multiple intersections of their social identity. Our focus on leadership work (rather than on individual leaders) illuminates how the shift from constraint to resources happens as a result of collective work, not just as personal effort or the choice of particular individuals. Our study further documents this strategic capacity and sheds light into at least one mechanism by which it may be developed, when race-identity happens to be a relevant dimension of social change work.

157

Illuminating the reciprocal and collective dimension of 'priming'

Neo-charismatic and transformational leadership scholars (Conger et al., 2000; Shamir et al., 1993; Shamir & Howell, 1999) view social identities such as race-ethnicity as a salient collective dimension of the self-concept, which the leader can prime for follower engagement (Kark & Shamir, 2003; Lord et al., 1999). This perspective broadens attention from individual cognition to consider the leader–follower relationship in social context, thus offering a more relational perspective than that of classical theories of social identity. Yet, these theories continue to conceptualize the relationship as something among separate, autonomous entities (Ulh-Bien, 2006), giving primacy to the leader over the follower in illuminating the role of a mechanism like 'priming' in leadership processes.

While neo-charismatic scholars have recently recognized the importance of followership in the co-production of leadership (Shamir et al., 2007), the mechanisms by which social identity is used in the work of leadership continue to be obscure, in part because of the insistence on focusing on leaders. Our findings suggest that race and ethnicity as particular dimensions of social identity were not merely tools that leaders 'primed' to influence followers in a top-down manner. Rather, they were part of a collective process of meaning making to address the challenges of organizing that made leadership happen.

Our findings do confirm the salience of an 'activation' mechanism around social identity. But interpreting it as a one-way process from leader to follower, as the word 'priming' suggests, tells a partial story of a more complex reality. The leadership work documented in the case studies was less about motivating followers and more about working with the raw materials at hand to create the conditions for making participants *leaders in their own right*.

In social change organizations, where issues of exclusion or marginalization are salient, leaders and followers worked together to turn negatively defined aspects of the self-concept into positive resources. Interpersonal and organizational conditions allowed participants to engage in self-activation and mutual activation processes through opportunities for collective meaning-making, like those of naming and engaging race-ethnicity signifiers described in the case studies.

This work grew organically from the particular contexts, conditions, and collective visions that drove the organizations' work. In some cases, when understanding race happened by way of highlighting *multiple narratives*, the constructed identities helped to create bridges among groups previously divided along racial-ethnic lines. In others, marginalized constituents were transformed by the power gained from reinforcing familiar *cultural traditions* and using these to advance the work itself. Finally, making *lived experience* a source of relevant expertise reframed race-ethnicity as a political identity that helped to connect and empower individuals. An activation mechanism was at work in each of these means of understanding race, but it did not necessarily or exclusively flow in one direction, from leader to follower.

These findings reaffirm previous claims that sources of stress associated with social identity can enhance, not just constrain, the capacity to act. Other researchers have documented leaders of color, who, rather than being primed by others, seem to develop a self-activated mechanism that *enhances* their capacity (Carver &

158

Livers, 2004). In the context of the studied social change organizations, engaging race-ethnicity in the work created not just *leader* capacity but *leadership* capacity, that is, capacity that generated reciprocal benefits for *all* organizational members, leaders and followers, and for advancing the organization's purpose. These leadership practices were collectively owned by participants, not just *used* by leaders to motivate followers, as is suggested in traditional leadership studies.

These findings also resonate with insights from the black leadership studies tradition (Childs, 1989; Ladner, 2001; Marable, 1998; Walters & Johnson, 2000; Walters & Smith, 1999; Williams, 1998), even though our cases included constituents of many races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. Black leadership scholars have identified leader behaviors that draw from cultural resources to resist the experience of discrimination and racism. For example, Pollard (1997) documents how black urban school women principals resisted oppression by drawing cultural resources from their own experiences to help their students, to mediate between them and a predominantly white staff, and to 'get things done' with parents and the bureaucracy. Likewise, finding equivalent practices in black educators of contemporary US and of earlier periods, Murtadha and Watts (2005) suggest that race-ethnicity became a source of strength and inspiration deployed to make things happen within a broader vision of social change, not just exclusively in the constrained context of the schools.

