

January 2013

## Negotiating Race-Related Tensions: How White Educational Leaders Recognize, Confront, and Dialogue about Race and Racism

Amy Jo Samuels  
*University of South Florida*, amyjosamuels@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd>



Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#), [Other Education Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

---

### Scholar Commons Citation

Samuels, Amy Jo, "Negotiating Race-Related Tensions: How White Educational Leaders Recognize, Confront, and Dialogue about Race and Racism" (2013). *USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/4760>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the USF Graduate Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usf.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usf.edu).

Negotiating Race-Related Tensions: How White Educational Leaders  
Recognize, Confront, and Dialogue about Race and Racism

by

Amy J. Samuels

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
College of Education  
University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: William Black, Ph.D.  
Co-Major Professor: Leonard Burrello, Ed.D.  
Vonzell Agosto, Ph.D.  
Rosemary Closson, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:  
June 26, 2013

Keywords: anti-racism, Critical Race Theory, critical whiteness, educational leadership,  
racial identity development, white privilege

Copyright © 2013, Amy J. Samuels

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to Greg Samuels, my husband, my best friend, my life partner. Without his companionship, encouragement, patience, and support, the last four and a half years would have been much more arduous and incredibly lonely. I am eternally thankful for his inspiration and reassurance in this process. When I became discouraged, doubtful, and overwhelmed, he was my biggest cheerleader; for that, I will always be thankful. I also recognize Marley, our beautiful, five-year old pug, as he inspires great joy and constant laughter in our home. Additionally, some of my best thinking for this work happened during our long, quiet walks together by the river. While citing a pet in a dissertation dedication may seem trivial to some, Marley represents the peaceful spirit and harmonious ideologies to which Greg and I are drawn, as he is named after the great Bob Marley, a man who brought social activism to life through music.

Until the philosophy which hold one race superior

And another

Inferior

Is finally

And permanently

Discredited

And abandoned -

Everywhere is war -

Me say war.

That until there no longer  
First class and second class citizens of any nation  
Until the colour of a man's skin  
Is of no more significance than the colour of his eyes-  
Me say war.

That until the basic human rights  
Are equally guaranteed to all,  
Without regard to race-  
Dis is war.

Bob Marley, *War*

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to begin by extending my greatest appreciation to each of my participants for their participation in my study. Without their reflective contributions, this research would not have been possible. While I was a complete stranger to most of them as we embarked on this process, they were willing to be open about a subject that is not always easy to discuss. To them, I am forever grateful. I would also like to thank my dissertation chairs and committee members for their guidance and consistent support throughout my studies and the dissertation process. Dr. Black, I thank you for the extensive time you have invested in reading my work. The quality of this piece is unquestionably richer because of your insightful comments and thoughtful feedback. You constantly helped to push my thinking and encouraged greater reflection. Dr. Burrello, I thank you for your support and belief in my ability to do this work, as your support encouraged me to further commit myself to completing a quality and meaningful piece. While I knew my stadium upon entering the program, I appreciate your assistance in helping me find my individual seat. Dr. Agosto, I thank you for the critical feedback and for encouraging me to further push my thinking, as well as your contributions in further framing my interests. The assigned readings and coursework were both insightful and inspiring and are referenced frequently throughout this work. Dr. Closson, I thank you for introducing me to Critical Race Theory (CRT) and fostering my interest to embark on this academic journey as a white woman employing a CRT lens. Your course helped me to more purposefully frame my thoughts and provided more powerful

language for articulation. To both Dr. Black and Dr. Burrello, I appreciate your commitment to racial equity and respect the intensity with which you express your thoughts and ideas. To both Dr. Agosto and Dr. Closson, I admire the gentle and sincere nature with which you approach this work. To my entire committee, as a result of working with each of you, I consider myself a much stronger student and more reflective person than when I embarked on this process and I thank you for your contributions in my growth. I would also like to thank my family for their consistent support and sincerity in this process. While we live over one thousand miles apart, through phone calls, cards, social media, and face-to-face gatherings a few times a year, their support and encouragement was both evident and unwavering. To everyone in my extended family who has supported me in this process and throughout my academic studies, I thank you. To my parents, Tom and LuAnn Spence, who exhibit constant pride in my achievements, words are not enough to express my gratitude for their love and support. To my brother and sister-in-law Tom and Jill Spence, I thank them for consistently checking in on my progress, showing interest in this seemingly never-ending process, and cheering me on. To my grandparents, Paul and Lois Lauer and Carol Spence, who exhibit consistent interest in my progress, I appreciate their steady backing and praise. To my grandfather, Dr. Joseph R. Spence, as I promised during our last moments together, on that afternoon in early August, as the warm rays of the sun shined through the window, "I WILL finish." Though I have proudly taken my husband's surname, when I walk across that stage on graduation day, "I am a Spence!"

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
Abstract .....	vi
Chapter One .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	8
Discussion of the Problem .....	8
Purpose of the Study .....	11
Research Questions .....	12
Theoretical Framework .....	13
Critical Theory .....	13
Critical Race Theory .....	13
Critical Whiteness .....	14
Anti-Racism .....	15
Definition of Terms .....	16
Race .....	16
Racism .....	17
Deficit Thinking .....	18
Overview of the Study Design .....	19
Overview of the Findings .....	20
Overview of the Dissertation .....	24
Chapter Two Literature Review .....	26
Introduction .....	26
Educational Disparities for Students of Color .....	27
Achievement Factors and Indicators .....	28
Cultural Capital .....	32
Behavioral and Discipline Disparities .....	35
Deficit Thinking .....	36
Race and Racism .....	40
Critical Race Theory .....	44
Racial Identity Development .....	48
Helm's Model .....	49
Frankenberg's Model .....	50
Critical Whiteness .....	51
Anti-Racism Theory .....	54
White Privilege .....	56
Implications for Educational Leadership .....	59

Conclusion .....	62
Chapter Three Methods.....	64
Introduction.....	64
Theoretical Perspective.....	65
Critical Theory .....	65
Critical Race Theory .....	67
Research Design.....	68
Phenomenology.....	69
Interviewing .....	70
Field Notes .....	73
Member Checking.....	74
Participant Selection .....	75
Aspiring Educational Leaders.....	75
Currently Practicing Educational Leaders .....	75
Recently-Retired Educational Leaders .....	75
Recruitment.....	76
Informed Consent and IRB .....	79
Benefits and Compensation .....	80
Research Interview Protocols .....	80
Researcher Reflexivity.....	82
Researcher Reflective Journal.....	83
Peer Debriefing .....	84
Data Analysis .....	85
Reporting.....	87
Ethical Considerations .....	88
Limitations .....	90
Conclusion .....	90
Chapter Four Research Findings.....	93
Participants.....	94
Bella .....	94
Hannah .....	94
Theresa.....	94
Ella .....	95
Morgan.....	95
Owen .....	95
Peter .....	95
Winston .....	96
Summary of Participants.....	96
Power of Personal Experiences.....	97
Influence of Experience on Conceptualizations of Race .....	98
Bella: White by Birth, Mexican by Heritage .....	99
Hannah: When Everything You've Ever Known is Turned Around.....	103
Theresa: The Value in Being a Cultural Outsider.....	108
Ella: Beyond Mayberry.....	112



Morgan: White and Left of Center.....	117
Owen: Conscious Through the Mind and Spirit .....	121
Peter: Lacks the Baggage of a Southern White Man .....	124
Winston: From the Fields to the Peace Corps.....	129
The Experience Beyond the Experience .....	133
Collective Consideration of Critical Incidences .....	134
The Power in the Majority Positioned as the Minority.....	135
The Power in the Majority Positioned as a Cultural	
Outsider.....	137
The Power of Academic Experience.....	138
Language as a Tool of Empowerment .....	140
The Role of College .....	141
Lack of Exposure to Race and Racism in Undergraduate	
School .....	141
Leadership Program Encourages Employment of New Lens .....	142
Influence of Personal Experience on Receptivity .....	143
Influence of Geographic Setting .....	145
Recognizing, Confronting, and Dialoguing about Race and Racism .....	146
Recognizing the Implications of Race and Racism .....	146
Subtleness of Racism .....	147
Subtleness Makes Racism Harder to Recognize.....	147
Talking about Race without Talking about Race.....	148
“Ignoring Racism is Racism within Itself” .....	149
Manifestation of Racism in Education.....	149
Dominance of White, Middle-Class Values .....	150
Detriment of Deficit Thinking .....	152
Success: An Exception to the Rule for Students of	
Color .....	153
Preconceiving African-American Boys as	
Threatening .....	154
Limited Opportunities through Gate Keeping .....	155
Message of Exclusion .....	156
Confronting Racism.....	158
Confronting Racism through Thought.....	158
Confronting Racism through Action.....	160
Influence of Time, Place, and Professional Role.....	163
Understanding and Engaging with Tension.....	163
Engaging in Dialogue about Race and Racism.....	165
Talking about Racism: “The Elephant in the Room” .....	165
Tips for Talking about Racism .....	166
The Value in Talking and Reflecting.....	167
Conclusion .....	168
Chapter Five Interpretations and Implications.....	170
Negotiating Race-Related Tensions.....	171
Influence of Limited Race-Related Context .....	171

New Thoughts Result in New Tensions.....	174
Importance of Translating Thoughts into Action.....	175
Limited Findings on Anti-Racism: Perceived Difficulties in Navigating.....	176
Creating Conversational Spaces .....	179
When Race Becomes Relevant .....	181
Can the Racial Majority be the Racial Minority? .....	182
Framing the Impact of Race and Racism.....	184
Connecting Race and SES .....	185
Role of White, Middle-Class Values .....	186
Racial Identity Models.....	187
Further Conceptualizations of Anti-Racism .....	190
Implications for Research and Practice.....	195
Implications for Practice .....	195
Implications for Preparation .....	200
Implications for Further Research .....	202
Limitations .....	204
Reflections on Role as Researcher.....	205
Conclusion .....	208
References.....	210
Appendices .....	221
Appendix A: Interview Protocol for Aspiring Educational Leaders .....	222
Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Currently-Practicing Educational Leaders.....	224
Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Recently-Retired Educational Leaders.....	226
Appendix D: Informed Consent to Participate in Recruitment Process .....	228
Appendix E: Informed Consent Form.....	230
Appendix F: IRB Certificate of Completion.....	234
Appendix G: IRB Letter of Approval .....	235
About the Author .....	End Page

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Comparative Summary of Participants .....	96
----------------------------------------------------	----

### **Abstract**

Despite exposure of educational disparities for students of color, as well as the notion that educational training rarely discusses race and racism, there continues to be a lack of discourse on race, racism, and anti-racism in educational leadership. Subsequently, it is important to challenge deficit thinking and encourage further examination of the deeply-rooted foundation of oppression. The study explored personal narratives of white educational leaders who oppose racial inequity to heighten awareness about conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism. The research involved interviewing educational leaders in three groups: 1) aspiring, 2) currently-practicing, and 3) retired. Eight participants were selected to engage in two semi-structured interviews about their experiences aligned with the following research questions: 1) How do white educational leaders frame the impact of race and racism? and 2) How do white educational leaders describe their perceptions and experiences recognizing, confronting, and dialoguing with others about race and racism? The findings revealed commonalties about the subtle nature of racism, as well as how to confront racism through thoughts and actions. While participants considered dialogue beneficial in their own awareness of race and racism, the lack of venues to dialogue were emphasized. The findings suggest implications for further contextualizing negotiations of race-related tensions and framing the impact of race and racism, particularly in relation to creating purposeful spaces and relationships to encourage such dialogue. Additionally, interpretation of the findings adds insight to further conceptualizing racial identity models and anti-racism.

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Having grown up in a rural town in western Pennsylvania, I spent the first five years of my life interacting only with people who looked like me and had virtually no exposure to people who were different than me racially or culturally. Once I entered elementary school, my experiences remained rather constant. Race was not discussed or considered in my home and racial diversity was certainly not a concern, thereby establishing a socially constructed norm of silence on race and a pervasive understanding that whiteness was the norm. It was not until high school when my network of friends and acquaintances started to somewhat diversify racially; my teachers, however, continued to be only white men and women. During my undergraduate college years, the lens on my world expanded monumentally for it was during this time that not only did I expand my social network to include many friends and acquaintances of color; I also realized I had a passionate interest in difference and equity, particularly matters regarding race and racism. Given my chosen area of study was social science education, I acted upon this passion by enrolling in a black studies minor and focused on pursuing a career working with student populations representing various racial groups.

The most enlightening experience of my college years occurred during my junior year when I participated in an alternative spring break in Brooklyn, New York. During my nine-day trip, I, along with 14 of my peers, volunteered our services at community centers and public schools comprised mainly of African-American populations. I was

exposed to many first-time experiences such as volunteering at a soup kitchen, observing an AIDS support group session, and dining with a local family in their home that was located in a high-rise housing project. While all of these experiences were enlightening, nothing had a greater influence on me than my days spent in a local public school as the atrocities renowned author Johnathan Kozol portrays in his writings became striking and undeniable. Having already read *Savage Inequalities* (1991) by this time in my life, these concepts were no longer just words in a book but rather the reality for the children with whom I volunteered. I witnessed cold classrooms with peeling paint and hallways of crumbling plaster and while I looked aimlessly for motivating books and materials, I found only outdated, worn textbooks. The digital divide was clearly exemplified by the absence of computers in the school and the potential for recess was incredibly limited for there was no playground, only sidewalks, on which for students to play.

Although the deteriorating building and substandard conditions and materials were both disturbing and disheartening, I was most alarmed by the absence of teaching staff. A peer volunteer, who was assigned to a room across the hall, entered my assigned classroom and expressed concern that, even though school had started ten minutes earlier, the teacher had not arrived. The teacher with whom I was volunteering did not seem discouraged or concerned by this matter, but rather nonchalantly asked my fellow volunteer if he would mind covering the class for the day. When he articulated he was not comfortable with this suggestion, she appeared slightly irritated, but simply requested he bring the fourth grade class he was visiting into her third grade class. Once the other class entered, there were nearly 50 students in the classroom and given there were not enough chairs, students were sitting on countertops as well as the floor. The most

alarming aspect of this development was it seemed to me the students did not even find the situation unusual, but rather it seemed as though it were customary.

When it was time for lunch, I sat at a table with third grade students in the school cafeteria. I was in disbelief over how intrigued the students were by my presence, particularly my physical appearance associated with my race. As though I was some strange foreigner, several of the students asked me if they could touch my hair, as well as my hands, and they were convinced my blue eyes could not be authentic. Although I let them examine me, touching my hair and skin, I was sure to emphasize even though my hair, skin, and eyes may look different than theirs, I was not much different. At the time, in the year 2000, in a country where white people comprised nearly 80 percent of the population (<http://factfinder.census.gov/>), and even though there were white teachers at the school, the fact these eight-year old students seemed to have never personally interacted so closely with a white person awakened me to just how segregated our worlds were.

After returning from my trip to Brooklyn, my passion to embrace racial equity further intensified, which thereby deepened my desire to pursue a career working with a student population that represented various racial backgrounds. I found myself continually reflecting on the experiences I had in Brooklyn and constantly pondering whether these same conditions would be tolerated in a school with a largely white student population. I wondered if the atrocious conditions were simply being excused or ignored because the students were children of color.

The alternative spring break to Brooklyn had taken place during my junior year. Upon return, as a result of my increased interest in working with students of various

racial backgrounds, I visited the office at my university that would be responsible for assigning student teaching placements the following year. The university was in a small town surrounded by predominately white schools. In fact, the only school less than a one and a half hour drive from campus that had a large racial minority population was a school for adjudicated males approximately 45 minutes from campus. Since I knew this would be my only option to work with students of color, I requested for one of my two nine-week student teaching placements to be at this center. Fortunately, given my interests, my request was fulfilled.

After college I began my work as an educator teaching in schools with large compositions of racial minority students, and my professional experiences have remained rather consistent throughout the last twelve years. Although the schools where I have worked have been in excellent physical condition in comparison to the school where I volunteered in Brooklyn, I have witnessed many commonalities between opportunities and expectations for similar student populations.

Working in largely racial minority schools has afforded me the opportunity to pay continual witness to educational inequities endured by minority students, such as placement in lower academic tracks, lower achievement results, higher rates of discipline that result in greater rates of suspensions and change of school placement, as well as the harmful employment of deficit thinking by a largely white educator population. As defined by Valencia and Black (2002), “Deficit thinking refers to the idea that students, particularly of low-SES backgrounds and of color, fail in school because they and their families have internal defects, or deficits, that thwart the learning process” (p. 83). In my recent work in a local high school, I found that although the overall school population



was comprised of 65 percent racial minority students, students of color represented only one or two of an average of 25 students in most Advanced Placement classes. Working at another nearby school, although the school is comprised of approximately 85 percent minority students, predominately African-American, when looking at the make-up of academically rigorous science courses, the minority rate was approximately 30 percent while “regular” sciences courses and other “regular” track content courses were comprised of over 90 percent racial minority students.

On multiple occasions I have heard educator colleagues express a sense of apathy for their work and low expectations for their students, primarily students of color, by saying, “What does it matter anyway, they are just gonna end up flippin’ burgers!”, “Why do I waste my time when they are just gonna end up in prison makin’ license plates?”, “She’s gonna be pregnant by the time she’s 15 anyway.” “They did pretty good, for neighborhood kids.” “I feel so bad for them. It’s no wonder they all end up turning to drugs and violence.” A sense of distrust and lack of confidence in parents has also been frequently expressed in the automatic assumption that parents simply do not care, are disinterested, or are unable. There have been numerous occasions when I was engaged in conversations with colleagues where I suggested they call home to speak with parents. The colleagues replied with nonverbal responses that clearly inferred they did not believe calling home would make any difference in the students’ behavior or academic progress. Most of the responses were annoyed shrugs and irritated sighs, but I have also encountered several colleagues who were vocal about their thoughts of distrust in parents’ abilities by saying things such as, “Like that’s gonna help!” or “You really think that’s gonna make a difference?” Even when I persist and reply with something like,

“Yes, I do. Parents want what’s best for their children,” there is rarely any positive affirmation or agreement with my idea. I have also paid witness to how some teachers and administrators on cafeteria, hallway, or bus duty are quick to disperse congregated groups of students of color, predominately African-American students, but react in a much more tolerant approach with white students. Other evidence of deficit thinking I have witnessed in my professional career is the shocked reaction many teachers exhibit when glancing over their class rosters and seeing students of color have been placed in their honors or Advanced Placement courses. Although still amazing and extremely disheartening, such exposure over the years has been insightful, because it has allowed me to develop an understanding of the deeply-rooted nature of deficit thoughts regarding students of color many white educators harbor, simply not expecting students of color to achieve at the same academic levels or behave as well as their white peers.

While I started out my journey as a naïve close-minded girl in a racially-homogeneous environment where racial-heterogeneity was never a priority nor did it have to be, I now find myself choosing to live a life surrounded by people of different races and conscious of implications of race and racism. Witnessing a white colleague advocate for more African-American students to be placed in Advanced Placement courses and encouraging them to excel academically, as well as having conversations with white colleagues and friends who recognize and are concerned by historical implications of race and current-day racism, has allowed me to see there are white people who do advocate for students of color and are concerned by racial oppression. I feel fortunate to have had many enriching conversations and numerous experiences that have shined further light on the benefits of embracing interactions and relationships of racially

heterogeneous compositions as well as the work that still needs to be done regarding advocacy for racial equity. As a result of the choices I have made and the ideals I choose to uphold, I frequently find myself being asked questions, primarily by other white individuals, such as why are you the way you are or why are you so interested in issues related to people of color? While these are questions that cannot be easily answered, I see definite value in exploring them. In the past, I would get offended by such questions for I felt they stigmatized me and labeled me as different; however, I have accepted the reality that some may view me as different compared to my peer group of middle-class, white educators, especially in regards to my willingness to openly discuss race and racism and my passion for racial equity. I have even had people go so far as to proclaim I must not like white people. I find this assertion to be incredibly insulting; how can someone possibly conclude just because I do not share the same race as many of the people with whom I work and interact, I must not respect and admire other white people? Why must race be such a binary notion; why must it be one or the other? Why is it that to be a supporter of racial equity and a proponent of engaging with unequal practices equates with anti-white tendencies? Perhaps as the notion of racial advocacy continues to expand, these assumptions will begin to dissipate and it will be possible to advance past this binary frame.

The study is a means of searching beyond the current framework by encouraging the exploration of thoughts and experiences of white educators who advocate for racial equity and challenge the traditional notion of equating difference with deficiency. Encouraging an open dialogue, the study will explore the thoughts and perceptions of

white educational leaders who are conscious about the historical implications of race and racism and want to talk about it, as well as those who consider racial diversity an asset.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the exposure of educational disparities for students of color and the idea that racial minority students are perceived to lack cultural capital, as well as the notion that educational training rarely discusses race and racism, there continues to be a lack of discourse on conceptualizations and influence of race, racism, and anti-racism in educational leadership (Boske, 2010; Hernandez & Marshall, 2009).

**Discussion of the Problem.** Present discussions and ideologies on race encourage educational practices that normalize whiteness and promote academic and behavioral gaps subsequently advantaging white students over students of color. Additionally, current literature is robust with the assertion that schools are failing to meet the needs of students of color (Anyon, 2005; Davis, 2008; Ferguson, 2000; Kozol, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2000), arguing there are sizable and noteworthy disparities between the performance levels of white students and students of color (Mead, 2006; Rothstein, 2004; Wiggan, 2007) as well as their established perceptions of schooling (Ferguson, 2007; McWhorter, 2001; Ogbu, 2003). Substantial educational disparities are present between racial groups in academic, extracurricular, and behavioral progress (Davis, 2008; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). White students achieve overall higher academic success, outscoring their black peers on standardized tests and maintaining higher grade point averages (Ferguson, 2000; Mead, 2006; Rothstein, 2004; Wiggan, 2007). Black and Hispanic students often attend schools with undesirable educational conditions with poor educational climates and placement in a less rigorous curriculum and classrooms than

white students (Anyon, 2005; Kozol, 1991, 2006; Ogbu, 2003; Wiggan, 2007), subsequently, resulting in higher drop-out rates for these groups (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012; Mead, 2006) and leaving them under-prepared (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012; Kozol, 1991, 2006).

Regardless of the fact that educational disparities for students of color are well-represented in literature and trace back over nearly the last fifty years (Coleman, 1966); the existing disparities are still considerable. According to data from *The Nation's Report Card* (NAEP, 2011), white students outscore both Hispanic and black students in reading. Results from the 2011 NAEP indicate Delaware was the only state where the gap between white and black students narrowed between the years of 1998 and 2011. The report also highlights the gap between white and Hispanic students narrowed only in California and Oregon during this thirteen year time period. Also, according to the NAEP (2011) report, though the percentage of white students scoring at advanced and proficient levels increased since 2009, there was no notable change for black or Hispanic students.

While most educators recognize the existing gaps in academic, extracurricular, and behavioral progress, many highlight the influence of socioeconomic status on educational disparities while overlooking, disregarding, or minimizing the impact of race. As a result, it is critical to consider the influence of cultural capital on educational disparities. Some argue since America's schools focus on white middle-class ideals and philosophies, students of color, in regards to attitudes, skills, and knowledge, are already behind their white peers when they first enter school, thereby leaving them lagging academically from the onset (Kumashiro, 2000; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Ladson-

Billings (2006a) refers to the differentiated progress as an “education debt” to underscore the significance of the disparities and highlight the influence of “historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components” (p. 3). Referencing the “assimilationist ideology”, researchers argue it is the responsibility of students of color to adopt the norms of the dominant culture and model the behavior of the white majority (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 27). “Schools and teachers treat the language, prior knowledge, and values of African Americans as aberrant and often presume that the teacher’s job is to rid African American students of any vestiges of their own culture” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 206). On the contrary, as referenced by Ndimande (2004), when white students arrive at school with their “cultural capital” in hand, it puts them at an even further advantage in regards to the school culture given “both the school and their culture share more or less the same understanding, values, and artifacts” (p. 201).

Considering the normalizing of whiteness (Niemonen, 2010) and the pervasive nature of racism in American culture (Abrams & Moon, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006a); many educators do not address issues of racial inequity because they do not recognize or value their existence. As a result, race and racism are rarely discussed in schools or in educational training (Ladson-Billings, 2000). The majority of educators report their educational training did little to prepare them to address the needs of racially diverse learners (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Research conducted with pre-service teachers found students’ knowledge of diverse cultures was minimal and illustrates a pervasive sense of deficit thinking (Davis, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2006b; Marx, 2001). Along with pre-service teachers, research also reveals experienced educators blame students and their

families for lower academic achievement and perceived inadequacies (Ladson-Billings, 2006b; McKenzie, 2001).

Considering most educational leaders were previously classroom teachers, since reports indicate their teacher training did little to prepare them to work with racially diverse populations, if educational leadership programs want to prepare educators to successfully work with diverse student bodies, many argue these programs must facilitate engagement in discourse about unequal practices and advocate for racial equity (Boske, 2010; Hernandez & Marshall, 2009). Conversely, there is constant critique of leadership programs in that they are charged with low-quality instruction, fail to prepare future leaders to lead in such a way that facilitates high achievement for all student populations, and are slow to enact democratic change regarding racial equity (Hernandez & Marshall, 2009). According to Dantley (2002), it is clear the educational leadership field is in a state of “crisis” that partially results from “the field’s truncated propensity to equate difference with deficiency” (p. 334). Dialogue centered on race, difference, and equity are not emphasized, and frequently avoided, in educational leadership programs (Boske, 2010; Hernandez & Marshall, 2009).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore how white educational leaders, who are conscious about race and racism and want to talk about it, understand and address race and racism by exploring their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences in an effort to extend and deepen conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism. The research prompted exploration of factors such as personal histories, motivations, and experiences that influenced participants’ desires to oppose racial inequity and oppression, promote

racial equity, and counter the deficit-based notions of race. Given current discourses on race and racism, as well as policies and practices, often normalize whiteness and equate difference with deficiency (Dantley, 2002), the research sought to purposefully create spaces for discussion regarding how to recognize, confront, and dialogue about such matters. The research was also an effort to encourage reflective thinking of those who identify with an advocacy stance for racial equity while encouraging difficult conversations about race and racism. Since American society is racialized and all peoples are influenced by race (Closson, 2010; Thompson, 1997; 2003), this study was an effort to interrupt and disrupt current practices of avoidance and harmful assumptions that associate difference with deficiency and serve to “name” racism and whiteness (Freire, 1970, 2010) to deepen and extend conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism. Such extensions could contribute to the educational leadership field by adding to the existing literature on leadership for anti-racism, as well as spark implications for further research on how to further contextualize race, racism, and anti-racism. Such work suggests implications for disrupting the deficit-based discourse regarding race and encourages the creation of purposeful spaces for discussions and providing opportunities to recognize, confront, and dialogue with others about race and racism.

### **Research Questions**

Although research questions were designed for the study, I did not seek specific answers to the questions, but rather utilized the following questions to guide the research.

- 1) How do white educational leaders frame the impact of race and racism?
- 2) How do white educational leaders describe their perceptions and experiences recognizing, confronting, and dialoguing with others about race and racism?



## **Theoretical Framework**

A critical paradigm was used to guide the study and examine race, racism, and anti-racism, while tenets of Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness were used to explore the endemic and pervasive nature of racism, as well as the influence and implications of whiteness.

**Critical theory.** Although the thoughts and perceptions of participants were critical to the study, the study extended beyond examining peoples' understandings and interpretations and served to critique the established power structure that advantage some while continuing to oppress others. This particular study employed a critical perspective to challenge the norms, assumptions, and dominant beliefs asserted by deficit thinking that equate difference with deficiency in attempt to critique the current power structure to fight oppression and encourage change. Given the research questions, purpose, and design, the study used a critical perspective as the theoretical framework to center the experiences of white educational leaders with the goal of further understanding how to recognize, confront, and dialogue with others about race and racism.

**Critical Race Theory.** The tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) were employed to further influence the inquiry's theoretical framework. CRT is a theory critical in nature that establishes race and racism as the precursor to the established power structure and identifies race as the key component in social inequities (Lynn, et al., 2006). Although CRT is interdisciplinary, it can be used to explore various educational components and attempt to provide a framework to challenge the dominant discourse on race, racism, and cultural deficit theories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

The study explored endemic and socially constructed tenets of CRT and the notion of intersectionality in regards to the intersecting dynamics of race and poverty. Additionally, the study applied the idea of counter stories as evidenced in the participants' narratives. The notion of counter stories, however, took a different approach than is traditionally characterized by CRT. Given white people are the dominant group in America, counter stories are used in CRT to highlight the ideas and experiences of racial minorities. The stories often focus on challenges, struggles, and frustrations that result from racism. Additionally, the counter stories are used to honor lived experiences and highlight a voice that is often overlooked or excluded (Stanley, 2006). Therefore, as characterized by CRT, only people of color are able to tell counter stories. The study was an effort to explore the experiences and stories of those that are often overlooked or excluded from the dominant discourse, as well. However, since the experiences the study explored are those of members of the dominant group, they cannot and will not be labeled as counter stories, but I need to emphasize the notion of counter stories as a methodological implication for narrative influenced the idea behind the research.

**Critical Whiteness.** Stemming from CRT, critical whiteness is a theory used to further examine the pervasive nature of racism by analyzing the construction, influence, and implications of white identity and how such identity awards dominance (Applebaum, 2003; Hayes & Juarez, 2009). Emphasizing the social construct of whiteness, this theory examines cultural, historical, and sociological influences within the American context, as well as how whiteness influences social status, sustains white dominance, and results in oppression of non-whites (Applebaum, 2003; Bergerson, 2003; Niemonen, 2010).

Critical whiteness involves race cognizance, which highlights the ability to understand historical influences on the social construction of race, as well as identify practices and policies that normalize whiteness and its implicit system of advantages (Niemonen, 2010). Since many white people do not see themselves as individually racist, they fail to recognize the ways in which their whiteness maintains current systems of oppression (Applebaum, 2003; Niemonen, 2010). Consequently, critical whiteness emphasizes the critical importance of being able to advance past the individual and analyze how the privileges link to and maintain systemic oppression (Applebaum, 2003). A connection must be established between the white privilege and the resulting oppression that sustains white dominance.

**Anti-Racism.** Anti-racism theory involves thoughts, beliefs, actions, and policies that oppose racism and challenge the status quo and traditional notions that favor hegemonic discourses regarding whiteness (Gupta, 2003). Proponents of anti-racism recognize race is not a neutral concept (Applebaum, 2003, 2007) and highlight the need to challenge the influence of race and racism and examine ways that can influence both thoughts and actions (Thompson, 1997, 2003). Employing the ideologies of Paulo Freire (1970, 2010), anti-racism theory applies principles of critical theory and cites the need to critically examine race and racism (Niemonen, 2007) particularly focusing on examining institutionalized and systemic racism (Gupta, 2003). The theory underscores the social construct of race and the influence race plays in the development of personal identities, interpersonal and social dialogues, as well as institutional constructs and organizations (Niemonen, 2007).

Proponents of anti-racism assert attempts to promote racial equity and eliminate racism must include exposing white privilege and deconstructing the meaning of whiteness (Niemonen, 2007) as they understand the implicit privileges from which white people benefit and recognize themselves as oppressors (Applebaum, 2007). Anti-racism is not non-racism as it does not assume racial innocence is possible, but rather asserts that “in the United States all relations are racialized” (Thompson, 1997, p. 14)

### **Definition of Terms**

**Race.** Even though many would describe the construct of race as biologically-based, America has deepened this notion into a socially constructed reality that is both historically contingent and socially significant (Omi & Winant, 1994; Lopez, 1994). While many associate race as a biological notion, since modern science has come to proclaim race cannot be supported as a biological concept (Smedley, 2007), as there are more differences within races than between (Lopez, 1994), the idea of race should be considered a cultural invention and must be examined through a sociocultural lens (Smedley, 2007). Although certain phenotypic characteristics may be representative of differing population groups, the idea of race does not rest on such biological differences, but rather on the “culturally based perceptions and interpretations of this diversity” (Smedley, 2007, p. 14). Race is a socially constructed notion that has been transformed throughout the years but maintains a fundamental and integral role in structuring personal identity, personal perspectives, social structures, and cultural representations (Lopez, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1994). As asserted by Smedley (2007):

“Race” is a shorthand term for, as well as a symbol of, a “knowledge system,” a way of knowing, of perceiving, and of interpreting the world, and of

its contents (in this case, other human beings) in terms that are derived from previous cultural-historical experience and reflective of contemporary social values, relationships, and conditions. Every culture has its own way of perceiving the world; race is the kaleidoscope through which Americans have been conditioned in our culture to view other human beings. (p. 15)

**Racism.** While many argue racism is best associated with things such as the Ku Klux Klan, hate groups, the use of offensive racial epithets, prejudice, or discrimination; extending beyond these overt examples, racism is also an amalgamation of beliefs and ideologies that result in organizational and institutional inequity (Lopez, 1994, Omi & Winant, 1994). When considering racism, particularly as an American construct, it is important to recognize implicit actions that preserved unequal relationships, such as slavery or Jim Crow laws, developed into an explicit ideological racism that influences beliefs and conceptualizations (Frederickson, 1988). Though not all racism is the same, the commonality is domination based on a signifier of race. Some whites tend to understand racism as color consciousness, and, as a result, advocate color blindness as a means of disassociating from it, however, such a strategy fails to recognize the established system of power is racist within itself (Omi & Winant, 1994). Racism is not only about individual acts, but rather the structural and organizational components that have created a system where racism is institutionalized (Lopez, 1994). As stated by Niemonen (2007), racism is:

an ideological practice that creates, then naturalizes, group distinctions based on phenotypic or other variations with the intent to establish relations of superiority and inferiority. Racism is an epistemology that privileges Eurocentric values,

beliefs, and practices. It is the normative framework that defines ‘whiteness’ as the standard by which to evaluate others. Racism is a set of institutionally embedded exclusionary practices that create, and then reproduce, socioeconomic status attainment disparities, including tracking in schools and hiring. It is an aversion to critiquing the ideologies that justify existing arrangements, such as equality of opportunity and meritocracy. (...) Sometimes it is likened to distorted thinking, impaired consciousness, or a cancer on society. (p. 161)

**Deficit thinking.** When questioning why educational disparities exist between racial groups in academic and behavioral progress, deficit thinking is frequently utilized as a rationalization. Contemporary deficit thinking equates lack of success and achievement with inadequacy or lack of desire or motivation from the marginalized group and acknowledges a differentiation between the marginalized and the mainstream (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Yosso (2005) asserts that deficit thinking is “one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in U.S. Schools” (p. 75). As described by Valencia and Black (2002), deficit thinking is a “pseudoscientific notion...a mind-set molded by the fusion of ideology and sciences that blames the victim, rather than holding oppressive and inequitable schooling arrangements culpable” (p. 81). Valencia and Black (2002), continue in that, “Deficit thinking refers to the idea that students, particularly of low-SES backgrounds and of color, fail in school because they and their families have internal defects, or deficits, that thwart the learning process” (p. 83). Deficit thinking “takes the position that minority students and their families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative culture and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education”

(Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Consequently, according to the deficit thinking paradigm, lack of academic achievement of students of color directly results from their own individual deficits or the deficits of their families and, therefore, does not recognize a need to change the system (Anyon, 2005).

### **Overview of the Study Design**

The research study involved investigating the thoughts and perceptions of white educational leaders who are conscious about race and racism and want to talk about it in attempt to deepen and extend conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism. In an effort to reflect a variety of perspectives, the study explored educational leaders who represent three distinct groups: 1) aspiring educational leaders, 2) currently-practicing educational leaders, and 3) retired educational leaders. Eight participants were selected, three aspiring, three currently-practicing, and two-recently retired leaders, and all participants were identified as individuals who have first-hand knowledge of the research topic. Although people in positions of school-based leadership, such as principals and assistant principals, were targeted for the study, some participants also served in supervisor, director, and district administration roles.

In contrast to the pervasive level of deficit constructions regarding students of color, the study was an effort to explore the thoughts and experiences of educational leaders who oppose racial inequity and oppression, challenge notions of equating difference with deficiency, and identify with an advocacy stance for racial equity. Additionally, the study provided the opportunity for participants to: 1) explore their personal histories, experiences, and perceptions that influence their thoughts and actions

about race and racism, 2) reflect on the motivation of their passion for racial equity, and 3) consider how anti-racist philosophy will be or has been manifested in their work.

Responsive interviewing was employed and two semi-structured interviews with each of the selected participants were conducted. Questions included: (a) how did you come to know race and racism, (b) how do you talk with others about race and racism, and (c) in what ways do you consider yourself an advocate for racial equity? Additional questions used in the interviews can be found in Appendices A-C. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 75 minutes in length and served to promote reflective thinking of participants to further recognize their personal histories, thoughts, experiences, and motivations that encouraged participants to oppose racial inequity and oppression, advocate for racial equity, and challenge deficit-based notions of race by recognizing, confronting, and dialoguing about race and racism.

### **Overview of the Findings**

Even though all of the participants had professional experiences involving students of color and the influence of race and racism, I found their personal encounters and interactions were extremely influential in the development of their critical consciousness regarding the topic. Throughout the interview process, it became strikingly clear that each of the participants had at least one personal encounter or interaction that influenced their conceptualizations of race and racism. These personal experiences were seemingly critical incidences because their thoughts related to the experience appeared to influence their frame of reference and perspectives regarding race and racism. Additionally, since all participants had a personal story, seemingly seminal in nature, and all had a connection to the topic, they all appeared to see value in exploring



the topics of race and racism and were more than willing to talk about their thoughts, beliefs, and actions associated with these concepts. All of the participants agreed their experiences grew to be something more than just an experience and attributed to how they see things, as well as whom they had become. Furthermore, many characterized the experiences as transformational or pivotal in their thoughts, actions, and manifestations of leadership. While nearly all participants started off with little exposure to people who were racially different, these experiences with people of other races increased their awareness and, as a result, increased their consciousness; participants expressed their experiences had heightened their cognizance of race and racism, thereby heightening both their interest in the topic and sensitivity to the deeply-rooted foundations of racial inequity and oppression. Whether it was by chance or by choice, all of the participants have found themselves in circumstances or experiences where they were influenced to see things from a positioning other than the one they were raised, influenced, and socially-normed to employ.

