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# White Lies: A Critical Race Study of Power and Privilege

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NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY

WHITE LIES: A CRITICAL RACE STUDY OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

In

ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

BY

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Chicago, Illinois

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## Adult and Continuing Education Doctoral Program

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## ABSTRACT

This was a phenomenological study of racial privilege as experienced by White people who have struggled to become more racially aware and socially active in dismantling racism and White privilege. The primary conceptual framework for this study was Critical Race Theory with Transformative Learning theory and Racial Identity Development as additional theoretical lenses. The purpose of this study was to increase our awareness of how White people come to understand their racial privilege and what change in behavior occurs as a result of that increased awareness. Its goal was to promote and influence White adult educators to find explicit ways in which to address White privilege and racism in adult education settings.

There were seven participants in this study. These were White adults who could articulate their understanding of White privilege and were willing to share those critical incidents that led to an increased consciousness about that privilege. The findings of the study revealed seven common experiences among these participants. Each began an understanding of privilege through a Black/White binary and had limited contact with people of Color growing up. They had self-constructed a deep reflective process, learned empathy, and their growth and development was a continuous process. Each struggled with their intention to not be racist when in fact they could not help but act in racist ways. In addition, each experienced many critical incidents that were transformative in nature. Within these incidents, common elements emerged that contributed to and influenced their growth and development in their understanding of racial privilege. More importantly and perhaps surprisingly, these elements did not exist in isolation. Instead, there seemed to be a convergence of these elements that, when combined, fostered growth. These elements

included: 1) a critical incident that challenged the participants previous assumptions; 2) a mentor-type relationship with a person of Color; 3) moral or ethical anguish or regret; and 4) a relational nature and deep commitment to the growth of themselves and others.

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*When everyone's talking and no one is listening  
How can we decide?  
Stephen Stills*

*I was born by the river in a little tent  
Oh and just like the river I've been running ever since  
It's been a long, a long time coming  
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will  
Sam Cooke*

*You can only protect your liberties in this world  
by protecting the other [person's] freedom.  
You can only be free if I am free.  
Clarence Darrow*

*Law and justice are not always the same.  
When they aren't, destroying the law  
may be the first step toward  
changing it.  
Gloria Steinem*

## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

## The Beginning – My Story

This chapter, through a technique employed by Critical Race Theorists known as narratives and count-narratives (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) introduces the way in which I came to undertake this study, the background, purpose, research questions, and significance of the inquiry. In addition, I have woven my own stories of White power and privilege throughout the document because self reflection was a vital part of my investigative process. The narration of one's own personal history can be difficult, yet offer perspective about how thinking and ideas have evolved in a particular way over time. I offer a series of short stories as a way to provide a glimpse into how I have come to know and live in the world as a White person.

## Personal Reflection: Obliviousness

*It's any other day in a small rural town and two strangers pay for their gas. Both are travelers, native to far away places. Each offers a credit card for payment. The White clerk asked one to show additional identification and not the other. As I watched this unfold, I started a familiar inner dialogue. What if both customers had been White, would the clerk have still asked for additional identification? Why did the clerk feel the need for additional identification from the person of Color? What would happen if I asked the clerk that question, what response would I receive? And finally the dialogue fades as I ask myself again, how aware are White people of their own privilege and racist behavior and what will it take to end oppression and racism in our country.*

There was a time in my life when I, as with most White people (Helms, 1992), wouldn't have recognized this scenario as a racialized experience; those acts that exclude, marginalize, and/or disenfranchise people of Color in which racial identification and

membership are the cause for the difference in treatment – a microaggression (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The subtlety of asking the person of Color and not the White person for additional identification would have gone unnoticed for me. The difference in race would have been obvious; I would not have associated or connected the behavior of the clerk to the difference in race of the customers. I think it went unnoticed because this was consistent with previous experiences; the treatment of people of Color has been different from White people in implicit and covert ways for as long as I can remember. I was used to that subtlety; I was accustomed to not paying attention.