The shift from constraint to resource can be associated with the position of members of social change organizations as outsiders vis-à-vis existing power structures. Management scholars have documented how organizational leaders viewed as outsiders can foster innovation by challenging assumptions and seeing new possibilities (Loder, 2005; Meyerson, 2001). Redefining identities that have been the source of social exclusion represents an effort to reframe the meaning of that *outsider* role. Acknowledging both the constraints and the expressive possibilities of race-ethnicity helps participants to imagine alternative scenarios and challenge inequality and social exclusion as inevitable. This is a prerequisite to the efficacy needed to do social change work. Reinforced by our findings, this evidence points to the promise of informing theories of leadership with insights from the experience of people of color and with a power lens.

Capitalizing on the convergence of disconnected research traditions

Finally, while drawing from the leadership field, some of our findings converge with insights from the social movements literature and may contribute some insights to this scholarship. Social movement scholars' interest in culture and identity has led them to examine how individuals interpret political and social conditions and opportunities, mobilize constituents, weave stories about their struggles, and strategically position their organizations vis-à-vis other organizations and counter-movements (Bernstein, 2005; Johnston & Klandermans, 1995; McAdam et al., 1996; Meyer et al., 2002; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Wood, 2002). For example, Polletta and Jasper's (2001) query about the need to further understand the raw materials of identity work points directly to the *work of leadership*, which has been underplayed in social movements scholarship. Our findings suggest that, indeed, exploring the linkages between race-ethnicity and leadership with a constructionist perspective can illuminate the

159

micro-dynamics of social movement work by focusing on leadership practices at the organizational level of action.

Relational, constructionist theories of leadership can help social movement scholars answer the call Morris and Staggenborg (2004: 190–1) make to explore the 'black box of leadership' and study 'how leadership affects the emergence, dynamics and outcomes of social movements'. For example, Morris and Braine (2001) argue that when cultural traditions already exist in groups, efforts to create collective identities can capitalize on them, rather than having to construct them from scratch. Our empirical work has specifically documented how leaders and followers use the raw materials that they already have at their disposal.

Implications for leadership practice

What do the different means of understanding race-ethnicity lead to in practice? While tentative, the findings allow us to speculate that different means may contribute more directly to capacity building at different levels of action: inter-organization or movement, organization, and individual levels. These outcomes are not mutually exclusive, but they merit further research (Morris & Staggenborg, 2004).

Chetkovich and Kunreuther (2006) articulate movement building as the greatest challenge facing American SCOs today, and our findings suggest that multiple narratives as a means of understanding race might especially help groups to build capacity at the inter-organizational level. For example, Cornernstone's theatrical productions – staged in shopping malls, movie theatres, libraries, houses of worship, cattle barns, public buses, or subway terminals – literally transport the public spheres developed by its leaders into the larger world. These spaces allow communities to engage with contentious, socially constructed issues of race-ethnicity in safe ways (Guinier & Torres, 2002; Su, 2007). Cornerstone's ultimate product are not theatre productions, but deliberation and dialogue, practices that continue after the plays end.

In contrast, the organizations focusing on lived experience seem to nurture individuals' self-efficacy. EVS's television program, *Linea Directa*, reached Latino immigrants in their living rooms and bedrooms, igniting processes of personal transformation, and encouraging their public and political participation. EVS's programs assume that their audiences are not passive watchers or couch potatoes, encouraging critical analysis and concrete personal action. While Wood (2002) emphasizes weaknesses as well as strengths in race-based political strategies, our findings speak to the ways in which racist social structures can motivate leaders to engage in resistance by drawing from cultural resources (Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Walters & Smith, 1999).

To what extent do these findings hold? Of particular interest is the question of 'mini-clusters' mentioned in the Method section, that is, those of arts organizations using multiple narratives and Native American organizations using cultural traditions as means of understanding race-ethnicity. More research is needed to explore the conditions and decisions leading to the means of understanding race-ethnicity pursued in each social change organization (Bernstein, 2005; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Since our analysis focused on narratives elicited without explicitly naming race, next steps should include testing the propositions we have developed, explicitly asking social change organization participants about issues of race and ethnicity.

