



Shifting racial stereotypes in late adolescence: Heterogeneous resources for developmental change in the New Latino Diaspora[☆]



Katherine Clonan-Roy*, Stanton Wortham, Briana Nichols

University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education, 3700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia PA 19104, USA

A B S T R A C T

Keywords:

Resources
Scales
Heterogeneity
Racial models of personhood
Ontogenetic development

In this paper we examine how resources, drawn from various spatial and temporal scales, contribute to shifts in how three Latina girls' deploy racial models of personhood as they move from eighth to eleventh grade. We argue that these changing perceptions are made possible by a set of contingent, heterogeneous resources, not by any predictable social or developmental process. We describe the relevant resources by telling the stories of Valeria and her friends Maria and Gabriela, as they move from middle school through high school in Marshall, a New Latino Diaspora town.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

One day Valeria, an 8th grade Latina, was sitting in the cafeteria of Marshall Middle School (MMS) with a group of Latina friends. The cafeteria contains eight long tables that span the length of the room. Eighth graders, the most senior students at the middle school, have the privilege of selecting where they sit. While there were a few mixed groupings here and there, across the lunchroom Black, Mexican, and White students formed racially homogenous social clusters at the tables.

Halfway through lunch, a Black boy bumped into a Mexican boy as he passed by with his lunch tray. The collision caused the tray to crash to the floor. The Mexican boy stood up, his body rigid in anger, and stepped toward the Black boy. Nearby, the Black boy's friend, another Black 8th grader, stood up in solidarity as the tension in the room mounted. Following his lead, a Mexican boy stood up to support the first Mexican boy, whose tray remained on the floor. Valeria sat watching with her peers as these events quickly turned into a massive racial brawl between Black and Mexican students.

Valeria, now an 11th grader, reflects back on this event, commenting on how the brawl was just one of many dramatic racial conflicts between Black and Mexican students in her 8th grade year. She muses about how, in middle school, she could feel the racial tension dividing groups of students, but that now, in high school, that tension has dissipated. The dramatic events are memories. Black and Mexican youth hang out together now, have friendships and even date each other. Reflecting on the shifting racial dynamics in her school and community, she pauses in confusion, as she can't really explain these changes.

[☆] Benjamin Smith & Greg Thompson, Guest Editors.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: kclo@gse.upenn.edu (K. Clonan-Roy), stantonw@upenn.edu (S. Wortham), brianan@gse.upenn.edu (B. Nichols).

In this paper we examine the complex and changing racial dynamics that Valeria describes in this vignette. We describe shifts in youths' perceptions of racial others and the changing racial models of personhood that they deploy. We argue that these changing perceptions are made possible by a complex set of contingent, heterogeneous resources, not by any wide-spread, predictable social or developmental process. We describe these resources by telling the stories of Valeria and her friends Maria and Gabriela, as they move from middle school through high school in Marshall, a New Latino Diaspora town. Since the 1990s, Latino migration patterns within the U.S. have changed, with newcomers moving into geographic regions that have not been home to Latinos in the past. In these 'New Latino Diaspora' towns, attitudes and ideologies are often more elastic, allowing Latinos and longstanding residents some flexibility in how they imagine themselves and racialized others (Wortham et al. 2009). We document this flexibility in Valeria, Maria, and Gabriela's experiences in Marshall. From 8th to 11th grade their mobilization of racial models of personhood changes significantly. We describe how resources from multiple scales converged to facilitate this shift.

In doing so, we address the following question: what resources, drawn from various spatial and temporal scales, contribute to the shifts in the three Latina girls' deployment of racial models of personhood between eighth and eleventh grades? 'Models of personhood,' as described by Wortham et al. (2009), are characterizations of the dispositions, moral strengths and weaknesses, typical behaviors, and life prospects of a person or group. We answer our question by drawing on Latourian (2005) actor-network theory, cross-event theories of language and social relations (Agha, 2007; Agha and Wortham, 2005; Wortham, 2006), and theories of scale (Blommaert, 2007, 2010; Blommaert et al., 2014; Goebel, 2009; Hult, 2010; Lemke, 2000; Lempert, 2012). We understand 'scale,' following Blommaert (2007), as a hierarchical, power-laden ordering of social space-time. Scale is both temporal and spatial. As Lemke (2000) argues, all processes in the human world inevitably draw on resources from across scales. We use actor-network theory to conceptualize the mobilization of cross-scale resources, tracing 'assemblages' of resources that are heterogeneous in both scale and type. Latour argues that no particular process, scale, or resource is always relevant to making sense of any particular object. Analysts must not limit themselves to certain characteristics of 'shape, size, heterogeneity and combination of associations in the network' (p. 11). We follow his lead and illustrate how an analyst can trace the heterogeneous, cross-scale resources relevant to the shifts in the racial models of personhood the girls deploy.

Our analysis draws on data collected over three years at the beginning of this decade by Clonan-Roy, as part of an ethnographic project in this town that our research team has conducted over the past ten years. Clonan-Roy followed three female Mexican girls from 8th grade to 11th grade and documented how their discussions of race shifted over these years. The data were collected using ethnographic methods, including fieldnotes taken during middle school girls' group meetings, lunches and dinners with the girls, participant observation during the school day, and recorded individual and group interviews. Our analysis traces the assemblages of resources from various scales that contribute to changes in how the girls deploy racial models of personhood. As we trace these assemblages, we show how heterogeneous resources converge in different moments and in distinct ways for each of the girls as their experiences of race shift across their transition from middle to high school.

2. Resources, scales, networks and trajectories

What resources, from which spatial and temporal scales, contribute to the girls' shifting use of racial models of personhood across adolescence? How do we know what resources are relevant to these shifts? To answer these questions, we draw on their emic descriptions of race, their racialized behaviors, and narratives they tell about racial interactions, against the background of our 10 years of ethnographic work in Marshall. We examine how these heterogeneous resources become important for each girl in middle school and in high school, contributing to their changing use of racial models of personhood.

2.1. Resources and scales

'Resources' are anything that can facilitate a focal process—in our case the shift in these girls' racialized interpretations of their peers. Resources can be diverse signs and objects, such as widely circulating stereotypes, seminal events, embodied habits, local knowledge, laws, customs, taste preferences, languages, and so on. Not all potential resources are relevant to any given process of social identification, nor can the relevant resources be known a priori (Lempert, 2012). Analysts must determine which of many possibly relevant resources in fact play central roles in the focal process (Wortham, 2012; Wortham and Rhodes, 2013). We argue that the following resources are particularly important to the girls' shifting experiences and accounts of race: family narratives about and attitudes toward race, family migration experiences, both widely circulating and local narratives about race, the racial heterogeneity of Marshall, institutional structures in school, institutionalized racial narratives in school, peer group racialized discourses, social media discourses on race, individual racialized experiences, and national racial events. These resources become important at different times for different girls.

We use 'scale' to describe an ordering of social space-time (Blommaert et al., 2014). Scales involve clusterings of objects that interrelate within a given spatial or temporal envelope. In a school, for example, many processes take place across an academic year: curricular concepts are elaborated and individual students' trajectories as successful or unsuccessful students are entrenched (Wortham, 2006). Other processes take place across interactional time in a classroom: teachers explain particular concepts, students tease or flirt, etc. As Lemke (2000) argues, processes in the human world inevitably draw on resources from across scales. Almost no significant human process draws only on one or two scales.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/934864>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/934864>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)