My understanding of racism and racialized experiences came through an evolution, perhaps a revolution, of trials and reflections and a deep personal search for my *roots*. As with many White people who struggle with a racial identity (Helms, 1992), I have had to learn what it means to be a member of the White race and the White majority. My struggle for racial identity began with shame (Helms) as I came to understand the role that White people played in the subjugation, exploitation, extermination, and enslavement of people of Color. I felt personally responsible, as if I had done those acts. I have seen the connection that people of Color seem to have to each other that I had not felt towards other White people. I wondered why they appeared to have some sort of connection to each other and why I, as a White person, didn't feel it with other White people.

There is another, perhaps even more familiar experience for me, as an adult educator, where the tentacles of racism have crept into the adult educational arena. The judgment for potential and success was race, not achievement.

### Personal Reflection: Denial

This next incident was even more subtle for me as I observed White adult educators.

*It's the break room as two White adult educators compare the achievement of two adult learners. These two learners have completed their course work and have been evaluated. Both demonstrated comparable abilities and aptitudes but one received a better evaluation than the other. When questioned, the adult educators replied that one of the students did **more** than either teacher expected while the other did **only** what was expected. The student who exceeded expectations was a student of Color and the other was White. Again, a familiar dialogue begins. These teachers appeared to have lower expectations for the student of Color. Why was that? Would either teacher identify those expectations as inherently racist? What would their reaction be if I proposed that there was a racial dynamic present in their explanations? Would they agree? What would it take for them to agree? Finally, my inner dialogue fades as I once again wonder when and how White people will come to recognize their own racism and prejudice and what will it take to inspire the action necessary to change it.*

Some have said that art imitates life; likewise, I think education imitates life. It is a venue in which each person brings the totality of their personhood – past and present experiences, feelings, and thoughts – into the space. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) state that “...no one is ever completely emancipated from the sociopolitical context that has produced him or her” (p. 308). The dynamics and tensions of racism and White privilege that are present in society, as illustrated in these two scenarios – the experience in the store and the teachers’ lounge – are also present in our adult learning spaces. These are contested ground as truth, reality, ideas, and knowledge are expressed and interpreted by people with multiple cultures and heritages or “sociopolitical contexts.”

### Statement of the Problem

White people have created divisions in our country since its inception using the constructs of race. We, White people appear to view racism as a problem of *not being White*, seem to deny responsibility for the status of race relations, and seldom admit or acknowledge

the privilege associated with Whiteness. Until one can admit or acknowledge a problem, there is little if any motivation to address or change it. Additionally, the issue of racism is further complicated because of the unacknowledged benefit inherent to White people. We, White people, have played a pivotal role for we have not fulfilled our obligation in deconstructing racism as it unfolds in the United States. As I reflect on this, I believe that in the United States, racism has at least two realities.

The reason for these different realities are that many White people believe that racism ended with the Civil Rights Movement (Helms, 1992), while many people of Color state that racism is just as prevalent, if not more so, well after the Civil Rights Movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The difference between these two realities is why I believe there is a need for social scientists and others to continue to study racism and White privilege in the United States. “White privilege thus demands the serious attention of every race scholar” (Delgado, 2006, p. 1271). Our future social experiences rest with our abilities and willingness to find ways in which a) these two realities can co-exist without further oppression or b) these two competing realities can unite.

A significant problem in adult education is the relative absence of explicit pedagogical practices for addressing racial privilege for White adult learners. Researchers have studied race and gender for the purposes of identity development (Hardiman, 1982, 2001; Hardiman & Jackson, 1992). Although research within adult education on Whiteness has been conducted, it has not reached a critical mass, nor has it significantly influenced the pedagogical practices of White adult educators. “Despite the emergence of a significant body of literature interrogating identity, the study of Whiteness as an (adult) education agenda is minimal” (Shore, 2001, p. 44). Feagin and O’Brien (2003) also support the

existence of this gap in research as they write specifically about White men, "...the views, perspectives, and proclivities of this group [White men] have received relatively little detailed attention in research literature or in popular magazines and periodicals" (p. 1).