160

Conclusion

Parallel theoretical developments in race-ethnicity studies and in leadership studies promise to transform our understanding of the relationship between race-ethnicity and leadership in significant ways. Still, much work needs to be done, because these areas of study have yet to converge. Even leadership scholars who view race-ethnicity from a constructionist perspective continue to hold to a more traditional *entity* perspective of leadership. Scholars in the transformational and neo-charismatic traditions, who highlight salient social identities and cultural narratives, only go as far as using these to illuminate leader behaviors and leader–follower dynamics. Empirical research emphasizing constructions of leadership is scant and its pioneers have not yet focused on race-ethnicity. Our research aims to address these gaps.

The important goal of understanding how race-ethnicity mediates the leader–follower relationship has been the focus of much prior research in social identity, neo-charismatic, and transformational theories of leadership. Motivated by the promise of furthering a relational, constructionist perspective of leadership (Hosking, 2007; Ulh-Bien, 2006), our goal has been instead to explore the role that race-ethnicity plays *in constructing leadership*. This demanded a shift in analytical attention not one but two levels up, from individual leaders, and from the leader–follower relationship, to the organizational and cultural levels of action, where collective meanings and understandings of the work are negotiated and constructed. It also meant attending to the relational practices that help to shape these constructions so that leaders and followers together engage the demands that call forth leadership (Drath, 2001).

Applying this constructionist lens to our research question illuminated how race-ethnicity – as a fluid and historically embedded social identity – is used to do the work of leadership, as an equally fluid and embedded social process. We have documented how race-ethnicity helps to construct common understandings in social change organizations from the ground up, how it gives meaning to leadership practices that motivate participants to take up their own leadership, and how it helps move their work forward.

Our study identified three distinct ways by which participants of social change organizations engage race-ethnicity in their work so as to create the conditions that enhance the needed efficacy to advance change in their communities and beyond. Social change organizations using *multiple narratives* seemed to build a public sphere of interdependence where none existed. In contrast, those drawing upon pre-existing, articulated *cultural traditions* seemed to harness and use their own world-view to challenge current policy-making institutions in the mainstream system. Finally, those organizations that developed their means of understanding race by drawing upon the lived experience of specific groups seemed to help transform individuals to see themselves as empowered citizens with rights and responsibilities.

These variations underscore the complexity of the activation mechanism depicted when linking race-ethnicity and leadership both in the mainstream literature (as priming) and in the black leadership and positionality leadership studies (as self-activation). These variations also clarify how context is not just a background variable in how race-ethnicity becomes part of the work of leadership, but the ground from which situated leadership work emerges. The work of leadership included

161

purposive efforts to draw on existing racial-ethnic meanings. This work helped to shape collective identities from within the multiple and overlapping social identities that informed participants' understandings of who they were vis-à-vis the institutions they inhabited (Kezar, 2000).

These findings offer two key contributions to leadership theory. First, considering race-ethnicity either as a constraint faced by leaders of color (Hogg, 2001; Slay, 2003) or as a tool to be 'primed' by leaders (Kark & Shamir, 2002; Lord et al., 1999; Shamir et al., 1993; Shamir & Howell, 1999) is helpful but limiting. Consistent with positionality leadership researchers who highlight the socially constructed nature of identity (Murtadha & Larson, 2004; Parker, 2001; Pollard, 1997), we underscore the potential of race-ethnicity as a collective resources in the work of leadership.

Second, we propose a modification of the neo-charismatic and transformational leadership insight (Conger et al., 1999; Kark & Shamir, 2002; Lord et al., 1999; Shamir et al., 1993; Shamir & Howell, 1999) that priming is something leaders do to followers in order to engage them in extraordinary work. Consistent with relational constructionist scholars (Drath, 2001; Hosking, 1997, 2007), our findings underscore the reciprocal and collective nature of the activation process by which leaders and followers assign meaning to race-ethnicity as a way to jointly construct together the efficacy demanded to advance their work.