Extending beyond the participant's narratives, since the research was partially designed around the idea of how white educational leaders describe their perceptions and experiences recognizing, confronting, and dialoguing with others about race and racism, findings are presented around these three concepts, as well.

Participants were in agreement that institutionalized and systemic racism is pervasive in both education and society in general. While most participants name this racism as "subtle", they assert not only is it troublesome because of its existence alone, but it continues to perpetuate educational inequities for students of color. Additionally, the subtleness, ambiguity, and failure to name make recognition of racism complex

because race-related dynamics are often not clearly stated or mentioned. As a result, since the implication is indirect, perhaps even unintentional, most people do not recognize such thoughts and comments as racist. Nevertheless, even though it may be more difficult to pinpoint in certain environmental contexts, participants argue racism is pervasive in schools and can be recognized in the form of biases, prejudice, lack of objectivity, lower expectations, inequitable access, inequitable resources, and systemic exclusion.

Along with recognition, commonalities in participants' perceptions about how they can confront racism were highlighted, as well. When considering how they confront racism, participants consistently shared ideas of how racism can be confronted through one's own thinking. The most popularly referenced idea was the simple process of drawing attention, pointing things out, and calling it like it is. According to participants, when something is racist or has racist connotations, it is critical to bring those ideas to light. Additionally, along with naming it and putting race on the table, participants also agreed it is important to highlight inconsistencies, counterexamples, and contradictions.

Along with calling it like it is, highlighting inconsistencies, and promoting more equitable hiring practices, participants highlight confronting racism can also take the form of engaging in conversation with other colleagues to heighten awareness and encourage greater equity. Participants frequently reflected on the value of dialogue. Whether it was having conversations with family or colleagues, participants considered dialogue an opportunity to not only express their personal thoughts and ideas, but an attempt to further highlight racist beliefs and practices and raise awareness of racial inequities. Participants, however, were in agreement that the subjects of race and racism

are often avoided and emphasized the lack of venues to engage in dialogue about race and racism. All participants articulated conversations about race and racism are rarely held in schools. While they might be referenced in cultural competency training or when a negative, race-related scenario occurs, for the most part, discussions about race and racism are uncommon.

While the interviews were not a conversation, they were still a purposefully created space for participants to discuss their thoughts, ideas, and experiences on race and racism. The participants cited participation in the study encouraged them to think about things they had not thought of in a long time, encouraged them to be more aware of their own thoughts and actions, and inspired them to participate in race-related conversations outside of the context of the study.

Even though all participants considered themselves opponents of racial inequity, and most considered themselves advocates of racial equity, many struggled to align themselves with anti-racism as they do not always feel they are in a position to take actions in alignment with their beliefs and values. Even when it may cause them to feel guilty, participants drew attention to this idea of thoughtful inaction. Subsequently, the influence of time, place, and professional role was a theme commonly inferred by participants. Given the controversial connotations associated with racism and the historical implications of race, participants highlight there are sociopolitical influences, factors, and repercussions to consider, systems to navigate, and tensions to be negotiated.

The findings have implications for framing the impact of race and racism and further contextualizing negotiations of race-related tensions. Additionally, interpretation of the findings adds insight to further conceptualizing racial identity models and anti-

racism, as well as purposefully creating conversational spaces and encouraging collegial relationships to foster employment of race-related dialogue.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

This chapter provided a context for the research by highlighting the continued lack of discourse on conceptualizations and implications of race, racism, and antiracism, as well as the pervasive nature of deficit thinking that is often used to explain the substantial educational disparities for students of color. The chapter introduction served as a means to highlight my personal narrative and contextual understanding of race and racism in education, particularly in regards to differentiated educational conditions, expectations, and academic achievement, as well as the prevalence of deficit thinking and harmful ideologies regarding students of color. After highlighting the substantial educational disparities, pervasive levels of deficit thinking, and failure of educational training to prepare educators to successfully work with student populations that represent multiple racial groups, the need to deepen and extend conceptualizations and influence of race, racism, and anti-racism prevails. The chapter also provides a brief synopsis of the research questions, theoretical framework, definition of terms, and an overview of the study and findings.

An examination of the literature that helped frame the research is presented in Chapter Two and focuses on exposed educational disparities, cultural capital, the deficit thinking paradigm, and race and racism. Examining the components of race and racism more deeply, Critical Race Theory, Racial Identity Development, Anti-Racism Theory, White Privilege, and Critical Whiteness Theory are explored.

Chapter Three outlines the critical theoretical perspective used to establish the framework for the method of inquiry, as well as the research design. Details are provided on participant selection, interview structure, research interview protocols, and data collection methods. The chapter concludes with an overview of how data was analyzed and reported, as well as ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapter four serves as a presentation of the findings from the research study. While a portion of the chapter is dedicated to providing a case description of each participant and presenting their narratives and personal histories, as their stories are critical to their understanding and interpretation of race and racism, the remainder of the chapter focuses on interpretations from cross-case analysis related to recognizing and confronting race and racism as concepts. These conceptual themes provide a focus for the reporting and are presented thematically.

Chapter five reviews themes in the research findings in relation to the literature; emphasizes nuances, commonalities, contradictions, and complications brought to light in the research findings; highlights interesting implications for educational leadership; and discusses how my role as the researcher influenced the research, as well as how the research influenced me as the researcher.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

While racial inequity and differentiated outcomes for students of color have been established, researchers argue current thinking, practices, and policies continue to perpetuate harmful injustices (Ferguson, 2000; Kozol, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Orfield & Lee, 2004; Stuart Wells & Frankenberg, 2007). Although educators may not believe they have a role in continued inequities, as Kumashiro (2000) suggests, harm frequently results from inaction. Therefore, thoughtful steps must be taken to further comprehend the dynamic of oppression and highlight strategies to counteract it. As Ndimande (2004) asserts, “it becomes important to interrupt hegemonic tendencies, including those that manifest themselves through educational institutions” (p. 202). Education that promotes or tolerates oppression must be challenged and difference cannot be equated to deficiency, but rather should be regarded as an asset. In order to challenge traditional notions that equate difference with deficiency and interrupt harmful assumptions, it is helpful to utilize a critical paradigm to examine race and racism. Employing tenets of Critical Race Theory, along with Critical Whiteness, can aid researchers in examining the endemic and pervasive nature of racism, as well as the influences and implications of whiteness. Both theoretical perspectives were used in exploring the thoughts and perceptions of white educational leaders who are conscious about race and racism and want to talk about it in attempt to deepen and extend conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism.

Although some research compares students of color to white students, other research is more specific and compares black and or Hispanic students to white students. While the study allowed participants to establish their own interpretation of students of color, information in the literature review will vary from general to specific comparisons.

### **Educational Disparities for Students of Color**

Current ideologies and dialogues on race support established social practices in education that normalize whiteness and contribute to academic and behavioral gaps thereby advantaging white students over students of color. Existing literature is robust with the assertion that schools are failing to meet the needs of students of color (Anyon, 2005; Davis, 2008; Ferguson, 2000; Kozol, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2000), arguing there is a noteworthy gap between the educational preparation and performance levels of white students and students of color (Mead, 2006; Rothstein, 2004; Wiggan, 2007) as well as their established perceptions of schooling (Ferguson, 2007; McWhorter, 2001; Ogbu, 2003). A substantial gap is present between racial groups in academic, extracurricular, and behavioral progress (Davis, 2008; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Ladson-Billings (2006a) refers to the existing gap and differentiated progress as an “education debt” to highlight the significance of the disparities that have accumulated throughout the history of America and highlight the influence of “historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components” (p. 3) on education.

In 1966, the U.S. Office of Education released the Equality of Educational Opportunity, more commonly known as the Coleman Report, a report that brought attention to the idea that black students lag academically behind their white peers (Viadero, 2006). The report suggested factors outside of school may be more impactful

than in-school factors and “argued that the characteristics of school districts were not significantly related to school achievement as much as the problems in students’ communities and family backgrounds” (Wiggan, 2007, p. 315). Forty years later, through the utilization of a critical epistemology and evaluation of equity audits (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003), researchers contend substantial gaps between racial groups in academic, extracurricular, and behavioral achievement still persist.

**Achievement factors and indicators.** Concerning academic progress, white students achieve overall higher academic success, outscoring their black peers on both standardized tests and maintaining higher grade point averages (Ferguson, 2000; Mead, 2006; Rothstein, 2004; Wiggan, 2007). Black and Hispanic students often attend schools with undesirable educational conditions, poor educational climates, and placement in a less rigorous curriculum and classrooms than white students (Anyon, 2005; Kozol, 1991, 2006; Ogbu, 2003; Wiggan, 2007), subsequently, resulting in higher drop out rates for these groups (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012; Mead, 2006) and leaving them under-prepared (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012; Kozol, 1991, 2006).

According to data from *The Nation’s Report Card* (NAEP, 2011), white students outscore both Hispanic and black students in reading. Results from the 2011 standardized test indicate Delaware was the only state in which the gap between white and black students narrowed between the years of 1998 and 2011. The report also highlights the gap between white and Hispanic students narrowed only in California and Oregon during this time period. Also, according to the NAEP (2011) report, though the percentage of white students scoring at advanced and proficient levels increased since 2009, there was no notable change for black or Hispanic students. In regards to data



highlighted by Rothstein (2004), “On average, if white students score at around the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile on a standardized math or reading test, black students typically score around the 23<sup>rd</sup> percentile” (p. 108). Black students express less understanding of lessons than their white peers and maintain overall lower grade point averages (Ferguson, 2000). The proportion of black students placed in honors or advanced courses is small in percentage. Additionally, in contrast to Advanced Placement courses that have a tendency to be comprised of primarily white and Asian students, the classes where many students of color are assigned lack structure and maintain a poor educational climate that is not conducive to learning (Kozol, 2006; McWhorter, 2001; Ogbu, 2003). As referenced by Ferguson (2007), when looking at “...*the Tripod Project for School Improvement*, an effort focused on closing achievement gaps, fewer than 60% of any racial group answered ‘mostly true’ or ‘totally true’ that: ‘My teacher in this class has several good ways of explaining each topic we cover’” (p. 33).

Urban schools with primarily Hispanic and black student bodies struggle to effectively serve their populations. As a result, students attending such schools are not benefitting from the same educational resources or opportunities as the majority of their white peers, subsequently leaving them less prepared (Anyon, 2005; Kozol, 1991, 2006). In 2000, for the first time since the 1960s, black children were more likely to attend predominately black schools. Seventy percent of black students attended majority-black schools and 37 percent of those attended schools that were over 90 percent black in student composition (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Pettigrew, 2004). Segregation of Latinos has increased rather steadily since 1968. The percentage of Latino students attending 90 to 100 percent minority schools more than tripled from 1968

to 2001, increasing from 12 percent to 37 percent (Orfield & Lee, 2004). Segregation of English-language learners is even more extreme given nearly 66 percent attend racially isolated schools (Orfield, Frankenberg & Lee, 2003). Although the suburban populations are now over 25 percent minority and high numbers of black and Latino students are moving to the suburbs, they are often moving into racially segregated schools (Orfield, Frankenberg & Lee, 2003). Also, even though many charter schools were established to enhance educational opportunities, data indicates even these schools are racially segregated. According to information from the Civil Rights Project at UCLA, seven out of ten black students that attend charter schools are on campus with few white students (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010). Such extreme and persistent degrees of racial segregation in the United States have actually started to be referred to as apartheid by some (Kozol, 2006).

As cited by Wiggan (2007), tracing back to the 1960s, “Clark (1965) argued that public schools in America’s urban ghettos reflect the oppressive damage of ‘racial exclusion (p.111). Clark proposed that segregation and inferior education prepare students to be second-class citizens in society” (p. 317). Despite the fact time has advanced 50 plus years, many would argue progress is minimal. Describing conditions deemed to be the worst since *Brown v. Board of Education*, researchers describe the current financial disparities resulting from property taxes and paint a picture of the vast differentiation in spending per pupil (Anyon, 2005; Kozol, 1991, 2006). Out-dated facilities, overcrowding, lack of supplies, shortage of substitute teachers, and teacher salaries that are shy in comparison to surrounding suburban districts are just some of the concerns that influence urban schools, decrease student achievement (Kozol, 1991,

2006), and result in some students in urban schools feeling education is not a priority (Anyon, 2005). Subsequently, this existing economic inequity results in harsh educational inequality where racial minority students are provided decreased educational opportunities.

Contrasting children of the privileged versus children of the marginalized, Kozol (2006) describes inequity in facilities, resources, course content, expectations and possibilities. These “apartheid” schools, that comprise a student population of at least 90 percent racial minority students, focus on career preparation courses such as cosmetology rather than academically-focused classes such as Advanced Placement. Furthermore, the punitive dimensions of high-stakes testing results in a scripted, structured curriculum that employs a robotic pedagogy of teaching to the test. Supporting Kozol’s ideas, Anyon (1980) argues different socioeconomic statuses of students are given identifying labels deemed appropriate by their levels of income and parental professions. According to Anyon, the Executive Elite schools are those with families earning \$100,000 a year and above, where occupations are undoubtedly white-collar positions. In this environment, focus is placed on developing ones’ analytical and intellectual powers as this will prepare students to better replicate their parents’ path of success. The Affluent Professional Schools exclusively educate students from the upper middle class. The goals for these pupils center on understanding and performance of tasks. Middle Class Schools and Working Class Schools also exist. Although some parents from affluent neighborhoods may permit their children to attend these schools, they are mainly comprised of students from similar zip codes with mid to low economic status. These schools tend to expect satisfactory means of productivity and focus on getting the right answer. In Working

Class Schools the parental incomes are usually below the poverty line, parental occupations tend to require non-academic skills, the ideas expressed in school do not evoke creativity, and communication between teachers, students, parents, and the community is nearly nonexistent (Anyon, 1980). Along with lowered academic expectations in marginalized communities, traditional forms of behavioral reinforcement are employed in attempt to establish an environment of order and control. There is also little discussion about the possibility of attending college. The undesirable existing educational conditions negatively impact the thoughts and morale of the students resulting in feelings of frustration and disenfranchisement (Anyon, 1980, 2005; Kozol, 1991, 2006).

**Cultural capital.** Although the substandard education provided in the urban school context is highlighted by many researchers (Anyon, 1980, 2005; Davis, 2008; Ferguson, 2000; Kozol, 1991, 2006; McWhorter, 2001; Mead, 2006; Ogbu, 2003), rather than centering on the influence of race, some consider economics to be the influential factor in academic performance and advocate the belief that socioeconomic status impacts students on a much larger scale than race or ethnicity (Hayes & Juarez, 2009; Payne, 2003). This speculation, however, is extremely controversial since research does not support such an exclusive conclusion.

As highlighted by Critical Race Theory, intersectionality is an important dynamic to consider since ones' experiences do not result from their race, socio-economic status, or gender alone, but rather an intersection of those components. Since American society is racialized and all peoples are influenced by race (Closson, 2010; Thompson, 1997; 2003), it is critical to consider that, in conjunction with economic status, family

background and racial demographics play influential roles in academic performance (Hayes & Juarez, 2009; Viadero, 2006; Wiggan, 2007). Additionally highlighting the influence of race on educational disparities, research shows, across economic lines, students of color achieve at a level substandard to that of their white peers indicating that even wealthy students of color do not perform as well academically as wealthy white students (Johnson, 2002; Rothstein, 2004; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, Wiggan, 2007).

When considering the educational disparities, it is important to note it is not just about academic and behavioral gaps as there are students of color who succeed but still have to navigate the system; therefore, the influence of cultural capital must be considered, as well. Some argue since America's schools focus on white middle-class ideals and philosophies, students of color, in regards to attitudes, skills and knowledge, are already behind their white peers when they first enter school, thereby leaving them lagging academically from the onset (Kumashiro, 2000; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Once in school, the gap continues to widen; as cited by Lee (2002), "Because of the history of racism in education and its impact on the curriculum, if you are a student of color, the experiences of your people are often missing, misrepresented or marginalized in the curriculum, and your prior knowledge may not be considered or used as a source of learning" ( p.2).

In regards to cultural imperialism, referencing the "assimilationist ideology", researchers argue it is the responsibility of students of color to adopt the norms of the dominant culture and model the behavior of the white majority (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 27). "Schools and teachers treat the language, prior knowledge, and values of African Americans as aberrant and often presume that the teacher's job is to rid African American

students of any vestiges of their own culture” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 206). On the contrary, as referenced by Ndimande (2004), when white students arrive at school with their “cultural capital” in hand, it puts them at an even further advantage in regards to the school culture given “both the school and their culture share more or less the same understanding, values, and artifacts” (p. 201).

Morris (2007) conducted research through a two-year ethnographic study to investigate how black girls perceive their experience of schooling. Morris concluded more emphasis was placed on social rather than academic skills and a significant focus was given to transforming students’ characteristically “loud” behavior. Attempting to mold their behavior into what would be considered more acceptable by the white mainstream; black girls were expected to transform their individual norms to mold themselves into what would be distinguished as more “ladylike.” Morris (2007) argues such hidden curriculum suggests the students’ current identity is not good enough and does not measure up to the white norm that has been established as the acceptable standard. Consequently, black students often feel their teachers do not care for them and have no valid interest in their growth and achievement (McWhorter, 2001; Ogbu, 2003).

Along with receiving an education inferior in quality, the differentiated treatment and limited value placed on the needs and values of the minority community frequently influences feelings of marginalization and alienation. “Racially isolated schools, internalize the degrading effects of segregation, which leads to feelings of shame and anger, as well as limited aspirations” (Stuart Wells & Frankenberg, 2007). Students of color often find “their learning experience alienating” (Wiggan, 2007, p. 318) and, in the case of continued busing, minority students frequently suffer the most, for it is usually

African-American and Hispanic students being bussed out of their own communities and into majority, white neighborhoods (Pettigrew, 2004). In such cases, marginalized communities frequently feel ill served by their schools and excluded from the overall school population and decision-making process; subsequently influencing a sense of disconnect, isolation, and educational disinterest (Anyon, 2005). Such feelings may also inspire civil disobedience in some students in attempt to prompt the school to recognize lack of responsiveness to the marginalized population (Larson & Ovando, 2001). Attempts to assimilate students of color into mainstream culture can result in feelings of exclusion. Such feelings of exclusion may influence further marginalization and differentiation and continue to perpetuate the image that marginalized students lack desire or motivation and exhibit inadequacies in comparison to their white counterparts.

**Behavioral and discipline disparities.** Further highlighting educational disparities, along with cultural capital and lower academic achievement, higher suspension, drop out and expulsion rates are significant issues afflicting many Hispanic and African American students in American schools (Ferguson, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Mead, 2006). In data referenced by the *Alliance for Excellent Education* (2012), the overall national graduation rate in 2008 was 72 percent. While white students graduated at a rate of 78 percent, Hispanic students averaged 58 percent, and black students were reported at just 57 percent. “Although possessing a high school diploma is no guarantee of success in U.S. society, not having one spells certain economic and social failure” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 212).

Some argue stereotypes that make African-American boys appear threatening and dangerous exacerbate the harsh and persistent discipline of their particular subgroup in

schools and place them further at-risk (Ferguson, 2000). Black students are three times more likely to be suspended, as well as three and a half times more likely to be expelled, than their white peers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012). Ferguson (2000) questions the disproportional representation of black males in punishing rooms, such as in-school suspension, throughout American schools to highlight institutionalized racism and the role it plays in establishing unfair procedures and the establishment of a racial order in schools. She finds boys who have been labeled as behavioral challenges look critically at schooling as a response to the negative perceptions their teachers have established such as being bound for jail and being labeled as unsalvageable. The influence of negative portrayals of African Americans in the media, and society at large, establishes a heightened difficulty in encouraging or accepting positive perceptions since society has already established negative labels, stereotypes, and lowered expectations (Anyon, 2005; Ferguson, 2000). As a result, “In addition to being told they cannot perform at high levels, African American students often are taught by teachers who would rather not teach them” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 208).

### **Deficit Thinking**

When questioning why educational disparities exist between racial groups, deficit thinking and cultural deficit theories are frequently utilized as a rationalization. As described by Valencia and Black (2002), deficit thinking is a “pseudoscientific notion...a mind-set molded by the fusion of ideology and sciences that blames the victim, rather than holding oppressive and inequitable schooling arrangements culpable” (p. 81). Valencia and Black (2002), continue in that, “Deficit thinking refers to the idea that students, particularly of low-SES backgrounds and of color, fail in school because they



and their families have internal defects, or deficits, that thwart the learning process” (p. 83). Given societies are positioned to support the dominant view and maintain the notion that anything outside the established perspective is often proscribed and perceived as “otherness” (Kumashiro, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Takaki, 2008), many consider students of color, as well as students of low socioeconomic backgrounds, will not achieve as well academically as their white counterparts (Anyon, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000). The culture of poverty asserts people of lower economic backgrounds, many of whom are racial minorities, by way of their own actions and beliefs, structure their culture in such a way that it continues to perpetuate poverty (Payne, 2003). Alluding to generalized assumptions that influence decisions, the culture of poverty maintains the cultural norms of those living in poverty are substandard to those of the middle class. According to Ladson-Billings (2000), “Thus, the educational research literature, when it considers African American learners at all, has constructed all African American children, regardless of economic or social circumstance, within the deficit paradigm” (p. 206).

Contemporary deficit thinking associates lower achievement and academic success with personal incompetence, deficient desire, or substandard motivation from the marginalized group and emphasizes a differentiation between the marginalized and the mainstream (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Yosso (2005) asserts deficit thinking is “one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in US Schools” (p. 75). Deficit thinking “takes the position that minority students and their families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative culture and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education” (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Rather than acknowledging that America was founded on racial inequalities

that favor people of European ancestry, and recognizing the hardships many racial minorities have had to endure, it is seemingly less complicated and more suitable to blame the victims for their own inequitable conditions (Davis, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2006b). It is easier to cite the student as the cause of the lack of achievement rather than the “failure in the wider structure of opportunities” (Anyon, 2005, p. 179). Consequently, according to the deficit thinking paradigm, lower academic achievement of students of color is a direct result of the students’ personal shortcomings or the deficits of their families and, therefore, does not recognize a need to change the system (Anyon, 2005).

The deeply entrenched deficit thinking mindset is often associated with social reproduction theory. While schools are often characterized as environments that encourage students to rise to their fullest potential, social reproduction theory suggests schools encourage, often exacerbate, the existing social inequalities (Anyon, 1980, 2005; Downey, von Hippel & Broh, 2004). Subordinate cultures, as McLaren (2009) describes, are viewed as inferior to the dominant culture, despite oppositional ideologies, and do not hold the cultural capital that further empowers the dominant culture.

Considering the idea of cultural capital, marginalized students have been raised in a system where they have been sent a systematic message that they are inferior and unable to excel at the same academic levels as the dominant group. Coupled with this, there are few voices that challenge this firmly established mindset and question equating difference with deficiency. Research conducted with pre-service teachers found students’ knowledge of diverse cultures was minimal and illustrates a pervasive sense of deficit thinking (Davis, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2006b; Marx, 2001). Along with pre-service teachers, research also reveals experienced classroom teachers blame students and their

families for lower academic achievement and perceived inadequacies (Ladson-Billings, 2006b; McKenzie, 2001).

Many educators report their educational training did little to prepare them to address the needs of racially diverse learners (Ladson-Billings, 2000). In order to effectively educate culturally diverse students, educators must first become culturally competent (Davis, 2008; Harmon, 2002). Considering many white educators lack basic knowledge of cultural history and experience dealing with discrimination and racism, current solutions for addressing inequity in academic achievement will only serve as “Band-Aids” until teachers acquire and apply knowledge and skills to promote diversity and aid in the progress of all students (Jost, Jost, & Whitfield, 2005). Ladson-Billings (2006) uses the phrase “the poverty of culture” to highlight pre-service and novice teachers’ lack of understanding of the cultures of marginalized students. Research has found students characterize ineffective teachers that lack an understanding of African American culture by saying “they won’t teach us” which leaves students feeling alienated and isolated (Harmon, 2002).

Many pre-service white teachers frequently reference their problems with African American male students, but fail to develop an understanding or appreciation of their students’ culture or experiences. Such teachers are not utilizing the construct of culture to their advantage in order to create education that is more inclusive for all students, but rather are setting up both themselves and their students for disappointment. “It is much easier to explain students’ failure by looking at something internal to the students than endemic in this thing we call school culture” (Ladson-Billings, 2006b, p. 106).

A paradigm shift would help to advance past the current deficit frame of thought. In order to successfully lead a school to attain both equity and excellence, people first have to believe it is possible (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Bearing in mind current training tends to provide only minimal exposure to cultural competency, it is essential to revise education programs to infuse concepts of cultural knowledge into the pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2006) and develop curricula that accounts for race and racism (Davis, 2008; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Suggested strategies include employment of challenging curriculum, establishment of high expectations, and equitable distribution of resources, extended learning opportunities, and improved training and preparation in relation to cultural competency (Davis, 2008). Utilization of Critical Race Theory (CRT) can aid in this process, because it establishes a foundation that racism is endemic in American society and influences many aspects of American life.

Considering the educational disparities between white students and students of color (Mead, 2006; Rothstein, 2004; Wiggan, 2007), it is essential to push for discussion and dialogue as to why many educators hold standards and expectations for racial minority students significantly lower than the expectations of those held for the racial majority. It is critical to address ideas of deficit thinking in attempt to confront prejudicial beliefs to effectively communicate with parents and educate children (Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2006; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003).

### **Race and Racism**

Even though many would describe the construct of race as biologically-based, America has deepened this notion into a socially constructed reality that is both historically contingent and socially significant (Omi & Winant, 1994; Lopez, 1994).

Intricately intertwining race and ethnicity in such a way they cannot be easily unraveled, people willingly label themselves as “African-American”, “Asian-American”, “Hispanic”, “Latino”, “Native American”, and “White.” However, race runs much deeper than physical appearance alone. In America, people look at their own and each others’ skin color, hair texture, and nose and lip structure as a means of defining “what” someone is. When individuals cannot define “what” someone is, it often leaves them with a feeling of confusion and then frustration. Thinking about this frustration reinforces the reality that race is an incredibly complex and deeply entrenched construct. “Our notions of race (and its use) are so complex that even when it fails to ‘make sense’ we continue to employ and deploy it” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9).

Not only does it allow people to trace from where someone might have come, it gives them a foundation to define “who” they are. Peoples’ phenotypes influence how society sees and defines them. These notions of conceptual blackness, conceptual yellowness, conceptual brownness, conceptual redness, and conceptual whiteness create a deeply entrenched perception of reality and help to shape both conscious and unconscious beliefs and associations. For example just by seeing a person’s race, many automatically conclude answers to questions such as in what neighborhood he lives, how he talks, how she dresses, what category of job he has, what she eats, how she performs on standardized tests, how much money he makes, if she is “at risk”, if he is likely to have a criminal record, whether he is to be feared, what type of music she likes, and the list goes on and on. If someone does not fit the model, people often consider him/her an exception to the rule and conclude that he/she is not like “the others”. This social construct has created a phenomenon and has established a reality in which “social meanings connect

our faces to our souls” (Lopez, 1994, p. 3). Race is central to both identity and understanding of the world, as well as how people see others and perceive their understandings of the world.

Racial awareness is pervasive and is an integral, structural component of society. However, the notion of race has evolved throughout the last 200 plus years. “America, I would conclude, was not born racist; it became so gradually as the result of a series of crimes against black humanity that stemmed primarily from selfishness, greed, and the pursuit of privilege” (Fredrickson, 1988, p. 205). Historical constructs “gradually transformed English ethnocentrism into antiblack racism” and then “into an explicit ideological racism” (Fredrickson, 1988, pp. 185-186). Economic structures created a system of status; however, when status alone was not able to justify the inhumane institution of slavery, or privilege a white farmer over a free black one, a sense of racial inferiority was established to make sense of what was occurring. Not wanting to relinquish the system of privilege and power, many people continued to perpetuate the concept of racial inferiority a century after the abolition of slavery, thereby creating a deeply-seeded reality of both societal and institutional racism. As stated by Niemonen (2007), racism is:

an ideological practice that creates, then naturalizes, group distinctions based on phenotypic or other variations with the intent to establish relations of superiority and inferiority. Racism is an epistemology that privileges Eurocentric values, beliefs, and practices. It is the normative framework that defines ‘whiteness’ as the standard by which to evaluate others. Racism is a set of institutionally embedded exclusionary practices that create, and then reproduce, socioeconomic

status attainment disparities, including tracking in schools and hiring. It is an aversion to critiquing the ideologies that justify existing arrangements, such as equality of opportunity and meritocracy. (...) Sometimes it is likened to distorted thinking, impaired consciousness, or a cancer on society. (p. 161)

Considering racism has become an engrained entity in American culture; many educators do not address issues of inequity because they do not recognize their existence. As a result, race and racism are rarely discussed in schools or in educational training (Ladson-Billings, 2000). However, in order to progress, race and racism cannot continue to be overlooked or ignored. People must accept racism is a natural condition in American life that impacts everyone. As expressed by Closson (2010), “when we accept racism as endemic, we accept that everyone is infected with a disease to greater or lesser degrees. Whites suffer from White privilege; Blacks suffer from internalized racism. To claim to be color-blind allows the disease to spread unchecked” (p. 279).

To look at how deeply entrenched race and racism have become and recognize the impact on conscious and unconscious beliefs, it is helpful to look at the Implicit Associations Test for Race (Harvey & Allard, 2009). The ten-minute online test presents a series of words and images that can be categorized as either positive or negative and the images can be sorted as either African American or European American. The purpose of the test is to probe unconscious associations, attitudes, and biases. The test, that has been taken over one million times, suggests 48 percent of participants exhibit a strong preference for European Americans, 13 percent indicate an automatic preference for European Americans, and 12 percent demonstrate a slight automatic preference for European Americans. According to the results, only 12 percent of participants show little

or no automatic preference between African-Americans and European Americans

(<http://www.understandingprejudice.org/iat/>).

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical theory addresses the dynamics of power and oppression and explores strategies to advance society in a more equitable direction by examining and evaluating power relations and highlighting questions such as: (1) who controls power, (2) what constitutes power, and (3) how is power utilized to maintain current social standings (Lynn, et al., 2006). Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a critical theory that establishes race and racism as the precursor to oppression and identifies race as the key component in social inequities (Lynn, et al., 2006). “Critical race theory begins with the notion that racism is normal in American society” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 7). Although CRT is interdisciplinary, it can be used to explore various educational components and attempt to provide a framework to challenge the dominant discourse on race, racism and cultural deficit theories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Seeking to disrupt the current educational patterns to work for equity, proponents suggests utilization of CRT will aid in such efforts by establishing a foundation that focuses on the central tenets of CRT: (a) racism is endemic; (b) race is socially constructed; (c) racialized concepts change over time; (d) interest convergence is beneficial for progress; (e) inclusion of counter stories gives voice to those who are frequently silenced; and (f) intersectionality helps to understand how different components such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality influence experiences (Abrams & Moon, 2006). Although CRT’s foundations are rooted in legal studies of the 1970s, CRT has expanded to include various sub-sections outside of the traditional black-white binary that include Latino Critical Race Studies (LatCrit), Asian American Critical



Race Studies (AsianCrit), American Indian Critical Race Studies (TribalCrit), Critical Race Feminism (CRF), and Critical Whiteness (Yosso, 2005).

Although the concept of race and the structure of racism have evolved over the years, race continues to be an influential force in shaping social relations in America today. As cited by Peterson (1999), according to Derrick Bell, renowned father of CRT, “racist behavior ends only when it is no longer beneficial to those who exhibit it” (84). When looking at the expansive opportunities and privileges from which the dominant group benefits, it seems difficult to imagine a time when such behavior will no longer be advantageous. Having the upper-hand is consistently beneficial, so it is hard to visualize when the dominant group would willingly relinquish positions of power and privilege that could result in decreased advantages. As cited by Jimenez Morfin, Perez, and Parker (2006), the interest convergence principle, described by Bell as that “which can be defined as persons of color in U.S. society only receiving political, economic, or other major gains when these gains can be used to somehow serve the interests of White European Americans” (p. 252), could be utilized to enable white people to see advantages in relinquishing some power and opportunity. According to Parker and Villalpando (2007), “the way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race” (p.519). Subsequently, if open and honest dialogue is not encouraged and people are unwilling to talk about the deeply-rooted and pervasive nature of racism, possibilities for democratic change remain challenging.

Application of CRT to educational research began to surface in the mid-1990s through the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997) who argued that race was an

“undertheorized topic” in education (Vann Lynch, 2006, p. 56). Utilizing CRT in educational discourse puts the topics of race and racism, as well as the voices and experiences of students of color, at the center of the discussion and encourages employing the issue of race in the analysis of educational inequities and opportunities (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Vann Lynch, 2006). As maintained by Solórzano and Yosso (2000):

CRT in education is defined as a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the marginal position and subordination of African American and Latino students. CRT asks such questions as: What role do schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination? (p. 42)

When considering curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, or desegregation, employing the central tenets of CRT can be useful in accounting for educational inequities and opportunities (Ladson-Billings, 1998). For example, in regards to curriculum, “it is not just the distortions, omissions, and stereotypes of school curriculum content that must be considered, it also is the rigor of the curriculum and access to what is deemed ‘enriched’ curriculum via gifted and talented courses and classes” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). Or, in the case of instruction, CRT can be applied to look at why much instruction of African American students is founded on the idea that the students are academically deficient and takes a remediate approach (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As argued by Ladson-Billings (1998), “Adopting and adapting CRT as a

framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education *and* propose radical solutions for addressing it” (p. 22).

Although such actions may be unpopular or uncomfortable, given the institutionalized advantage of white privilege is widely unacknowledged (Applebaum, 2003; Thompson, 2003), disrupting the silence and current discourse of avoidance to encourage open dialogue about race and racism would benefit movement and progress. Vann Lynch (2006) chronicles a year of teaching freshman teacher-education students in an educational foundations course utilizing a CRT framework. Providing students with a context for teaching diverse populations in order to develop culturally responsive educators, Vann Lynch employed a CRT framework to begin the work for educational equity through recognizing racism as a tool of domination, discussing what it means to teach students who are culturally diverse, confronting biases, tackling difficult questions, and developing empathy for marginalized students. Slightly different than those previously referenced by Abrams and Moon (2006), Vann Lynch (2006) outlines the six central tenets of CRT; (1) racism is an ordinary condition in American society, (2) suggested color-blindness and race neutral mentalities are challenged, (3) race is a product of social thought and historical context and should be studied in relation to the law, (4) understanding society and the law should be centered on the experiences of people of color, (5) interdisciplinary discourse is encouraged to integrate multiple perspectives, and (6) the primary goal of CRT-based work is elimination of racial oppression and oppression in all of its forms. Vann Lynch suggests application of this framework to the course resulted in heightened responsiveness to the educational context

of urban awareness for students and competency enhancement for success working with students of color.

Considering the notion racism is endemic in American society, employing tenets of CRT to focus on race and racism in educational research and analysis of educational inequities and practice can aid in understanding. As Cornel West (1993) proclaims, “Race Matters” and it is important to consider “the need to ask difficult questions and challenge traditional notions in our personal lives as well as our work in education” (Bergerson, 2003, p. 61). Students of color have been silenced for far too long and have been made to feel they are a “problem” (DuBois, 1989); therefore, giving voice to the voice that has been silenced is long overdue. “Until lions have their own ‘story tellers,’ tales of a lion hunt will always glorify the hunter” (Stanley, 2006, p. 702).

Subsequently, until students of color are permitted to share their counter stories and disenfranchisement is exposed, the dominant voice will continue to uphold untruths or represent only part of the picture. The story will continue to proclaim all students are receiving equal educational opportunities and the status quo will remain undisturbed.

### **Racial Identity Development**

Along with recognizing the endemic nature and considering the socially constructed disposition of racism, CRT proponents assert it is important to reflect on the multiple factors that influence thoughts and perceptions on race. Although some racial identity models are developmental and comprised of stages, other models, such as the multiple identity development model and the development of intercultural sensitivity, are not developmental, but rather ecological and take into account contextual, historical, political, and socially constructed influences. Helms’ Model of Racial Identity

Development (1990) and Frankenberg's Model on the Five Phases of White Racial Consciousness (1993) are two popular models used to analyze development of racial identity. Both of these models are comprised of stages and appear to exist along a continuum. It is critical to mention, however; in either model, the stages do not have to be experienced in a linear fashion and fluidity between and throughout stages is common.

**Helm's Model.** Viewing race from a psychological perspective, Helms (1990) offered a developmental model of racial identity to understand behaviors and relationships of African Americans and European Americans. Presenting major theories of racial identity, Helms utilized theoretical perspectives and described how the role of race relations and racial identity has socially evolved over time. She established measures for evaluating individuals' racial identity, as well as racist tendencies, by focusing on the relationship of racial identity and other personal characteristics such as values and experiences. In order to develop the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS), Helms focused on basic racial identity theory and measurement issues as they relate to individual and interactive relationships. Methods of examining racial identity and how it influences everyday interactions and relationships were considered, as well. According to Helms, individuals in the Contact Stage have little or no experience with people from other races that frequently results in curiosity or fear of people of color. The Disintegration Stage is distinguished by feelings of guilt or anger experienced when faced with the reality of one's own racial advantage. The Reintegration Stage illustrates the phase in which individuals focus their guilt-associated anger back on people of color, thereby attempting to reverse the feelings they are starting to recognize. The Pseudo-Independent Stage is indicative of abandonment of feelings of white superiority while

maintaining a negative image of one's own white identity. The Immersion Stage describes positive acceptance of one's whiteness as well as commitment to disseminate accurate information related to race. Internalization, the final stage of Helms's model, is characterized by individuals who have advanced beyond reflections of conceptions of whiteness as a social construct, acknowledge White Privilege while still being proud of their own identity, and dedicate themselves to further understanding and fighting the injustice of racism and discrimination (Helms, 1990). Helms emphasized these stages do not exist along a rigid continuum and it is possible to fluctuate between and in and out of stages.