Give this, I investigated the growth process of White people with regard to raising our consciousness and inspiring action for social change as well as make a contribution to the literature. This is a phenomenological study of racial privilege as experienced by White people who have struggled to become more racially aware and socially active in dismantling racism and White privilege. The primary conceptual framework for this study is Critical Race Theory.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to increase our awareness of how White people come to understand their racial privilege and what change in behavior occurs as a result of that increased awareness. More importantly, however, I think its goal was to persuade and influence White adult educators to find explicit ways in which to address White privilege and racism in adult education settings. This study is devoted to the examination of White privilege from within the White community. Additionally, this research explores the implications of racial privilege for adult education.

There have been many times in my life that I have been distressed and ashamed that I did not speak up as I witnessed a racialized experience; I found it difficult to form the words and tap into courage in the moment. I also know that I have not witnessed other White people speaking about privilege and racism with other White people; I have had no role models. Learning environments are spaces in which we don't have to get it right immediately; we can take time to make mistakes, study more, and try again. As White adult

educators, we can construct our learning environments to be free from humiliation. This allows adult learners to practice and/or rehearse responses to racialized experiences.

### Research Questions

I am a teacher. My realm of experience is education. I think this forum has the most influence for social change. My study focused on the lived experiences of White people as they became aware of their privilege and acted in ways to deconstruct or dismantle it.

Specifically, my research questions were:

1. How do White people experience being a member of the racially privileged?
2. What are the essential characteristics or elements of an experience that cause a change in consciousness about White privilege?
3. In what ways or to what degree does a change in consciousness regarding White privilege serve as a catalyst to action?

### Significance

The purpose of social justice adult education is to contest and change the cultural and political inequities in our society (Baumgartner, 2006; St. Clair & Sandlin, 2004). “The privileged work hard to maintain the status quo. Movement toward a more just society is met with profound resistance” (Baumgartner, 2006, p. 194). Social movements are often a site for adult education and social change, but adult social justice education is not limited to those education environments. As adult educators, we can influence social change in whatever environment or community we practice and have “concern for forms of education which are liberating rather than merely adjusting, and which point to new possibilities for thought and action rather than fixate the learner to the status quo” (Hart, 1990, p. 125). The significance of this study is to upset the status quo of racial dynamics within adult learning environments in an effort to deconstruct racism. The present research analyzes the racial power and privilege that White adult educators and White adult learners carry forward into learning

environments. Oppression of all kinds is an embedded dynamic in our country, perpetuated both by individual acts and systemic policies and practices or laws (Bell, 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Thus, these dynamics are also present in learning environments. It is vital for White adult educators to explicitly bring racism, and racial privilege and supremacy into educational dialogues, regardless of content or subject matter. It is through the re-education of White adults about racial privilege that ultimately can or may eliminate racial oppression. “If normality is constructed, it occurs to us that it can be dismantled and remade by human effort” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 87).

#### Definition of Terms

As a researcher and scholar, it is important that I acknowledge how I experience the world. Words are significant, evoke feeling, and give context to expression; how we state our ideas is important and meaningful. This definition section serves two purposes. First, it is to assist you, the reader, to understand both my meaning and ideas in this inquiry. Second it is to challenge me, the writer, to be clear, concise, and thorough. These by no means represent fixed or static definitions. These terms are contested, as they should be, in order to continue our evolving understanding of racial dynamics in our society.

**Critical incidents** are those experiences that have increased our awareness and influenced a change in our actions. These may be an implicit, spontaneous experience or the result of an intentional event. “Events that engage our emotions are those that tell us most about ourselves. They reveal the values we actually live by rather than those we think we should revere” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 72).