Our preliminary classification of means of understanding race itself makes another contribution by addressing the present concern in the literature to understand *how leadership happens*. This contrasts with the traditional emphasis on the *who* and *what* of leadership (Grint, 2005). We also broaden the scope of the *how* of leadership beyond the leader–follower dyad by focusing on meaning making and its emerging practices. We further illuminate the assumptions and practices constituting the leadership work that creates the conditions for individual and collective action. We find, for example, that each category from our framework operates with fewer assumptions than the previous one, as presented in Table 5.

The organizations that used multiple narratives build on work already achieved by previously distinct social groups and organizations. Thus, statements by CAAAELII leaders revealed assumptions that many people already identify themselves as immigrant or native-born, and of a given heritage. In contrast, organizations in the lived experience category took little for granted. Instead of assuming a certain level of political mobilization or social identification, these organizations reached out to individuals and engaged in processes of personal transformation and empowerment.

Our work also highlights the potential benefits of introducing critical theory to explore the connection between race-ethnicity and leadership. Power has been relatively absent in leadership studies that view race-ethnicity as a fixed variable, and it is downplayed in studies that highlight the cultural dimensions of leadership. Positionality studies, in contrast, remind us that the social meanings of identities are embedded within power structures. This is illustrated in the more nuanced depiction we propose of the activating mechanism by which race-ethnicity becomes a leadership resource. In our case studies, each means of understanding race-ethnicity helped advance collective action in a different way, but all represented efforts to imagine creative possibilities to enact collective leadership under adverse circumstances. Drawing on their marginalized identity to find strength represented a creative

162

Table 5 *Assumptions leaders used for each category of means*

Means of understanding race-ethnicity	Multiple narratives	Cultural traditions	Lived experience
Assumptions by leaders	1. Some pre-existing social/political narrative, no overarching one 2. Pre-existing affiliation with racial-ethnic identity associated with cultural traditions 3. Pre-existing and articulated cultural traditions (values, rituals, food, language) associated with a specific race-ethnicity	1. No pre-existing social/political narrative 2. Pre-existing affiliation with racial-ethnic identity associated with cultural traditions 3. Some pre-existing but not yet fully articulated cultural traditions associated with a specific race-ethnicity	1. No pre-existing or articulated cultural traditions or collective identity 2. No pre-existing affiliation with racial-ethnic identity 3. Disparate patterns in lived experience (in work, housing, criminal justice, etc.) often follow race-ethnicity-based lines

163

response of collective resistance to negative experiences of exclusion in social change organizations.

Finally, our findings reveal the promise of linking insights of relational leadership to insights from the social movements literature. The boundary between the two scholarly arenas is particularly puzzling because both call for greater attention to the cultural dimensions of collective work. Linking race-ethnicity to resistance as a dimension of leadership work illuminates the inner workings and localized dynamics of social movement work. This begins to address what Polletta and Jasper (2001: 299) saw as under-examined questions surrounding 'the cultural building blocks that are used to construct collective identities'. Race-ethnicity, we argue, is exactly the kind of cultural building block that social change leaders use to mobilize movement work.

More empirical constructionist work about the connections between race-ethnicity and leadership would help social movements and leadership researchers develop further nuances in their understanding of both structural factors and leadership agency in social change. To accomplish this, comparative studies of mono- and multi-racial organizations are needed, following organizations through time, and interpreting how their leaders negotiate, develop and change their collective identities in their struggles towards social change.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. For more information, see Cornerstone's website, www.cornerstonetheater.org.
2. Social identity refers to the knowledge individuals have about belonging to certain social groups and the meaning attributed to membership in those groups. As per Abrams and Hogg (1990), an individual's self-conception as a member of various groups and the salience given to each forms his or her social identity.
3. Collective identity belongs simultaneously to the individual (as in: being black means being part of a larger group identity) and to the work group (as in: employees of all races may tap into self-expression to develop a shared identity with others in the work unit).
4. Many of the studies focus on the intersection of race, ethnicity AND gender, and stress, rightly so, the problems of separating these.
5. Substantively, scholars most commonly categorize social movement organizations by campaign issues, such as environmental or immigrant rights. Further, while research on social movement clearly gives key insights into the case study organizations, some of the studied organizations explicitly reject commonly used social movement categories. For example, two of the case studies here work primarily on environmental campaigns but have ambivalent or complex relationships with the so-called environmental movement.
6. This article draws upon and grows out of data collected for the Leadership for a

164

Changing World (LCW) project that ran from 2001 to 2007. For more information see www.leadershipforchange.org. A total of 150 leaders from 90 organizations participated in the program over time.