**Frankenberg's Model.** Similar to Helms, Frankenberg (1993) established measures for evaluating white people's racial identity development. Frankenberg's model highlights five phases of white racial consciousness that describe how white people understand race and White Privilege. In the first phase titled Essentialist Racism, a belief of white superiority based on biological difference is upheld. The Color Blindness phase characterizes those who believe recognition of race is seen as prejudicial, so they attempt to bracket or ignore race altogether; the Color Blindness phase is one of the most common phases in Frankenberg's Model. In the Power Evasion stage, people recognize race, but do not acknowledge the associated power difference. They embrace feel-good relationships and avoid uncomfortable discussions regarding race and power. The Power Evasion stage is also a popular stage. In the fourth stage titled Race Cognizance: Rethinking Race and Power, people begin to recognize the influence of race on daily life. Individuals in this stage identify institutional racism, are willing to think about difficult questions, and focus on reflection rather than action.

Frankenberg's final stage is Race Cognizance: Transforming Silence into Language and Action. People in this stage understand individual racism and view political activism as beneficial in taking action. In this stage the focus shifts to collective action rather than individual thinking. According to Frankenberg, Race Cognizance: Transforming Silence into Language and Action, is a level of racial consciousness few white people reach.

### **Critical Whiteness**

When considering race and racial identity development, although it is critical to examine whiteness and corresponding cultural assets, it is necessary to develop a critical consciousness of how white privilege influences and connects to oppression of non-whites. As referenced by Niemonen (2010), whiteness studies began to emerge in the late 1980s as a result of the frustration of multiculturalism's failure to challenge Eurocentric ideology and continued reinforcement of the status quo that favors whiteness. In attempt to challenge the existing hegemonic tendencies, honest discourse about race and anti-racist work must focus on understanding how whiteness is constructed, experienced, and reproduced as privileged (Niemonen, 2010). Critical whiteness examines the invisibility of whiteness and the social forces that continue to position white identity as the norm (Applebaum, 2003; Bergerson, 2003).

Stemming from CRT, critical whiteness is a theory used to further examine the pervasive nature of racism by analyzing the construction, influence, and implications of white identity and how such identity awards dominance (Applebaum, 2003; Hayes & Juarez, 2009). Emphasizing the social construct of whiteness, this theory examines cultural, historical, and sociological influences within the American context, as well as

how whiteness influences social status, sustains white dominance, and results in oppression of non-whites (Applebaum, 2003; Bergerson, 2003; Niemonen, 2010).

White individuals must be encouraged to view oppression with a comprehensive lens. Although it is important to heighten both the mindfulness and responsiveness to whiteness and expose white privilege, it is essential to focus on how whiteness relates to political, social, and historical constructions (Applebaum, 2003). “Because they do not suffer materially from the interlocking effects of such systems, because they do not experience institutional and cultural oppression, it is easy for them to avoid viewing the world macroscopically. In fact, they can choose to ignore oppression altogether; they have the option to decide whether to struggle against it or not” (Applebaum, 2003, p. 11).

Critical whiteness involves race cognizance, which highlights the ability to understand historical influences on the social construction of race, as well as identify practices and policies that normalize whiteness and its implicit system of advantages (Niemonen, 2010). Since many whites do not see themselves as individually racist, they fail to recognize the ways in which their whiteness maintains current systems of oppression (Applebaum, 2003; Niemonen, 2010). Many whites go so far as to emphasize they are “good whites” and differ from other white people by highlighting flaws in other whites in attempt to highlight their own positive white identity (Thompson, 2003). As Thompson (2003) argues, many white people are determined to define their own whiteness and tell their story in their own way. Feeling they did not choose either whiteness or racism, nor did they participate in the historical events tied to slavery or its oppressive aftermath, many white individuals attempt to distance themselves from these associations by highlighting their “good” characteristics (Thompson, 2003). However,



even though many white people insist they had nothing to do with the past nor do they have the ability to change it, feelings of guilt often result, thereby continuing to highlight whiteness as the focus of the oppression (Thompson, 2003). Consequently, critical whiteness emphasizes the critical importance of being able to advance past the individual and analyze how the privileges link to and maintain systemic oppression (Applebaum, 2003). A connection must be established between the white privilege and the resulting oppression that sustains white dominance.

As stated by Thompson (2003), "...those of us who want to confront and challenge racism in ourselves, in institutions, and in others, can never forget race or racism but also cannot be trapped by it; we cannot allow it to be reified as meaningful in the particular ways we have learned to understand it" (p. 24). White individuals must develop an understanding of the social construct of whiteness and the pervasive nature of racism, but most importantly, they must examine how the manifested privileges of their whiteness have worked to create and sustain a system of dominance that oppresses non-whites. Although the ideologies of anti-racism directly connect to and influence critical whiteness, it is difficult to assume an understanding has been established for what it means to be an antiracist white person as the tools are still under construction

(Thompson, 2003) and there is still much work to be done. As Thompson (2003) asserts:

when we start congratulating ourselves on how far along we are, it is easy to stop thinking of ourselves as on a journey and start thinking of ourselves as having arrived. Not only have we not arrived but we cannot know, either in a pragmatic or visionary sense, what the end of the journey looks like. What will come to count as antiracist will change as we take on new lived possibilities. (p. 20)

## **Anti-Racism Theory**

Anti-racism theory involves thoughts, beliefs, actions, and policies that oppose racism and challenge the status quo and traditional notions that favor hegemonic discourses regarding whiteness (Gupta, 2003). Proponents of anti-racism recognize that race is not a neutral concept (Applebaum, 2003, 2007). As asserted by Scheurich (2002), “White racism steals lives of color, destroys people, and convinces many that they are not intelligent, capable, important, valuable. At best, it constantly places barriers in the paths of people of color. At worst, it literally kills. In between, it hurts, damages, stunts, limits, contorts. Even for us whites, it corrupts our souls and devalues our lives” (p. 18). Subsequently, given the complex, deeply-entrenched, and destructive nature of racism, proponents of anti-racism highlight the need to challenge the influence of race and racism and examine the ways in which they influence both thoughts and actions (Thompson, 1997, 2003). Employing the ideologies of Paulo Freire (1970, 2010), anti-racism theory applies principles of critical theory and cites the need to critically examine race and racism (Niemonen, 2007) particularly focusing on examining institutionalized and systemic racism (Gupta, 2003). The theory underscores the social construct of race and the influence race plays in the development of personal identities, interpersonal and social dialogues, as well as institutional constructs and organizations (Niemonen, 2007).

Given many people displace the responsibility and claim that racism is not about them, but rather it is a problem that involves other people (Applebaum, 2003; Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Thompson, 2003), application of this theory is critical as it emphasizes “the ability to move beyond prejudice and discrimination as a problem to be corrected in individuals in order to critically examine how institutional structures support racist

practices economically, politically, and culturally” (Niemonen, 2007, p. 160).

Proponents of anti-racism assert that attempts to promote racial equity and eliminate racism must include exposing white privilege and deconstructing the meaning of whiteness (Niemonen, 2007) as they understand the implicit privileges from which they benefit and recognize themselves as oppressors (Applebaum, 2007). As Scheurich (2002) argues, “Since I cannot individually escape my racial group and its position with the inequitable social hierarchy, no matter how much I individually detest racism, I am compelled to work inclusively with other members of my racial group to address white racism” (p. 33). Consequently, in order for advancements to be made, white people must recognize that, despite their personal dispositions regarding people of color, they are subject to racist tendencies and influenced by the social construction of race (Niemonen, 2007).

Anti-racism is not non-racism as it does not assume racial innocence is possible, but rather asserts that “in the United States all relations are racialized” (Thompson, 1997, p. 14). Progress can only be made by recognizing the highly influential nature of race and impact of racism, deliberately create spaces to discuss such matters (Johnson Lachuk & Mosley, 2011), and engaging in critical discourse (Scheurich, 2002). The theory supports the need to “create performative spaces in which the commonplaces of racism can be unsettled – in which racism can be addressed as a framing of meaning rather than as natural, while alternative possibilities are played out within the performative constraints of the classroom” (Thompson, 1997, p. 35). In order to best examine race and racism, the theory focuses on collaboration with insiders who have a wealth of experience with race and racism and taking into account the knowledge of those who are “relegated

to the ‘margins’ of society” (Gupta, 2003, p. 459). To “extend what it means to be racially literate” (Johnson Lachuk & Mosley, 2011, p. 328), conversations must be encouraged to examine inequitable ideologies, practices, and policies, exposing who is favored and who is not.

### **White Privilege**

Although critical theory suggests society has been cautioned to be aware of the abuse of power and encouraged to question who is advocating reform and what their potential agendas may be, as well as to be cognizant of the dangers of hegemony and the privileges of the dominant group, many people still frequently fail to employ such critical consciousness (Foster, 1986). Many educators do not understand issues of racial inequity, do not want to engage in this particular topic, or cannot picture what educational equity would look like; therefore, they avoid related dialogue (Applebaum, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1993). Since many educators are white and middle class, they do not have personal experience with inequity, therefore, they are frequently unaware of the realities of racial inequity, discrimination, and white privilege (Applebaum, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Kendall, 2006; Thompson, 2003). It is not uncommon for white individuals to be completely unaware that schools focus on white curricula, white values, and white culture. Although society has incorporated Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month, the remainder of the year tends to focus on topics that align with white values and norms. Subsequently, as asserted by Takaki (2008), “Not to be ‘white’ is to be designated as the ‘Other’ – different, inferior, and unassimilable [*sic*]” (p. 4).

The hegemonic discourse of white privilege highlights a system of advantages based on race that rests on the notion that American institutions perpetuate the advantages of the majority culture, thereby perpetuating racism. Since white culture is dominant and people frequently regard what is dominant to be the norm, it requires a conscious effort for white people to realize the existence and effects of racism (Applebaum, 2003; Kendall, 2006; Thompson, 1997, 2003; Wise, 2005). White privilege provides an avenue for such thinking as it is a way of conceptualizing racial inequalities that underscores the benefits white people receive based on skin color, as well as the reality that such benefits and privileges result in an advantaged position (Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Kendall, 2006; Niemonen, 2010). Although white people do not ask for such privileges, due to the socially constructed nature of whiteness, they are unable to return them or avoid the resulting benefits (Applebaum, 2003; Kendall, 2006; Thompson, 2003). Since the reality of whiteness and the corresponding privileges are often invisible to many white people (Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Niemonen, 2010; Wise, 2005), such privileges often manifest themselves as entitlement (Watt, 2007) or are equated with hard work, skills, and motivation (Applebaum, 2003; Niemonen, 2007). The idea of white privilege is invisible to many and usually only subconsciously reveals itself. As highlighted by Wise (2005), despite common messages that advocate color evasiveness and human equality, actions and experiences inform people from an early age about the reality of white privilege and superiority, as well as the power of systemic racism.

As described by McIntosh (1988) in her seminal essay that established the foundation for discourse on this subject, white privilege is “an invisible package of unearned assets which [white people] can count on cashing in each day, but about which

[they were] ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks” (p. 1). White privilege seems to be an incredibly complicated, often uncomfortable topic to address, because one cannot see what one does not understand and, since white privilege is often completely invisible to those who benefit from it; white people are frequently completely unaware it exists altogether (Applebaum, 2003; Heinze, 2008; Kendall, 2006; Thompson, 2003). Since whiteness dominates and has been established as the norm, many white people do not identify themselves as racial beings, often regard race as something only people of color have (Jay, 1998; Niemonen, 2007), and are blind to the issue of racial inequity proclaiming society is fair and just (Jost, Jost, & Whitfield, 2005). Deeming themselves as colorblind or racially neutral, many whites make excuses and offer explanations for inequities or differentiated treatment based on characteristics that do not involve race such as socioeconomic status, personal dress, family history, or personal credentials or explain failure to comply with or measure up to the norm as a failure on the part of non-whites. Rather than engaging in conversations about race, which many white Americans realize is a difficult subject to address (Howard & Denning del Rosario, 2000), neutrality has become part of the dominant discourse and many white people proclaim opportunities and success result from merit alone (Bergerson, 2003). As emphasized by Tate (1997), “most oppression does not seem like oppression to the oppressor” (p. 220). White individuals do not have to deal with the tiring micro-aggressions that inconvenience, sometimes torment, the lives of people of color. In fact, most white people can live in such a way that they rarely, if ever, have to actually even consider their own race or the reality of racism. “Racism is

not an aberration or tragic flaw but a systematic way of organizing social relations that privileges whites and then naturalizes that privilege” (Thompson, 1997, p. 13).

Subsequently, racism cannot be addressed without recognizing the need to deconstruct whiteness and the corresponding implicit advantages since, “Whiteness is the cultural marker against which ‘otherness’ is defined. Because those who possess whiteness accrue unearned benefits, whiteness must be rendered problematic if prevailing inequalities are to be redressed” (Niemonen, 2007, p. 162).

### **Implications for Educational Leadership**

Since there is a constant critique of leadership programs given they are charged with low-quality instruction, failure to prepare future leaders to lead in such a way that facilitates high achievement for all student populations, and slow to enact democratic change (Hernandez & Marshall, 2009), it is important to consider implications for such programs in regards to race and racism. According to Dantley (2002), it is clear the educational leadership field is in a state of “crisis” that partially results from “the field’s truncated propensity to equate difference with deficiency” (p. 334). Dialogue centered on race, personal difference, and equity are not emphasized, and frequently avoided, in educational leadership programs (Boske, 2010; Hernandez & Marshall, 2009). Such cultural exclusion and marginalization are deeply entrenched and a strikingly clear “us and them” ideology has been established (Dantley, 2002). It is commonplace to see the ideas and beliefs of people of color excluded from the leadership field, because such views are not deemed influential in the dominant world view (Dantley, 2002). Dantley (2002) reinforces this concept when saying, “...so the African American voice is sonorously silent even among cacophonous voices of hegemonic ideologies as well as

counter narratives of educational leadership research, including postmodernism and critical pragmatism” (p. 342).

In order to further examine the influence of race and racism in higher education, Boske (2010) conducted a study at a predominately white, upper class university in Texas to explore the experiences of aspiring school leaders enrolled in an educational leadership program. The students she studied identified as students of color and engaged in interviews, as well as reflective writing, to share their ideas regarding racism and oppression. She found four common themes articulated by participants; (1) race still plays an influential role, (2) the dominant worldview had been entrenched into the dominant ideology of the program, (3) it is important to address social justice issues, and (4) programs must be structured to address the experiences of all populations, especially the marginalized. Her findings closely align with several of the central tenets of CRT in that they suggest: (1) racism is endemic, (2) race is a product of social thought, (3) the goal of CRT is to eliminate racial oppression, and (4) inclusion of counter narratives gives voice to the silenced (Abrams & Moon, 2006; Vann Lynch, 2006).

Given that current findings suggest racism is pervasive in leadership programs and influence professors’ behaviors and expectations and the lack of opportunity to address issues of race and racism result in isolation and alienation for students of color (Boske, 2010), literature suggests current practices and traditional norms should be examined. The racial inequities must be challenged and dialogue centered on race, racism, and anti-racism must be encouraged. It is critical for educational leadership programs to make a conscious effort to enact change to establish more inclusive curricula and develop a deepened empathy for social justice issues (Boske, 2010). Such change



can be made possible through encouragement of faculty to reexamine the role of race on thought processes, actions, and personal interpretations of the world to promote critical discourse and challenge the dominant ideology (Boske, 2010). Students can also be encouraged to engage in such critical discourse and participate in reflective journaling about their own racial identity and personal worldviews (Hernandez & Marshall, 2009).

Hernandez and Marshall (2009) also conducted a study of students in an individual course using a socio-cultural approach. In their study they examined thoughts and perceptions of 15 aspiring educational leaders enrolled in a leadership program in the Midwest to explore their ideas on identity, equity, and diversity. Fourteen members of the sample were identified as white. The program of study requires two courses related to issues of identity and equity, but the authors chose to focus their studies on the first of the two courses that was taken near the beginning of the program. Data was collected from responses participants wrote in their journals over a three-month period. Through analysis of reflective writing, the authors found several common patterns among participants: (1) they seemed interested in social justice and equity issues and were open to reflect on their experiences, (2) they utilized their own worldview to filter experiences dealing with difference, (3) they were not willing to engage in discomfort in order to expand their knowledge base on diversity, and (4) they were in the developmental thinking stages as identified by Helms' (1990) theory of racial identity development.

Given the findings of the developmental level of thinking aspiring educational leaders traditionally employ about racial diversity, Hernandez & Marshall (2009) cite significant implications for curricula and pedagogy. Leadership programs must challenge traditional notions regarding race and racism and encourage reflective thinking among

aspiring leaders in attempt to aid in awareness and growth. As stated by Dantley and Tillman (2006), “we must move from passive discourse and involvement to conscious, deliberate, and proactive practice in educational leadership that will produce socially just outcomes for all children” (p. 27). There is a need to conduct further studies within leadership programs to examine how programs deal with issues of race and racism (Boske, 2010) and continue work in the field to establish a foundation for how future leaders view race and racism (Hernandez & Marshall, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

When considering continued exploration of race, racism and anti-racism, it is important to encourage work that challenges traditional notion of deficit thinking and examine the thoughts and perceptions of those who use an advocacy stance to explore such matters. As Kumashiro (2000) argues, “we are not trying to *move to a better place*; rather, we are just trying to *move*. The aspect of oppression that we need to work against is the repetition of sameness, the ongoing citation of the same harmful histories that have traditionally been cited” (p. 46). Subsequently, rather than continue to employ currently established practices and policies that establish whiteness as the norm and view “others” as deficient and lacking (Takaki, 2008), a paradigm shift is necessary. It is critical to encourage thinking that counters racism, challenges the status quo, and encourages development of a critical consciousness to examine the deeply-rooted and pervasive foundation of the oppression. In an effort to work against the limiting educational conditions and disparities that systemically oppress students of color, a framework must be encouraged to identify, examine, and transform both domination and marginalization (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Since research has established a connection between

culturally competent educators and positive outcomes for students of color, in attempt to encourage equity, give voice to those who are frequently silenced, and ensure no child is made invisible, educators must be prepared to create and facilitate environments that incorporate tenets of CRT, critical whiteness, and anti-racist advocacy to challenge hegemonic tendencies. Rather than continuing to engage in the same discourse, educators must encourage difficult conversations centered on race and racism to deepen and extend conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism. Establishing a space to identify, discuss, and examine race, racism, and anti-racism will aid educators in their racial literacy development (Johnson Lachuk & Mosley, 2007) as well as assist them on their journey to work for educational environments that are racially inclusive and representative.

## **Chapter Three: Methods**

### **Introduction**

The research study explored the thoughts and perceptions of white educational leaders who are conscious about race and racism and want to talk about it an attempt to deepen and extend conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism. In an effort to reflect a variety of perspectives, the study explored educational leaders who represent three distinct groups: 1) aspiring educational leaders, 2) currently-practicing educational leaders, and 3) retired educational leaders. Eight participants were selected, three aspiring, three currently-practicing, and two recently retired educational leaders.

Although people in positions of school-based leadership, such as principals and assistant principals, were targeted for the study, participants also included educational directors, supervisors, and district administrators. Individuals were considered information-rich (Patton, 2002) individuals. Information-rich suggests participants are knowledgeable and have experience with the research topic. In contrast to the pervasive level of deficit constructions regarding students of color, the study explored thoughts and perceptions of educational leaders who oppose racial inequity and oppression, challenge notions of equating difference with deficiency, and seek or have sought to utilize an assets-based lens to consider race. The study provided the opportunity for participants to: 1) explore their personal histories, experiences, and perceptions that influence their thoughts and actions on race and racism, 2) reflect on the motivation of their commitment to engage in race and racism, and 3) consider how anti-racist philosophy will be or has been

manifested in their work. Although research questions were designed for the study, I was not seeking specific answers to the questions, but rather utilized the questions to guide the research. The study explored the following research questions: 1) How do white educational leaders frame the impact of race and racism? 2) How do white educational leaders describe their perceptions and experiences recognizing, confronting, and dialoguing with others about race and racism?

The purpose of the study was to explore how white educational leaders frame and conceptualize race, racism, and anti-racism by exploring their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences. Responsive interviewing was employed and two semi-structured interviews with each of the selected participants were conducted. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 75 minutes in length and served to promote reflective thinking of participants to further recognize personal histories, thoughts, experiences, and motivations that encourage participants to oppose racial inequity and oppression and challenge deficit-based notions of race and racism by recognizing, confronting, and dialoguing about race, racism, and anti-racism.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

**Critical Theory.** Although the thoughts and perceptions of participants were critical to the study, the study extended beyond examining peoples' understandings and interpretations and served to critique the established power dynamics that advantage some while continuing to oppress others. It challenged the norms, assumptions, and dominant beliefs asserted by deficit thinking that equate difference with deficiency in attempt to critique the current power structure to fight oppression and encourage change. Given the research questions, purpose, and design, the study used a critical perspective as

the conceptual framework to center the experiences of white educational leaders with the goal of further understanding how to recognize, confront, and dialogue with others about race and racism. Bearing in mind Freire's (2010) notion of *conscientização*, in which individual and collective consciousness can be changed when people learn to recognize and challenge contradictions within social, economic, and political systems, the study was an effort to examine individual consciousness using dialogue. As highlighted by Guba (1990), considering the aim of critical theory is to raise consciousness of individuals in attempt to motivate them to transform current conditions, "critical theorists (ideologists) take a dialogic approach that seeks to eliminate false consciousness and rally participants around a common (true?) point of view" (p. 24).

A critical perspective emphasizes the constructed nature of reality, as well as the influence of power and power relations in understanding reality (Paul, Graffam, & Fowler, 2005). The research was focused on revealing the power structure and oppression while simultaneously challenging the oppression (Paul, Graffam, & Fowler, 2005). "What gives critical theory its name – what makes it critical- is that it seeks not just to study and understand society but rather to critique and change society" (Patton, 2002, p. 131). Critical theorists contend people unknowingly accept things as they are and, by doing so, strengthen the status quo and emphasize there are multiple existing realities within the given cultural, social, and political contexts and one of those realities is advantaged (Merriam, 2009). Critical theory emphasizes the notion that knowledge is subjective because it highlights from whose point of view the knowledge originates or whose perspective is being taken (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Many critical theorists assert the current educational power structure is inequitable and encourages the continued repression of students of color while privileging white students. Subsequently, critical theoretical stances maintain oppression is a reality (Kumashiro, 2000; Ndimande, 2004). As Kumashiro (2000) suggests, harm frequently results from inaction, therefore, thoughtful actions should be employed to understand the dynamic of oppression and consider strategies to counteract it. “It becomes important to interrupt hegemonic tendencies, including those that manifest themselves through educational institutions” (Ndimande, 2004 p. 202). As highlighted by Freire’s (2010) notion of *conscientização*, it is critical to critique current thinking, practices, and outcomes, as well as examine the thoughts and perceptions of those who counter the status quo and critique the dominant voice. Such critique can raise consciousness of existing inequities and connect inequities to matters of power and injustice in attempt to work towards transformation and change.

**Critical Race Theory.** Critical Race Theory (CRT) further influenced the inquiry’s theoretical framework. CRT establishes race and racism as the precursor to the established power structure and identifies race as the key component in social inequities (Lynn, et al., 2006). Although CRT is interdisciplinary, it can be used to explore various educational components in attempt to provide a framework to challenge the dominant discourse on race, racism, and cultural deficit theories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Seeking to disrupt the current educational patterns to work for equity, proponents suggest utilization of CRT will aid in this process by establishing a foundation that focuses on the central tenets of CRT: 1) racism is endemic; 2) race is socially constructed; 3) racialized concepts change over time; 4) interest convergence is beneficial for progress; 5) inclusion

of counter stories gives voice to those who are frequently silenced; and 6) intersectionality helps to understand how different components such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality influence experiences (Abrams & Moon, 2006).

The study explored the endemic and socially constructed tenets of CRT, as well as the idea of intersectionality and notion of counter stories. The idea of counter stories, however, took a different approach than is characterized by CRT. Considering white people are the dominant group in America, counter stories are used in CRT to highlight the ideas and experiences of racial minorities. The stories often focus on challenges, struggles, and frustrations that result from racism. The counter stories are used to highlight a voice that is often overlooked or excluded (Stanley, 2006) and highlight such lived experiences through the use of narrative. Therefore, as characterized by CRT, only people of color are able to tell counter stories. The study explored the experiences and stories of those that are often overlooked or excluded from the dominant discourse, as well. However, since the experiences the study explored were those of members of the dominant group, they can not and will not be labeled as counter stories, but I need to point out the notion of counter stories as a methodological implication for narrative influenced the idea behind the research.

### **Research Design**

The research study involved investigating the thoughts and perceptions of white educational leaders who are conscious about race and racism and want to talk about it in attempt to deepen and extend conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism. In an effort to reflect a variety of perspectives, the study explored the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of educational leaders who represent three distinct groups: 1) aspiring



educational leaders, 2) currently-practicing educational leaders, and 3) retired educational leaders. Rubin and Rubin (2005) highlight the credibility of research can be enhanced by interviewing people who reflect various perspectives and offer “different vantage points on what is going on at center stage” (p. 67). The different vantage points can then be brought together to represent a more comprehensive representation of the research topic. Eight participants were selected, three aspiring, three currently-practicing, and two recently-retired leaders, and were identified as individuals who have first-hand knowledge of the research topic.

In contrast to the pervasive level of deficit constructions regarding students of color, the study was an effort to explore thoughts and perceptions of educational leaders who challenge notions of equating difference with deficiency and utilize an assets-based lens to approach race. Additionally, the study provided the opportunity for participants to 1) explore their personal histories, experiences, and perceptions that influence their thoughts and actions, 2) reflect on the motivation of their commitment to engage in race and racism and 3) consider how anti-racist philosophy will be or has been manifested in their work.

**Phenomenology.** Along with utilizing a critical perspective to highlight the critique and challenge the power dynamics, the study utilized phenomenology to frame and inform interviews as the experiences and world views of the participants guided data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings. Phenomenology traces back to the early twentieth century to the works of Husserl and focuses on lived experiences. Concentrating on the essence of the experience and how the essence of the experience is converted into consciousness (Merriam, 2009), phenomenology attends to individuals’

perceptions and meanings to understand and interpret their experiences (Paul, Graffam, & Fowler, 2005). Phenomenology is well-matched for studying intense and emotional human experiences in that its purpose is to better understand what it is like for individuals to experience a certain phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Trying to get inside others' understanding of the world, phenomenology is concerned with "how people conceive the world around them" (Janesick, 2004, p. 131). When seeking to understand the experience of experiencing something and the way things appear to others, perspective and frame of reference are important components. When using phenomenology to frame and inform interviews, the focus is placed on narrative and developing an understanding of participants' world views. As with the notion of counter stories from CRT as a methodological implication, the resulting narrative calls for the researcher to set aside, or bracket, preconceived notions and assumptions to better examine the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

**Interviewing.** In research it is critical for the research method to lend itself to the selected research questions. When considering the methodological approach for the study, responsive interviewing that employed a phenomenological approach seemed the most fitting as such interviewing lends itself to highlight the lived experiences of participants through narrative. Representing one of the three types of qualitative data, interviews, as defined by Patton (2002) are "open-ended questions and probes" that "yield in-depth responses about people's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. Data consist of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable" (p. 4). Interviews enable the researcher to get a glimpse of that which is not necessarily on view and examine that which is often looked at but seldom seen

(Rubin & Rubin, 2005). “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories” (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

When examining the thoughts and perceptions of educational leaders who are conscious about race and racism and want to talk about it, in an effort to gain rich and substantive data and develop meaning in context (Janesick, 2004; Merriam, 2009), it seemed most appropriate to use interviews to gather data. I choose this method because it offers insight regarding interpretation and construction of meaning from experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Janesick, 2004) and lends itself to facilitate research requiring detail and depth (Patton, 2002). As highlighted by Merriam (2009), “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). In this research I did not and do not seek to prove a point, but rather explored and discovered valuable information from various perspectives for thought (Merriam, 2009). Speaking with selected participants at length helped me to capture their stories in order to communicate their experiences (Patton, 2002) in attempt to understand their ideas regarding race, racism, and anti-racism and offer insight to how they challenge manifestations of oppression. Given detailed information was being sought that required thorough explanation to gain understanding of participants’ thoughts and perceptions, in an effort to carefully explore and present a holistic view to share stories and experiences, in-depth interviews seemed to be the most evocative strategy for the research topic.

The interview portion sought to develop an understanding of participants' experiences by focusing on their beliefs, values, attitudes, and personal narratives. Two semi-structured interviews with each of the selected participants were conducted. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 75 minutes in length and served to promote reflective thinking of participants to further understand their personal histories, thoughts, experiences, and motivations that encouraged participants to engage in recognizing, confronting, and dialoguing about race and racism. The interviews were held at a location of the participants' convenience and during non-school hours. With the permission of the participants, I recorded all interviews on an audio device, specifically an iPod touch. As the interviews concluded, I fully transcribed the data from each interview. To maintain confidentiality, participants were not identified by name during the interviews and were assigned pseudonyms in all transcriptions. All audio files have been secured and will be locked in my home for five years. Each participant was offered a copy of their audio files and was given an electronic copy of their transcripts in order to verify the accuracy of the data collected.

The 16 interviews for the study were completed over a four-month period; I began the interviews in mid-November 2012 and concluded the interviews in mid-March 2013. The first interview with each participant was conducted during the first six to eight weeks of this four-month time frame. During this time period, I also worked on transcribing the interviews and provided the interviewees the opportunity to offer member checks based on the transcripts. The second interview with each participant was conducted during the final two months of the four-month time frame and commenced only after each participant had been given time to review the transcript from the first interview. As I

conducted the second interview phase, I also worked on transcribing the interviews and provided the interviewees the opportunity to offer member checks based on the transcripts. At the conclusion of the second interview phase, I completed all remaining transcriptions. Throughout the four-month period, there was consistent overlap between the interview and transcription processes. For example, I did not wait until all interviews had been completed to begin transcriptions, but rather I began working on transcribing each interview shortly after it concluded since the information was still fresh in my mind.

**Field notes.** Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, rather than taking field notes during the interviews, I reserved note taking until immediately following the interviews. Focusing on the participants' reactions and behaviors, I first used the field notes as a means of noting information that could not be recorded by the audio device during the interviews, such as facial expressions and body language. I also used the notes as a means of referencing important comments made. This process helped to serve as a reminder for comments stated during the interviews that I wanted to revisit in the second interview (Patton, 2002), as well as for data analysis purposes. The notes also included a reflective component in that they were used to monitor my "feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, speculations, and working hypotheses" (Merriam, 2009, p. 131). Shortly after each interview concluded, as suggested by Merriam (2009), preferably within 24 to 48 hours, but sometimes as early as getting into my car after the conclusion of an interview, I began jotting down notations. This ensured information was fresh in my mind and helped to maintain the accuracy of what was written, as well as make note of any elaborations that came to mind.

**Member checking.** In an attempt to check the data and verify an accurate portrayal of participant's comments and perspectives, each interviewee was given the opportunity to review the transcripts and offer feedback before arrangements were made for the second interview. Also, at the beginning of the second interview, I began by referencing the transcripts and asked participants if there was anything they would like to add or clarify. Additionally, I began each of the second interviews with an overview of the preliminary findings and asked participants if they believed the interpretations accurately aligned with their experiences and personal interpretations. Four of the eight participants came to the interview with a printout of the transcripts that included handwritten notes. Similarly, at the conclusion of the second interview, after fully transcribing the data, I gave each interviewee the opportunity to review the data and offer feedback. Such member checking served to address the accuracy of the information and whether it established a realistic representation of participants (Merriam, 2009). Given the controversial nature of the research topic, sharing the transcripts and initial findings with participants also served as an effort to enhance trustworthiness, to allow participants to feel comfortable in the accuracy of what was shared and being reported. While a few participants offered clarification on minor details, such as spelling or names of specific programs or locations, none of the participants asked to add, adjust, or change anything in their stories. Additionally, participants were in agreement with the representation of the preliminary findings. One participant actually stated, "It's amazing to me how much of me you captured in terms of values, attitudes, and stances" (Winston, email correspondence).

**Participant selection.** Eight participants were selected; three participants represented an aspiring educational leaders group, three participants were currently-practicing educational leaders, and two participants were retired educational leaders. Although individuals in positions of school-based leadership, such as principals and assistant principals, were targeted for the study, participants also included supervisors, directors, and district administrators. All participants self-identify as white.

***Aspiring educational leaders.*** Criteria for participant selection of white aspiring educational leaders included the following: (a) educators who were currently enrolled in an educational Master's program, (b) educators who engage in conversations about race and racism, (c) educators who indicated they want to explore their own historical and existing perspectives on race and racism, (d) educators who want to work or work in schools with students of color, (e) educators who believe racism continues to play a role in education today, and (f) educators who oppose racial inequity and oppression.

***Currently-practicing educational leaders.*** Criteria for participant selection of currently-practicing white educational leaders included the following: (a) educators who were currently practicing in positions of educational leadership, (b) educators who engage in conversations about race and racism, (c) educators who indicated they want to explore their own historical and existing perspectives on race and racism, (d) educators who work or have worked in schools with students of color, (e) educators who believe racism continues to play a role in education today, and (f) educators who oppose racial inequity and oppression.

***Recently-retired educational leaders.*** Criteria for participant selection of recently-retired white educational leaders included the following: (a) individuals who

have retired from positions of educational leadership within the last five years, (b) educators who engage in conversations about race and racism, (c) people who indicated that they want to explore their own historical and existing perspectives on race and racism, (d) people who have worked in schools with students of color, (e) educators who are identified as individuals who believe racism continues to play a role in education today, and (f) educators who oppose racial inequity and oppression.

**Recruitment.** With the aim of developing a potential pool of participants, I worked with nine standing university professors, as well as eight educational directors and practicing educational leaders, who have explored race and racism in either the classroom or their professional work, to gather a list of nominees to potentially interview. As suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2005) when selecting interviewees, when the researcher is uncertain of how to find potential participants that are both knowledgeable and experienced in the area of research, it can be helpful to speak with others who “have already observed the scene” (p. 65) and are familiar with the field. Information-rich participants (Patton, 2002) have a great deal of information to offer about the topic.

In order to establish a potential pool of participants, I asked the university professors, educational directors, and practicing educational leaders to identify individuals who they perceived as aligning with the following criteria: (a) educators who self-identify as white, (b) educators who aspire to practice, are currently practicing, or have recently served in positions of educational leadership, (c) educators who engage in conversations about race and racism, (d) people who indicate they want to explore their own historical and existing perspectives on race and racism, (e) people who have worked in schools with students of color, (f) educators who are identified as individuals who



believe racism continues to play a role in education today, and (g) educators who oppose racial inequity and oppression. Also, for financial reasons and practicality of face-to-face interviewing, I asked for nominations of potential participants who were in relatively close geographic proximity. In attempt to establish a pool of participants from which to select, I gathered six names of aspiring leaders, seven names of currently-practicing leaders, and ten names of recently-retired leaders which created a pool of 23 potential participants.

After nominations had been made by standing university professors, educational directors, and practicing educational leaders, I contacted each of the potential participants by way of email in order to explain the nature and purpose of the study, as well as highlight the selection criteria. In the email, I asked potential participants to respond via email or phone if they felt they met the selection criteria and were potentially interested in participating in the study. If a potential participant responded via email, we then established a time to talk over the phone.

When talking with participants on the phone, I first explained the nature and purpose of the study; I informed potential participants the study was an effort to extend current conceptualizations of race and racism in educational leadership since research shows such matters present challenges for white educators. I also explained the study was an effort to talk with individuals who engage with and are conscious of race and racism to explore how people frame the impact of race and racism, as well as how individuals talk with others about such issues.

After explaining the purpose of the study, the selection criteria were emphasized. Participants were asked to carefully consider each of the selection criteria and whether

they self-identified. The selection criteria for participation in the study were: (a) educators who self-identify as white, (b) educators who aspire to practice, are currently practicing, or have recently served in positions of educational leadership, (c) educators who engage in conversations about race and racism, (d) people who indicate they want to explore their own historical and existing perspectives on race and racism, (e) people who have worked in schools with students of color, (f) educators who are identified as individuals who believe racism continues to play a role in education today, and (g) educators who oppose racial inequity and oppression.

If a potential participant self-identified as meeting the selection criteria and expressed an interest to participate, I asked them to answer a few initial questions. These questions served as a pilot interview. I asked potential participants if they preferred to answer the questions by phone or would prefer to meet face-to-face. All potential participants elected to answer the questions by phone during the initial phone call.

Before beginning the pilot interview, I read the verbal recruitment script for Informed Consent to Participate in Research Recruitment Process in order to outline and obtain verbal informed consent. The transcript for the pilot interview can be found in Appendix D.

The pilot interview focused on the following questions: 1) Talk to me about what racism looks like. 2) In what ways do race and racism influence your thoughts and actions? 3) How do race and racism play a role in schools today? 4) In what ways do you oppose racial inequity and oppression?

If the potential participant exhibited reflective power in their thinking, offered thoughtful responses, and articulated an understanding that racism extends beyond

individual thoughts and actions (Applebaum, 2003), the participant was invited to participate in the study. When participants were not reflective in their thinking, did not offer thoughtful responses, or articulated an understanding of racism limited to individual thoughts and actions, such as use of racist epithets and bullying based on race, the participant was not invited to participate in the study. The invitation process was informed by the conceptualizations of racism highlighted in Critical Whiteness; when recognizing racism, it is critical to look past individual actions and beliefs and highlight how privileges of whiteness link to and maintain systemic oppression (Applebaum, 2003; Niemonen, 2010).

The study originally proposed to include two to three participants from each of the three select groups: 1) aspiring educational leaders, 2) currently-practicing educational leaders, and 3) retired educational leaders. Therefore, the recruitment process continued until nine participants were selected to participate in the interview process. However, shortly before the first interview, one of the recently-retired participants elected not to participate. As a result, the study was conducted with three aspiring, three currently-practicing, and two recently-retired leaders.

**Informed consent and IRB.** Before any interviews were conducted, I had a conversation with each participant that described informed consent to participate in the research study. I clearly stated participation was voluntary and the study would only include people who choose to take part. As the researcher, I also made it known that participants could select to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Having already prepared an Informed Consent to Participate in Research that was approved by the University of South Florida's IRB, I asked each participant to read the form and

carefully consider its contents before making a decision regarding participation. The informed consent form outlined: (a) the purpose of the study, (b) study procedures, (c) total number of participants, (d) alternatives, (e) benefits, (f) risks or discomfort, (g) compensation, (h) cost, and (i) confidentiality. A copy of the Informed Consent to Participate Form can be found in Appendix E. Additionally, the Informed Consent to Participate Form was emailed to each participant upon scheduling the first interview. A hard copy of the form was also taken to the first interview and reviewed in detail. Interviews with participants commenced only after each individual agreed to and signed in recognition of informed consent.