**People of Color** refers to “those groups in America that are and have been historically targeted by racism” (Tatum, 1997, p. 15).

**Racialized experiences** are those acts that exclude, marginalize, and/or disenfranchise people of Color during interactions with White people. Racial identification and membership is the cause for the oppression. These are often experienced by people of Color as microaggressions and “are subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 60). These tend to go unnoticed by White people (Frankenberg, 1993; Hardiman, 2001; Helms, 1992; McIntosh, 1988; Tatum, 1997).

**Racism** refers to institutional policies and practices, systemic behaviors and actions, and pervasive attitudes and beliefs that maintain the preference for one race over all other races. “From the beginning, this term *racism* was intended to denote a *system* of racialized oppression. A systemic perspective on racism directs us to pay attention to the particular social setting surrounding and generating racial discrimination and other forms of racial oppression” (Feagin & McKinney, 2003, p. 18). Additionally, “[racism is a] system of advantaged based on race...racism cannot be fully explained as an expression of prejudice alone” (Tatum, 1997, p. 7).

**Race** is socially constructed and racial group membership is identified by the individual. “...*race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies*. Although the concept of race invokes biologically based human characteristics (so-called ‘phenotypes’), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55). Bonilla-Silva (2006) states that “there is very little formal disagreement among social scientists in accepting the idea that

race is a socially constructed category. This means that notions of racial difference are human creations rather than eternal, essential categories” (p. 8).

**White** refers to “Americans of European descent” (Tatum, 1997, p. 15). Additionally, “If, when you move down the streets of major cities, other people assume, based on skin color, dress, physical appearance, or total impression, that you are white, then in American society that counts for being white” (Kivel, 2002, p. 9).

**White ally** are those White individuals who act in ways that counter the hegemony of racial privilege, stand as “enlightened witnesses” (hooks, 2003, p. 89) to people of Color during racialized experiences, and work within the socio-political systems to eliminate the privileges and advantages that White people are given (Kivel, 2002).

**White privilege** refers to the unquestioned or invisible *preference* that White people receive regarding their treatment by others; these may be but are not limited to words, behaviors and/or actions, policies and practices, and/or non-verbal communications. It is the *assumption* that the experiences of White people are normal and all else is not normal, untraditional, different, or unusual. It is *disregarding* that race, i.e. being White, has a factor in how White people experience life. “All racial categories are by definition social relations of power. Within this system of racial stratification, being white typically affords a disproportionate share of status and greater relative access to the material resources that shape life chances” (Gallagher, 2007, p. 13).

### The Language of R(r)ace

As a White person writing about race I approach this work with great humility in the acknowledgement of the ways in which my ancestors have used racial categories and slurs to oppress and maintain the oppression of racial groups.

Therefore, I have been thoughtful and deliberate in my use of the language of racial identification. I started with the American Psychological Association Style Manual, 5<sup>th</sup> edition directions about capitalization which are that “racial and ethnic groups are designated by proper nouns and are capitalized. Therefore, use *Black* and *White* instead of *black* and *white*” (2001, p. 68). While I want to respect the multiple racial identities that are included in this work, I found it cumbersome to try to identify individual groups each time I spoke about racism. Therefore, I have adopted the term *people of Color* to refer to those racial groups in the United States that have historically and systematically been victimized by the White majority (Tatum, 1997). Yet, the term *color* is not a proper noun, but used in this context does refer to racial and ethnic groups. Tatum (1997) addresses the dilemma about language as she notes that “race is a social construction” and that “social definitions of these [racial] categories have changed over time” (p. 16). Given that the term *people of Color* is the result of social definitions that have changed over time, and refers to many racial and ethnic groups, I have chosen to capitalized the word *Color*.