7. Every year supporters nominated individuals and teams to the program. A national committee selected about 250 top candidates who moved on to a regional selection committee. Using newly submitted essays from nominees, this committee selected five primary and four secondary regional finalists. A total of 36 semi-finalists were visited and reviewed. Then the national committee recommended 24 finalists by consensus, 17 to 20 of whom made the final cut each year, for a total of 90 organizations over five years. The research team played no role in the selection process.

8. Because these leaders and their organizations fit the program funder's mission of social and racial justice, politically conservative organizations were excluded.

9. It can be argued that there is no neutral means of understanding race-ethnicity, and that not mentioning race-ethnicity itself entails a specific set of practices regarding race-ethnicity and collective leadership. That said, the sampling rationale outlined here does not detract from the data's internal validity in this paper's inductive analysis to exploring ways of understanding race-ethnicity and its influence on the work of leadership.

10. Four additional organizations were excluded from our sampling frame because they defied categorization, or because we had not collected sufficient data for them.

11. Since this analysis is limited by the data already available, the fact that current data do not mention any concept of race-ethnicity in an organization's work does not mean that the organization does not view race-ethnicity as central to its work.

12. Many Native American groups tend to think of themselves in terms of nationhood rather than in terms of race-ethnicity. While we honor this self-identification, we included a Native American organization in our sample because of the important evidence presented with respect to the use of social identity as a cultural means to engage the work of leadership.

13. Even though three of the six case studies (the Laotian Organizing Project, the Gwich'in Steering Committee and the Latino-based EVS Communications) worked with specific mono-racial-ethnic communities to address problems from within.

References

Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (eds) (1990) *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Alire, C. (2001) 'Diversity and Leadership: The Color of Leadership', in M. Winston (ed.) *Leadership in the Library and Information Science Professions: Theory and Practice*, pp. 95–109. Philadelphia, PA: The Haworth Press.

Allen, B. L. (1997) 'A Re-articulation of Black Female Community Leadership', *African American Research Perspectives* 3: 60–6.

Alvesson, M. (1996) 'Leadership Studies: From Procedure and Abstraction to Reflexivity and Situation', *The Leadership Quarterly* 7: 469.

Bartol, K. M., Evans, C. J., & Stith, M. T. (1978) 'Black Versus White Leaders: A Comparative Review of the Literature', *Academy of Management Review* 3: 293–304.

Bernstein, M. (2005) 'Identity Politics', *Annual Review of Sociology* 31: 47–74.

Bordas, J. (2007) *Salsa, Soul and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age*. San Francisco, CA: Berret Koeheller.

Brady, S. (2000) 'Welded to the Ladle: Steelbound and Non-radicality in Community-based Theatre', *The Drama Review* 44: 51–74.

Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. L. (1996) 'Who Is This "We"? Levels of Collective Identity and Self Representations', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71: 83–93.

Bryson, J., & Crosby, B. (2005) 'A Leadership Framework for Cross-sector Collaboration', *Public Management Review* 7: 177–201.

Calas, M. B. (1993) 'Deconstructing Charismatic Leadership: Rereading Weber from the Darker Side', *Leadership Quarterly* 4: 305–28.

Carson, C. (1987) 'Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charismatic Leadership in a Mass Struggle', *Journal of American History* 742: 448–54.

Caver, K., & Livers, A. (2004) 'Latino Leaders Can Gain Insights from Black Colleagues', *Leadership in Action* 241: 14–16.

Chahin, J., & Rodriguez, R. (2005) 'Where Leadership Is Really Learned', *Leader to Leader* 35: 57–9.

Chetkovich, C., & Kunreuther, F. (2006) *From the Ground up: Grassroots Organizations Making Social Change*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Childs, J. B. (1989) *Leadership, Conflict and Cooperation in Afro-American Social Thought*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Conger, J. A. (1999) 'Charismatic and Transformational Leadership in Organizations: An Insider's Perspective on These Developing Streams of Research', *Leadership Quarterly* 10: 145–80.

Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1987) 'Toward a Behavioral Theory of Charismatic Leadership in Organizational Settings', *Academy of Management Review* 124: 637–47.

Conger J. A., Kanungo, R. N., & Menon, S. T. (2000) 'Charismatic Leadership and Follower Effects', *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 21: 747–67.

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (1995) *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*. New York: The New Press.

Dachler, H. P., & Hosking, D. M. (1995) 'The Primacy of Relations in Socially Constructing Organizational Realities', in D. M. Hosking, H. P. Dachler, & K. J. Gergen (eds) *Management and Organization Relational Alternatives to Individualism*, pp. 1–28. Brookfield: Avebury.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001) *Critical Race Theory*. New York: New York University Press.

Dickerson, N. (2006) 'We Are a Force to Be Reckoned With: Black and Latina Women's Leadership in the Contemporary U.S. Labor Movement', *Working USA* 921: 293–313.

Drath, W. (2001) *The Deep Blue Sea: Rethinking the Source of Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Drath, W., & Palus, C. (1994) *Making Common Sense: Leadership as Meaning Making in a Community of Practice*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

Fitzgerald, T. (2006) 'Walking Between Two Worlds: Indigenous Women and Educational Leadership', *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 3442: 201–13.

Fletcher, J. (2004) 'The Paradox of Post-heroic Leadership: An Essay on Gender, Power and Transformational Change', *Leadership Quarterly* 15: 647–61.

Fletcher, J. K., & Kaufer, K. (2003) 'Shared Leadership: Paradox and Possibility', in C. Pearce & J. A. Conger (eds) *Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership*, pp. 21–47. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Foldy, E., Goldman, L., & and Ospina, S. (2008) 'Sensegiving and the Role of Cognitive Shifts in the Work of Leadership', *Leadership Quarterly* 19: 514–29.

Gordon, J. (2000) *Black Leadership for Social Change*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Grint, K. (2005) *Leadership: Limits and Possibilities*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Guinier, L., & Torres, G. (2002) *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Heifetz, R. (1994) *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

Hogg, M. (2001) 'A Social Identity Theory of Leadership', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 53: 184–200.

Hosking, D. (1997) 'Organizing, Leadership and Skilful Process', in K. Grint (ed.) *Leadership: Classical, Contemporary and Critical Approaches*, pp. 293–318. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hosking, D. (2007) 'Not leaders, Not Followers: A Post-modern Discourse of Leadership Processes', in B. Shamir, R. Pilai, M. Bligh, & M. Uhl-Bien (eds) *Follower-centered Perspectives of Leadership*, pp. 167–86. Greenwich: Information Age Publishing.

Jansen, J. D. (2005) 'Black Dean: Race, Reconciliation, and the Emotions of Deanship', *Harvard Educational Review* 753: 306–26.

Johnston, H., & Klandermans, B. (1995) *Social Movements and Culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Kark, R., & Shamir, B. (2002) 'The Influence of Transformational Leadership on Followers' Relational Versus Collective Self-concept', proceedings of the annual meeting of the Academy of Management, Denver, USA.

Kezar, A. (2000) 'Pluralistic Leadership: Incorporating Diverse Voices', *The Journal of Higher Education* 716: 722–43.

Kuftinec, S. (1996) 'A Cornerstone for Rethinking Community Theatre', *Theatre Topics* 6: 91–104.

Ladner, J. (2001) *The New Urban Leaders*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Loder, T. L. (2005) 'African American Women Principals' Reflections on Social Change, Community Othermothering, and Chicago Public School Reform', *Urban Education* 403: 298–320.

Lord, R. G., Brown, D. J., & Feiberg, S. J. (1999) 'Understanding the Dynamics of Leadership', *Organization Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 783, 167–203.

McAdam, D., McCarthy, J. D., & Zald, M. N. (1996) *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

McCauley, C., Paiusm C., Drath, W. et al. (2008) *Interdependent Leadership in Organizations: Evidence from Six Case Studies*. Greensboro, NC: CCL Press.

Marable, M. (1998) *Black Leadership*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Meindl, J. (1995) 'The Romance of Leadership as a Follower-centric Theory: A Social Constructionist Approach', *Leadership Quarterly* 6(3): 329–41.