**Benefits and compensation.** The researcher highlighted a potential benefit of participating in the study could be an increased understanding of dynamics surrounding race, racism, and anti-racism that could lead to further informing participants' personal reflections and professional practice. In regards to compensation, participants were paid \$40.00 in the form of a gift card to a local grocery store upon completion of both interviews. If participants withdrew for any reason before the completion of the study, they were to be paid \$20.00 in the form of a gift card for each completed interview. However, all participants completed both interviews. The funds to purchase the gift cards were at my personal expense.

**Research interview protocols.** Research questions focused on participants' perceptions of students of color, race and racism, as well as self-reflection on how they came to embrace race and racism and challenge race-related oppression. Semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions were utilized to gather data through observation,

talking, and listening while participants were encouraged to share their personal stories and experiences, as well as their beliefs, perceptions, values, and attitudes.

The first interview included general questions about participants' personal narratives such as personal histories, personal identity, background, formalized schooling, educational experiences, professional experiences, experiences with students of color, preparation to work with racially diverse populations, and personal experiences with race and racism. Questions included: (1) How do you identify yourself racially? Why do you identify this way? (2) How did you first develop an awareness of your race? (3) Explain your experiences with people of color. (4) Talk to me about your personal experiences with race and racism. (5) How did you come to know race and racism? (6) What has influenced your understanding of race and racism? (7) Who in your history helped increase your awareness or influenced your desire to confront race and racism? (8) How has your educational training prepared you to work with racially diverse populations? (9) Talk to me about the students of color with whom you work or have worked. (10) How do you think race and racism impact the lives of the students with whom you work? (11) Do you think white educators have different expectations for students of color than they do for white students? Do you think this is a few, some, or many white educators? (12) In what ways and why may such expectations differ? (13) In what ways is race used to define students? (14) How do you equate or differentiate between race and SES? (15) How do we address racism in schools?

The second interview concentrated on issues of anti-racism, focusing on self-awareness, understanding whiteness, influential factors in their desire to counter inequity and racism, and how they think they [can] dialogue with others to recognize and confront

race and racism. Questions included: (1) In what ways do you think about race and racism? (2) Explain what your whiteness means to you? How does it impact your identity? (3) What influence does your whiteness have upon your life? (4) Many equate difference with deficiency. How do you feel about this notion? (5) In what ways can a positive lens be used to look at race? (6) How do you talk with others about race and racism? (7) How do you talk about race and racism with others when your opinions differ? (8) In what ways do you oppose racial inequity and oppression? (9) What does anti-racism mean to you? (10) In what ways do you consider yourself an advocate of anti-racism? (11) Why is it important for you to be an advocate of anti-racism? (12) In what ways have you struggled with your opposition to racism? (13) Discuss times when your anti-racist beliefs did not align with your thoughts or actions. (14) How is your passion for racial equity manifest in your work as an educational leader? (15) In what ways can institutional and systemic racism be challenged? Interview questions are also listed in Appendices A-C.

**Researcher reflexivity.** Since qualitative interviewing involves interpretation and construction of meaning from experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Janesick, 2004), it was critical for me, as the researcher, to be aware of my own beliefs, assumptions, and biases. After interviewing participants and attempting to make sense of their insights to capture and communicate their experiences (Patton, 2002), it was important to explore my own consciousness, reflect on my thoughts, and examine my feelings. Considering the critical lens I use to view the world and my personal interest in the research topic, my personal perspectives definitely influence the way I see things and interpret meaning, therefore, it was critical I attempted to bracket (Merriam, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005)

my experiences so as not to interfere with the research or findings. As stated by Rubin and Rubin (2005), “The researcher needs to continually examine their own understandings and reactions” as emotions and biases can influence what the researcher may ask and how the interviewee may respond (p. 31).

***Researcher reflective journal.*** In attempt to make my internal dialogue personally explicit and take ownership of my personal perspective (Patton, 2002), I recorded reflective notes throughout the research process. The reflection provided a venue to consider my own subjectivity by analyzing my thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and ideas about the interviews, research, and the research study in general. The recording also provided the opportunity to reflect on and interpret the interviews and served as a means for data triangulation (Janesick, 2004). “It is a type of member check of one’s own thinking done on paper. The clarity of writing down one’s thoughts allowed for stepping into one’s inner mind and reaching further into interpretations of the behaviors, beliefs, and words we write” (Janesick, 2004, pp. 146-47). The process helped me, as the researcher, further focus the study by documenting personal reflections regarding the research, as well as processing information to help develop an understanding of participants’ responses (Janesick, 2004). Along with using the reflection as a strategy for examining and refining my inner thoughts and recording my responses, beliefs, and ideas, it served to highlight my understanding of my role as the researcher, which is highlighted in chapter five.

Since the researcher is the primary research instrument in qualitative work, maintaining a reflective journal throughout the research process is essential (Janesick, 2004). As cited by Janesick (2004), “Journal writing personalizes representation in a way

that forces the researcher to confront issues of how a story from a person's life becomes a public text, which in turn tells a story. Furthermore, how are we to make sense of this story?" (p. 144). Reflection helped to further analyze my ongoing thoughts, ideas, and understandings throughout the research process. I used the journal to both express my thoughts, feelings, and reflections and to interrogate how I came to certain conclusions, as I found myself personally struggling with the balance between being critical and judgmental. Throughout the process I attempted to keep my personal beliefs, assumptions, and personal biases in focus and explored what ways such beliefs and biases influenced my thinking. I attempted to use counterexamples and contradictions as a way of further examining my preconceptions and personal dispositions.

***Peer debriefing.*** Along with using a researcher reflective journal to aid in researcher reflexivity, I also dialogued with a peer throughout the research process. The role of the critical friend was to help further debrief my thoughts, reflections, and conclusions by talking them out. I found giving voice to my ideas and conceptualizations encouraged enhanced clarity and more purposeful framing. The critical friend assisted me to further push my thoughts and assumptions and further examine counterexamples and contradictions between existing literature and my findings. Dialoguing with my critical friend aided in further exploration of my consciousness and encouraged me to further interrogate how I arrived at certain conclusions. My critical friend also encouraged me to consider ideas I previously had not and highlighted alternative ways of thinking. Since I tend to see things through one lens, since my lens is colored by my experiences and personal worldview, it was helpful to talk with someone who employs a different lens. After debriefing with my critical friend, I added further reflections



sparked by our conversations to my reflective notes to continue to maintain a record of my thinking patterns and ideas.

Although the researcher reflective journal and peer debriefing are critical components to encourage researcher reflexivity throughout the researcher process, the tools also played a role in the presentation of the findings. Along with presenting the narratives of the participants, I also presented my internal narrative, in the role of researcher, as I believe it was important to represent how my ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions were influenced, transformed, and evolved throughout the research process.

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of qualitative data analysis is not to count or highlight predetermined answers, but rather to “discover variation, portray shades of meaning, and examine complexity” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 202). When analyzing the interview data, as Merriam (2009) suggests, I looked to “notice things that have become routine to the participants themselves, things that may lead to understanding the context” (p. 119), as well as information that may be exceptional. Given the researcher is the data gathering instrument in qualitative work (Merriam, 2009), most of the data for the study came from me and included the following: 1) audio of interviews, 2) interview transcriptions, 3) field notes, and 4) the researcher’s reflective journal.

Throughout the research, I made an effort to make the process transparent. Providing participants the opportunity to review their transcripts and offer feedback about what was described provided an approach to analytical triangulation (Patton, 2002) by having the people being described check the “accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity of their data analysis” (Patton, 2002, p. 560).

To move from the raw data to interpretations based on conceptual themes, I employed Rubin and Rubin's (2005) steps of interview data analysis. The data analysis process involved: 1) recognition, 2) examination, 3) coding, 4) sorting, and 5) synthesis. Recognition, examination, and coding involved preparing the data. Sorting and synthesis involved analyzing the data. Recognition entailed the process of reading, reviewing, and studying the transcripts multiple times to find common concepts and themes important for understanding the research. Examination involved carefully looking at concepts and themes to clarify meaning and understanding. Coding called for designating and employing a system of color-coded highlighting to readily retrieve and examine concepts and themes across the interviews. I printed out the transcripts and coded them using the following themes: a) personal experiences, b) academic influences, c) recognizing racism, d) confronting racism, e) dialoguing about race and racism, and f) implications for leadership. Sorting required separating the data into groups to refine and integrate understanding by examining similarities and differences within themes. The sorting involved creating a document categorizing information from participants aligned with the aforementioned themes. Once sorted into themes, the information was further sorted into subthemes. The final synthesis necessitated putting concepts and themes together to show how they address or further explain the research questions. My primary concern in the final synthesis was creating a rich, detailed, and reflective report. Analysis concluded when an accurate representation of interviewees' thoughts and experiences had been established through presentation of the findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

## **Reporting**

Considering rich, detailed descriptions lay the groundwork for qualitative reporting (Patton, 2002), it was important I carefully planned, organized, and outlined my ideas on how to approach reporting the findings of the proposed research. The study was not an effort to answer the designed research questions, but rather the research questions were used to guide the research and make audible the voices of the people represented in the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I also found the research questions to be helpful to establish a framework for presenting the findings.

When presenting the findings, I first made an effort to provide a description of each of the participants in narrative form to help the reader develop an understanding of who is represented in the study. Additionally, along with background information, personal experiences, and critical incidences that served as transformative, pivotal, or influential in the development of participants' conceptualizations of race and racism were presented. Also, along with narratives, thoughts, experiences, and actions that represent advocacy for anti-racism, struggles, dilemmas, and pitfalls were also reported. In order to emphasize negotiation of race-related tensions, stories that show purposeful inaction, when efforts promoting racial equity were avoided or resisted, or when participants' actions may have been in contradiction with their beliefs were also included.

After presenting a case description of each participant, I transitioned into cross-case analysis. Cross-case analysis involves grouping participants' ideas together by common themes and analyzing different perspectives (Patton, 2002). The concepts and themes that emerged in the data analysis were used to focus the reporting and highlight the concepts and ideas I wanted to communicate (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The findings

were presented thematically and presented across the participants' experiences. I focused on using enough description and providing direct quotations to "allow the reader to enter into the situation and thoughts of the people represented in the report," (Patton, 2002, p. 503) but being selective enough so as not to overwhelm the reader with too much information or reporting findings in such a way that became repetitive. When drafting the manuscript, I focused on creating a piece that richly portrayed the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of the participants regarding their conceptualizations of race and racism, as well as how they recognize, confront, and dialogue with others about race and racism. The findings also include a piece on me, as the researcher, to represent how my ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions evolved and were influenced and transformed throughout the research process.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Although ethical responsibilities are important to consider in any research, given the nature of qualitative research and the reality that the researcher serves as the research instrument, it was critical to adhere to codes of ethics and uphold ethical standards of conduct with interviewees. It was essential for the researcher to approach the work with honesty, integrity and a commitment to excellence. Furthermore, it was critical for the researcher to be completely honest about the nature of the research and how the findings would be used, obtain signed informed consent statements, maintain respectful interactions, show respect for the participants' time, and present findings in an accurate manner (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Before any interviews took place, I had a conversation with each participant describing informed consent to participate in the research study. I clearly stated

participation was voluntary and the study would only include people who choose to take part. As the researcher, I also made it known that participants may elect to discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

After preparing an informed consent, I asked each participant to read the form and carefully consider its contents before making a decision regarding participation. The informed consent form outlined: (a) the purpose of the study, (b) study procedures, (c) total number of participants, (d) alternatives, (e) benefits, (f) risks or discomfort, (g) compensation, (h) cost, and (i) confidentiality. A copy of the Informed Consent to Participate in the Research Study can be found in Appendix E. Interviews with participants commenced only after each participant agreed to and signed the informed consent form.

Although completion of the form for the Institutional Review Board certainly heightened my awareness to possible ethical dilemmas, it was also vital I made every effort to protect the interviewees from harm, prevent deception of any kind, and protect the privacy of the interviewees and their responses (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, throughout the research, I made efforts to make the process transparent. Providing participants the opportunity to review their transcripts and offer feedback provided an approach to analytical triangulation (Patton, 2002) by having the people being described check the “accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity” of what was represented (Patton, 2002, p. 560).

Also, taking into consideration the idea of doing no harm, as Goodson and Sikes (2001) contend, “the key ethical consideration is how the research affects the people whose experiences, perception, behaviors, attitudes, or whatever, are the focus of the

study and who are the designated ‘research population’” (p. 90). Considering the interviewees shared private matters about their lives, both personal and professional, and given the sensitive nature of the research topic, to respect the privacy of the interviewees, it was critical that interviewee’s responses and transcripts remain anonymous.

Consequently, audio files and transcripts were secured and locked in my home and will remain there for five years in accordance with IRB protocols. Additionally, pseudonyms were used to reference the interviewees in both the transcripts and the presentation of the findings.

### **Limitations**

Since I selected this research topic because it is something I want to better understand, I consider myself to be one of the primary audience members for my work (Patton, 2002). However, taking this into consideration, my own biases definitely influence the critical lens used during the research as well as the analysis. Additional limitations to the study that should be highlighted are length of engagement, self-reported data, and the potential of socially desirable responses. In regards to length of engagement, each participant was interviewed twice, so I only spend two to two and half hours with each participant. Additionally, the data gathered for the study was self-reported by the participants. Given the controversial nature of the study, the potential for socially-desirable responses could have played a role.

### **Conclusion**

Schools of thought suggest many white educators employ deficit thinking in their thoughts and perceptions regarding students of color (Davis, 2008; Ferguson, 2000; Kozol, 1991, 2006; Mead, 2006; Ogbu, 2003). Scholars also draw attention to the reality

that educational training does not prepare educators to successfully work with students of color (Boske, 2010; Davis, 2008; Heinze, 2008; Hernandez & Marshall, 2009) and matters of race and racism present challenges for white educators (Davis, 2008; Harmon, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2000; Tate, 1997). Furthermore, many white educators are not comfortable dialoguing about race and racism and often choose to avoid such conversations (Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2000; Tate, 1997).

The research study was an effort to explore the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of white educational leaders who oppose racial inequality and oppression, challenge the notion of equating difference with deficiency, and utilize an assets-based lens to approach race in an attempt to deepen and extend the conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism. Participants' personal and professional experiences were explored in an effort to develop an understanding of how they recognize and confront race and racism, as well as how they dialogue with others, about such matters.

The chapter outlines the critical theoretical perspective used to establish the framework for the study, as well as the research design and methodological approach. Details are provided on participant selection, interview structure, and data collection methods. The chapter concludes with an overview of how data was analyzed and reported, as well as ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapter four serves as a presentation of the findings from the research study. While a portion of the chapter is dedicated to providing a case description of each participant and presenting their narratives and personal histories, as their stories are critical to their understanding and interpretation of race and racism, the remainder of the chapter focuses on interpretations from cross-case analysis related to recognizing and

confronting race and racism as concepts. These concepts provide a focus for the reporting and are presented thematically.

Chapter five reviews the themes in the research findings in relation to the literature; emphasizes nuances, commonalities, contradictions, and complications brought to light in the research findings; highlights interesting implications for educational leadership; and discusses how my role as the researcher influenced the research, as well as how the research influenced me as the researcher.



## **Chapter Four: Research Findings**

Chapter four serves as a medium for presenting the findings from the research study regarding the thoughts and perceptions of white educational leaders who are conscious about race and racism, and want to talk about their experiences and ideas, in attempt to deepen and extend conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism. Since the research questions were used to guide the research and make audible the voices of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), chapter four will illuminate findings based on commonalities, patterns, and themes to further extend the conversation on race and racism.

While a portion of the chapter is dedicated to providing a case description of each participant and presenting their narratives and personal histories, as their stories are critical to their understanding and interpretation of race and racism, the remainder of the chapter focuses on interpretations from cross-case analysis related to recognizing and confronting race and racism as concepts. These conceptual patterns provide a focus for the reporting and are presented thematically. Additionally, theoretical and contextual issues have been refined and are integrated to make connections between research findings and existing literature. While findings based on conceptual themes are the center of the chapter, my goal as the researcher was to create a piece that richly portrays the thoughts and experiences of the participants regarding their conceptualizations of race and racism, as well as how they recognize, confront, and dialogue with others about these concepts.

## Participants

I selected eight individuals to participate in the research study; three participants represented an aspiring educational leaders group, three participants were currently-practicing educational leaders, and two participants were retired educational leaders. Although individuals in positions of school-based leadership, such as principals and assistant principals, were targeted for the study, participants also included supervisors, directors, and district administrators. All participants self-identify as white.

**Bella.** Bella is a white female in her early-thirties. Having spent her professional career thus far as a language arts teacher, Bella considers herself an advocate in teaching for social justice and giving voice to those who are often overlooked in the classroom. Enrolled in an educational Master's program at the time of the study, Bella is an aspiring educational leader who is interested in curriculum reform.

**Hannah.** Also an aspiring educational leader enrolled in an educational leadership Master's program at the time of the study and serving as a district resource teacher, Hannah aims to be a school principal. While she has spent most of her career as a special education classroom teacher, having taught both elementary and high school, she also spent time working with a for-profit educational company, as well as the Florida Department of Education. Hannah identifies as a white female in her mid-forties.

**Theresa.** Theresa is a white female who is estimated to be in her late-twenties. Also an aspiring educational leader, at the time of the study, Theresa was a full-time graduate student in an educational leadership Master's program. Her entire professional career thus far has been working as a music teacher in elementary, middle, and high school settings. Theresa aspires to be a school principal.

**Ella.** Having spent 35 years in education, Ella is currently in a position of educational leadership. Having worked in a milieu of educational leadership positions, Ella has served in various principalships, drop-out prevention and human resources, as well as coordinator, director, and supervisor positions. During her career she earned both an Educational Specialist degree, as well as a Ph.D. Ella is in her late-fifties and identifies as a white female.

**Morgan.** Morgan is a white male in his early-fifties. Currently serving as an educational leader, Morgan has spent 25 years in public education. While he was a secondary classroom teacher for 13 years, he then entered into administration, first as an assistant principal and then as a principal. Morgan is presently in his eighth year as a school principal. Currently working on his doctorate in education, at the time of the interviews, Morgan expressed interest in district-level administration.

**Owen.** Also a white male in his early-fifties, Owen has spent 25 years in education. He worked first as a classroom teacher for 15 years, then served in a position as a middle school dean for two years, and is currently serving as an assistant principal, a position that he has held for the last eight years. Owen is presently enrolled in a doctoral program in education.

**Peter.** Peter is recently-retired after having served 35 years in public education during which time he served in positions of classroom teacher, human relations specialist, assistant principal, principal, director, and general director. Peter identifies as a white male in his mid-sixties. Prior to entering leadership positions, Peter earned his Master's degree in educational leadership.

**Winston.** After having served approximately 30 years in public education, Winston retired three years ago and is currently working as an adjunct professor in an educational leadership program at a university in Florida. During his career in k-12 education, Winston served as a teacher, educational coordinator, supervisor, principal, and director and earned both Master's and doctoral degrees in education. Winston is in his mid to late-sixties and identifies as white.

**Summary of participants.** The table below serves as a comparative summary of participants and includes information on their age, research-based cohort (aspiring, currently-practicing, or recently retired educational leader), educational positions held throughout their career in chronological order, and education-related degrees.

**Table 1. Comparative Summary of Participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Educational Positions</b>	<b>Education-Related Degrees</b>
Bella	Early-30s	Aspiring	Teacher	Master's
Hannah	Mid-40s	Aspiring	Teacher, District Resource Teacher	Master's (in progress)
Theresa	Late-20s	Aspiring	Teacher	Master's (in progress)
Ella	Late-50s	Current	Teacher, Coordinator, Director, Principal, Supervisor	Master's, Ed Specialist, Doctorate
Morgan	Early-50s	Current	Teacher, Assistant Principal, Principal	Master's, Doctorate (in progress)
Owen	Early-50s	Current	Teacher, Dean, Assistant Principal	Master's, Doctorate (in progress)
Peter	Mid-60s	Retired	Teacher, Human Relations Specialist, Assistant principal, Principal, Director	Master's
Winston	Mid/late 60s	Retired	Teacher, Educational Coordinator, Supervisor, Principal, Director, Adjunct Professor	Master's, Doctorate

### **Power of Personal Experiences**

Embarking on the interview phase of the research study, I was incredibly eager to see what I would discover. While I knew personal experiences had been incredibly influential in my personal conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism, I was unaware of how influential they would be in the lives of the participants. Even though all eight of the participants had professional experiences involving students of color and the influence of race and racism, I found their personal encounters and interactions were extremely influential in the development of their critical consciousness regarding the topic. Throughout the first round of the interview process, each time I completed an interview, as I drove away, I found myself reflecting on the experiences that had influenced participants' thoughts, beliefs, and actions. By the time I had completed the fourth interview, it became strikingly clear to me that each of the participants had at least one personal encounter or interaction that influenced their conceptualizations of race and racism; these personal experiences were seemingly critical incidences because their thoughts related to the experience appeared to influence their frame of reference and perspectives regarding race and racism. Furthering this idea, as suggested by Merriam (2009), these experiences were then translated into consciousness and influenced how they perceived, understood, and interpreted concepts of race and racism. How the participants have come to know racism and their interpretation of what racism looks like was based on their experiences; as suggested by Janesick (2004), their experiences influence how they "conceive the world around them" (p. 131).

While research shows many white individuals avoid thinking or talking about race and racism (Applebaum, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2000;

Tate, 1997), since nearly all participants had a personal story, seemingly seminal in nature, and all had a connection to the topic, they all appeared to see value in exploring the topics of race and racism and were more than willing to talk about their thoughts, beliefs, and actions associated with these concepts. Going into the second interview, I went back and revisited the critical incidences with each of the eight participants by probing further. All of the participants agreed their experiences grew to be something more than just an experience and attributed to how they see things, as well as whom they had become. Additionally, many characterized the experiences as transformational or pivotal in their thoughts, actions, and manifestations of leadership. While nearly all participants started off with little exposure to people who were racially different, these experiences with people of other races increased their awareness and, as a result, increased their consciousness; participants expressed their experiences had heightened their cognizance of race and racism, thereby heightening both their interest in the topic and sensitivity to the deeply-rooted foundations of racial inequity and oppression.

**Influence of experience on conceptualizations of race.** During the study, as the researcher, I never gave definition to the phrase students of color. However, it became clear to me that the participants' experiences shape how they define students of color. While one participant (Bella) referenced students of color through multiple demographics, for example, she used terms such as Arabic, English as a Second Language Learners (ESOL), Egyptian, Indian, and Muslim students when referring to students of color, the remaining seven participants connected students of color primarily to black and Hispanic students. Additionally, nearly all of the participants immediately and automatically connected students of color to low socio-economic status (SES).

During the interviews, even when attempting to differentiate conceptualizations between these demographics, participants articulated difficulty since, in their experiences; race and poverty were so interconnected.

While all participants assert there is an overwhelming lack of discussion on race and racism, both in their professional and personal worlds, participants were both willing and eager to discuss the topics at length. Sharing their stories and interpretations shed light on how each of the participants attributes meaning to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). As stated by Peter, racism is “a difficult thing to get at in 2013. It’s there, it’s like air, we just can’t see it, it’s hard to get at....it’s so subtle” (Peter, second interview); however, each participant greatly contributed to the research study by exploring their individual consciousness through discourse and offered their insights on how to recognize, confront, and dialogue about race and racism.

**Bella: White by birth, Mexican by heritage.** Beginning her career in education with the specific intention of teaching ESOL students, Bella majored in English linguistics. She embarked on her student teaching assignment working with ESOL students and second language development. However, during her first week of the assignment, Bella encountered a blatantly racist incident she just could not ignore that altered the course of her teaching career. Recounting a story she rarely shares, Bella’s speech started to quicken and her voice started to rise as she recounted something that happened approximately 10 years ago. Filled with excitement and looking forward to fulfilling her passion of working with ESOL students, she reported to her assigned ninth grade class with ESOL I students who spoke very little to no English. After approximately one week of observation in the classroom, she clearly remembers an

incident where the teacher looked at two students who had been speaking Spanish to one another and said, “No Español! Don’t talk in Spanish again or I’ll get the ears.” After a few minutes passed, again the students started talking in Spanish. The classroom teacher stopped the lesson, went to a cabinet in the room, and pulled out a pair of donkey ears. She then required one of the students put on the ears and wear them for five minutes as a consequence for talking in Spanish. Bella, having grown up 13 miles from the Mexican border, was very familiar with the negative associations with “burro”. As a result, she was immediately infuriated. Reflecting back she still finds herself questioning, “You put that on the head of a child who is new to this country and new to this system and trying to learn English?”

As soon as the situation occurred, Bella got up and left the classroom. In tears, she immediately reported to the university and explained what happened to her placement specialist. Bella was called a liar and was placed in another school outside of East Los Angeles where she was no longer assigned to an ESOL program. When asked why she left, Bella immediately states, “I was sickened. I could not, in good conscious, sit there...I could not be a passive observer. And I was not in the position to confront her...because I was an intern.”

While Bella was no longer officially assigned to an ESOL classroom, since southern California has a large Spanish-speaking population, Bella still found herself teaching primarily second language learners. After teaching English and credit recovery classes in a suburb of Los Angeles for one year, she relocated to Florida where she experienced a total culture shift and culture shock, because the majority of students in her new school are white, English-speaking students.



While some may consider this problematic and non-reflective in nature on the part of the participant, Bella references herself as “white by birth, Mexican by heritage.” Even though Bella did grow up in a small rural town in southern California 13 miles from the Mexican border where Mexican cuisine and Spanish dancing was the norm, many would argue that eating the food and listening to the music of another culture does not and cannot equate with actually being a member of another racial or cultural group, particularly when that person is a member of the dominant group and their reality is still advantaged in comparison to the non-dominant group. Nonetheless, Bella maintains the descriptive phrase as representative of her reality. In elementary school, at the end of the year May Fair and at athletic events, rather than serving hot dogs and potato chips, vendors would sell churros and tamales. As a result of these cultural influences, Bella considers her heritage to be deeply-steeped in Mexican culture. Additionally, as a result of her geographical location, growing up, Bella considered herself to be the racial minority since the overall population of white Americans was smaller in number than the Mexican and Mexican-American population. From her point of view, she states, “having that reference as growing up as a majority-minority, really framed and shaped how I see things.”

When asked when she first developed an awareness of her race, Bella immediately traced back to elementary school. She explained that there were only four other white girls in her class and, as “minority” students, they became friends at a young age. In the sixth grade, the Chicano girls would call them “the white patrol” after the popular children’s toy the “Pooch Patrol”. Reflecting back, Bella states:

When we would walk the halls, they would say, “Oh watch out, here comes the

white patrol!” and it came to the point where it wasn’t just girls, it was boys, it was all grade levels. It came to the point where we were identified and singled-out as the white kids. That was the first time. I remember going home crying. Going, “Why are they saying that to us?” And feeling so helpless, because there were only five of us.

Bella continues to describe her feelings of isolation explaining that as a result, by the time she was in tenth grade, she had been in five physical fights, none of which she had started. She felt bullied, she felt marginalized.

However, tenth grade really marked a turning point for her, because it was during this year she was making many unwise decisions and going down the wrong path that could have led to very bad things, but it was also the year she met Dr. Walker. Dr. Walker was an African American male teacher who taught American History from an African American perspective. Bella found herself relating to the stories in class. She found herself relating to the idea of struggle and having people constantly make judgments based on skin color. She speaks of staying after class to talk with Dr. Walker in attempt to learn everything she could. Now, as she reflects back, she is humored by the irony of her egocentric point of view, but as a sophomore in high school, she felt a sense of connection to people in history who had been marginalized and excluded. Even now, years later, as she speaks of Dr. Walker, her face lights up and her voice is filled with excitement. Calling him her mentor, she tells the story of how he recommended her for a scholarship that she says changed her life. She still appreciates his advocacy and support of her and, as a result, realizes just how critical it is to advocate for students in similar situations.

When asked if her experience growing up majority-minority were transformational in her conceptualizations of race and racism, Bella explains her experiences were highly influential in shaping who she became. Believing many white people do not know what it is like to be discriminated against because of “the color of their skin”, Bella feels she had experiences many white educators have not. Knowing what it is like to be discriminated against and to be bullied as a result of race-based prejudice, not only informed her as a person, but as an educator. She feels her experiences have better prepared her to advocate for and see the perspectives of minority students. Bella contends:

In a way, I associate with the other. I advocate for the other because I’ve been the other. And I think, once you feel being the other, if that doesn’t change the way you feel about the other, then I don’t know what will. What does it feel like to be vulnerable? To not feel like you’re being recognized? To not feel you’re being advocated for? I developed that sense of protection against people who were singled out because of how they looked, because of who they were. I carry that with me in my teaching.

**Hannah: When everything you’ve ever known is turned around.** After graduating from a large university in the southeast in the late 1980s, Hannah went directly into teaching and worked with predominately African-American student populations. While she taught special education for two years, she uses quotations when she says “students with disabilities”, because she truly believes race was an influential factor in over-identification. She states, “I have reflected on this a lot through the years. Some of the kids were placed in there, not because they had learning disabilities but

because they didn't fit the mold, so they wound up in these classes when, in fact, they could have been pushed to do more." Speaking of two particular boys, she states, "I've realized a lot of the systems we had in place were not allowing them social justice." She continues on, "I don't think we did them any justice based on what we did and we probably lost the majority of them to dropping out, so I think some of our systems had an effect." Although Hannah enjoyed teaching and working with the students, she quickly became frustrated with the system. When considering the vast differences in the resources to which her students had access and the resources the predominately white students of higher SES had on the other side of the city, she says, "I saw the system in general was definitely the haves and the have-nots." When she attempted to bring attention to her district-level supervisor, Hannah states, "I was basically just told to shut my mouth." As a beginning teacher, she felt she had been put in her place, which left her feeling powerless about these race-based injustices and inspired her to leave, not only that particular school, but the classroom in general for a number of years. While she returned to the classroom years later, she spent many years in educationally-based non-profit organizations.

When asked about how she identifies herself racially, Hannah immediately refers back to her childhood. Hannah was born in New Jersey and relocated to Florida with her family when she was in elementary school. Two years after relocating, Hannah learned her former elementary school in New Jersey had been closed as a result of integration. She cites this as being one of the first times she ever remembers thinking about issues dealing with race. While she was still rather young, the fact that the school choose to close its doors rather than integrate had an impact on her. In Florida, she lived with her

family in a predominately white community in a suburban town, but she remembers black students went to class with her and it was the first time she had ever seen or had a black teacher. When asked if she remembers having feelings or ideas associated with this teacher, she stated, “I don’t think I ever really reacted to the fact that she was a woman of color, but I do remember feeling that it was important that she liked me. I do remember that. I wanted her to like me and I wanted to please her.” She continued by explaining the students would go to different teachers in their pod for different levels of instruction. While Hannah was in the high-level reading group, she clearly remembers the black female teacher was assigned the low groups and, although she was unable to make any connection at the time, she remembers thinking it would be normal for the black teacher to have all the low groups. She stated that she was young, and while she did not consider these thoughts to have racist connotations at the time, she vividly remembers the thoughts.

Hannah articulates she has always considered herself to be white; however, she is clear to state that for many years, race was something she never really confronted. Highlighting the influence of her parents, she spoke of their close-minded ideas, beliefs, and opinions. Hannah explained that, while there were many things they did not speak of in their home, race tended to be one of them. In her family environment, it was not acceptable to be familiar with anybody outside of what her parents considered to be normal, or mainstream. Her mother had a way of compartmentalizing people, for example, “there are nice Negroes and there are not-nice Negroes,” however, normal and mainstream was white.

The influence of her parents was challenged when Hannah went to college and was assigned to a suite with three African-American females. Hannah explained this experience had a profound effect on her because she found herself the minority. When asked if she found this experience to be transformative, Hannah states, “Most definitely, because everything I had ever known about racism was kind of turned around because I was the minority, so it really had me look through a completely different lens.” Even though she felt the four of them developed great relationships and she described her roommates as “delightful,” she clearly remembers feeling like an outsider when they had friends over to visit. Since nearly all of their friends were African-American, Hannah frequently found herself to be the only white person in the group. Hannah explains, “Within our group I felt like I belonged; we all had a good relationship, but I definitely felt that sense of isolation when other people were put into the mix. It was a very eye-opening situation.” She would wonder what they would say about her when she was not there or if they would make issue that she was a white female. She continued by saying, “It kind of put me on edge, made me feel like I was under a microscope.”

Despite the edgy feelings she would have when she was in larger groups, the closeness she had established with her roommates made her reflect on her upbringing and challenge the influence of her parents. One weekend, Hannah invited her roommates to her parents’ home. Since she lived close to the school and wanted them to meet her family, she thought it was the normal thing to do. Even though her parents treated her roommates with the utmost respect during their visit, Hannah recently discovered, through comments made to her older sister, that her parents were appalled she would

even consider bringing them home. When asked how she felt about their reaction, Hannah states:

I was not surprised, because my parents have always had these feelings about the way they feel about people of other races, but I was shocked because their actions during that weekend did not match. The actions when they were there, they were very friendly, I never got any feeling they were uncomfortable, but it was kind of after the fact that they were sharing their feelings that they felt invaded by that visit.

Hannah continues to explain her disappointment by stating she did not really see her roommates as “these black people. They were my roommates, they were my friends, they were in my inner circle, and, because of that, I guess I incorrectly expected my parents would see them the same way.”

While Hannah’s experience with her roommates in college certainly had an impact on her thoughts, when asked if it influenced the way she interacted with others, she confirmed that it did, but admitted it was rather inauthentic at first. During her two final years of college, when an African-American girl was in her group of friends, she remembers trying to befriend her, at a level which she felt she was overdoing it, but remembers it was important for her to prove that she was not seeing her as a person of color, but rather just as a friend amongst the group. Hannah remembers reflecting on the friendship and considering if she was trying to prove to herself or to the friend that she was not racist. While they continued to be friends, she used these reflections to move forward. Labeling it as a “pivotal” dynamic of reflection, Hannah used these experiences to start to break away from the influence of her upbringing. As stated by Hannah:

It took these situations to help me rethink what I had learned, because, until I was exposed to these experiences, the only thing I knew were the relationships with my family. And it felt normal, when we would go into a certain part of town, my mother would lock the doors, so I always had very confusing feelings and images about people of color....

**Theresa: The value in being a cultural outsider.** Raised in a white, middle class suburban town in Michigan, Theresa had limited interactions with people who were racially different than herself. While there were people of other races in her school, her parents, who grew up a few hours from where they resided as a family, expressed there were no black students in their school, so Theresa describes her environmental context as lacking in racial diversity.

When asked about when she came to recognize her race, Theresa traces back to elementary school when her family relocated from the northern part of the state further south. After the move, Theresa remembers there were African-American kids in her class. Expanding on this, she references an African-American friend she had in sixth grade and, although she remembers thinking it was “not a big deal”, she explicitly remembers thinking she was African-American and she was different.

Prior to college and during her undergraduate years, interestingly, Theresa describes her experiences as “monochromatic” in terms of race. In her community, there were a few “token” families. She goes on to describe them by saying, they “fit into our community, they were suburban, middle class African-American families, so they had the same value set, same upbringing, they just happened to be African-American.” She also explained her brother’s best friend, with whom she was close as well, was an African-



American male who had been adopted by two white parents. She states that, “culturally, he didn’t seem any different than us.” The racial context during her college years remained consistent as she went to college in close geographic proximity to where she grew up. While there was greater variety in racial composition in the university setting, her friends and acquaintances were white, middle class individuals.

After earning her undergraduate degree in music education, she was offered her first teaching position in a very affluent suburban town in Minnesota where she taught elementary music at three different schools, one of which was a French immersion school and two were neighborhood schools. After teaching there for two years, she relocated to New York where she took another position teaching in an affluent suburb of New York City. While she describes the school as being more ethnically and racially diverse, the socioeconomic status of the school was similar to where she previously taught in Minnesota. After teaching there for a few years, Theresa and her husband moved to Bogota, Colombia for a year. While she was there, she taught English. Upon her return to the United States, she purposefully decided to take a different path and accepted a position teaching in the South Bronx at a small school that was 98 percent free and reduced lunch, 60 percent Hispanic, and 40 percent African-American. After teaching in the Bronx, Theresa also held teaching positions in Washington and Florida.

When asked about her desire to talk about and explore the concepts of race and racism, Theresa proclaims that living in Colombia and working in the Bronx really influenced her awareness and desire to examine and think about people who come from places different than from where she came. Living in Colombia and feeling like a cultural-outsider, Theresa was encouraged to examine her own values and belief systems.

She describes it as an “eye-opening experience” that challenged her thoughts and perceptions. Examining what it was like to be different than the cultural norm, she states:

The idea that not everybody comes from the same place and, that where you come from is just where you come from, it was a complete accident that you came from that place, just like it’s a complete accident of birth where anybody comes from. And so that’s when I started really valuing and digging in and trying to understand other people’s perspectives.

Theresa continues by explaining once you explore and understand your own perspective, then you are able to begin to understand the limitations in your perspective, as well.

Upon her return from Colombia, she narrowed down her employment choices to two options: a) a position in the South Bronx or b) another job in the suburbs north of Manhattan. Theresa remembers sitting down and thinking she had an opportunity to continue on the path she had been traveling or she “had an opportunity to do something that seems like it really matters.” When asked what she means by something that really matters, Theresa went on to explain how much the students in the South Bronx “needed positive, invested teachers.” As a result, since volunteerism and helping others were values instilled in her by her parents, the position in the Bronx felt like a natural fit. Not only did the position afford her the opportunity to “help” others, but she also came away from the experience seeing the world differently. Theresa explains:

I think it is really hard to gain a perspective on something without having some sort of experience. So the experience of meeting a person that is different than you, and the experience of trying to understand that person’s perspective, and that goes from the kids that I taught, to the parents that I worked with, to the people in

the community, everyone touches a part of that so being open to understanding a way that is different than what you know is important.

