

Abstract title: Working with/in diversity: an ethnographic exploration of racialized visibility in rural nursing workforce

Presenters and institutional affiliations:

Dr Virginia Mapedzahama, Postdoctoral Research fellow, School of Rural Medicine, University of New England, Armidale, Australia

Prof. Trudy Rudge, Sydney Nursing School, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

Assoc Prof. Sandra West, Sydney Nursing School, University of Sydney, Australia

Contact person:

Prof. Trudy Rudge

Sydney Nursing School, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

Email: trudy.rudge@sydney.edu.au

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The paper presents a beginning exploration of an ethnographic study of the workplace relations of rural nurses from New South Wales, Australia. The ethnography occurred in nursing units in two rural hospitals as examples of multicultural workplaces constituted in part by the societal beliefs about race, ideologies of multicultural tolerance, and a raft of workplace policies in support of equality and diversity management. The study uses participant observation of nurses who identified as racially visible as they went about their day to day work. The nurses' interactions with colleagues, patients and their relatives are analysed for what they exemplify as to how the worker, the nursing unit space and the organizational rules becomes racially coded.

The aim of the study from which this paper draws was to critically analyse the social relations of these workplaces – claimed as multicultural and cosmopolitan - to begin developing nuanced understanding(s) of how racial visibility is constructed as problematic difference. The study was informed by our earlier work on the practice world of skilled African nurses (Mapedzahama et al., 2012; Mapedzahama et al., 2011; Mapedzahama et al., in review; Rudge et al., 2012; Rudge et al., in review), which found in their interviews that the narratives of all of the participants were framed within their experiences of everyday racism, the dominance of a white racial frame and constructions of a racialized black skilled migrant nurse as unknowing, incompetent, suspect and a work unit only to be tolerated. Rather than view the skilled African migrant nurses as a solution to the nursing shortage, the very system that had sought them out problematised them and their black bodies, and created a workplace that the migrant nurses experienced and rapidly learnt to view as hostile.

Our contention is that in using organizational ethnography, the unarticulated meanings of difference constructed within the inclusion of the broader workplace policies are yet enacted within normalised acts of micro-aggression based on racial visibility (Willis, 2009). Simultaneously, how that meaning is made is analysed to expose how, if also broken (deconstructed), the operations of the power relations of whiteness with/in the multicultural workplace are explicated. The analysis uses observations, conversations with workers and their colleagues, where relevant conversations with patients, and a review of diversity management policies at the unit and hospital level to explore this meaning making. The intention is to break apart the workplace promoted as harmoniously multicultural to expose the ways in which racially visible difference is signified and how this signification orders the social relations of such workplaces.

In the end, our ethnographic project presents alternative ways of understanding and theorising the experiences of racially visible workers' experiential realities in Australian nursing workplaces. The theorising moves away from an exclusive focus or centring of the subjective experiences of the racially visible worker, to centring social relations of the workplace, which

allows for crucial examination of the minute processes of the making and unmaking of problematised visible racial difference.

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