Meyer, D. S., Whittier, N., & Robnett, B. (2002) *Social Movements: Identity, Culture, and the State*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Meyerson, D. (2001) *Tempered Radicals: Everyday Leadership Transforming Organizations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Morris, A., & Braine, N. (2001) 'Social Movements and Oppositional Consciousness', in J. Mansbridge & A. Morris (eds) *Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest*, pp. 20–37. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Morris, A., & Staggenborg, S. (2004) 'Leadership in Social Movements', in D. Snow, S. Soule, & H. P. Kriesi (eds) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, pp. 171–96. New York: Blackwell.

Muller, H. J. (1998) 'American Indian Women Managers: Living in Two Worlds', *Journal of Management Inquiry* 71: 4–28.

Murtadha, K., & Larson, G. L. (2004) 'The Outsider Within: Toward a Socially Critical Theory of Leadership', in W. K. Hoy & C. C. Miskel (eds) *Educational Administration, Policy, and Reform Research and Measurement*, pp. 337–70. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Murtadha, K., & Watts, D. M. (2005) 'Linking the Struggle for Education and Social Justice:

Historical Perspectives of African American Leadership in Schools', *Educational Administration Quarterly* 414: 591–608.

Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1986) *Racial Formation in the United States*. New York: Routledge.

Oppenheimer, G. M. (2001) 'Paradigm Lost: Race, Ethnicity, and the Search for a New Population Taxonomy', *American Journal of Public Health* 91: 1049–55.

Ospina, S., & Dodge, J. (2006) 'Narrative Inquiry and the Search for Connectedness: Practitioners and Academics Developing Public Administration Scholarship', *Public Administration Review* 654: 409–24.

Ospina, S., & Foldy, E. (2005) 'Toward a Framework of Social Change Leadership', proceedings of the eighth annual meeting of the Public Management Research Association, September, Los Angeles, US.

Ospina, S., & Sorensen, G. (2006) 'A Constructionist Lens on Leadership: Charting New Territory', in G. Goethals & G. Sorenson (eds) *Quest for a General Theory of Leadership*, pp. 188–204. London: Edward Elgar.

Pardo, M. S. (1998) *Mexican American Women Activists: Identity and Resistance in Two Los Angeles Communities*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Parker, P. S. (2001) 'African American Executives Within Dominant Culture Organizations: Re-conceptualizing Notions of Instrumentality and Collaboration', *Management Communication Quarterly* 15: 42–82.

Parker, P. S., & Ogilvie, D. T. (1996) 'Gender, Culture, and Leadership: Toward a Culturally Distinct Model of African American Women Executives' Leadership Strategies', *Leadership Quarterly* 7: 189–214.

Pollard, D. (1997) 'Race, Gender, and Educational Leadership: Perspectives from African American Principals', *Educational Policy* 113: 353–75.

Polletta, F., & Jasper, J. (2001) 'Collective Identity in Social Movements', *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 283–305.

Prindeville, D. M. (2003) 'Identity and the Politics of American Indian and Hispanic Women Leaders', *Gender and Society* 174: 591–608.

Quinn Patton, M. (2002) *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. London: SAGE.

Richardson, A., & Loubier, C. (2008) 'Intersectionality and Leadership', *International Journal of Leadership Studies* 32: 142–61.

Rittel, H. W. J., & Webber, M. (1973) Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning', *Policy Sciences* 4: 155–69.

Robnett, B. (1997) *How Long? How Long? How Long? African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Schall, E., Ospina, S., Godsoe, B., &. Dodge, J. (2004) 'Appreciative Narratives as Leadership Research: Matching Method to Lens', in D. L. Cooperrider & M. Avital (eds) *Advances in Appreciative Inquiry*, pp. 147–70. Oxford: Elsevier Science.

Semple, A. (2000) 'A Reason to Read', *Boston Globe*, 7 February.

Shamir, B., & Howell, J. (1999) 'Organizational And Contextual Influences on the Emergence and Effectiveness of Charismatic Leadership', *Leadership Quarterly* 102: 257–283.