According to Theresa, interacting and developing relationships with people not only helps people to gain a better understanding of people who are different, it also puts a face to a person and helps to work against stereotypes, because once you start to see a person, you look less at the mass of people.

Theresa explains, had she not been exposed to these experiences, especially in New York, she might have continued with a limited perspective, however, once she was put in a situation where she witnessed continual racial inequities, it was impossible to ignore. When asked if she would describe her experiences as transformative, she agreed, but she also cited them as “pivotal” in how she saw herself going forward as she came away from both Colombia and the Bronx seeing the world differently and proceeding in a slightly different direction than the one she had started. Theresa states:

Prior to those experiences, I really think I had some sort of fear of people who weren't like me, but, as a result of these experiences, I realized that was unfounded and more ignorance than anything. And the value of meeting people and knowing people is much greater than trying to keep yourself safe based on some unfounded ignorance.

Throughout the interviews, Theresa frequently equated race with difference. When thinking about racism, since the majority of her experiences were with African-American and Hispanic students in the Bronx, most of who lived in poverty, she had an incredibly difficult time separating race and SES. When asked how to differentiate between these

two demographics, she contends, this “is something I’ve also been struggling with myself, because they seem so tangled up.” Theresa states:

It’s very hard for me to separate socioeconomic status and race, and so when I talk passionately about something that I label as race, sometimes I really think I mean poor, or I say poor, and I think maybe it’s not poor, maybe it’s race....I think there’s something really wrong with looking at society and seeing high poverty areas are primarily racial minorities, at least in urban environments...And I look at the place I grew up, and the places like where I grew up, and it’s nearly all white people and so, it’s not really an eloquent way to say it, but there is something very disturbing to me that it has to be related to race, it just has to be related to race.

When asked if she ever talked about race with her brother’s best friend, with whom she was also close, she states, “No, never.” After I inquired further, she stated, “But I should talk to him about that. We’re still close. I should say, ‘What was it like for you?’ That would be interesting to find out.”

Given Theresa connects race with difference and she considers both her brother’s best friend and other “token” families in her neighborhood where she grew up as having “the same core value set”, she does not give much thought to how race and racism impact the lives of people of color who do not live in poverty. When specifically asked, how race may influence the lives of people of color not living in poverty, Theresa states, “I wonder. I think it does.”

**Ella: Beyond Mayberry.** After graduating from college in the late 1970s, Ella accepted her first teaching position at an elementary school in Nebraska. After teaching

there for a few years, she took a position as a family teacher at a group home where she served as the house mother to nine boys, ages 13 and older, all of whom were adjudicated through the court system. After working there for a few years, Ella moved back to Kansas to serve as a director of a vocational education program designed for ninth grade students who were labeled as potential dropouts and then served in principalships for both an elementary and a k-12 school. After relocating to Florida in the late 1980s, Ella has worked in a milieu of educational leadership positions having served in drop-out prevention and human resources, as well as coordinator, director, principal, and supervisor positions. The majority of Ella's 35 years of professional experience has been working with high needs schools.

Growing up on a ranch in an incredibly small racially-homogenous Midwest town that she compares to Mayberry, Ella references college as the first time she really became aware of her race and came to understand that everybody was subject to a classification. While she was in school in Topeka, Kansas, where *Brown verse Board of Education* had taken place, when she looked at her program of study for her teaching degree, she could tell there were some experiences to which she was not going to be exposed. She knew there were going to be some serious differences in the experiences she had growing up in an all-white rural town and what she would encounter in her teaching career. However, she did not feel her program of study addressed those differences. As a result, she approached the department chair and said, "I don't want this experience you have outlined for me. There are some real gaps. I am a white female. I grew up in western Kansas. I have never been exposed, have not taught, have not been around black children."

While Ella did not feel she grew up with any sense of prejudice and describes her parents as open-minded people who exposed her to many things and challenged the “status quo”, she knew she did not feel prepared professionally to work with racially diverse student populations. Subsequently, she rewrote her program of study, where she requested to be placed at specific schools, and the college accepted it. When I probed further as to why she took this initiative, she very matter-of-factly stated she knew she was not ready; she was not prepared, she had not had that experience or that exposure. She knew the “real world” was going to look very different than from where she had come.

When it came time for student teaching, Ella was placed at a middle school with predominately African-American children. When she arrived, she remembers thinking the school was not traditionally assigned student teachers, because they did not know what to do with her. She also remembers the students were very skeptical of her at first, but once they realized she was going to be there for a while, once they realized she was committed, they became much more comfortable.

While Ella is grateful for the variety of encounters she has had in her life, she cites her experience as the family teacher in the group home as the circumstance that most transformed her understandings and altered her perspective regarding race relations. When asked if she considers the experience to be transformative, she states, “Definitely. If I would’ve never had the experience...just being 22 or 23 years of age at the time, and if I would have remained in western Kansas, I would have never had the luxury of actually being a mother to three black teenagers and, from that, it made me be able to look at things differently.”

Ella goes on to describe how she had to become familiar with different cultural aspects. Speaking about personal hygiene, Ella reflects on having to learn about different hair products and lotions. Since she was their “mother”, and did the shopping, she had to understand their needs and how to meet them. With a smile on her face, she reflects on a young boy named Cecil who was a “lifer.” He had come to the group home when he was 8 years old and remained there until he graduated. Thinking about one evening when they were in the living room listening and dancing to ‘70s disco, she remembers Cecil saying, “You dance just like a white woman.” Laughing aloud she remembers her response, “But Cecil, I am a white woman!” Cecil then came back with, “But you don’t have to dance like one.” With a smile on her face and continued happiness in her voice, Ella states, “All of those experiences...I learned so much from them....it was really interesting, being the mother to these kids and learning.”

Having developed a personal connection with the students, Ella speaks of how she took three of the boys, who were not able to go home to visit their families, to Kansas with her during the Christmas holiday. While all three of the students were African-American, ages 18, 16, and 13, she remembers she did not really think about that until others in the town made it apparent. Living 15 miles from town, she reflects on how, when they would go into town, people stopped and purposefully engaged them in conversation. Even though she perceived the towns’ people as being very kind, she remembers thinking the boys’ presence was a real novelty, because the town really had not had any exposure to people who did not look like them.

Reflecting back, Ella continues by telling a story about going to church on Sunday. Mamie Brown, the lady who stood at the front door and greeted everyone upon

arrival, looked shocked when she opened the front door and saw these three young black men standing on the other side. Describing it as a sense of panic, Ella remembers Mamie Brown's prolonged look at the boys; her eyes then shifted to Ella's parents, and then to Ella. Ella remembers Mamie Brown trying to piece it all together. "How come they were standing there?" It was not until she made the connection that the look of panic subsided. Once she realized the young men were with Ella's family, her demeanor shifted to welcome the boys and invite them into the church. However, what if the boys had arrived without Ella's family and wanted to attend the service? Would they have been welcomed? Following the service, Ella remembers her father asking her about Mamie Brown's reaction. After Ella expressed her surprise, her father reminded her of the importance of remembering the context of the community. Referencing an old law, that was still on the books at the time, that prohibited black people and Mexicans to be out in town past 10pm, he reminded her of the community's lack of exposure to people who were not like them. While Ella appreciated her father's comments, she most appreciated that he also recognized Mamie Brown's reaction to the situation.

Describing her parents as well-read and eager to challenge the status quo, Ella remembers her father loved to attend his Sunday school class and challenge what other people said. After church, as a family, they would go out to eat and Ella vividly remembers the conversations. Whether he was challenging traditional notions of religion or close-minded views on race, Ella's father encouraged curiosity and embraced a different way of thinking. Reflecting back to when the Gideon's and the Mormons would knock on their door, rather than asking them to go away, her father would invite them in and engage in conversation. Asking them why they believed the way they did and why



their beliefs were important to them, Ella's father embraced the idea of considering things from an alternate perspective. While Ella compares the community where she grew up to Mayberry, she sees her parents' ideologies, especially her father's, as extending well-beyond a Mayberry state of mind. The philosophies with which she was raised influenced her decision to challenge her program of study in undergraduate school and apply for the position at the boys' home. Extending well-beyond her childhood, these challenging philosophies continue to influence Ella. Whether it is calling attention to contradictions or encouraging conversations people may traditionally find uncomfortable, Ella finds it important to name issues of race and racism and put them on the table. Relating what she observes in the educational arena to the towns' people with whom she grew up in "Mayberry", Ella references the lack of awareness to racism as a lack of consciousness. Ella argues, when people are not exposed, they are not aware and it is very difficult for people to be aware of what they are not aware.

While Ella was aware of race and made conscious decisions related to this dynamic when she was living in the Midwest, she remembers when relocating to Florida, "it was so marked in our face." Referencing the racially-associated rudeness, Ella spoke of the derogatory terms and comments she began to hear. She reflects on conversations with her husband, who is also an educator, and states, "We just kept thinking...*Brown verse the Board of Education* happened in the 1950's, and we got here in the late 80's, and people were still talking about these things and we were so surprised."

**Morgan: White and left of center.** When asked how he identifies himself racially, Morgan states he considers himself to be white, but quickly goes on to clarify that "people, particularly other white people, would view me left of center," thereby

disassociating himself from traditional conservative views. When asked to expand on this notion of “left of center”, Morgan talks about discussions he has had with other educators. Explaining most educators are white and come from middle class backgrounds, Morgan contends their frame of reference is limited and their understanding of how their whiteness benefits them is not understood and traditionally overlooked. According to Morgan, while many white people avoid talking about matters of race and racism, he considers himself constantly thinking about and wanting to talk about these dynamics.

When asked when he first developed an awareness of his race, Morgan traces back to his undergraduate years in college. Morgan was raised in a predominately white community. While there were approximately 1,000 students in his high school, he says, “You could count all the African-American kids on one hand in my school, no Hispanics.” However, his lack of interaction with non-whites quickly changed when he went away to college as he was assigned an African-American roommate his second semester of his freshman year. Since he was always struggling to pay his tuition, he was never able to reserve a dorm room in advance. As a result, he was forced to sign-up and pay at the last minute. This last-minute strategy left him no choice in roommate selection, and he was paired with an African-American male from Washington D.C. Reflecting back, Morgan remembers how his roommate had a picture on his dresser of his football team in Washington D.C. and there were no white guys on the team and Morgan had a picture of his wrestling team in Ohio and, for the exception of one black guy, the team was all white. Thinking back on the experience, Morgan describes how he and his roommate used to lay in their beds at night and have deep conversations. Not

long after they became roommates, they began to engage in dialogues about race.

Morgan states, “I’ve just never had that before. It was really eye-opening to me.” When asked specifically if he considers his roommate as being influential in his understanding of race and racism, Morgan responds by saying, “Absolutely.” He then goes on to talk about Richard, a colleague for whom he still carries a deep sense of fondness and admiration.

After going to college for two years, Morgan had to take a break from school for financial reasons. While working at a car rental company in Ohio, Morgan met a black man named Richard. Morgan remembers being the only white guy who worked the second shift, 4:00pm until midnight. While Richard was his manager and was about 10 years older than him, Morgan and Richard quickly developed a friendship. Speaking fondly of him, Morgan states, “He carried himself like a pure leader.” Reflecting back on their friendship, Morgan describes how they would go out together after they would get off work. He remembers Richard would take him to certain places where he would be the only white guy. While being the minority in an environment was a new experience for Morgan, he felt comfortable with Richard; he felt like he looked out and took care of him. He states he never would have gone into the places without Richard, but when he was with him, he did not feel threatened. He describes Richard as having an air of respect, as well-liked, powerful, and having a quiet reserve.

In the second interview, I revisited Morgan’s relationships with both his roommate and Richard. When asked if he considers the relationships to be influential in his perceptions of race and racism, Morgan again responds by saying, “Absolutely!” He also goes on to explain how both of these men further informed his understanding of not

just African-American males, but African-American males from low socioeconomic situations. Morgan continues on to talk about the influence of these men and states, “Especially Richard, because we spent a lot of time together. He really was a mentor of mine, about how to treat people, and how to work, I saw how he worked and it was just very....the memories of him I will never forget.” Morgan clearly sees Richard as not only a mentor about life in general, but as a mentor who helped him better understand race and his own racial identity.

Along with the powerful relationships Morgan developed with both his roommate and Richard, Morgan also considers his parents to be influential in his perspective and understanding of race and racism. While he was raised in an all-white community, and can only remember one African-American coming to their house while he was growing up, he vividly remembers the “n-word” was forbidden in their house. Even though he would commonly hear the word being used at his friends’ houses by their parents, especially their fathers, the word was never used at their house. Morgan states, “It was just as any other profane word, I would have been in just as much trouble.”

Describing his father as both a Democrat and a union leader, Morgan considered his father to be politically left of center, as well. Since he was in his 20s in the 1960s, he was in-tune with the Civil Rights Movement and the struggle for racial equity and those were things that they would discuss. Additionally, he remembers talking with his mother, who was also an educator. Describing her as far left of center, almost a radical, when it comes to her political beliefs, Morgan states that even at 75 years of age, “she goes crazy over women or minorities being mistreated, she just is, she is definitely a civil rights type mentality.” As a result, he has always found himself willing to listen and apt

to engage in discourse on race relations. He also considers himself to be one to encourage others, especially white people, to look at things differently. Whenever race comes up in conversations, Morgan is curious to inquire about others' frame of reference, as well as highlight possible inconsistencies.

**Owen: Conscious through the mind and spirit.** When asked how he identifies racially, Owen states he considers himself white, but then quickly states he likes to “extend that even a little bit to the cultural elements of what race entails.” While he was born in the north, he relocated to Florida as a child, so he considers himself a southern person, a positioning that has colored and filtered the way he sees things.

When asked when he started to develop an awareness of issues of race and racism, Owen states he really did not think much about racial issues prior to getting into the graduate program in which he is currently enrolled. Thinking he had everything figured out, he understood he was white, knew there were different races, and was comfortable in understanding his own ability to distinguish what he would consider to be racist and what he would not. However, after completing and reflecting on some of his course work, he feels he is in a different place than where he started. He still considers himself white and believes he is not an overtly racist person, but when he thinks about what racism means, he is now at the point where he defines his understanding as a work in progress, as evolving. When asked to expand upon this notion, Owen states, “I think the biggest epiphany would be in coming to recognize there’s an element in my racial identity I have little control over.” Continuing on to talk about the properties of whiteness, Owen admits that prior to his coursework this was a foreign concept to him and it was something he had never really given any thought. Realizing he is treated

differently than someone of a different color was an idea that never occurred to him until recently. He speaks of the reality of social structures and racially hegemonic systems and talks of how they influence things without him even being cognizant. As a result of this new-found information, Owen has been inspired to start to look for and recognize these structures. While he may not be in control of these structures, he feels, on a minimal level, he needs to be aware of this lack of control, as well.

Along with graduate course work, Owen also credits a professional colleague as being influential in his understanding of race and racism. According to Owen, this colleague, who was also inspired by graduate course work a few years ago, has always had a passion for the underserved. Having worked together for almost 10 years, Owen credits this colleague for helping him to understand what it means to reach out and give voice to people who are “very much under the radar.” He has led by example and given life to the idea of walking the talk and putting a foot where the mouth is. Owen emphasizes this colleague takes a special interest in students of color who he believes are under-resourced and is concerned with all students being given the tools they need to be successful.

Thinking of both the course work and the influence of his colleague, these experiences have encouraged Owen to consider his personal framework and attempt to see things from a different angle. Rather than accepting the status quo without question, Owen feels more comfortable trying to employ an alternate view point to think of situations and question the way things are. His colleague constantly reminds him of the importance of understanding there are different perspectives. These experiences have encouraged Owen to be more reflective and introspective about things and reflect on

situations before making assumptions and jumping to conclusions. Subsequently, he is more willing to communicate with others about areas where race or racism is involved when perhaps, before, he might not have. Additionally, he feels he has turned the analytical lens onto other people and highlights contradictions and questions ideas.

While Owen does not consider his course work or interactions with his colleague to be transformational, he asserts they have obviously impacted him in some way, but would not necessarily say that he is different because of that exposure. Although there have been moments of an epiphany and reflection and introspection have been heavily encouraged, he does not connect his experiences with dramatic change or significance. The new way of thinking has been prevalent, but when considering how others perceive him, such as his wife or his friends, he does not believe they would note a significant change.

While Owen's course work and his relationship with this colleague have been influential in his recognition and interpretation of race and racism, extending beyond academically-based conceptualizations, Owen cites his faith as being the personal component that has had the biggest influence on his thoughts and actions. Owen states:

Opening up to what I feel the true teachings of Christ are about have been very revelatory to me. Thinking of the issue of race, me coming to understand that I'm no more deserving or less deserving than anyone else of any color. I've tried to put that in action, as a person, in how I deal with people. That's a spiritual thing for me and that's been something over the last few years I've been more reflective about. How do I live out these teachings, because the opposite of that has happened for so long. People have used these teachings as hegemonic practices

and still, I think it was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said the most segregated place in America is 11am on Sunday morning.

Referencing the idea of mind, body, and spirit, when asked if he would consider that his mind, from an academic basis, and his spirit, from a religious standpoint, are working together to encourage his consciousness about race and racism, Owen agrees that is an accurate way to describe it. He then continues to say, “Then hopefully, maybe in a grander way, it will impact the body, what I do, how I act, how I manifest myself in the world.”

**Peter: Lacks the baggage of a southern white man.** Having spent 35 years in public education, Peter began teaching high school English in the mid-1970's. After completing a Master's degree in Educational Leadership, he became a human relations specialist. The position, at the time, was funded by the federal government and was especially designed to establish a liaison for African-American students when handling issues with administration and faculty during the era of desegregation. Having a case load of approximately 50 students each semester, Peter's work involved interceding in disciplinary issues and serving as an advocate for black and Hispanic students. Peter believes the position helped him become well-known in the black community, which helped integrate him with the black professional educators in the district in which he worked; they appreciated Peter and took him under their wing. Peter entered into administration, serving both as a dean and an assistant principal, before becoming director of pupil administrative services. In this position Peter worked side-by-side with attorneys and the NAACP legal defense fund to create a desegregation plan in compliance with the mandates of the federal courts. After receiving a lot of criticism in



the high-profile position, he left district administration to hold principalships in both a high school and a middle school. While he intended to retire directly from the principal position, upon request of the superintendent, he returned to district administration and served as a director responsible for creating a plan to change multiple boundaries, as well as create a school choice plan involving alternative, magnet, and charter schools. Similar to the human relations specialist position, much of Peter's work in the new director position involved continued work with the African-American community. Although he has recently retired, Peter still defines his areas of expertise as student assignment and working to balance racial demographics through the use of school choice.

Born and raised in Detroit, while he lived in an all-white neighborhood, as African-Americans lived on the other side of town, Peter still had daily interactions with people of color, especially at school. He feels those interactions placed him at an advantage when he relocated to Florida in the 1970s. Not only did he have experience interacting with people of other races, but he was not viewed as a southern white man, he did not have "the baggage that a white southern man would have." Reflecting back on his experiences in Detroit, Peter remembers blacks and whites going to the movies together. However, in the 1960s, as a child, when he visited Georgia, he was quickly introduced to the realities of segregation. He saw black and white water fountains, bathrooms, and other separate facilities, but, given his northern experience, he could distance himself from those realities. Unlike whites who were raised in Florida and Georgia, Peter did not grow up in a completely segregated society, he was not familiar with or institutionalized by Jim Crow; Peter feels fortunate for that.

When asked how he identifies racially, Peter stated that he considers himself to be white, but immediately went on to discuss the power and privilege associated with that whiteness. Peter asserts, “being white, or being black, for the last 70 years of the last century, was everything.” While he does not consider race to be as influential in Michigan, when he speaks of Florida, he states, “what you were, who you were, who you became, the value of your existence, if you were white, you had opportunities that Hispanics or blacks did not have. Your destiny, how successful you were going to be, was based heavily on race.”

While his current wife is Hispanic, Peter strongly believes they would not have been able to marry 30 years ago, because, “Anglos didn’t cross into their world, and they didn’t cross into the Anglo world.” When asked to speak more about his relationship with his wife, and whether there have been any issues associated with race, Peter states there have not been any. He explains his wife’s other two sisters are also married to white men.

When asked if there was an event or circumstance in his life that most influenced his understanding of race and racism, Peter reflects back to his position as human relations specialist and references how the position was his first exposure that sensitized him to these dynamics. While he has 35 years in public education and 20 years working specifically with school-choice, Peter views the human relations specialist position as having served as a catalyst for his well-founded knowledge on racism in schools. Even though most human relations specialist were African-American, since it was ultimately the decision of the principal of each school to hire for the position, when deciding to hire

Peter, the principal received a great deal of criticism for that decision and it left Peter in a position where he had a lot to prove.

Reflecting back on attending the monthly meetings, he remembers being the only white human relations specialist in the room. While he believes his northern roots assisted in helping his colleagues develop a positive perception of him, he still remembers he was not comfortable at first. When asked how his colleagues received him, Peter states, "I had to win them over. In fact, some of them were down-right hostile. I just tried to be calm, and reasonable, and rationale and be supportive, but not back down. But, at the same time, not be aggressive. And, it worked. I won over the supervisor, a black lady." Peter remembers one lady calling him "white boy" in the meeting in front of all their colleagues and the supervisor. Reflecting back on the situation, he references her as saying, "What the hell is he talking about? That white boy doesn't know what he's talking about." Peter continues by saying, "Right to my face, but, yet, we're human relations specialists, we are trying to bridge that, yet, I've got a fellow professional calling me a white boy. I was shocked." Realizing she was baiting him, he decided not to say anything. Peter states, "She would have been happy for me to get pissed off. If you're in a meeting, with all black educators, you've got to do a lot of listening, you don't do a lot of talking, until you get to a point where they don't see you as black or white, they see you as an educator or a peer." While Peter and this colleague ended up being great friends, he explains it took time.

Along with his experience as a human relations specialist, Peter also spoke of his relationship with his black roommate in the military with whom he bunked when stationed on a remote airbase in Thailand. Comparing himself to his roommate, Peter

asserts they came from two different worlds and describes the situation as interesting. He remembers his roommate giving him the book *Malcolm X* since Malcolm X was from Detroit like Peter. While they were only roommates for three months, Peter describes him as the first black friend he ever had. When asked about the most profound thing he took away from this experience, Peter states:

I learned African-American people are people. I hadn't been around, I went to school with black kids, but the black kids in Detroit, lived in their own part. You had sections of the city where people stayed together. We talked and I got to hear about his life and what was important to him. I grew a sensitivity, they felt they had to fight the establishment in the military, everything they had to do was a fight. There was a lot of tension. I saw it in the military, I saw it in the public school system. The tension was there, in everything, people can tell you what it's like, but, you don't see that now. I know there is still racism, but it is extremely subtle, very well-hidden.

When asked about the importance of working for racial equity, Peter again references his profession. He states:

I honestly believe that I had to. I could not do the job unless I believed it was the right thing to do, to dismantle the dual school system. It was a crime what happened down here. It was a crime what happened in the south, what they did to African American students because they were African American. The community wasn't going to do it, the state wasn't going to do it, they had laws that prevented a white child from going to a black school. The feds had to do it, and they made us do it, and we did it, because it was the right thing to do.

Administrators like myself, you couldn't do the job unless you believed it was the right thing to do.

**Winston: From the fields to the Peace Corps.** After graduating from undergraduate school as a liberal arts major, Winston entered into the Peace Corps in west Africa. Spending two years in Sierra Leone working in community development in a very remote village in the bush, Winston taught local people how to grow rice in their swampy environment. After returning to the United States, Winston enrolled in a graduate program in Georgia where he studied German. After a year, he decided he was not interested in teaching German for his career and decided to shift his focus to childhood studies, because it seemed like a natural fit for him. As a result, he entered an Early Childhood program at a university in Florida. After completing his degree, he went into Teacher Corps, where he spent a few years working at inner city schools in an urban area. Since it was just before integration, Winston first worked in the all black schools in the city and then followed the students to their newly assigned suburban setting.

When asked why he decided to join the Peace Corps, Winston spoke of his ministerial service in undergraduate school, as well as John F. Kennedy's motivational influence in the idea of, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Winston describes JFK's ideas as resonating with him, especially given the assassinations at the time. Winston considered the Peace Corps an opportunity to serve, as sort of a calling, as the natural thing to do after college before transitioning into the real world.

Reflecting back, he cites the Peace Corps as an incredible opportunity. Learning much about himself, he feels he got much more out of the experience than he gave. He

developed a great appreciation for the people as he learned how they cared for and treated each other. The extended family ideology was appealing to Winston. Developing a fondness for those with whom he was living and working, Winston states, “It blurs the color lines when you look at people in terms of what they are doing for others, how they treat others.” Along with their sense of extended family, Winston developed an appreciation for their sense of hard work, “When you farm, you cut it down with a machete, you burn it, and you go to a new bush the next year that’s tall and you cut it down, so they work hard, but they also have this sense of psychological soundness... I think we could learn a lot from their subsistence, primitive culture.”

Further reflecting on his experiences in Sierra Leone, Winston references the importance of practical, real-life experience. Believing individuals have both an intellectual and an emotional switch, Winston asserts, while people can intellectualize things, he believes it is not until people have emotionally experienced things that they can truly develop an appreciation. Winston continues, “We can talk about it all day, but until you’ve lived it, I think that’s why the Peace Corps was so valuable, because I lived it. I was the only white person amongst a whole bunch of black people who brought me in. I came to trust, and, if you can trust, then you’re alright.”

Along with the Peace Corps, Winston references his upbringing in the rural south as influential in his conceptualizations of race and racism. Growing up in a very small farming community, Winston learned about the dynamics of race at an early age. While he identifies as white, he grew up working very closely with black people in the fields. As they worked side-by-side, he thought nothing of it; he thought that was the way it was. However, he quickly learned it was not that simple.

Citing an incident as “one of the most telling things”, he remembers a day when his grandfather took him to get a haircut in a black barbershop. After the haircut, having been raised with the expectation to shake people’s hands out of politeness, Winston extended his hand to the barber. Winston remembers being quickly chastised by his grandfather as he proclaimed, “You don’t do that; you don’t shake a black person’s hand!” Subsequently, at a young age Winston began to realize there are certain ways you act and certain ways you interact in terms of race. This realization aided in the development of a self-awareness of race and he came to know racism as benevolent racism. Winston states, “People treated blacks well, Negroes well, however, there was a place. You become very familiar with that and that in itself you realize is discriminatory.”

As Winston continued to work in the fields, he was continually exposed to black people; they worked together, they ate together, they developed relationships. Reflecting back, Winston states, it is “that sense, you’re almost like family, but another point in time, no you’re not family, which doesn’t make a lot of sense, but it’s truly the south.” Additionally, Winston recalls all the racist epitaphs and words that were used were just seen as everyday expressions.

As Winston grew, matured, and evolved, there was a whole self-education as he began to unlearn much of what had been instilled in him. Whether it was benevolent racism, acceptability of racist epitaphs, or the idea of “stay in your place”, as Winston committed his career to one of service and working with diverse student populations, he began to truly value diversity and sees strengths in such diversity. When asked if his

educational training prepared him for working with diverse student populations, Winston responds:

I think my background did that. I think my unique upbringing, in a rural setting, I think serving through the Peace Corps setting, which was all about cultural relativism and learning to adapt and adjust to a culture, which you had to realize how different you were to be able to go in and kind of live within that kind of situation, and realize that there are differences and that you adjust, and you make accommodations for that situation. So, I think those were really trainings that emotionally affected me. I don't think you can do it intellectually, unfortunately, I think people that think they can rationalize racism, they're not going to get it. I think it is a very emotional kind of experience that people have to have or they fall back to their inset values, or biases, or prejudices. That would be my, I think that's what made the difference with me, because I think I could have very easily gone down the road of a very prejudicial set of values, that were there. I don't think they're far away.

When asked if his experiences in Sierra Leone and working in the fields were transformational, Winston asserts the experiences, without question, shaped who he has become. Serving in Africa not only allowed him to interact with people who were different than him, it encouraged the development of a respect for their philosophies and work ethic. Winston states:

I think definitely being in the Peace Corps was transformative, living in Africa was transformative, where you're in different cultures, so you are looking at the cultural relative aspect of things, how we tend not to be able to see things from



somebody else's perspective, we always see them from ours, being able to put yourself in somebody else's place, that's transformative.

Working in the fields, Winston's achievement and production was tied to others.

Working together, they contributed in the same manner. According to Winston, "Maybe that's the key to the situation; you don't see them as being any less productive than yourself."

**The experience beyond the experience.** Considering the critical incidences, although there was value and meaning in the experience itself, there was also value in what resulted from the experience for each of the participants. Almost seen as cathartic exposure, these critical incidents influenced participants to set aside what they had been taught or socially-constructed to consider the norm. In the words of Theresa, they were influenced to let go of "unfounded ignorance and fear" that resulted from lack of exposure or distorted ideologies instilled in them by either their parents or society as a whole. Looking less at the mass of people, these experiences encouraged participants to start to see a person as a person. While for some, this person may have been an exception to the rule, the experience resulted in learning, or unlearning, that influenced greater reflection and related action.

It is also important to highlight everyone's critical incident was described through a positive lens. Bella could be considered the one exception, in that she felt bullied and judged because of her skin color, however, she walked away from the overall experience of growing up 13 miles from the Mexican border with a fondness for her childhood steeped in Mexican culture. Had the participants had negative experiences and interactions with people who were racially different than themselves, perhaps they would

not have been influenced to conceptualize race and racism in the same way. As stated by Theresa, “Maybe, if the people I met along with way, I had really negative experiences with, maybe I’d have a different feeling, but I feel I had such positive experiences; I made so many connections.”

**Collective consideration of critical incidences.** Having provided a case description of each participant in the forms of both comparative information and critical incidences in order to present their narratives and personal connections to race and racism, since their stories are critical to their understanding and interpretation of race and racism, the remainder of the chapter will focus on interpretation of the findings based on cross-themes. Themes from the critical incidences of the participants will be highlighted, as well as how participants recognize, confront, and dialogue about race and racism.

Whether it was by chance or by choice, all of the participants have found themselves in circumstance or experiences where they were influenced to see things from a positioning other than the one they were raised, influenced, and socially-normed to employ. For the exception of Bella, all participants were raised in a geographic setting where white people were the majority which resulted in limited early exposure to people of color. They spoke of this lack of exposure resulting in lack of awareness that continued to influence lack of consciousness; it was not important to consider or conceptualize race or racism because it was seemingly irrelevant in the lives of participants. Additionally, this lack of exposure to people of color further reinforced the socially-normed ideology of white people, white culture, and white standards as the norm. While participants were seemingly initially unaware of this norm, their individual experiences not only increased exposure and awareness to things outside of the norm, but

heightened consciousness of race and racism when the norm of whiteness became exposed. As suggested by Ella, it is “difficult for people to be aware of what they are not aware.” However, once the participants experienced their critical incidences, it would be difficult for them to revert back to their previous thoughts and ideas because it is difficult for people to ignore that of which they are aware, especially when they have developed a personal connection to those who helped bring the awareness to light.

*The power in the majority positioned as the minority.* Growing up the racial majority, participants could easily ignore the social norm of their whiteness without even being aware of doing so. Given the invisibility of their privilege, they did not have to and were not encouraged to engage in it. As suggested by Theresa, “Because the mainstream race, and what you see on tv, and the culture of popular media, and news is white, middle class culture, so, if that’s the perceived norm, you don’t need to identify, you’re just normal.” However, once participants entered into situations where they found themselves seemingly positioned as the racial minority, regarding numeric representation, attention and awareness of race were quickly illuminated.

When participants found themselves in situations where they were smaller in number, or at least equal in number to people of color, they overwhelmingly cited such incidences as when they first became aware of their race. For Hannah, Morgan, and Peter, these incidences first came when they were assigned African-American roommates. Both Peter and Morgan speak of their roommates, in comparison to themselves, as having come from two different worlds, but as leaving the situation knowing much more than when they arrived. While Morgan references the experience as eye-opening, Peter simply states, “I learned African-American people were people.”

While he clearly understood African-Americans were human beings, biologically speaking, it was not until this experience that he realized the commonalities between thoughts, feelings, experiences, and lives of people who were racially different than him.

Even though Hannah cites her experience as positive overall, she does describe it by saying, "It put me on edge, made me feel like I was under a microscope." Never before had Hannah, or the other participants, had to think about how others perceived her because of her race. However, in this situation, where she was one white female living with three African-American females, when she was positioned as the minority, she became very sensitive to her race. When her race became relevant to the situation, not only did her awareness and consciousness increase, she also found herself challenging the negative influences instilled in her mind by her parents, because the things she had been taught did not match what she was seeing.

Even though Ella was not actually assigned African-American roommates per se, given her experience serving as the house mother to three African-American boys, her critical incident is similar to those of Hannah, Morgan, and Peter. While she was not an equal, but rather in a position of power over the boys, her time spent with them still encouraged increased awareness. She states the experience made her look at things differently and she credits the boys for teaching her so much. Additionally, having developed an emotional attachment to the boys, when she took them to her hometown and Mamie Brown reacted negatively to their presence; the situation prompted Ella to look at things much differently than she ever had before. She became aware of what she was not previously aware, but, at the same time, was able to recognize that of which others were still unaware. With this increased consciousness, race became relevant and

Ella found herself wondering if the boys would have been welcomed into the church if they were not with her and her family.

*The power in the majority positioned as a cultural outsider.* Bella, Theresa, and Winston cited their racial awareness being heightened when they were in situations where they found themselves positioned not just as smaller in number to people of other racial groups, but in situations where their cultural was minimally represented, thereby prompting them to feel like cultural outsiders. Bella cites her experience as growing up the racial minority, just 13 miles from the Mexican border, as being highly influential in framing and shaping how she sees things. She constantly felt she was being “identified” and “singled out” because of her race. Not only did she feel “bullied,” she also felt she was constantly judged because of her skin color.

While, at the time, Bella felt discriminated against, later in life she seemed to recognize while her experiences may have been related to race-based prejudice, they should not be considered to place her on the receiving end of racism. While Bella felt judged, violated, and, in her words “bullied,” in the scenario, later in life, she came to realize it is not the same as when a racial minority is constantly judge, violated, and bullied. Subsequently, even though Bella’s feelings were undoubtedly hurt and she was forever influenced by the unkind treatment from the Chicano girls, Bella was not on the receiving end of racism, but rather the target of racially-related motivations.

Like Bella, Theresa and Winston also spoke of situations where they were cultural outsiders, but unlike Bella, both Theresa and Winston entered into these situations by choice and were older at the time of the experience. Living in Colombia, Theresa’s awareness increased and she found herself thinking about people who came from places

different than from where she came. By doing so, it encouraged her to explore her own values and belief systems in attempt to analyze her thoughts, ideas, and perspectives. Prior to going to Colombia, Theresa never needed to analyze her own beliefs, because they were so similar to those around her. However, when she came to feel like an outsider, her consciousness increased and she realized her norms needed to be examined and exposed in attempt to try to better understand those around her.

While Winston had worked alongside African-Americans in the farm fields of the south, when he was in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone, being “the only white person amongst a whole bunch of black people” increased his awareness of his race. Even though he saw the workers in the fields as African American, he did not give much thought to the fact he was white. However, when he was in a situation where he was the only white person, his race became undeniable. Also, it is interesting to highlight he referenced himself as “the only white person surrounded by a whole bunch of black people” rather than the only American surrounded by a whole bunch of Sierra Leoneans or Africans. Perhaps it was because the interviews themselves were specifically focused on race, but it is thought-provoking that race seemingly took precedence over nationality or even continent of origin, or perhaps it was because he was in Africa he was encouraged to see race.

***The power of academic experience.*** Of all the participants, Owen was the only person who did not recount a personal experience where he was positioned as the racial outsider; his experiences were primarily academically-based rather than personal. While several participants cited the value in their graduate coursework as a powerful influence in their thinking and as a catalyst for reflection, not all participants were in agreement

regarding the power of the academic experience. When asked if his education prepared him to work with students of color, Winston states, “I think my background did that.” Expanding further, Winston highlights his strong belief in the power of the practical experience, the power of experiential learning. When speaking about conceptualizing race and the implications of race and racism, Winston asserts, “I don’t think you can do it intellectually, unfortunately. I think people that think they can rationalize racism; they’re not going to get it. It’s a very emotional kind of experience that people have to have or they fall back to their inset values, biases, prejudices.”

Owen, however, is in direct opposition to Winston asserting his academic experience has encouraged him to reflect on his values, biases, and prejudices and embark on a new course of thought. Owen admits he did not think about race or the implications of race prior to entering the doctoral program that he is currently enrolled, and spoke at length about the positive influence of academics on his frame of reference. Owen states, “I’ve learned to think of it as perspective and learning to see things from a different angle, from a different viewpoint.” Additionally, Owen highlights he has been inspired to be much more reflective and introspective regarding matters of race and racism as readings from his coursework and class discussions have encouraged him to think of things in ways he has never previously considered. Never before having to question the ideology of whiteness as the norm, after being introduced to white privilege, Owen finds himself conceptualizing things in a completely new way. He states, “There’s an element in my racial identity I have little control over.” Prior to his coursework, he did not give thought to his whiteness, as it was seemingly invisible and irrelevant, but after the concepts of white privilege and whiteness as property were introduced to him in

a Critical Race Theory class, it is something he can no longer ignore. While he acknowledges he does not think about race and race-based conceptualizations every day, he is clear to cite he is much more aware of race-based privilege than he was previously. Similar to Ella, and the power of her critical incident, academics have influenced Owen to become aware of what he was not previously aware and, now since he has relearned, it is difficult to unlearn. The increased awareness has resulted in increased consciousness regarding race and racism.

*Language as a tool of empowerment.* Along with increased awareness, Owen also cites a feeling of empowerment associated with increased vocabulary and well-informed ideologies related to race and racism. Having the appropriate vocabulary to respond and well-versed ideas has increased both his comfort and confidence when placed in situations where his ideas and new-found learning may be challenged. He states, “It’s caused me to communicate with others about areas where race or racism is involved when perhaps before I might not have.” Similarly, Hannah also speaks of the importance of language and how the information she has acquired in her graduate coursework has given her the tools to describe things she previously did not know how. Additionally, regarding his new-found knowledge Owen states, “I hope, that if anything else, it gives me compassion for the other that perhaps I didn’t have or thought I had and didn’t.” While Owen does not consider his academic influence to be transformational, as he is still looking for some “grander” way of how he manifests himself in the world and his work, he cites his education as being highly influential in highlighting ideas and notions he never previously considered. Subsequently, Owen directly connects his



academic experience for further developing his critical consciousness and giving meaning to how he has come to know race and racism.