Shamir, B., House, R., & Arthur, M. B. (1993) 'The Motivational Effects of Charismatic Leadership: A Self-concept Based Theory', *Organization Science* 44: 577–94.

Shamir, B., Pilai, R., Bligh, M., & Uhl-Bien, M. (eds) (2007) *Follower-centered Perspectives of Leadership*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Shamir, B., Zakay, E., Breini, E., & Popper, M. (1998) 'Correlates of Charismatic Leader Behavior in Military Units', *Academy of Management Journal* 41: 387–409.

Slay, H. S. (2003) 'Spanning Two Worlds: Social Identity and Emergent African American Leaders', *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies* 94: 56–66.

Steinberg, M. (2002) 'Toward a More Dialogic Analysis of Social Movement Culture', in

168

D. S. Meyer, N. Whittier, & B. Robnett (eds) *Social Movements: Identity, Culture, and the State*, pp. 208–25. New York: Oxford University Press.

Su, C. (2007) 'Cracking Silent Codes: Critical Race Theory and Education Organizing', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 28: 531–48.

Terry, R. W. (1993) Authentic Leadership: Courage in Action. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Uhl-Bien, M. (2006) 'Relational Leadership Theory: Exploring the Social Processes of Leadership and Organizing', *The Leadership Quarterly* 17: 654–76.

Walters, R., & Johnson, C. (2000) *Bibliography of African American Leadership*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Walters, R., & Smith, R. (1999) *African American Leadership*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.

Warner, L. S., & Grint, K. (2006) 'American Indian Ways of Leading and Knowing', *Leadership* 22: 225–44.

Wilcox, J. (2001) 'The Face of Public Health Nursing: Carol Maureen Easley Allen', *American Journal of Public Health* 9112: 1947–9.

Williams, L. (1998) *Servants of the People: The 1960s Legacy of African American Leadership*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

Wood, R. L. (2002) *Faith in Action: Religion, Race, and Democratic Organizing in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Wong, K. (1995) 'Chinese Culture and Leadership', *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 44: 309–19.

Yanow, D. (2003) *Constructing Race and Ethnicity in America*. New York: M. E. Sharp.

Yukl, G. (1999) 'An Evaluation of the Conceptual Weaknesses in Transformation and Charismatic Leadership Theories', *Leadership Quarterly* 102: 285–305.

Appendix

Full list of original organizations, where issues of race-ethnicity appeared to be central to their work

Black AIDS Institute
Center for Young Women's Development
Coalition of African, Asian, European, and Latino Immigrants of Illinois
Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
Community Voices Heard
Cornerstone Theatre Company
EVS Communications
Fanm Ayisyen Nan Miyami, Inc.
Fifth Avenue Committee
Gwich'in Steering Committee
Justice for Janitors
Junebug Productions
Laotian Organizing Project
New York Immigration Coalition
Oaxaca Indigenous Binational Coalition
People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources (PODER)
Regional AIDS Interfaith Network
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Tonatierra Community Development Institute
Teamsters for a Democratic Union

Note: Two organizations from the original group of 22 declined publication. For more information on the LCW organizations, please visit http://leadershipforchange.org

169

Sonia Ospina is an associate professor in the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and Faculty Director of the Research Center for Leadership in Action at New York University. A sociologist by training, her academic interests include leadership, engaged scholarship, and democratic governance. She is the author of *Illusions of Opportunity: Employee Expectations and Work place Inequality* (Cornell, 1996) and is currently working on a book based on a national, multi-year study of leadership in community organizations engaged in social change in the US. She is also exploring governance and accountability issues associated with public management reform in Latin America. [email: sonia.ospina@nyu.edu]

Celina Su is a civil society scholar and teaches in the Department of Political Science at Brooklyn College, City University of New York. Her research interests lie in the intersection of cultural practices and discourse, grassroots groups, and social policy-making. She is the author of *Streetwise for Book Smarts: Grassroots Organizing and Education Reform in the Bronx* (Cornell University Press, 2009), and co-author of *Our Schools Suck: Students Talk Back to a Segregated Nation on the Failure of Urban Education* (New York University Press, 2009). She received a Ph.D. in Urban Studies from MIT. [email: celinasu@gmail.com]