***The role of college.*** When examining the other participants, direct connections between the personal experiences and academic experiences makes it difficult to determine whether participants relate more with Winston or Owen when it comes to the power of the academic experience in the college setting. For example, it was in college where Hannah and Morgan met their roommates, so it is difficult to separate the two components. Similarly, it was in college, during her student teaching placement, where Bella encountered the blatantly racist incident of the donkey ears and Ella came to realize her program of study was not designed to expose her to experiences with students of color. While Bella's and Ella's situations are more academically aligned and Hannah and Morgan's are more social, all of the scenarios are tied to the college experience. Therefore, college came to play a role in furthering the conceptualizations of race and racism for Bella, Hannah, Ella, Morgan, and Owen.

***Lack of exposure to race and racism in undergraduate school.*** When focusing on how their academic experiences prepared them to work with students of color, none of the participants offered favorable reviews. Hannah states, "I think my undergraduate and Master's program did not prepare me at all for that. It just seemed like it was the elephant in the room that nobody wanted to talk about. I never took a class on racial or cultural awareness." When asked if she went into student teaching or her teaching career feeling unprepared, she responded, "I guess I just didn't really think about it." When asked how his educational preparation prepared him to work with students of color, Morgan, who is approximately five years older than Hannah, simply responds, "It

didn't." When asked to respond to the same question, Theresa, who is approximately 20 years younger than Morgan, states, "I can't think of one thing. And, I don't know if that's because I'm from Michigan...maybe there wasn't a perceived need for that sort of thing." Furthermore, regarding formalized training, Bella, Hannah, Ella, and Owen also highlight the lack of professional development on implications of race in education and racial diversity.

*Leadership program encourages employment of a new lens.* While the participants do not give favorable reviews to their academic experiences in undergraduate school in preparing them to work with students of color, participants gave overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding the educational leadership Master's or doctoral program which they were currently enrolled at the time of the study. Of the eight participants, five were enrolled in a program at the same large research-based university in the state of Florida; three of the participants were enrolled in Master's programs and two were enrolled in doctoral programs. Even though I did not directly ask participants about their current academic experience in relation to working with racially diverse populations, just their educational preparation in general, each of the five participants directly referenced the value of their current program. Hannah, Theresa, Morgan, and Owen all spoke of the exposure of white, middle-class norms and the importance of coming to understand yourself and your own perspective to better understand others. Bella spoke of the importance of understanding historical implications of race and racism in education. Viewing the leadership program as a powerful force for encouraging thinking about personal perspective, the participants spoke of the value in attempting to employ a new lens and see things from perspective different than the one

they traditionally employ. Since a person's culture influences their decisions and how they interact with others, it is critical to discover and uncover ones' own belief system before attempting to understand others. When asked about how often she thinks about race and racism, Hannah states:

I wouldn't say that I dwell on it, but, especially since entering this leadership program, I have definitely had to revisit these issues. I can't say it's been a constant, but ever since going back to school, it's opened my eyes; it's reopened the conversation and it's been empowering to be exposed to...thinking about things in other ways besides that dominant, white middle-class way of thinking.

Extending this notion of empowerment and illumination of a different perspective, Morgan asserts the exposure in the leadership program has helped to transform his thoughts into a more solid belief system; "Without a doubt, in the last five years, working on my doctorate, nothing has done more to change or solidify my view of what we should be doing in schools when it comes to race relations."

***Influence of personal experience on receptivity.*** The notion of receptivity related to the academic experience is important to consider. From my own experience, completing a Master's degree and working on a doctoral degree in educational leadership, even though issues of social justice and racial equity were heavily supported and reinforced in the coursework, I do not feel all of my peers were equally receptive to the material. From my experience, it appears those who had a previous connection to the content, whether through their professional or personal experiences, similar to the critical incidents of the participants, were immediately interested and more likely to engage in class discussions on race-related material whereas those who did not have a personal

connection were either disengaged, did not initiate contributions, or were outwardly resistant.

Considering the participants, it is thought provoking to think about how their personal histories and experiences connect with their academic experiences. For example, were the participants more receptive to the idea of employing a new lens or questioning white, middle-class values because they had already been “opened up” to matters of race and racism? Even Owen, who overwhelmingly credits his academic experience for framing how he has come to know race and racism, speaks of the influence of a colleague who further reinforces the importance of heightened awareness and increased consciousness related to these dynamics. As a result, if people are not “opened up” by something else, is it possible for them to be “opened up” by the academic experience alone? This notion relates back to Winston’s idea that race and racism cannot be intellectually conceptualized or rationalized, but rather some emotional experience is required to advance beyond the negative values, biases, and prejudices influenced by parents, families, and society.

Additionally, of the eight participants, it is interesting to note, the only individuals who did not speak of the power of academic influence or academically-related incidences, were the two participants representing the recently-retired group. While Winston actually challenged the value of academics in conceptualizing race and racism, Peter did not speak of academically-related experiences. While I did not explore this further, it is interesting to consider the implications. Could it be the experiences were further back in time, so they did not seem as influential in the grand scheme of things or could it be, since their experiences occurred in a different era, they really were irrelevant

to their understandings of race and racism since racial sensitivity or awareness was far from a priority at that point in time.

***The influence of geographic setting.*** While I did seek out participants who currently live nearby for interviewing purposes, I did not pursue individuals who were born or raised in different places. I find it remarkable, however, of the eight participants Owen and Winston are the only two who identify with being southern. Of the other participants, Theresa, Ella, Morgan, and Peter identify as mid-Westerners, while Hannah cites she is from the mid-Atlantic state of New Jersey, and Bella distinguishes California as the place where she was raised. Throughout the interviews, participants reference not only how they were perceived differently by others on account of where they were from, but how where they were from influenced their perceptions, especially when they arrived in Florida, because in the words of Ella, “race became so marked in our faces.”

Additionally, for the exception of Bella and Winston, the geographic setting of where participants were raised limited participants’ exposure to people from other races. Theresa, Ella, Morgan, and Owen spoke of how they had little to no exposure to non-whites before going to college. Hannah and Peter referenced, while there were African-Americans who attend school with them, because they lived in different neighborhoods, social interaction was limited.

Similar to the participants, I also identify as being from a different geographic setting as I identify the mid-Atlantic state of Pennsylvania as my home. Additionally, I also grew up in a town where my exposure to non-whites was limited. Since there were only approximately ten students of color who attended my high school, like the participants, it was not until I went to college that my exposure to different races was

substantial. Furthermore, when I relocated to Tampa, Florida, I was also struck by the implications of race and racism. Since I was accustomed to the company of interracial groups, I was astounded by the much more segregated groupings in both social and professional settings.

Subsequently, I find it interesting to consider the implications of geographic setting on mind-set and receptivity to matters of race and racism. Is it the historical implications of the south run so deep? Given Owen and Winston are the only participants who identify as southern, it is noteworthy to again mention it was not until Owen, who is in his early-50's entered the doctoral program, that he was currently enrolled at the time of the study, that he really considered race and racism and, for Winston, he really only began to conceptualize race, in regards to his own whiteness, when he traveled to Africa to serve in the Peace Corps.

### **Recognizing, Confronting, and Dialoguing about Race and Racism**

Extending beyond the participant's narratives and related cross-theme analysis, since the research was partially designed around the idea of how white educational leaders describe their perceptions and experiences recognizing, confronting, and dialoguing with others about race and racism, I conducted cross-theme analysis around these three concepts, as well. The remainder of the chapter will serve as a medium for presenting the findings across these three themes.

**Recognizing the implications of race and racism.** As previously discussed, when selecting participants, I sought out individuals who conceptualize racism as a dynamic that extends beyond negative thoughts and actions of an individual and are attune to the idea of systemic privilege of some and oppression of others (Applebaum,

2003; Niemonen, 2010). In attempt to extend the dialogue on race, racism, and anti-racism, I pursued participants who were in agreement with the theme highlighted in critical theory that there are multiple existing realities and one of those realities, the reality of the white dominant group, is advantaged (Merriam, 2009).

Similar to how the participants have come to define students of color, how they have come to recognize the implications of race and racism has also been framed by their own experiences, both personal and professional. While their experiences, particularly the critical incidences, impact their individual interpretation and receptivity to see certain things, the nature of their profession has also influenced their conceptualizations in regards to what they see, what they are exposed, and how they construct meaning.

*Subtleness of racism.* When talking with participants about how they recognize racism and how they see racism manifest in the educational setting, all participants were in agreement that overt racism is scarce in today's society. As stated by Peter, "No one in their right mind is going to be overtly racist." He asserts not only is it illegal in the educational setting, but it is not "cool." Bella extends this notion by maintaining, "Most people nowadays don't walk around being overtly racist, it's not politically correct." However, participants agree just because people are not saying something does not necessarily mean they are not thinking it. Bella contends, "So, what's going on inside their head, if they are consciously thinking this, you would never know."

*Subtleness makes racism harder to recognize.* Still, rarity of overt racism does not equate with an overall lack of racism, as participants are also in agreement that institutionalized and systemic racism is pervasive in both education and society in general. While most participants name this racism as "subtle", they assert not only is it

troublesome because of its existence alone, but it continues to perpetuate educational inequities for students of color. Additionally, as a result of its subtle nature, participants assert racism can be more difficult to recognize and name. As asserted by Peter, “I know there is still racism, but it is extremely subtle, very well-hidden. It’s a difficult thing to get at in 2013. It’s there, it’s like air, we just can’t see it, it’s hard to get at.” Morgan maintains this idea by saying:

I see the subtleness, the unintentional racism that people, especially educators, don’t see that they’re doing. When I think of the word racism in education and how I frame it, policies and procedures done by educators, that they don’t even realize create social injustice for kids of color.

Given the subtle nature of racism, similar to Morgan, Bella expresses concern over how “the individual may hold these beliefs and they translate into how they might interact in the classroom without them even thinking or knowing.”

*Talking about race without talking about race.* Additionally, Owen argues that with the presence of covert racism, it is “very easy to disguise racism.” Whether that means shifting the focus to politics or socioeconomic status or utilizing replacement words or phrases, people can talk about race without ever talking about race. Participants reference language they commonly hear from colleagues such as: (a) those students don’t know how to behave, (b) those people don’t care about their kids, (c) those people don’t value education, (d) they’re going to be the prison population of the future, (e) he’ll be a drop out, (f) working with those kids must have been tough, (g) they just don’t have the work ethic, (h) thuggy kids, and (i) close-to-home schools. While these comments clearly relate to racist-ideologies, race was never mentioned, only implied, thereby



supporting Omi and Winant's (1994) argument that people think not talking about race disassociates them from racism, but they fail to recognize the power system itself as racist. Also, during the interviews, there were times when the participants themselves used words such as "monochromatic" and "culturally" instead of race-related language. Subsequently, people can and do clearly speak about race without ever speaking about race, thereby further reinforcing the subtle nature of how racism is manifest.

*"Ignoring racism is racism within itself."* The subtleness, ambiguity, and failure to name make recognition of racism complex because race-related dynamics are often not clearly stated or mentioned. As a result, since the implication is indirect, perhaps even unintentional, most people do not recognize such thoughts and comments as racist. However, failure to recognize racist overtones in comments, ideas, or behaviors, even if people are choosing to selectively ignore, perhaps because subtle racism is seemingly innocent in comparison to overt racism, does not make it any less racist.

Even though people may not perceive subtle racism as an issue, closing their eyes to the problem or pretending it does not exist does not make it disappear, but rather allows for continued perpetuation of negative race-related ideologies and associated actions, practices, and policies. Bella asserts, "I think people overlook the fact that ignoring racism is racism within itself." When people fail to recognize that racism by any other name is still racism, regardless of the subtle nature or the code talk used to replace race-based descriptors in conversation, they fail to see the destructive nature and potentially harmful implications perpetuated by the systemic oppression.

***Manifestation of racism in education.*** Participants highlight it can be difficult to recognize racism given the reality of increasingly segregated schools that result in black

and Hispanic students often attending schools comprised predominately of racial minority students. When students of color and white students are attending school together and are in the same classrooms, it is easier to recognize and highlight potential inequities; however, with the large number of students of color attending school with other racial minorities (Kozol, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Orfield & Lee, 2004; Pettigrew, 2004), recognition is further complicated.

Since many of the participants have experience in predominately racial minority schools, this complexity was highlighted multiple times throughout the interviews. Theresa asserts it can be difficult when the “Us versus Them” or the “These Kids” mentality is not there, because it is only “Them” or all of the students are “Those Kids.” Nevertheless, even though it may be more difficult to pinpoint in certain environmental contexts, participants argue racism is pervasive in schools and can be recognized in the form of biases, prejudice, lack of objectivity, lower expectations, inequitable access, inequitable resources, and systemic exclusion.

*Dominance of white, middle-class values.* Since the people largely in charge of determining what is valuable are white (Owen), white, middle-class values become the established norm, thereby making white culture, white mindsets, and white people the benchmark from which most other things are measured (Applebaum, 2003; Niemonen, 2010; Wise, 2005). Even though it may not be intentional, since these values set and influence expectations, participants reinforce the ideas highlighted by Niemonen (2010) in that the educational system is Eurocentric in its practices, values, and beliefs and associates other perspectives as inferior. Similar to how many people fail to recognize racism because of its subtle nature; many fail to see the advantages of whiteness because

of its seemingly neutral nature. When discussing how whiteness is the norm of society, Morgan states, “When I think about white America, this is sort of how I frame that, I’m not saying white America is bad, I’m white, I’m just saying, I don’t think we realize how we frame this culture to favor whites.”

However, given the systemic advantage, whiteness is not neutral, but rather seen by many as superior; whiteness is the framework from which all others are evaluated (Niemonen, 2007). As Theresa states, this advantage of whiteness can be seen in the “fundamental feeling that you’re different than me and my way is a better way.” Since whiteness has come to be normalized (Niemonen, 2010), as argued by the participants, most white people do not consider whiteness or its implications, because they do not have to, it is just normal. As Hannah asserts, “when white, middle-class women are teaching, they just have those white, middle-class values and they think everybody should have the same values as they do.” However, when educators fail to recognize the pervasiveness of whiteness and the implicit system of advantages it provides (Niemonen, 2010), they also fail to see how “others” are being simultaneously disadvantaged. Morgan maintains the majority of his white staff does not think about race. He continues by saying, “Now, they think they’re not racist because they don’t think about it. See, I disagree with that...your whiteness doesn’t make you see things in a racist way.” Being white and having little or no experience with race-related oppression makes it easy for white people to ignore racism (Applebaum, 2003; Wise, 2005), thereby making both their own implicit system of advantages and the systemic oppression of “others” invisible.

Considering biases, prejudices, and preconceived notions, if whiteness is considered the norm, what are the mental models constructed for “non-whiteness”? What happens

when students of color do not fit the mold for the norm? Even if they get close to adopting the dominant norms, since students of color will never be able to exactly match the model for whiteness, will they always be in a position of trying to adopt, trying to improve, trying to measure up?

*Detriment of deficit thinking.* Since students of color are not considered the norm, but rather are expected to adopt the dominant norms of whiteness (Kumashiro, 2000), they are often, in the words of Winston, “painted with a broad brush” or, in the words of Theresa, “generalized in a mass mentality” which starts to dehumanize students. Theresa continues by saying, “I feel like that leads to a lot of generalizing and, when you start to generalize, and group, and classify people, you start to discount entire groups, or lower your expectations for that group. I feel that faceless grouping is a kind of first marker” for recognizing racism. According to participants, many white educators automatically judge students of color based on socially-constructed stereotypes and ideologies without even knowing they are doing so.

As asserted by Hannah, Morgan, Ella, and Winston, since students of color are often viewed as different; they are seen through a deficit lens, thereby reinforcing Dantley’s (2002) argument that educators often equate difference with deficiency. Whether it is the expectation that students of color will struggle, whether educators are quicker to judge, or whether it is lower expectations established for students of color as a whole, as argued by Hannah, educators often believe students of color are capable of less.

Additionally, as cited by Ella, “I think what racism, now, when I look at it, it comes down to teachers not having a belief system that students can do it.” Hannah states, “I always find it ironic when you hear a teacher... ‘He will never make it; he will be a drop

out!’ Would they ever feel that way about their own child? Would they ever feel it was okay for a child not to get experiences or opportunities if it was their kid?” Hannah continues this idea by saying, “I really have just seen, through the years, that a lot of times students of color are judged. For instance, in relation to the parents, if a kid is not doing well in school, it’s the parents; they don’t value education, they don’t help their kids with their homework! I find a lot of othering, blaming, never having thought about other things.”

While most participants reference deficit thoughts coming from their colleagues, Owen cites an incident when he was serving as a classroom teacher when it was not uncommon for him to think, “Well, that’s probably the best this student can do.” It was not until the mother of one of his African-American female students highlighted his lowered expectations in a parent-teacher conference that Owen’s consciousness increased and he developed an awareness of his thoughts and actions. After the awareness developed, he felt he was able to consciously shift his practice in a more equitable way.

*Success: An exception to the rule for students of color.* Whether it is related to behavior or academic performance, participants argue many white educators maintain negative perceptions and hold lower expectations for students of color than they do for white students, and, when a student goes against these perceptions or exceeds the expectations, he/she is often considered an exception to the rule rather than the norm. As highlighted by Hannah, “I still think race is thought of as a deficit and when people think of a student that does well, that is a student of color, they are compared to what the typical white student would do, because they really focused on their education and they came around, they came to the white point of view.” Asserted by Bella, Hannah,

Theresa, Ella, and Winston, while success is an expectation for white students, it is often considered an exception to the rule for students of color. “There is a different level of appreciation when they excel,” because it is not expected (Bella).

*Preconceiving African-American boys as threatening.* Regarding the deficit thinking paradigm, many educators hold preconceived notions and perceptions for students of color in relation to their behavior that they may not even be aware. For example, supporting the research of Ferguson (2000), as highlighted by Ella and Morgan, many white educators view African-American students, particularly males, as threatening. Ella recounts a story of when she was working with a principal who was concerned about large groups of black students hanging out together and congregating at lunch and in the hallways. When Ella, asked, “Why aren’t you concerned about all the whites hanging together?” he responded, “Well, I hadn’t thought about it.” When I asked her what she thought may have caused his thinking, she stated, “I don’t know if it’s identified fear or if it’s just not a consciousness.” Morgan furthers this idea by recounting:

I’ve got one of my very best teachers, white, middle-aged, probably 54, great teacher. But, when I get a group of African-American males together, who might be louder than another group of kids in the hallway, she always comes and gets me to break it up, cause “those kids over there”...I always make her say what kids are you talking about, you mean the black kids?

Additionally, Morgan explains when students get into trouble off-campus, if racial minority students are involved, several teachers react much more strongly than they do when white students have encounters with the law, which results in articulation of comments such as, “I don’t feel safe here anymore.”

While these teachers are likely not even aware they have a fear of students who are racially different than themselves, particularly black males, their biases and prejudices influence how they act, what they say, and what they think. When you have a school, as highlighted by Ella, where black males comprise 25 percent of the population, but receive 75 percent of the referrals, there is something influencing such disproportionality. Morgan contends, “Very few people, very few of our white educators are consciously trying to be prejudiced or doing racist things, but I think they do things they don’t even realize have impacts.”

*Limiting opportunities through gate keeping.* Along with negative preconceived notions about students’ behavior, lowered expectations regarding their academic ability also influences racist thoughts and actions. Struggling to believe students of color can excel academically, or at the same levels as their white counterparts, it is not uncommon for white educators to articulate racist thoughts that often result in racist actions. Participants cite common practices such as low expectations for academic performance, failure of teachers to push students, and articulation of excuses. These thoughts directly relate to actions that, as cited by Hannah, limit opportunities and access for many students of color. Labeling it as “gate keeping”, Hannah highlights how white teachers have the potential to limit and restrict access for students of color. As stated by Bella, “Tracking exists, but we act like it doesn’t. Not only does it exist, but it is perpetuated as students go through the education system. Even in elementary, the lower tracks tend to be the minority, especially ESOL students.” By the time students get to middle and high school, the tracking of students continues to influence student placement. Bella continues, “The more advanced the classes, the less racially diverse they become.”

While in most schools teachers have some influence in which students are selected for Advanced Placement (AP) classes, Bella and Morgan argue white educators do not pay attention to who they are selecting and, more importantly, who they are not selecting. Highlighting this troubling practice, Morgan simply states, “You go into any AP class and you don’t see very many kids of color. You don’t.” Not only is the practice problematic because it limits access of students of color to academically rigorous coursework and potential college credit, it also limits educational access because more qualified teachers tend to be assigned to teach AP classes. Therefore, if students of color do not have access to the class itself, they, most likely, do not have access to the quality and expertise of the teacher.

Peter also highlights underrepresentation when talking about his concern of the common practice of establishing schools within a school. Although most common at magnet and International Baccalaureate (IB) schools, if there is diversity in the student population, this practice can also be seen in neighborhood schools through tracking. Regardless of the environment where it occurs, Peter is concerned by the practice that results in continued underrepresentation. He states, “We’ve integrated schools, but if you go into the basic and regular classes, they tend to be high minority, so even though we integrate the schools, once they get inside the school, they segregate the kids.” Peter continues, “Unless you are an outstanding, high-performing minority student, the deck is stacked against you.”

*Message of exclusion.* While the limited access to academically rigorous classes is concerning given the nature of the discriminatory practice alone, participants argue the practice is also alarming because of the message it sends to students. When nearly all of



the students a teacher recommends for an AP course are white, Bella contends, “I think they are not aware of those subconscious decisions and how those subconscious decisions impact how students feel about their own ability.” These practices can leave students of color feeling excluded from the mainstream and not embraced as part of the overall school population.

Extending this idea of exclusionary practices, as stated by Lee (2002), and further reinforced by participants, for students of color, “the experiences of your people are often missing, misrepresented, or marginalized in the curriculum” (p. 2). Concerned by the lack of representation of students of color in the canon of literature, Bella contends, “When we talk about making learning relevant to students, when it comes to minorities, when it comes to race...how do you make those connections if you’re just teaching from a Eurocentric standpoint?” Morgan furthers this argument from a social studies perspective by saying:

How can you be an African American boy going to school, all those years, and everything you’ve read doesn’t have people that look like you? How can that be? How can that not be weird to a kid? Because if you spun it, and white kids only got to read about black people in the history book, how long before white people would say, ‘What the hell’s going on?’”

Bella, Ella, Morgan, and Winston also highlight racist exclusionary practices in the lack of racial diversity in faculty and administration. Not only is it problematic because people of color are not represented in positions of power and authority, the practice also sends a message to students. Emphasizing there are more African-American custodians at his school than there are teachers, Morgan is very concerned that a student, black or

white, could complete 13 years of schooling in his county, without ever having a teacher of color. He asks, “How can that be fair?” Extending into the administrative realm, Morgan emphasizes, “We’re at a principals’ meeting today with all of the principals in the county. I looked around, there’s probably 25 of us, not one face of color in there. Then, at the end of the day, we had assistant principals and all, there’s probably 100 in the room, I don’t think I saw a face of color.”

**Confronting racism.** Just as participants are in agreement about the pervasive nature of racism in schools and articulate similar thoughts as to how racism is manifest in the educational setting, there are commonalities in participants’ perceptions about how they can confront racism. These strategies include both thoughts and actions

***Confronting racism through thought.*** When considering how they confront racism, participants consistently shared ideas of how racism can be confronted through one’s own thinking. Highlighting the need for a paradigm shift, nearly all of the participants spoke of how this shift must originate from within, as understanding yourself and from where you come is essential in understanding personal beliefs and values. In order to shift the paradigm, it is critical for people to understand the lens they employ to see the world as this reflection can help them become aware of personal perspectives, beliefs, and biases. Once people take ownership of their own perspective, according to Bella, Hannah, Theresa, Ella, Morgan, Owen, and Peter, they can then consider others and attempt to develop an increased awareness of their thoughts and ideas. Until people understand: a) they have a lens and b) that lens was influenced by their own experiences, they cannot understand their lens is one way of seeing the world, but rather think it is the only way of seeing the world. Theresa illuminates this idea by saying:

I think it has to start from within, in terms of understanding who you are and where you come from and recognizing that's not the same for every person. But, you have to start by understanding some things about yourself...Understanding, oh, yeah, I did have a set of experiences in my life that brought me to this point. Everybody has, and maybe our experiences have been different, but I use that as a lens to see the world, so, if I can understand that about myself, I think it is easier to understand that they're not coming from the same place that I came from; it makes it easier and it starts that humanizing relationship." (Theresa)

Given this paradigm shift was not something that they were always aware, participants spoke of this reflection and understanding of self and ownership of one's own beliefs and values as a means of enlightenment. Five of the eight participants spoke of the influence of their graduate studies as a facilitator in this illumination. Speaking specifically of a Critical Race Theory class, Owen states, "I'm never going to be able not to see things racially. And I'm okay with that. When I went into that class, I was saying, I don't see things racially, I don't look at color. But, I came...to say yes, I do, and all I can do is be cognizant of that and continually work to make sure that doesn't cause me to treat people differently."

As referenced by Owen, this idea of continual work in a growing process was also cited by several of the participants. Not seeing it as a point of arrival, but rather as a process they are experiencing, participants consider this idea of confronting racism a work in progress. Citing the need for more experience and real world scenarios to see how their thoughts and ideals can and will play out, participants showed a commonality in they consider this a process and they know it is something they must continue to foster.

As highlighted by Hannah, “I would love to see where I stand in all of this five years from now; I think that would be very interesting. As I’ve gone into leadership roles, will I stay the course, will I continue to think about that? I don’t want what I’ve learned in my educational studies to get lost in the overall managerial job that being a leader sometimes becomes.”

***Confronting racism through action.*** While the process of confronting must start with reflection and clarification of thoughts in order to develop an understanding of one’s own belief system, confronting must take the form of action in order for it to extend beyond one’s self and impact others. When considering commonalities between participants, the most popularly referenced idea was the simple process of drawing attention, pointing things out, and calling it like it is. According to participants, when something is racist or has racist connotations, it is critical to bring those ideas to light.

Along with naming it and putting race on the table, participants also agree it is important to highlight inconsistencies, counterexamples, and contradictions. When a principal with whom Ella was working was concerned about large groups of African-American students hanging out together at lunch and in the hallways, Ella was sure to question him as to why he was not concerned about large groups of white students hanging out together. When a teacher at Morgan’s school asked him to intervene with groups of African-American boys, Morgan was sure to clarify she was asking him to go break up the group of black boys. When a teacher that works at Owen’s site was concerned about having a potentially volatile parent-teacher conference with an African-American mother, Owen was sure to ask if she would have those same concerns if the mother was a white woman. When a predominately white suburban school in Peter’s

district was about to receive an extraordinary amount of funding to build a coliseum, Peter was sure to question why a similar project was not scheduled for a predominately black urban school. Whether it is in one-on-one conversations or small-scale meetings, the participants highlight the importance of drawing attention to racist practices, actions, and beliefs. When asked what he is the most proud of, Peter states, “What I’m most proud of is I was always the voice” for pointing out the inequities for marginalized and underrepresented students. Bella supports this notion by highlighting her desire to “give voice to the underdog” and both Owen and Theresa speak of the importance of being aware of the missing voice and giving voice to the people who are often not represented.

As highlighted by participants, sometimes the missing voice results from the lack of faculty and administration of color. As a result, it is critical to be mindful of race in hiring practices and encourage more equitable representation. Ella spoke of initiatives she took to increase black applicant pools and both Morgan and Winston spoke of the need to have teachers who are representative of the actual population. Citing an example, Morgan explains each time he has an opening for a teaching position; he attempts to interview a racial minority. If minorities do not apply, he tries to advertise the position an extra week or two to encourage submission of further applications. He clarifies, “That doesn’t mean I won’t hire the best person for the school, but I am conscious about trying to hire minorities to teach at my school.”

Along with calling it like it is, highlighting inconsistencies, and promoting more equitable hiring practices, confronting racism can also take the form of engaging in conversation with other colleagues to encourage greater equity. As stated by Owen, it is about “Being courageous enough to say, no, this is not acceptable.” Since the push for

equity is not always equal, it can be perceived as unfair and result in awkwardness, discomfort, or tension. When talking about her advocacy for differentiated funding for high-needs school, Ella highlights the resistance she receives because it would result in “those” schools getting more than everybody else. When Winston talked about screening candidates seeking entrance into a university Master’s program, he reflects on the resistance he received when suggesting some leniency for students of color for the required SAT scores. In attempt to provide greater opportunities for students of color, Winston thought it was important to factor in multiple components and consider the holistic view; however, many disagreed with Winston, ironically suggesting it would provide an unfair advantage.

Recognizing exclusionary actions as racist, participants cite advocacy for access as another means of confronting racism. Although it may require challenging the ideas and practices of other colleagues, such as guidance counselors, teachers, or administrators, it is important to question ideas and practices that limit opportunities and access for students of color. Advocating access for increased numbers of racial minority students in AP classes or considering scholarship recommendations can help to encourage greater access and opportunities. Bella spoke of her actions on a curriculum committee and her push for inclusion of more racially diverse readings. While her views were not popular, Bella believes faces of color must be represented in the literature students are required to read.

Peter spoke of how he advocated for an 18 year old senior in court. Even though the young man was only a few months away from graduation, he was about to be deported to Mexico. Upon the request of the young man’s attorney, Peter was asked to go to the

federal court house to speak to the judge on the student's behalf. While this action was not part of Peter's job requirements, he felt it was extremely important to fight for this young man and give him the opportunity to graduate and walk across that stage.

***Influence of time, place, and professional role.*** Even though all participants consider themselves opponents of racial inequity, and most consider themselves advocates of racial equity, they do not always feel they are in a position to take actions in alignment with their beliefs and values. Even when it may cause them to feel guilty, participants drew attention to this idea of thoughtful inaction. Subsequently, the influence of time, place, and professional role was a theme commonly inferred by participants. For example, when Bella was reflecting on her internship position when she encountered the donkey ears scenario, she stated, "I was not in the position to confront her [the supervising teacher] about it, because I was an intern." As a result, Bella physically took herself out of the situation. When Hannah reflected on her experience teaching at a predominately black, under-resourced school, she states, "It made me angry, and when I tried to voice that, being a brand new teacher, when you try to voice things like that, you are pretty much put in your place." Being much further into his career, when asked about the ease with which he attempts to put race on the table, Morgan responds, "I don't know if that is just part of the age I am now, what do I got to lose?" Hannah also supports this idea when she suggests she did not always feel comfortable questioning others about their inequitable practices, especially when she was younger because she did not know her place.

***Understanding and engaging with tension.*** Peter's work placed him in a position where he was expected to take actions to dismantle the dual school system and work to

balance racial demographics through creation of a school-choice plan. Even though his actions were greatly resisted and unpopular at times, he had the support of federal legislation and the expectations from the system at large. Conversely, the other seven participants have never been in positions where confronting racism was a job requirement or expectation. Even though they may consider their actions the right thing to do and in the best interest of children, they have never been expected or required to promote racial equity. As a result, when the participants are placed in positions where they could choose to confront, there is an existing tension they must engage.

Concerned by how their actions may be perceived by others, Bella and Ella both question how you can retain your passion and advocate for students of color without coming across as radical or looking over the top. Bella states, “I’ve been called a hippy, I’ve been called a liberal, I’ve been called progressive, because I say, well, maybe this white mainstream course of action isn’t the best way to take.” When asked why it can be difficult to be an advocate, Hannah contends:

Because it’s not popular. I think it’s popular when you have a speech and it’s a mass or mixed audience, but, in reality, we don’t practice what we preach. When you’re going against the grain, you can stick out and I’ve done that many times as an advocate for the disabled and it’s even more difficult to be that advocate when it comes to race.

Participants also highlighted the particular tension associated with engaging in race-related discourse and advocating for racial equity in the state of Florida. Bella speaks of “that idea of minding your p’s and q’s”. Further contextualizing she states, “I would say I’ve actually had to change my behavior to advocate less and to be less overt in my



communication, in my advocacy for minorities, since I've moved here. In California, I did it to empower my students. When I moved here, it was seen as threatening." She continued by saying, "I still think the way I think, but I have had to control, reign in, be much more mindful and much more careful of the way I act on that because of the repercussions I've experienced."

Owen also highlighted the particular influence of being in the state of Florida. Referencing political influences that discourage him from speaking up and doing more, Owen speaks of the potentially-negative ramifications of being labeled. When I asked him if he wanted to be more of an advocate, Owen stated, "In this stage, again, being honest, I don't know that I feel comfortable, from a political perspective, that's just not my thing. It may not always be that way, but at least, at this point, I can't say that's something I'm ready to do." He continues by saying, "I also recognize there are education systems in Florida, and certainly all over the country, where there is prevalent racism. And, so, if you oppose that side, you run the risk of not advancing professionally."

**Engaging in dialogue about race and racism.** When talking about confronting racism, participants frequently reflect on the value of dialogue. Whether it is having conversations with family or colleagues, participants consider dialogue an opportunity to not only express their personal thoughts and ideas, but an attempt to further highlight racist beliefs and practices and raise awareness of racial inequities. "How do you ever move forward or make any change if you don't ever have the conversations?" (Ella)

***Talking about racism: "The elephant in the room."*** As stated by Morgan, "Education has the potential to be the great equalizer, but we have to be willing to talk

about race, to talk about differences.” Participants, however, are in agreement that the subjects of race and racism are often avoided. Describing racism as the “elephant in the room that nobody wants to talk about” (Hannah), all participants articulate conversations about race and racism are rarely held in schools. While they might be referenced in cultural competency training or when a negative, race-related scenario occurs, for the most part, discussions about race and racism are uncommon.

As highlighted by Ella, it could be that schools do not have the mechanisms built in, the time, or the established venue to have these conversations; however, since all participants see value in having these discussions, the question then comes down to why these conversations are not taking place. The three current educational leaders, Ella, Owen, and Morgan, emphasize it can be difficult to have a genuine conversation when you are the boss. Additionally, as expressed by Bella, Hannah, Theresa, Morgan, and Owen, it can be challenging to dialogue with people who are not open to other perspectives or, particularly, your perspective. Extending this idea, while it is best if both people see value in the conversation, Hannah and Theresa emphasize, while people may be in disagreement and may be resistant at the time, engaging in dialogue may cause them to be more reflective in the future.

***Tips for talking about racism.*** Connecting this idea to confronting racism and the importance of understanding oneself, when it comes to dialogue, Theresa maintains the importance of how helpful it can be when you enter the conversation being open to understanding where the other person is coming from. Morgan also highlights the importance of “really listening to them.” Then, as Peter maintains, it is essential to encourage them to articulate their thoughts and concerns. When talking about a potential

change or shift in policy or practice, it is critical to encourage the people to try to understand, not only how they will be impacted by the potential change, but how others involved will be influenced, as well. According to Winston, “You have to listen to them. You have to ask them to explain, well, why do you feel that way; have you thought about it this way? Have you seen this? You don’t want to alienate people.”

***The value in talking and reflecting.*** Just as Johnson Lachuk and Mosley (2011) highlight the value in deliberately creating spaces to discuss and examine race and racism, as they assert it will aid in racial literacy development, participants also saw merit in engaging in conversation through participation in the research study. While the interviews were not a conversation, they were still a deliberately created space for participants to discuss their thoughts, ideas, and experiences on race and racism.

The participants cited participation encouraged them to think about things they had not thought of in a long time, encouraged them to be more aware, and inspired them to participate in race-related conversations outside of the context of the study. When reflecting on his roommate in the military, Peter stated, “You know, I hadn’t thought about him in so long, you made me think about him. I’m not sure I ever talked to anybody in my life about him.” Ella expressed, “I am really appreciative because this has been really reflective for me and from this meeting I am taking away things. I don’t know if I’ve ever really thought about how we don’t have the mechanism or the venue set up for us to have these conversations and how important it is.” Extending this notion, Bella asserts, “I’ve liked having this opportunity because I have reflected quite a bit, even since the last interview I’ve tried to be more aware.” Both Peter and Bella discussed how

participation in the study encouraged them to have conversations with other people about race and racism. Additionally, Bella maintains:

One of the reasons I wanted to participate in this is because I wanted to talk about it....To be sitting here with another white woman and really flushing this out, I think the most important thing is we are talking about it, we are dialoguing. We have to be aware of it. And, for those teachers, for those institutions, that do not talk about it, that aren't aware of it, how do you become aware of it if you don't talk about it? Why aren't we having these conversations in schools?

As Theresa asserts, "the only way, I can think, to be open to an idea, other than your own, is to communicate with another person about it." Although participants are in agreement that such talk can be challenging and uncomfortable, they are also in agreement it is both advantageous and worthwhile.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter four served as a medium for presenting the findings from the research study. After a case description was provided for each of the eight participants, highlighting both biographical information and personal experiences that seemingly encouraged their interest in engaging with race and racism, findings from cross-case analysis were thematically presented. Commonalities, patterns, and trends were explored among the biographies and critical incidences of participants, as well as across the three-pronged lens of the study: 1) recognizing, 2) confronting, and 3) dialoguing about race and racism. While some connections were made to existing literature, chapter five will serve as a means for further unpacking the literature in relation to research findings, as

well as discussion of implications for educational leadership, and exploration of how I, as the researcher, have come to stand in relation to the study.

## **Chapter Five: Interpretations and Implications**

In chapter four a narrative of each of the participants was provided to underscore the experiences associated with their increased interest and desire to consider and explore matters of race and racism. Along with highlighting themes across the narratives, I also accentuated themes in relation to how participants recognize, confront, and dialogue about race and racism. I chose to present the findings in this manner for two reasons. First, I felt it was important to discuss the themes in relation to the narratives, because personal experiences were highly influential in personal interpretation and framing of the concepts of race and racism. This framing and interpretation directly related to the first research question of the study. Additionally, since the means by which people recognize, confront, and dialogue with others about race and racism was the focus of the second research question, I wanted to purposefully present these findings, as well. While I did not embark in the study looking for specific answers to the research questions, I felt it was helpful to not only utilize the following questions to guide the research, but to serve as a framework for presenting the findings, as well: 1) How do white educational leaders frame the impact of race and racism? 2) How do white educational leaders describe their perceptions and experiences recognizing, confronting, and dialoguing with others about race and racism?

In this chapter, I will review the themes in relation to the literature; emphasize nuances, commonalities, contradictions, and complications brought to light in the research findings; highlight interesting implications for educational leadership; and

discuss how my role as the researcher influenced the research, as well as how the research influenced me as the researcher.

### **Negotiating Race-Related Tension**

Since peoples' experiences are converted into an established consciousness (Merriam, 2009) and come to define how they "conceive the world around them" (Janesick, 2004, p. 131), personal narratives are critical as they influence peoples' perspective and frame of reference. Experiences help to define how people give meaning and come to know certain things; in this study, participants' personal experiences gave meaning to how they came to know, understand, and conceptualize race and racism, as well as how they negotiate race-related tensions.

**Influence of limited race-related context.** If individuals have no personal experience or are never expected or required to engage with certain things, their corresponding frame of reference is limited. In regards to race and racism, when white people have limited interactions with people of color, their means of knowing does not come from what they have personally witnessed or experienced, but rather from thoughts and ideologies instilled by their parents, the culture around them, or society in general. Accepting these ideas as "truth", when white people come to have experiences and interactions with people of color, and begin to realize these "truths" they have been encouraged to believe might not necessarily be true, it leaves tension to be negotiated. When there is disconnect between what they have been directly or indirectly taught, or subconsciously encouraged to believe, and what they see, confusion and conflict can result. While individuals could continue to believe parental or socially-influenced thoughts, since whiteness is the established normative framework (Niemonen, 2007), if

their experiences challenge what they have come to accept as “true,” knowing what to think and believe is further complicated.

As Hannah highlighted, her parents’ beliefs were fundamental in her framing of race-related concepts. She stated, “For so long, race was unspoken. I never realized I needed to, or that it was important to think about these issues.” She continued by saying, “For many years, I never really confronted race, but it was probably a more-close minded opinion because my role models, my parents, were probably more close-minded in that respect. So, there were always things we didn’t speak of, and that tended to be one of them.” However, after she began rooming with three African-American females in undergraduate school, she highlighted, “it really made me reflect on my whole upbringing.” She continued by saying, “...because of the close-mindedness I feel surrounded me when I was younger, it took these situations to help me rethink it because until I was exposed to these experiences, the only thing I knew were the relationships with my family.”

Winston also highlighted the influential role of family and societal structure in his framing of race-related concepts. When talking about the “very deep-seeded” values of farming in the south, Winston explained that while he grew up working “very closely with black people in the fields,” when his grandfather took him to a black barbershop and he attempted to shake the barber’s hand, he was chastised. Reflecting back he remembered, “You don’t do that, you don’t shake a black person’s hand!” Winston continued by saying, “....there’s certain ways you act and certain ways you interact, in terms of race, which sort of over the years you begin to be very self-aware of race and



things and some things are not even articulated, they're almost like reticular sort of emotional sorts of things that people develop."

This negotiation involves reflection and rethinking that could potentially encourage development of a heightened awareness and responsiveness to race and racism. Given the historical implications tied to race and racism are shaded with controversy, straying from parental and socially-normed influences is not done easily and appears to take some level of commitment. Whether this commitment comes from consciously thinking about race and racism, considering race-related contradictions, talking with others about race and racism, or purposefully making decisions and taking actions to promote racial equity, these thoughts and actions serve to extend and deepen their personal conceptualizations about race and racism.

For example, Theresa explains it was not until she lived in Colombia and taught in the Bronx that she developed an awareness that "where you come from is just where you come from, it was a complete accident that you came from that place, just like it's a complete accident of birth where everybody comes from." However, Theresa came to recognize where people come from is influential in their personal frameworks and perspectives. As a result, she uses this increased awareness to try to better understand herself and people around her.

Ella also highlights the idea of increased awareness and cites the power in open conversations. For example, she tells a story about having a conversation with the night foreman at a school where she was serving as the principal. Knowing Ella had just returned from an Ebony Scholars event, the foreman asked Ella about the speaker at the presentation. While Ella did not know at the time, the speaker was the night foreman's

niece. Fortunately, Ella delivered what she thought was a positive review of the speaker. Reflecting back, she remembers saying, “Oh, she was great! The students paid attention. She was engaging...She was really articulate.” In response, the night foreman asked, “I have a question for you. Would you have used the word articulate if she was white?” Ella immediately replied, “Absolutely!” The foreman disagreed and said, “I don’t think so, I don’t think you would have used that word. White people don’t ever talk about white people being articulate. They talk about black people being articulate because they don’t think we are. If a white person stood up there and spoke well, you wouldn’t describe her as articulate, because everybody would think she would be.” Ella responded, “That’s not fair.” She then remembers they went on to have a lengthy debate. However, after leaving school that evening and reflecting further on the conversation, Ella went back to the foreman and said, “You know, I think you’re right. I think I only do use that term when I think about blacks.” Ella continued by saying, “It was an unconsciousness on my level, but, when I thought about it, he was right.” When I asked her if the opportunity to engage in such dialogue has allowed her to become more conscious of things that she was not previously conscious of she agrees and states, “I could not believe I would do that. Again, I was unconscious until I started reflecting.”

**New thoughts result in new tensions.** Even if one elects to stray from their original thoughts and embrace a new line of thinking, tension persists; there are many factors to consider and systems to navigate. For example, are there certain environments where it is appropriate to express thoughts and other places where they need to be concealed? Is it enough to have thoughts or must those thoughts be translated into action?

When considering translation of thoughts into action, there are additional tensions to be negotiated. Again, given the controversial connotations associated with racism and the historical implications of race, there are sociopolitical influences and repercussions to consider. Subsequently, the fear of being labeled, socially or professionally, can result in purposeful inaction, thereby encouraging reflective prompts such as: 1) What can I live with? 2) What am I comfortable with? 3) Do the benefits outweigh the risks? 4) Is standing up for what I believe in worth risking the respect of my family? 5) Am I willing to risk peer acceptance by voicing and acting upon my concerns? For example, when I asked Owen if there were other things he aspires to do to be more of an advocate, he responded by saying, “In this stage, again, being honest, I don’t know that I feel comfortable, from a political perspective. That’s just not my thing. It may not always be that way, but, at least at this point, I can’t say that it’s something I’m ready to do.”

**Importance of translating thoughts into action.** While reflection and anti-racist thoughts are critical, as Kumashiro (2000) suggests, harm frequently results from inaction, therefore, thoughtful actions should be taken to understand the dynamic of oppression and consider strategies to work against it. Additionally, Kumashiro (2000) argues, “we are not trying to *move to a better place*; rather, we are just trying to *move*. Considering this, it is important to emphasize reflection and thoughts should be translated into action in order to encourage democratic change. As stated by Scheurich (2002):

...emancipation, revolution, struggle, transformation is not just an issue of the critique of the socially constructed inequitable world; it is an issue that comes down to our own subjectivities...We can criticize the world out there day after day, but if we don’t also criticize our own subjectivity, we leave one of the main

tropes of white racist modernism not only untouched but also active in reproduction. (p. 156)

Again, while it is important to reflect on implications of race and racism, as well as recognize how racism is manifest in both education, and society at large, if no action is ever taken beyond personal reflection or critique of what is wrong in the world; it will not be possible to *move* (Kumashiro, 2000).

While most participants in the study described the need to put race on the table and highlighted inconsistencies and inequities in actions, practices, and policies, there is merit in considering how confronting relates to ones' own personal roles and subjectivities. It is critical for people to question how their personal actions or lack thereof influence perpetuation of existing privileges and oppressions. When asked about engaging in difficult race-related conversations, Hannah emphasized it is challenging and stated, "In the instances I've been brave enough to go there, I just try to restate something I may have heard. And sometimes I will just avoid the conversation, which I have come to feel a great amount of guilt over, because not facing it, I'm not doing my job as a leader." Subsequently, when people are only thinking and reflecting, or pointing out the existing problems, their own unwillingness or inability to translate thoughts into actions is obstructing change and preventing movement, as well. If individuals are deliberately choosing, or being influenced not to act upon their thoughts and ideas, the causes or motivations of this inaction are worthy of exploration.

**Limited findings on anti-racism: Perceived difficulties in navigating.** While I went into this research study looking to further explore white educational leaders' thoughts and actions in relation to race, racism, and anti-racism, although I was able to

gather a great deal of information on race and racism, I gathered little data in relation to anti-racism, not because I did not look for it, but because it was not there. Even though participants were interested in exploring issues of race and racism, when it came to action, it seems as though many things served as road blocks. Whether it was the geographical implications of Florida serving as a barrier, as the area is not perceived as an environment receptive to promotion of these ideas, or fear of placing professional mobility at risk, apprehension was expressed. While participants were concerned by existing racial inequities and saw the current Eurocentric system to be problematic, it was clear they felt the system was difficult to navigate in order to expose or highlight race-related issues or encourage change. While Morgan and Hannah expressed promotion of equity and questioning the status quo seems to get easier with more experience in the system, others expressed the sociopolitical implications and repercussions of advocacy can discourage or hinder action. For example, Owen stated:

...in an educational setting, any time you make a decision, you are choosing a side. Politically, anytime you're picking a side, you automatically involve politics, and, if you end up on the wrong side, then you may not get a particular job or you may always be stuck in a particular job....I also recognize there are education systems in Florida, and certainly all over the country, where there is prevalent racism and so, if you oppose that side, you run the risk of not advancing professionally.

Comments were also made about lack of time and appropriate venues to have conversations about race and racism. Ella asserts, "...we haven't built into our system really good times to have conversations and reflect. I guess the best case scenario is a

situation where you really have time built in to do that, but, I see less and less time for reflection and stopping and really thinking about where we are and what's going on."

Additionally, socially-desirable responses also seemed to play a role in the research. Although five of the participants were in graduate school at the time of the interviews, there were several incidences of academically-related language, such as teaching and leading for social justice and exposure of white privilege, used to express thoughts and ideas. While many participants did highlight the merit in strengthened vocabulary to frame and articulate their ideas, it is worthy to consider if the thinking preceded the vocabulary or if the vocabulary preceded the thinking? Since social and political factors influence actions, or lack thereof, taken in a professional setting, do they also influence comments made in an interview setting? Was academic vocabulary used because it was considered safe or less controversial? Were certain comments made because they were perceived as the appropriate thing to say?

For example, when I asked Theresa how to become open, she responded, "I thought about that quite a bit in trying to figure it out because I have some very (pause) conservative (pause), let's say, family members and I can't blame them for their perspective because I know the experiences they've had." While I should have probed further regarding what she meant by the word conservative, it is still interesting to reflect on the word choice. Was "conservative" replacement language for something with more negative connotations? Additionally, when Hannah reflected on taking her roommates home to meet her family, she spoke of her disappointment by her parents' reaction in that they felt "violated" by the visit. When expressing her disappointment, she said, "I didn't see them as these black people...." However, other comments made regarding her

roommates complicate this assertion, because she did seem to see and understand her roommates to be people of color.

In regards to utilization of academic vocabulary, when asked to talk more about the development of his racial awareness, Owen discussed the properties of whiteness and how they result in preferential treatment for white people. He stated, "...the reality of the social structures and racially hegemonic systems do that without me even being cognizant of it." While the ideas stated directly connected to content presented in a Critical Race Theory class, it is interesting to consider if he elected to utilize this academic vocabulary in his description because it was seemingly appropriate and appeared safer than formulating his own thoughts regarding the subject.

**Creating conversational spaces.** While the reasoning behind the participants' struggle to translate thoughts into action and the motivation behind utilization of socially-desirable responses was obscure, the participants' genuine interest in exploring matters of race and racism was clear. What was also unmistakable was they felt they did not have the appropriate avenues for having these conversations in their professional lives.

When asked about race-based conversations in the professional setting, Winston responded, "To be perfectly honest, I haven't had those kind of discussions that much." He continued to explain:

The discussions there (at the district level), if they came up, putting committees together, you wanted to make sure you had a diverse committee. There was never any in-depth discussion. I think most of it is cursory and meeting formalities, structural kinds of things. I think when you get into the raw feelings of racism, then you have to have somebody who is feeling abused or slighted.

Ella also explains how “we don’t have the mechanism or the venue set up for us to have these conversations.”

Dialogue centered on race, racism, and equity is not emphasized and frequently avoided (Boske, 2010; Hernandez & Marshall, 2009). Bella connects with this notion when she questions, “For those teachers, for those institutions that do not talk about it, that aren’t aware of it, how do you become aware of it if you don’t talk about it? Why aren’t we having these conversations in schools?”

Subsequently, in a conscious effort to influence change, spaces must be deliberately created to discuss race and racism (Johnson Lachuk & Mosley, 2011) and encourage critical discourse (Scheurich, 2002). Participants highlighted a connection in that talking about race and racism in the interviews encouraged them to further discuss race and racism in contexts outside the interviews. For example, because of thoughts transpired by the first interview, in the second interview Bella spoke of how she spoke about race-related topics with two colleagues at work, as well as her mother. Peter also spoke of talking with his brother about thoughts that transpired from the first interview. Bella also stated, “One of the reasons I wanted to participate in this is because I wanted to talk about it. If you weren’t doing this study, would we be talking about it?...To be sitting here, with another white woman and really flushing this out, I think the most important thing is we are talking about it, we are dialoguing. We have to be aware of it.” Further extending Johnson Lachuk and Mosley’s (2011) notion of deliberately creating spaces, there is merit in considering how purposefully designing spaces to talk about race and racism in education and leadership programs could influence increased dialogue



outside of the deliberately created spaces; thereby, positively influencing racial literacy development (Johnson Lachuk & Mosley, 2011).

**When race becomes relevant.** While purposefully building in spaces for reflecting on and discussing implications of race and racism is critical, it is also important to consider how receptive people will be to the conversation. While some conversation is better than no conversation at all, even for people without a personal connection to the topic, openness appears to amplify for people who have a personal connection or interest.

Chapter four highlighted the role personal experiences play in influencing individuals' conceptualizations of race and racism. Participants, when placed in environments where they were positioned as cultural outsiders, could no longer accept the invisible nature of race, but rather adapted their framework for understanding. Most participants were raised in environments surrounded primarily by other white people. As a result, since it was seemingly irrelevant to their lives, they had the privilege of not having to consider or engage with race and racism. However, when race was highlighted in their personal experiences, usually as a result of their own feelings of initial discomfort, isolation, or vulnerability, participants came to realize the need to negotiate the notion of race, particularly their own whiteness; thereby, further extending Scheurich's (2002) argument, "We can criticize the world out there day after day, but if we don't also criticize our own subjectivity, we leave one of the main tropes of white racist modernism not only untouched but also active in reproduction." (p. 156) When race became relevant to the participants, the concept then became worthy of consideration and their personal biases and subjectivities were able to be explored. It was as if the experience became much more than an experience, more so a catalytic scenario

that extended beyond the narrative and encouraged both enhanced sensitivity in relation to their own racial positioning, as well as enhanced receptivity and interest in considering implications of race and racism for people of color.

Since white culture is dominant and people frequently regard what is dominant to be the norm, it often requires a conscious effort for white people to realize the existence and effects of racism (Applebaum, 2003; Kendall, 2006; Thompson, 1997, 2003; Wise, 2005). However, when participants were put in situations where their race became undeniable, reflective engagement was encouraged. Conversations about race and racism were no longer subconsciously or purposefully avoided, but rather such conversations came to be something in which participants were interested in engaging, particularly after an emotional connection had been established. For example, both Morgan and Peter discussed the race-related conversations they had with their roommates after getting to know one another. Reflecting back, Morgan states, “We’d lay in bed at night and we started having racial dialogues. I’ve just never had that before. It was really eye-opening to me.” Additionally, Ella cites the conversation she had with her father regarding Mamie Brown’s reaction when she arrived at church with three African-American boys to whom she was serving as a house mother. Ella expressed concern by Mamie Brown’s reaction as she remembers thinking, “What if the boys had arrived without her family and wanted to attend the service? Would they have been welcomed?”

**Can the racial majority be the racial minority?** While some participants described themselves as being the racial minority at times, there is merit in considering the implications of this portrayal. When white people are in a situation or environment where they are fewer in number than people of color, even though they are smaller in

representation, which numerically can be designated as a minority, when considering the overtones related to the term racial minority, it has much greater implications than number alone. Given racial majority status is associated with systemic privilege (Applebaum, 2003; Gupta, 2003; Niemonen, 2010; Scheurich, 2002) and power and racial minority status is associated with a long history of discrimination and oppression (Bell, 1973; DuBois 1903/1989; Frederickson, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2006a; Smedley, 2007), when describing the scenarios similar to those experienced by participants, they are better suited to be referenced as being positioned as cultural outsiders rather than racial minorities; minority has societal connotations, while outsider suggests the individual. Even the terminology of majority-minority is seemingly inappropriate as it infers the systemic nature of power and oppression can be altered in given environments.

This notion prompted me to reflect back to undergraduate school when I was enrolled in a sociology class about race and ethnicity. The professor made a comment about how it was impossible for people of color to be racist since they did not have the sociopolitical powers to make discriminatory decisions. As a 19-year old, I struggled with this train of thought, however, over the years, I have come to agree. While white people may feel judged, violated, inconvenienced or, in the words of Bella, “bullied,” in racially-related circumstances, given the epistemology that privileges Eurocentric values, beliefs, and practices and since whiteness is the standard by which to evaluate others (Niemonen, 2007), the racially-related circumstances are not racist. Given the historical implications and socially-constructed norms related to race, white people are not subject to systemic discrimination. As highlighted by Critical Whiteness, when considering racism, it is critical to look past the individual and evaluate how privileges link to and

maintain systemic oppression (Applebaum, 2003). As a result, while white people may feel vulnerable or discriminated against at times, given the reality of systemic social privilege and power, while white people may be the target of racially-related motivations, they should not be considered to be on the receiving end of racism. For example, when Bella lived in southern California, even though she referenced herself as being “majority minority,” when she reflected on Dr. Walker’s class, where American History was taught from an African-American perspective, while she remembers identifying with the idea of struggle, she sees irony in it now. When asked why she identified with the struggle, she stated, “Almost that idea of, there are other people who have gone through this. And of course, now, that’s me as a high school kid going, oh, that egocentric point of view, right. Going, oh, people have shared my experience, while I’m not realizing it’s the reverse.”

### **Framing the Impact of Race and Racism**

In the interviews, participants seemingly connected race with difference and the contrasting mark of color was also associated with difference. There were times, however, the participants did not differentiate certain people of color as much as they did others; it was almost as if there was a scale, or continuum, for difference. The further people of color were perceived to be from the established white norm, the more differently they were perceived, while the closer people of color were perceived to be to the established white norm, the more similar they appeared. For example, when asked about her experiences with people of color, Theresa spoke of her neighborhood and of her brother’s best friend growing up. She stated:

...this is not a very nice way to say it, there were like token families that fit into our community. They were suburban, middle-class African American families, so

they had the same value set, same upbringing, they just happened to be African American. One of my brother's very best friends in high school, one of my very best friends, was African American. He was adopted and had two white parents. Culturally, he didn't seem any different than us.

Such comments make it seem as if certain people of color are not perceived as "raced" because they represent what most white people consider to be similar to their own reflection. What is worthy of consideration in this thought process is that just because someone may be perceived as less "raced" than someone else, that does not minimize the historical implications of race or lessen the influential sociopolitical implications (Bell, 1973; DuBois, 1903/1989; Frederickson, 1988; Smedley, 2007, Niemonen, 2007). Regardless of a white person's interpretation of how "raced" a person of color is considered, while race is a socially constructed notion that has been transformed throughout the years, it maintains a fundamental and integral role in structuring personal identity, personal perspectives, social structures, and cultural representations (Lopez, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1994); race is a powerful construct that continues to be employed that results in differentiated treatment, marginalization, and continued oppression.

**Connecting race and SES.** One factor that was highly influential in this difference continuum was the connection between race and SES. While most participants made immediate connections between racial minorities and low SES, when asked to differentiate between the two factors, it was challenging. For example, when I probed further about Theresa's friend and asked if race ever came up as a topic of conversation, she responded, "Nope. No. Never. But I should talk to him about that. We're still

close. So I should say, what was it like for you? That would be interesting to find out.”

When I asked Theresa about the “token” families in her community and questioned if race still had an influence even when the people are not in a low SES environment, she responded:

I wonder. I think it does. I think that they have a different perspective and a different way to negotiate themselves in the community that white people don't have to think about. If you are a minority in a dominant culture, I would bet. If I were to talk to him them now, they would have a lot of things to say about feeling different, feeling like they had to conform, feeling like, maybe, they lost some of themselves trying to fit into the community.

Throughout the interviews it appeared participants had not given much thought to people of color not living in poverty. For example, when I asked Owen about how people can equate or differentiate between race and SES, he stated:

On a practitioner level, I think it can be very difficult to do that. I don't think we are really equipped to differentiated between the two in the sense that we are having to make decisions about a child's education in a real-time situation, you don't have a lot of time to reflect....I'm not so sure it's easy to separate the two on a ground level. All that being said, I think that a deeper understanding, or a more nuanced understanding, of how they are connected and how they can be separated needs to be part of teacher training programs, so they come to understand one doesn't necessarily equal the other.

**Role of white, middle-class values.** When exploring how racism is recognized in educational settings, many participants emphasized the systemic inequity associated with

expecting all students to conform to white, middle-class values. When exploring what such white, middle class values meant to the participants, I came to discover the following: 1) the idea of focusing primarily on contributions, developments, and works of white people, 2) overlooking, disregarding, or minimizing matters of race and racism, and 3) emphasizing the importance of an education.

**Racial identity models.** When reflecting on white peoples' conceptualizations of racism and understandings of historical implications of race, particularly whiteness, Helms' Model of Racial Identity Development (1990) and Frankenberg's Model on the Five Phases of White Racial Consciousness (1993) are two popular academic models that can be applied to analyze development of white racial identity. While I initially thought it might be helpful to utilize the models to better contextualize participants' understandings and actions or position participants in relation to each other, throughout the research I have gained a new perspective on the models. As a result, I hesitate to utilize the models to assign a position to individual participants.

Even though I do not feel comfortable placing individual participants in particular stages, I will highlight that collectively, in relation to Helm's (1990) Model, I perceive most participants to be in the Immersion Stage. The Immersion Stage is associated with construction of a positive white identity while working to overcome racism. This stage involves recognition of white privilege, positive acceptance of one's whiteness, and commitment to disseminate accurate information related to race. Additionally, along with self-exploration of their own racial status, individuals positioned in this stage tend to connect with other white individuals who are also interested in racism in an attempt to confront personal biases. In relation to Frankenberg's Model (1993), I consider most

participants to be in the fourth phase of the model, Race Cognizance: Rethinking Race and Power which highlights the importance of recognizing sociopolitical structures and historical implications of race. In this phase, people begin to recognize the influence of race on daily life. Additionally, individuals in this phase identify institutional racism, are willing to think about difficult questions, and focus on reflection rather than action. By definition alone, I consider Race Cognizance: Rethinking Race and Power to be the most representative of participants' overall racial identity as it highlights thinking and reflecting regarding the influence of race and racism. While the models highlight different degrees of anti-racism, and suggest individuals positioned further right on the continuums as anti-racist, given the findings, I would not place any of the participants in the final, most advanced stages of either of the models.

While both Helms (1990) and Frankenberg (1993) highlight the fluid nature of the stages and explain people fluctuate between phases, it is important to consider the influence of time and place in this assessment process. For example, if people are in an environment seemingly unreceptive to promotion of racial equity, they may engage in purposeful inaction whereas, if people are in an environment seemingly receptive or supportive of racial equity, they may be more likely to take action to challenge racial injustices. For example, Bella talked about differences in her behavior when she lived in California compared to when she moved to Florida. She stated, "I would say I've actually had to change my behavior to advocate less and to be less overt, in my communication, in my advocacy for minorities since I moved here. In California, I did it to empower my students, when I moved here, it was seen as threatening. If it were California, I probably would have fought tooth and nail, but I know that's not the



majority here, especially in the county I teach in.” Even though individual choice is still necessary in taking action, since environmental factors are seemingly influential in these choices, it is important to consider that not all actions, or lack thereof, are solely representative of an individual’s personal racial identity development. Context appears to be highly influential in thoughts and action.

Additionally, it is also critical to consider the nature of peoples’ roles and how those roles may assign responsibilities or set expectations for taking action to advocate for racial equity. For example, if someone is placed in a position where it is within their established job role to work to promote anti-racism, such as Peter when he was expected to create a plan to actively pursue desegregation of schools, while such action is technically aligned with the Race Cognizance: Transforming Silence into Language and Action, is it fitting to say this person has reached the final stage of White Racial Consciousness, a place, according to Frankenberg, few white people reach? Race Cognizance: Transforming Silence into Language and Action is described as the phase where people understand individual racism and view political activism as beneficial in taking action. Additionally, in this stage the focus shifts to collective action rather than individual thinking. If someone’s job requires them to participate in collective action and engage in political activism, such as when Peter collaborated with the NAACP, while those efforts are still actions taken by the individual, if the actions are not individually driven or motivated should they still be considered when assessing an individual’s racial identity development?

While the models can be useful to establish a framework for understanding racial identity, as highlighted by Scheurich (2002), the importance of criticizing personal

subjectivities remains critical. Even though people may want to redirect attention and make excuses, if they are failing to reflect, think, or act, it is important to consider why. After reflecting at length on these models, I find them to be most helpful to contextualize personal understandings. Objectively reflecting on personal development and consciousness can be beneficial in positioning oneself. Such positioning would not be to label oneself in a given phase or measure themselves against others, but rather to reflect on where they are, so they can use that information to encourage themselves to move; again, directly tying into Kumashiro's (2000) assertion that "we are not trying to *move to a better place*; rather, we are just trying to *move*."

**Further conceptualizations of anti-racism.** Along with further reflection on racial identity development, it can be helpful to further consider conceptualizations of anti-racist identity development. While stages in Helm's and Frankenberg's model are aligned with anti-racism, there are no established models distinctively created for anti-racist identity development. Given anti-racism is defined as thoughts, beliefs, actions, and policies that oppose racism and challenge the status quo regarding white privilege (Gupta, 2003), there are different degrees of anti-racism. Considering the academic models presented, it appears anti-racism would align with the final stage in Helm's (1990) model and the final two phases in Frankenberg's (1993) model. Again, to review Helm's final stage, Internalization is characterized by individuals who have advanced beyond reflections of conceptions of whiteness as a social construct, acknowledge white privilege while still being proud of their own identity, and dedicate themselves to further understanding and fighting the injustice of racism and discrimination (Helms, 1990). In regards to Frankenberg's Model, in the fourth stage titled Race Cognizance: Rethinking

Race and Power, people begin to recognize the influence of race on daily life.

Individuals in this stage identify institutional racism, are willing to think about difficult questions, and focus on reflection rather than action. Frankenberg's final stage is Race Cognizance: Transforming Silence into Language and Action. People in this stage understand individual racism and view political activism as beneficial in taking action. In this stage the focus shifts to collective action rather than individual thinking.

Similar to racial identity development, when thinking about anti-racist identity development, even though there are challenges associated with rigidly employing models, they can be helpful as they provide a framework for what anti-racism could look like. However, as Thompson (2003) argues, the tools are still under construction as to what it means to be an anti-racist white person. For example, while there are different degrees of anti-racism, is it enough to have thoughts and beliefs that oppose racism and challenge the status quo or must individuals purposefully take action and support such policies in order to align with anti-racism? While transforming (Frankenberg, 1993) seems to clearly align with anti-racism, does rethinking (Frankenberg, 1993) align, as well? Given some people may have more tensions to negotiate than others, is it appropriate to compare peoples' thoughts and actions in relation to others' thoughts and actions? For example, it is interesting to highlight Frankenberg's model was created based on a study she conducted with women living in the San Francisco Bay Area of California (Frankenberg, 1993), a geographic region that tends to be associated with more "liberal" and "progressive" mind sets than many other areas of the country and more so than Florida. Connecting this to the participants, it is also interesting to highlight Bella felt she had to "advocate less" and "be less overt" in her actions in Florida than she was in

California. Ella also spoke of how racism was much more marked in her race after relocating to Florida from the Midwest.

Subsequently, when thinking about conceptualizations of both racial identity development and anti-racism, ecological and contextual influences should be considered. It appears multiple identities can exist within an individual and the identity that is revealed in a given situation is influenced by both ecological and contextual factors. Considering this, there is merit in reflecting on whether anti-racist identity development has a predetermined destination or if such development is more about the process along the way? As Thompson (2003) asserts:

when we start congratulating ourselves on how far along we are, it is easy to stop thinking of ourselves as on a journey and start thinking of ourselves as having arrived. Not only have we not arrived but we cannot know, either in a pragmatic or visionary sense, what the end of the journey looks like. What will come to count as anti-racist will change as we take on new lived possibilities. (p. 20)

In order to encourage democratic change, white people should recognize that, despite their personal dispositions regarding people of color, they are subject to racist tendencies and influenced by the social construction of race (Niemonen, 2007). For example, Owen stated:

There's an element in my racial identity I have little control over....I'm not going out there saying, hey, you should treat me this way because of my color, but the reality of the social structures and racially hegemonic systems do that without me even being cognizant of it. So, I think that's probably the biggest development

for me to start to look at that and recognize. I may not be in control of that, but on a minimum level I need to be cognizant of that.

As Closson (2010) highlights, racism is an endemic phenomena by which everyone is infected to varying degrees. As a result, transformation must include analyzing personal subjectivities (Scheurich, 2002). Thompson (2003) argues, "...those of us who want to confront and challenge racism in ourselves, in institutions, and in others, can never forget race or racism but also cannot be trapped by it; we cannot allow it to be reified as meaningful in the particular ways we have learned to understand it" (p. 24). "Our actions and efforts, our directions, our anti-racist practices must be constructed both within and against the constructions of white racism in which we are embedded and which are embedded throughout our very being" (Scheurich, 2002, p. 8).

While there are different degrees of anti-racism, the idea of anti-racist identity development should be regarded as a process. As Thompson (2003) highlights, it is a journey on which we have not, yet, arrived. However, arriving should not be the goal and may not even be a possibility. Given the deeply-rooted nature of racism, the pervasive implications of race, and the systemic reality of white privilege, it is seemingly something against which people will always be working. When white people begin to think they have arrived, or that they are better positioned than someone else, such thinking becomes counterproductive to anti-racism, because that is when they start to focus on the problems and existing inequities and fail to evaluate their own subjectivities, purposeful inactions, and personal role in the systemic inequities.

While I do not know if there is an exemplar for what anti-racism should look like, as there are varying degrees of anti-racism, and the shades certainly fluctuate depending

on the environmental context, place, and time, it is important to consider what it could look like. For example, when Peter worked to promote racial diversity in the public schools in his district, when Morgan held positions open longer to encourage more people of color to apply, when Ella called a meeting with black faculty members to discuss strategies to increase the black applicant pool, when Bella advocated for more racial minority students in Advanced Placement courses, or when Bella served on a curriculum committee and called for the required reading list to include books written by and representing people of color, they were attempting to navigate the system to challenge the status quo regarding white privilege.

Considering influential factors, such as environmental context that support working against racial oppression and peers and colleagues who advocate challenging the status quo, when someone is in a position where fewer tensions have to be negotiated, it is important to emphasize not all actions are solely representative of an individual person's anti-racist intentions. However, because it is a difficult process, and complex to negotiate, does not mean it is not worthy of exploration as anti-racist ideologies can serve as a framework to encourage democratic change.

Given the pervasive sociopolitical implications of race and racism, when people are on this anti-racist "journey" (Thompson, 2003), they must continuously evaluate their thoughts, actions, and inactions and the corresponding motivations. What are their interpretations of themselves and their own positioning? What encourages them to move? What dissuades them against moving? While it is important to recognize race-related inequities and the systemic nature of racism, in order to deepen and extend racial consciousness, people must be willing to extend this reflection and rethink their own

thoughts, actions, and inactions. Furthermore, in order to encourage progress they must be willing to take risks and reflect on how they can purposefully confront existing oppressions. While this transformation will seemingly always be a work in progress, without it, people remain stationary and fail to encourage equity. People must be willing to challenge their socially-normed truths and explore their subconscious influences in order to grow, both individually and as a society; when they feel they have arrived, they limit themselves from imagining and achieving heightened awareness and greater possibilities.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

Based on the findings and the interpretations of the data from the research study, I have considered implications for further research and practice. The remainder of the chapter will explore implications for practice, preparation, and further research, as well as implications for me and my role as the researcher.

**Implications for practice.** Even though equity and achievement for all students is often cited in school mission and vision statements, if equitable expectations are not established for different racial demographics and equitable opportunities are not encouraged for students of color, such vision is really more of a socially-acceptable proclamation than a genuine commitment. If there is a sincere sense of responsibility for student learning and concern for all students, educational leaders must incorporate consequences of the “education debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006a) in their leadership platform to maintain focus and encourage change. As Hannah stated, “...I think in too many cases, we just think there are acceptable losses. And we’ve got to change that thinking; there are no acceptable losses.” Hannah continued by saying, “By having a

leadership platform that reflects that [achievement for all students], make sure that it's in my leadership plan and that I am constantly revisiting that so I don't forget and just to make sure it stays in the forefront." Furthermore, as highlighted by Hannah, it is also important to understand the time and consistency required to commit to such change.

Many educators do not understand issues of racial inequity, do not want to engage in this particular topic, or cannot picture what educational equity would look like; therefore, they avoid related dialogue (Applebaum, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1993). Since systems are not in place to encourage these conversations, "the need to ask difficult questions and challenge traditional notions in our personal lives as well as our work in education" (Bergerson, 2003, p. 61) is left unbridled. However, if there is no space available to highlight or expose inequities, or explore strategies for change, how is it possible to disrupt these propensities? As highlighted by Solórzano and Yosso (2000), it is critical to consider what role "schools, school processes, and school structures play in the maintenance of racial, ethnic, and gender subordination" (p. 42); however, if the time or venues are not established for such consideration, the systemic privileges and oppressions go unchecked.

Vann Lynch (2006) asserts race continues to be an "untheorized topic" in education (p. 56). Subsequently, if educators continue to permit the current practice of avoidance, implications of race will continue to remain under-theorized and conceptualizations of strategies for encouraging democratic change will continue to be difficult to imagine. Conversely, if spaces are deliberately created to discuss race and racism (Johnson Lachuk & Mosley, 2011), educators can begin to not just critique the current inequities but explore strategies for movement.



When considering implications for practice, further conceptualizing and contextualizing implications of race and racism and imagining possibilities for anti-racism is fundamental in heightened responsiveness and democratic change. Although I often hear educators comment on how far education has come, while progress has surely been made in certain capacities, it is important to look outside the immediate here and now and consider the deeply-rooted historical implications of race and racism that continue to influence the subtle racism that remains pervasive today. Considering Ladson-Billings (2006a) idea of the “education debt”, there are long term problems associated with racial inequity in education. These problems cannot begin to be rectified by ignoring or minimizing them. Considering the notions emphasized by participants such as the dominance of white, middle-class values, the widespread notion of deficit thinking, and systematic exclusion of students of color, or undesirable stereotypes, racism is manifested in education today.

As a result, it is essential to encourage professional development that provides educators the tools and opportunities to recognize racism, explore implications of race and racism, and consider ways to encourage democratic change. As many participants highlighted in this research study, they feel more comfortable speaking about race-related topics when they have insight and language. If educators are not exposed to this information in teacher preparation programs (Davis, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2006) or leadership programs (Boske, 2010; Hernandez & Marshall, 2009, it is essential to create professional development to provide opportunities for further learning, personal reflection, and exploration of new possibilities. Increased learning opportunities could be offered through reviewing school data that exposes existing inequities or exploration of

online resources, reading articles in scholarly journals, or participating in book studies and related dialogue. Given the potential controversial nature of discussing implications of race and racism, data chats, book studies, or literature review groups should be small in composition. For example, large group in-service or whole-school faculty sessions are not the appropriate venue for such conversations because they are not perceived as safe spaces and they do not provide opportunities for meaningful conversation. It is only within small groups where these reflective dialogues and democratic discussions can be fostered. As highlighted by Ella, “We go back to the whole idea that we are busy, we want to make changes, we want to do things, but when we do, to set up the time to build the relationships, to build that trust. Until we have the environments where people feel safe, it’s not going to happen.” When speaking of existing professional development, Ella described it as “a compliance issue” and Owen stated, “I’ve found that professional development, in a school setting, can be a difficult thing, regardless of the topic, because of the nature of what teachers are required to do day in and day out. I think getting any individual away from the work setting and then hopefully having some authentic dialogue can be healthy.”

This study further highlights the benefits of deliberately creating conversational spaces to discuss race and racism (Johnson Lachuk & Mosley, 2011), as well as encourage personal reflection. In this research participants articulated there do not seem to be established venues and mechanisms in the educational arena to encourage these conversations. Subsequently, if there are no spaces for reflection and conversation, recognition, rethinking, and transformation are difficult. As asserted by Bella, “And, for those teachers, for those institutions that do not talk about it, that aren’t aware of it, how

do you become aware of it if you don't talk about it? Why aren't we having these conversations in schools?" As highlighted by Winston, while schools talk about race in relation to compliance issues or when working to establish diverse committees, the discussions are more of a formality, not a conversational space to explore sociopolitical implications of race or reflect on personal thoughts, subjectivities, or actions.

Subsequently, it is important to be mindful of the absence of such spaces and consider strategies for purposefully creating spaces for discourse that can lead people to better understand themselves and be more aware of others. For example, creating Critical Friends Groups is an idea worthy of exploration. As cited by the National School Reform Faculty, "A Critical Friends Group is a professional learning community consisting of approximately 8-12 educators who come together voluntarily at least once a month for about two hours. Group members are committed to improving their practice through collaborative learning." If there are leaders or educators who are interested in further contextualizing implications of race and racism, they could make arrangements to work together and support each other in their work through the framework of a Critical Friends Group. While journal article reviews or book studies could be a focus for their sessions, they could also use their time together to discuss, in their given environments, how they recognize and confront racism in thoughts and actions. Such groups would not only encourage people to feel supported as they encounter challenging situations or navigate related tensions; they could help to enhance racial identity development by encouraging collective activism on the part of the group as opposed to reflection and action of the individual members.

**Implications for preparation.** Dialogue centered on race, personal difference, and equity are not emphasized, and frequently avoided, in educational leadership programs (Boske, 2010; Hernandez & Marshall, 2009), therefore, it is critical for educational leadership programs to make a conscious effort to enact change to establish more inclusive curricula and develop a deepened empathy for social justice issues (Boske, 2010) that can evolve throughout the professional career. It is essential for educators to avoid making assumptions that people know, or are familiar with what racism is and what opposition to racism or anti-racism looks like, and include dialogue centered on race, racism, anti-racism, and equity in leadership programs. This exposure will not only further student learning, it will provide tools and language to be utilized in both current and future practice, thereby potentially influencing different stages of their career.

Additionally, students can be encouraged to engage in critical discourse and participate in reflective journaling about their own racial identity and personal worldviews (Hernandez & Marshall, 2009). Such critical examination will help students better understand themselves and their own positioning in order to further contextualize their perceptions, interpretations, and interactions with others, particularly those who are racially different than themselves. Encouraging students to examine their own beliefs and imagine how those beliefs can be manifest into action may aid students in understanding there are thoughts and belief systems that need to be challenged in order to encourage a more equitable discourse.

When considering implications for educational leadership preparation, while it is important to explore how academicians can encourage discourse on race and racism and

encourage personal reflection on the part of students, it is also necessary to consider how to advance the dialogue, reflection, and heightened responsiveness beyond the classroom and the confines of the college or university setting. Once students leave the classroom, or finish a course that emphasizes implications of race and racism and social justice issues, how can reflection and critical discourse continue to be encouraged? For example, as Hannah highlighted, how can aspiring leaders “stay the course” and continue to think about race and racism without getting “lost in the overall managerial job that being a leader sometimes becomes?”

Similar to implications for educational practice, implementation of Critical Friends Groups is worthy of exploration. Working collaboratively with their peers in purposefully and deliberately created spaces, students can continue to encourage and engage in explicit discourse and reflective thinking on how to recognize and confront racism, as well as how to facilitate such confrontation while navigating established sociopolitical systems and negotiating established frameworks. Utilization of such Critical Friends Groups not only provides opportunities for continued learning and sustained professional development, it offers educators support in a system that can be challenging to navigate and opportunities to collectively collaborate in a conscious effort to encourage change. In addition, since participants highlighted that it can be intimidating to challenge the system or advocate for equity when others around them do not appear to be doing so, Critical Friends Groups might provide further support, encouragement, and motivation.

Along with Critical Friends Groups, there may also be merit in exploring the idea of providing mentoring support to aspiring and newly-appointed educational leaders.

Currently serving as a mentor for beginning teachers, one of the activities I facilitate with new teachers is an equity project. In this project, I work with teachers to create a research question that relates to potential inequities in their own classroom and create a plan to investigate the potential inequities. Once the investigation is complete, we work together to reflect on the findings. If inequities are observed, we work together to create an action plan to foster a more equitable learning environment. I find this process to be useful in promoting exploration of inequitable practices in a less-threatening environment. Not only does it offer beginning teachers the opportunity to explore dynamics of which they may not be aware, it builds in time for reflection and opportunities to explore strategies for change. Providing similar mentoring support to aspiring or beginning leaders could also be beneficial in that it: (a) deliberately creates a space for discussion, (b) builds in opportunities for personal reflection, (c) encourages individuals to further reflect on their subjectivities, biases, thoughts, actions, and inactions, and (d) offers aspiring or newly-appointed leaders the opportunity to collaborate with experienced leaders who have worked with and explored implications of race and racism in their own careers.

**Implications for further research.** When considering implications for further research, based on the suggested facilitation of Critical Friends Groups and established mentoring support, it would be insightful to explore the perceptions and experiences of individuals who collaborate in such networks. For example, do the networks provide support and influence advocacy? Do they encourage collective action to promote heightened responsiveness and opposition to racism? Do they help participants to feel further empowered?

Additionally, considering the notion of deliberately creating spaces to discuss race and racism (Johnson Lachuk & Mosley, 2011), it could be constructive to examine the perceptions and experiences of people who engage in such spaces to explore whether participation in the deliberately created spaces influences increased dialogue about race and racism outside of the deliberately created space and if/how that dialogue is translated into action. Further examination of the influences of established networks and deliberately created conversational spaces could further extend conceptualizations on racial literacy development.

In addition to influences of extended discourse, it could be useful to further explore peoples' perceptions regarding the connections between race and SES. For example, research could explore white educational leaders who work with mid to upper SES racially diverse populations to study whether the components of race and SES are perceived as interconnected and are as deeply rooted.

Furthermore, given my hesitation to utilize racial identity models to position individual participants in a given phase, the field could also benefit from further research on racial identity models and consideration of anti-racist development models to further contextualize such development. When I struggled to place individuals in particular phases, I realized there may be limitations to the current academic models for white racial identity development. While the models do highlight the ability for people to transition in and out of phases, I still find myself wondering if the scope presented by the models is too narrow. Being more aware that the ecology of individual thoughts and actions, as well as the influential nature of the context of time, place, and professional role, are influential in personal subjectivities is an important factor to consider. As a result, it

would be helpful if frameworks were more sensitive to dimensions such as institutional placement, subject position, experience, and sociocultural context. However, that being said, it is important to revisit the purpose of the model. For example, what does positioning in the model mean? Is it important to the people being positioned or how the people being positioned are perceived by those around them?

Models can be helpful to provide a framework for what anti-racism could look like in various existing contexts, thereby creating a sort of mental model. However, given the historical implications of geographic region, and various levels of receptivity, it is important for models to highlight the potential for individuals to maintain multiple identities and the identity that is revealed in a given situation is influenced by both ecological and contextual factors. For example, when considering how educators navigate existing sociopolitical systems, how do they balance what is strategic and practical with their personal belief systems?

**Limitations.** When reflecting on limitations of the research study, the richness of the study may have been limited by the research design. Given my engagement with participants was limited to two 60 to 75 minute interviews, and all of the data was self-reported by participants, the length of engagement could have influenced the richness of the data. Additionally, given the controversial nature of the research subject, it is also important to highlight the potential of socially desirable responses from participants. In addition, I must also underscore my role as the researcher in the research study. Given my personal interest in the topic and the interpretative nature of the study, my interpretations and conclusions were undoubtedly influenced by my personal experiences, as my own history influences my frame of reference and how I construct meaning.



**Reflections on role as researcher.** Executing this research study has been both a rewarding and challenging experience. I selected to embark on this particular process because the research topic was something I wanted to better understand. While I have enjoyed immersing myself in both the process of data collection and analysis, there were times when I became overwhelmed with the process. Given the complex nature of the topic, there were many times when my thought processes were clouded by shades of gray.

While I enjoyed hearing the stories of the participants and appreciated their thorough and reflective responses, I found myself constantly questioning if my respect for them influenced my ability to be critical. Since I was thankful for their participation and came to appreciate their deep reflection, I found myself struggling with the difference between being critical and judgmental. I admit, in the beginning, it was more difficult to explore and write about the contradictions and complications than to write about the commonalities as I always found myself wondering if I was being judgmental of their thoughts and actions or, more importantly, lack thereof. However, as I entered further into the process, I came to realize it is within these intricacies and nuances where strategies and potential for change can best be explored. While it is interesting to consider why people think what they think and do what they do, when exploring potential for change, it is more helpful to consider why people inadvertently or purposefully decide not to speak or act in certain situations.

When considering myself, in relation to the study, along with developing interpretations and constructing meaning, I have come to be much more critical of myself and have developed an increased awareness of how I negotiate my whiteness.

Additionally, I am much more reflective on how and where I position myself. For example, a few months ago, I was in a situation where I overheard a white teacher make a racist remark to a white student about another black student. The teacher had been working on essay writing with the two students. After the black student left the media center, the white student said something that was inaudible to me. In response, the teacher stated, “You have to remember, he doesn’t speak the same language as us.” The white student looked confused and said, “Huh?” The teacher replied, “You know, in my house we have a certain way we speak and in your house you have a way you speak. But, African Americans from the south, they don’t speak the same language as us.” The white student continued to look confused. The teacher continued by saying, “You know, Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ in the front office, she speaks the same as we do, but African Americans from the South, they just speak differently.” While I was immediately alarmed by what I heard, sickened by this “us and them” idea she was arguing, I did nothing; I sat silently as if I were paralyzed.

When I was on my way home that afternoon, I called a friend to talk to her about what happened. Along with telling the story, I heard myself making excuses about why I choose not to act. For example, I heard all of the following come out of my mouth as justifications: (a) “Since I’m not actually assigned to that school site, I didn’t think it was my place to say anything.” (b) “How was I supposed to confront the teacher about what she said without making her look bad in front of the student?” and (c) “I’ve never even seen her before, I don’t even know her name; I didn’t know how to handle it.”

For the rest of the evening, I could not get the situation out of my mind. The following day, I decided to go inform the principal, an African-American male, about the

situation. He was extremely concerned by the event and thanked me for bringing it to his attention because, as he stated, “He didn’t think that was something many white people would do.”

When I left his office, I could not get Thompson’s (2003) article out of my mind; I did not deserve a “good white person medal” for this, if anything I should be labeled a hypocrite. There I was in the midst of working on this research study, and, when called to the carpet, I failed to act; I could not navigate the system. Additionally, I took the situation to an African-American male, thereby turning over the responsibility to him and I allowed this innocent, African-American male student to be further marginalized without even knowing.

Over the last few months, I have talked to a few other people about this, both black and white. While none of them seem to criticize me for my failure to act (maybe they are just being nice), as I continue to criticize my own silence and inaction, the idea of negotiating tensions and navigating established sociopolitical systems takes on a different light. Before embarking on this research, I think I probably would have considered the teacher who made the comment to be the problem; however, now, after much reflection and consideration of my role in this process, I find my silence and lack of action to be more problematic. Again, to quote Scheurich (2002), “We can criticize the world out there day after day, but if we don’t also criticize our own subjectivity, we leave one of the main tropes of white racist modernism not only untouched but also active in reproduction” (p. 156). Furthermore, before doing this study, I think I would have positioned myself as much more enlightened than the teacher who made the comment. However, now, as I have come to believe anti-racist development is not about positioning

or a point of arrival, but rather the process of moving and growing, when I reflect on this scenario, I think the reason it bothers me so much is that it is no longer about her; it is about me. When I consider my failure to act, I must reflect, not on what she said, but on my own subjectivities. As I reflect on the participants, I see their struggles and purposeful inaction parallel my own and I still find myself wondering how we better negotiate.

## **Conclusion**

While I was sitting in a high school social studies classroom a few weeks ago, I saw a poster with a picture of James Baldwin that cited his popular quote, “It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.” While I have read this quote multiple times in the past, as I work on this research, it takes on a completely new meaning; when white people fail to recognize white privilege and related systemic privileges and oppressions, even if they are unaware of their ignorance, they are actively serving as adversaries of racial equity. Reflection on these ideas brought me to consider another well-known quote by James Baldwin, “I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain.” Whether one is overtly racist, engages in subtle racism, or is influenced by the socially-constructed ideologies privileging whiteness, to acknowledge such biases, prejudices, and subjectivities requires recognizing personal roles in the oppression of others. Since the associated feelings may be embarrassing, shameful, or unpleasant, it may be easier, or less painful, to ignore them, or pretend they do not exist, rather than to deal with the discomfort of historical and present-day racism. Purposefully ignoring or choosing to remain silent, however, does not eliminate this threat to justice, but rather continues to perpetuate inaccurate

thoughts, unfairness, and mistreatment. Subsequently, it is critical for people to challenge themselves to negotiate race-related tensions and navigate the established sociopolitical systems, while constantly assessing their own biases and subjectivities, in an effort to translate thoughts into action to encourage democratic change.

### References

- Abrams, L., & Moon, J. (2006). Critical race theory and the cultural competence dilemma in social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*. 245-262.
- Alliance for Excellent Education (2012). Caught in crisis: Students of color and native students in U.S. high schools. Washington D.C.
- Anyon, J. (1980). Social class and the hidden curriculum of work. *Journal of Education*, 162(1), 67-92.
- Anyon, J. (2005). *Radical possibilities: Public policy, urban education, and a new social movement*. New York, NY: Taylor and Francis.
- Applebaum, B. (2003). White privilege, complicity, and the social construction of race. *Educational Foundations*, 17(4), 5-20.
- Applebaum, B. (2007). White complicity and social justice education: Can one be culpable without being liable? *Educational Theory*, 57(4), 453-467.
- Bell, D. (1973). *Race, racism, and the American law*. Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company.
- Bergerson, A. (2003). Critical race theory and white racism: Is there room for white scholars in fighting racism in education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(1), 51-64.
- Boske, C.A. (2010). "I wonder if they had ever seen a black man before?" Grappling with issues of race and racism in our own backyard. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 5(7), 248-275.

- Clark, K. B. (1965). *Dark ghetto: Dilemmas of social power*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Closson, R. (2010). Critical race theory and adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 60(3), 261-283.
- Coleman, J.S. (1966). *Equality of educational opportunity*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Dantley, M. E. (2002). Uprooting and replacing positivism, the melting pot, multiculturalism, and other impotent notions in educational leadership through an African American perspective. *Education and Urban Society*, 34, 334-352.
- Dantley, M. E., & Tillman, L.C. (2006). Social justice and moral transformative leadership. In C. Marshall and M. Oliva (Eds.), *Leadership for social justice: Making revolutions in education* (pp. 16-29). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1993). Reframing the school reform agenda: Developing the capacity for school transformation. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 14(10), 754-761.
- Davis, P. (2008). Something every teacher and counselor needs to know about African-American children. *Multicultural Education*, 15(3), 30-34.
- Denevi, E., & Pastan, N. (2006). Helping whites develop anti-racist identities: Overcoming their resistance to fighting racism. *Multicultural Education*, 14 (2), 70-73.
- Downey, D. B., von Hippel, P. T., & Broh, B. (2004). Are schools the great equalizer? Cognitive inequality during the summer months and the school year. *American Sociological Review*, 69, 613-635.
- DuBois, W. E. B. (1903/1989). *Souls of Black Folk*. New York, NY: Bantam.

- Ferguson, A. A. (2000). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of black masculinity*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Ferguson, R. (2007). Become more sophisticated about diversity. *National Staff Development Council*, 28(3), 33-34.
- Foster, W. (1986). *Paradigms and promises: New approaches to educational administration*. New York, NY: Prometheus.
- Frankenberg, E., Siegel-Hawley, G., & Wang, J. (2010). Choice without equity: Charter school segregation and the need for Civil Rights standards. Los Angeles, CA: The Civil Rights Project.
- Frankenberg, R. (1993). *White women race matters: The social construction of whiteness*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Frederickson, G. M. (1988). *The arrogance of race: Historical perspectives on slavery, racism, and social inequality* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Freire, P. (1970/2010). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum International.
- Goodson, I., & Sikes, P. (2001). *Life history research in educational settings: Learning from lives*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
- Guba, E. (1990). *Paradigm dialog*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Gupta, T. (2003). Teaching anti-racist research in the academy. *Teaching Sociology*, 31(4), 456-468.
- Harmon, D. (2002). They won't teach me: The voices of gifted African American inner-city students. *Roeper Review*, 24(2), 68-75.



- Harvey, C. P., & Allard, M. J. (2009). *Understanding and managing diversity: Readings, cases and exercises* (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River: NJ.
- Hayes, C., & Juarez, B. (2009). You showed your whiteness: You don't get a 'good' white people's medal. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22 (6), 729-744.
- Heinze, P. (2008). Let's talk about race, baby: How a white professor teaches white students about white privilege and racism. *Multicultural Education*, 16(1), 2-11.
- Helms, J. (1990). *Black and white racial identity: Theory, research, and practice*. New York, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Hernandez, F., & Marshall, J.M. (2009). "Where I came from, where I am now, and where I'd like to be": Aspiring administrators reflect on issues related to equity, diversity, and social justice. *Journal of School Leadership*, 19(3), 299-333.
- Howard, T. C., & Denning del Rosario, C. (2000). Talking race in teacher education: The need for racial dialogue in teacher education programs. *Action in Teacher Education*, 21(4), 127-137.
- Janesick, V. (2004). *"Stretching" exercises for qualitative researchers* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jay, G. (1998). Who invented white people?: Talk on the occasion of Martin Luther King, Jr. Retrieved June 2, 2012, from <https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/gjay/www/whitepeople.pdf>
- Jimenez, Morfin, O., Perez, V., & Parker, L. (2006). Hiding the politically obvious: A critical race theory preview of diversity as racially neutral in higher education. *Educational Policy*, 20(1), 249-270.

- Johnson Lachuk, A. & Mosley, M. (2011). Us & Them? Entering a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space with white pre-service teachers to explore race, racism, and anti-racism. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 15 (3), 311-330.
- Johnson, R. S. (2002). *Using data to close the achievement gap. How to measure equity in our schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Jost, M., Jost, M., & Whitfield, E. (2005). When the rules are fair, but the game isn't. *Multicultural Education*, 13(1), 14-21.
- Kendall, F. E. (2006). *Understanding white privilege: Creating pathways to authentic relationships across race*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York, NY: Crown.
- Kozol, J. (2006). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Kumashiro, K. (2000). Toward a theory of anti-oppressive education. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(1), 25-53.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1999). Preparing teachers for diverse student populations: A critical race theory perspective. *Review of Research in Education*, 24, 211-247.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Fighting for our lives preparing teachers to teach African American students. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3) 206-214.

- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006a). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(3), 3-12.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006b). It's not the culture of poverty, It's the poverty of culture. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 37(2), 104-109.
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Larson, C. L. & Ovando, C. (2001). The color of bureaucracy: The politics of equity in multicultural communities. (p. 31-60). Belmont: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning.
- Lee, E. (2002). Coaching for equity. *New Teacher Center Reflections*, 2(1), 1-10.
- Lopez, H. (1994). The social construct of race. *Harvard Civil Rights - Civil Liberties Law Review*, 29, 1-44.
- Lynn, M. et al., (2006). Critical theories of race, class, and gender in urban education. *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*, 19(2), 1-9.
- Marx, S. A. (2001). Turning a blind eye to racism no more: Naming racism and Whiteness with pre-service teachers. (UMI 3008388).
- McIntosh, P. (1988). White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies. *Work in Progress*, No. 189., Stone Center Working Paper Series, Wellesley, MA.
- McKenzie, K.B. (2001). White teachers' perceptions about their students of color and themselves as white educators. (UMI 3038188)

- McLaren, P. (2009). Critical pedagogy: Major concepts. In A. Darder, M.P. Baltodano, & R. D. Torres, (Eds), *The critical pedagogy reader*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (pp. 62-83). New York, NY: Routledge.
- McWhorter, J. (2001). *Losing the race: Self-sabotage in black America*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Mead, S. (2006). The truth about boys and girls. *Educational Sector*.
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Morris, E. (2007). "Ladies or loudies?" Perceptions and experiences of black girls in classrooms. *Youth & Society*, 38(4), 490-515.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2011). *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2011* (NCES 2012-457). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.
- National School Reform Faculty*. Retrieved May 10, 2013 from <http://www.nsrffharmony.org/faq.html#1>
- Ndimande, B. S. (2004). [Re]Anglicizing the kids: Contradictions of classroom discourse in post-Apartheid South Africa. In K. Mutua & B. Swadener (Eds.), *Decolonizing research in cross-cultural contexts* (pp. 197-214). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Niemonen, J. (2007). Antiracist education in theory and practice: A critical assessment. *The American Sociologist*, 38 (2), 159-177.
- Niemonen, J. (2010). Public sociology or partisan sociology? The curious case of whiteness studies. *American Sociology*, 41, 48-81.

- Ogbu, J. U. (2003). *Black American students in an affluent suburb: A study of academic disengagement*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Omi, M. & Winant, H. (1994). *Racial formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), New York, NY: Routledge.
- Orfield, G., Frankenberg, E., & Lee, C. (2003). The resurgence of school segregation. *Educational Leadership*, 60(4), 16-20.
- Orfield, G. & Lee, C. (2004). *Brown at 50: King's dream or Plessy's nightmare?* Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- Parker, L. & Villalpando, O. (2007). A race(cialized) perspective on educational leadership: Critical Race Theory in educational administration. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(5), 519-524.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Paul, J., Graffam, B., & Fowler, K. (2005). Perspectives and critique of research: An overview. In J. Paul (Ed.), *Introduction to the philosophies of research and criticisms in education and the social sciences*. (pp. 43-48) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Payne, R. (2003). *A framework for understanding poverty*. Highlands, TX: Aha Process.
- Peterson, E. (1999). Creating a culturally relevant dialogue for African American adult educators. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 82, 79-91.
- Pettigrew, T. (2004). Justice deferred a half century after Brown v. Board of Education. *American Psychological Association*, 59(6), 521-29.

- Rothstein, R. (2004). A wider lens on the black-white achievement gap. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(2) 104-110.
- Rubin, H., & Rubin, I. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Scheurich, J. J. (2002). *Anti-racist scholarship*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Scheurich, J. J., & Skrla, L. (2003). *Leadership for equity and excellence creating high-achievement classrooms, schools, and districts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Smedley, A. (2007). *Race in North America: Origin and evolution of a worldview*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Solórzano, D., & Yosso, T. (2000). Towards a critical race theory of Chicano and Chicana education. In C. Tejada, C. Martinez, & Z. Leonardo (Eds.), *Charting new terrains in Chicana(o)/Latina(o) education* (pp. 35-66). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Solórzano, D., & Yosso, T. (2001). From racial stereotyping and deficit discourse toward a critical race theory in teacher education. *Multicultural Education*, 9(1), 2-8.
- Stanley, C. (2006). Coloring the academic landscape: Faculty of color breaking the silence in predominately white colleges and universities. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(4) 701-736.
- Stuart Wells, A. & Frankenberg, E. (2007). The public schools and the challenges of the Supreme Court's integration decision. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 89(3), 178-188.
- Takaki, R. (2008). *A different mirror: A history of multicultural America*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.

- Tate, W. (1997). Critical Race Theory and education: History, theory, and implications. *Review of Research in Education*, 22, 195-247.
- Thompson, A. (1997). For: Anti-Racist Education. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 27(1), 7-44.
- Thompson, A. (2003). Tiffany, friend of people of color: White investments in antiracism. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16 (1), 7-29.
- Understanding Prejudice Implicit Associations Test*. Retrieved October 2, 2011, from <http://www.understandingprejudice.org/iat/>
- U.S. Census Bureau: American Fact Finder*. Retrieved September 5, 2011, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=01000US&-ds\\_name=DEC\\_1990\\_STF1\\_&-\\_lang=en&-redoLog=false&-mt\\_name=DEC\\_1990\\_STF1\\_P001&-mt\\_name=DEC\\_1990\\_STF1\\_P006&-format=&-CONTEXT=dt](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-ds_name=DEC_1990_STF1_&-_lang=en&-redoLog=false&-mt_name=DEC_1990_STF1_P001&-mt_name=DEC_1990_STF1_P006&-format=&-CONTEXT=dt)
- Valencia, R. & Black, M. (2002). "Mexican Americans don't value education!" On the basis of the myth, mythmaking, and debunking. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1(2), 81-103.
- Vann Lynch, R. (2006). Critical-Race educational foundations: Toward democratic practices in teaching "other people's children" and teacher education. *Action in Teacher Education*, 28(2), 53-65.
- Viadero, D. (2006). Race report's influence felt 40 years later: Legacy of Coleman study was new view of equity. *Ed Week*, 25(41), 121-124.
- Watt, S. K. (2007). Difficult dialogues, privilege, and social justice: Uses of the Privileged Identity Exploration Model in student affairs. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 26(2), 114-126.

- West, C. (1993). *Race Matters*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Wiggin, G. (2007). Race, school achievement, and educational inequity: Toward a student-based inquiry perspective. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(3), 310-333.
- Wise, T. (2005). *White like me: Reflections on race from a privileged son*. Brooklyn, NY: Soft Skull Press.
- Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A Critical Race Theory discussion of community cultural wealth. In A. Dixon, & C. Rosseau (Eds.) *Critical Race Theory in education: All God's children got a song*. (pp. 167-189). New York, NY: Routledge.



## Appendices

## **Appendix A:**

### **Interview Protocol for Aspiring Educational Leaders**

#### **Protocol for First Interview**

- 1) How do you identify yourself racially? Why do you identify this way?
- 2) How did you first develop an awareness of your race?
- 3) Explain your experiences with people of color.
- 4) Talk to me about your personal experiences with race and racism.
- 5) How did you come to know race and racism?
- 6) What has influenced your understanding of race and racism?
- 7) Who in your history helped increase your awareness or influenced your desire to confront race and racism?
- 8) How has your educational training prepared you to work with racially diverse populations?
- 9) Talk to me about the students of color with whom you work or have worked.
- 10) How do you think race and racism impacts the lives of the students with whom you work?
- 11) Do you think white educators have different expectations for students of color than they do for white students? Do you think this is a few, some, or many white educators?
- 12) In what ways and why may such expectations differ?
- 13) In what ways is race used to define students?
- 14) How do you equate or differentiate between race and SES?
- 15) How do we address racism in schools?

#### **Protocol for Second Interview**

- 1) In what ways do you think about race and racism?
- 2) Explain what your whiteness means to you? How does it impact your identity?
- 3) What influence does your whiteness have upon your life?
- 4) Many equate difference with deficiency. How do you feel about this notion?
- 5) In what ways can a positive lens be used to look at race?

- 6) How do you talk with others about race and racism?
- 7) How do you talk about race and racism with others when your opinions differ?
- 8) In what ways do you oppose racial inequity and oppression?
- 9) What does anti-racism mean to you?
- 10) In what ways do you consider yourself an advocate of anti-racism?
- 11) Why is it important for you to be an advocate of anti-racism?
- 12) In what ways have you struggled with your opposition to racism?
- 13) Discuss times when your anti-racist beliefs did not align with your thoughts or actions.
- 14) How do you imagine your passion for racial equity will be manifest in your work as an educational leader?
- 15) In what ways can institutional and systemic racism be challenged?

## **Appendix B:**

### **Interview Protocol for Currently-Practicing Educational Leaders**

#### **Protocol for First Interview**

- 1) How do you identify yourself racially? Why do you identify this way?
- 2) How did you first develop an awareness of your race?
- 3) Explain your experiences with people of color.
- 4) Talk to me about your personal experiences with race and racism.
- 5) How did you come to know race and racism?
- 6) What has influenced your understanding of race and racism?
- 7) Who in your history helped increase your awareness or influenced your desire to confront race and racism?
- 8) How has your educational training prepared you to work with racially diverse populations?
- 9) Talk to me about the students of color with whom you work or have worked.
- 10) How do you think race and racism impact the lives of the students with whom you work?
- 11) Do you think white educators have different expectations for students of color than they do for white students? Do you think this is a few, some, or many white educators?
- 12) In what ways and why may such expectations differ?
- 13) In what ways is race used to define students?
- 14) How do you equate or differentiate between race and SES?
- 15) How do we address racism in schools?

#### **Protocol for Second Interview**

- 1) In what ways do you think about race and racism?
- 2) Explain what your whiteness means to you? How does it impact your identity?
- 3) What influence does your whiteness have upon your life?
- 4) Many equate difference with deficiency. How do you feel about this notion?
- 5) In what ways can a positive lens be used to look at race?
- 6) How do you talk with others about race and racism?

- 7) How do you talk about race and racism with others when your opinions differ?
- 8) In what ways do you oppose racial inequity and oppression?
- 9) What does anti-racism mean to you?
- 10) In what ways do you consider yourself an advocate of anti-racism?
- 11) Why is it important for you to be an advocate of anti-racism?
- 12) In what ways have you struggled with your opposition to racism?
- 13) Discuss times when your anti-racist beliefs did not align with your thoughts or actions.
- 14) How is your passion for racial equity manifest in your work as an educational leader?
- 15) In what ways can institutional and systemic racism be challenged?

## **Appendix C:**

### **Interview Protocol for Recently-Retired Educational Leaders**

#### **Protocol for First Interview**

- 1) How do you identify yourself racially? Why do you identify this way?
- 2) How did you first develop an awareness of your race?
- 3) Explain your experiences with people of color.
- 4) Talk to me about your personal experiences with race and racism.
- 5) How did you come to know race and racism?
- 6) What has influenced your understanding of race and racism?
- 7) Who in your history helped increase your awareness or influenced your desire to confront race and racism?
- 8) How did your educational training prepare you to work with racially diverse populations?
- 9) Talk to me about the students of color with whom you worked.
- 10) How do you think race and racism impacted the lives of the students with whom you worked?
- 11) Do you think white educators have different expectations for students of color than they do for white students? Do you think this is a few, some, or many white educators?
- 12) In what ways and why may such expectations differ?
- 13) In what ways is race used to define students?
- 14) How do you equate or differentiate between race and SES?
- 15) How do we address racism in schools?

#### **Protocol for Second Interview**

- 1) In what ways do you think about race and racism?
- 2) Explain what your whiteness means to you? How has it impacted your identity?
- 3) What influence has your whiteness had upon your life?
- 4) Many equate difference with deficiency. How do you feel about this notion?
- 5) In what ways can a positive lens be used to look at race?

- 6) How do you talk with others about race and racism?
- 7) How do you talk about race and racism with others when your opinions differ?
- 8) In what ways do you oppose racial inequity and oppression?
- 9) What does anti-racism mean to you?
- 10) In what ways do you consider yourself an advocate for anti-racism?
- 11) Why is it important for you to be an advocate for anti-racism?
- 12) In what ways have you struggled with your opposition to racism?
- 13) Discuss times when your anti-racist beliefs did not align with your thoughts or actions.
- 14) How was your passion for racial equity manifest in your work as an educational leader?
- 15) In what ways can institutional and systemic racism be challenged?

## **Appendix D:**

### **Informed Consent to Participate in Recruitment Process**

#### **IRB Study # Pro 9569**

Hello. I am Amy Samuels and I am a researcher from the University of South Florida. This conversation is part of the recruitment process for a research study for my dissertation. Since it is my dissertation, I am serving as the Principal Investigator for the research study. The IRB Study # Pro is 9569.

You were nominated by \_\_\_\_\_ as a potential participant for the research study. Therefore, I am contacting you to see if you are interested in taking part in the recruitment process for the study. Since research studies include only people who choose to take part, participation is voluntary. Consent of the participant must be obtained. If you are to go on to participate in the study, you will receive a document called an informed consent form that will clarify details of the main study that you will be asked to review and sign. For the purposes of the recruitment process and the pilot interview, I am asking for verbal consent.

After explaining an overview of the research and selection criteria, I will ask a few questions to see if you are interested in participating and self-identify as meeting the selection criteria to make you eligible for participation.

Please know that as we talk today and any time during the interview process, you are free to withdraw at any time. Also, information and data collected today, as well as any future data, will remain private and confidential. Although the research team and individuals who provide oversight on the study, may need to see research data, by law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. Information learned from the study may be published, but, if it is, your name will not be included nor will we will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

The research study is called: Extending the Discourse: How White Educational Leaders Recognize, Confront, and Dialogue about Race and Racism. The purpose of this study is to:

- Explore the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of white educational leaders who are conscious about race and want to talk about it
- Create spaces for discussion regarding how to recognize, confront, and dialogue about race, racism, and anti-racism
- Deepen and extend conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism

The Research is an effort to extend current conceptualizations of race and racism in educational leadership since research shows such matters present challenges for white educators. The study is an effort to talk with individuals who engage with and are conscious of race and racism to explore how people frame the impact of race and racism, as well as how individuals talk with others about such issues.



In regards to selection criteria, there are seven particular components for which I am looking to make potential participants eligible to participate. As I read over these selection criteria, please listen carefully to determine if you feel you self-identify with each of the criterion.

The selection criteria for participation in the study are:

- (a) Educators who self-identify as white
- (b) Educators who aspire to practice, are currently practicing, or have recently served in positions of educational leadership
- (c) Educators who engage in conversations about race and racism
- (d) People who indicate that they want to explore their own historical and existing perspectives on race and racism
- (e) People who have worked in schools with students of color
- (f) Educators who are identified as individuals who believe racism continues to play a role in education today
- (g) Educators who oppose racial inequity and oppression.

After hearing what the study is about, do I have your consent to proceed with the pilot interview for the recruitment process?

*(If yes):* Thank you. Before we proceed with the pilot interview, please remember you are free to withdraw from the interview study at any time. Now, we will proceed with the pilot interview questions.

*(If no):* I would like to thank you for taking time out of your schedule to talk to me today. I appreciate it.

After hearing the characteristics for eligibility, do you feel you self-identify with the criteria?

After hearing what the study is about and the selection criteria, do you think you might be interested in participating?

*(If no):* I would like to thank you for taking time out of your schedule to talk to me today. I appreciate it.

*(If yes):* Would it be okay if I asked you a few initial questions for the recruitment process? These questions will serve as a pilot interview and should take about ten minutes. The pilot interview can be completed either by phone or in a face-to-face meeting. Which of these do you prefer?

*(If the potential participant prefers to meet face to face, arrangements will be made for the pilot interview. If he/she prefers to answer the questions by phone and has time, the pilot interview could be completed during the initial phone call. If he/she does not have the time, arrangements will be made for a follow-up phone call.)*

## Appendix E:

### Informed Consent Form



### **Informed Consent to Participate in Research Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study**

#### **IRB Study # Pro 9569**

---

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher to discuss this consent form with you, please ask her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called: Extending the Discourse: How White Educational Leaders Recognize, Confront, and Dialogue about Race and Racism

The person who is in charge of this research study is Amy Samuels. This person is called the Principal Investigator. She is being guided in this research by Dr. William Black and Dr. Leonard Burrello. Mrs. Samuels can be contacted at (813)283-8601 or [ajsamuel@mail.usf.edu](mailto:ajsamuel@mail.usf.edu).

The two research interviews will be conducted at a location of your convenience off school campus, during non-school hours.

---

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to:

- Explore the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of white educational leaders who are conscious about race and want to talk about it

- Create spaces for discussion regarding how to recognize, confront, and dialogue about race, racism, and anti-racism
- Deepen and extend conceptualizations of race, racism, and anti-racism

## **Study Procedures**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in two one-hour semi-structured interviews at a location of your choice and approximately one hour of verifying transcripts and themes. The first interview will occur early Fall 2012 (October-November) and the second interview will take place late Fall or early Winter 2012-2013 (November-February). Research questions may include questions about personal history, personal identity, background, formalized schooling, educational experiences, professional experiences, experiences with students of color, preparation to work with racially diverse populations, and personal experiences with race, racism, and anti-racism.

Transcripts for the first interview will be made available for participant review before the second interview. Transcripts from the second interview will be made available by the end of March, 2013.

With your permission the interviews will be taped and transcribed by Amy Samuels. To maintain confidentiality, you will be given a pseudonym in all transcriptions and you will not be identified by name on the audio tape.

The audio files will be locked in Amy Samuels' house. Each participant will be offered a copy of their own audio files and a copy of their own transcriptions. The participants and principle investigator will be the only ones with access to the audio files. The master audio file will remain in Amy Samuels' possession and will be destroyed five years after the after the close of the dissertation study.

## **Total Number of Participants**

Nine individuals will take part in this study at USF.

## **Alternatives**

You do not have to participate in this research study.

## **Benefits**

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study. A potential benefit of participating in the study could be an increased understanding of dynamics surrounding race, racism, and anti-racism which could lead to further informing your personal understanding and practice.

## **Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study and I do not anticipate participants will experience psychological distress and/or discomfort during the interviews. If discomfort is experienced, participants can select to stop the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any time.

## **Compensation**

You will be paid \$40.00 in the form of a gift certificate to local grocery store or coffee shop if you complete all the scheduled study visits. If you withdraw for any reason from the study before completion, you will be paid \$20.00 for each completed interview. During the study visits, all food and beverage will be paid for by Amy Samuels.

## **Cost**

There will be no additional costs to you as a result of being in this study.

## **Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are: The research team, including the Principal Investigator and other research staff. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study such as the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP) and the USF Institutional Review Board may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

## **Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal**

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

## **You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints**

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

### **Consent to Take Part in this Research Study**

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

**I freely give my consent to take part in this study and authorize that my information as agreed above can be collected/disclosed in this study.** I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

---

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

---

Date

---

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

### **Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent**

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/ she understands:

- What the study is about;
- What the potential benefits might be; and
- What the known risks might be.

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. This subject does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. This subject is not under any type of anesthesia or analgesic that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give informed consent.

---

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent / Research Authorization

Date

---

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent / Research Authorization

**Appendix F:****IRB Certificate of Completion****Certificate of Completion****Amy Samuels****Has Successfully Completed the Course in****CITI IRB Members****On****Wednesday, July 18, 2012**

8/6/2012 12:04:17 PM

## Appendix G:

### IRB Letter of Approval



#### DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE

Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
 12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
 (813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-5618

October 16, 2012

Amy Samuels, M.Ed.  
 Educational Leadership  
 106 West Chelsea Street  
 Tampa, FL 33603

RE: **Expedited Approval** for Initial Review

IRB#: Pro00009569

Title: Extending the Discourse: How White Educational Leaders Recognize, Confront, and Dialogue about Race and Racism

Dear Mrs. Samuels:

On 10/15/2012 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 10/15/2013.

Approved Items:

**Protocol Document:**

Extending the Discourse: Samuels' Proposal

**Consent Document:**

Extending the Discourse Informed Consent .pdf

**Please use only the official, IRB- stamped consent document(s) found under the "Attachment Tab" in the recruitment of participants.** Please note that these documents are only valid during the approval period indicated on the stamped document.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review categories:

- (6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
- (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to,

research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John A. Schinka, Ph.D.".

John A. Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board



### **About the Author**

Amy Samuels graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Social Studies Education and a minor in Black Studies from Clarion University of Pennsylvania in 2001. She continued her studies at the University of South Florida to earn a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership in 2008 and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership in 2013. Amy has served in public education for twelve years, spending 10 years teaching social studies in both middle and high school classrooms before transitioning into her current role as a fully-released mentor for beginning teachers.