### Summary

This was a phenomenological study of racial privilege as experienced by White people who have struggled to become more racially aware and socially active in dismantling racism and White privilege. Narratives illustrated obliviousness to differential treatment of people of Color, and denial of the presence of racism in decisions White people make. The problem I identified was the absence of pedagogical practices in adult education that assist White adult learners in realizing and addressing their racial privilege and power. I presented

my research questions, significance of this research to adult educators, and definition of relevant terminology.

The chapters that follow continue to explore the experience of racial privilege. In chapter two, I reviewed the relevant scholarship on Critical Race Theory, Racial Identity Development theory, and Transformative Learning theory. These were the conceptual frameworks for the study. Additionally, I examined literature regarding the formation and definition of race and how White people experience or don't experience race, racism, White privilege, and supremacy. In chapter three I discussed the method of the inquiry – phenomenology, introduced participants of the study, and presented the procedures for data collection and analysis. I identified the findings of the study in Chapter four organized thematically. In chapter five, I presented the phenomenon of my own experiences of Whiteness and how I have come to incorporate social justice education into my own practice. The last chapter I discussed my conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

## Personal Reflection: Regret

*It was the late seventies; I was in Florida working at my uncle's campground. I had never lived anywhere but in the Midwest. One of my jobs at the campground was to assign camp spots to guests. I was assisting an African American man when a White man walked in. When I turned to assist him, he said, "Don't put me next to that n---." I was stunned. The Black man looked at him and then turned and walked back out to his car. I assigned the White man a campsite away from the Black man. I had a stereotype about southerners and their treatment of African Americans, and this White man had confirmed all of them. I called my parent, Jerry, and asked for advice...what should I have said? His comment was, "when in Rome, do as the Romans do." I didn't understand what he meant. He told me not to make waves or cause any trouble by speaking out. So I didn't.*

*I have replayed that scene in my head over and over since then. I have rewritten many different endings. There's one where I turn to the White man and say, "sorry, we don't serve your kind, you'll have to find another campground." There's one where I turn to the African American man and say, "I'm sorry that this White man assumes that because we're both White, he and I share some kind of common understanding or belong to some kind of White club. He has assumed that because I am White, I will be silent and complicit about his racial slur."*

*I learned that day silence was an unacceptable response. I still don't find words all the time and there are times when I'm silent because I still have periods of obliviousness. But I'm not silent any longer because I want to avoid speaking out.*

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

White people have used race to create economic, social, educational, and political divisions. The purpose of this literature review is to investigate those divisions and the use of race to oppress, disenfranchise, marginalize, and disparage people of Color. This literature review explores racial privilege and oppression in the context of the following research questions:

1. How do White people experience being a member of the racially privileged?
2. What are the essential characteristics or elements of an experience that cause a change or transformation in consciousness about White privilege?
3. In what ways or to what degree does a change in consciousness regarding White privilege serve as a catalyst to action?

I begin with an examination of the conceptual frameworks which informed and guided this inquiry. These are Critical Race Theory, Transformative Learning theory, and Racial Identity Development. The chapter continues with an exploration of the historical context in which the formation and definition of race, White supremacy, and White privilege occurred in America. I also examine what the literature reveals about how White people define and frame their Whiteness and how this definition occurs both individually and in a sociopolitical context. In addition, I explore the ways in which White people discuss and/or don't discuss racism, supremacy, and privilege. I conclude with the strategies that White people employ that perpetuate racist structures and/or systems in America.

## Conceptual Frameworks

No study conducted can be free of the experiences and personal history, the *positionality* of the investigator. The best one can do is to frame the study in such a way that both the value and limitations of ones experiences are acknowledged and expressed. As I consider my own racial privilege and the privilege of White people in general, I tend to examine it through a specific perspective. That orientation is Critical Race Theory, which puts “race at the center of critical analysis” (Roithmayr, 1999, p. 1). Additionally, there have been times in my life when I have been very combative with other White people when I think they have said something that exposes their racism and the perpetuation of their own privilege. That tends not to be a helpful exchange. When I step back and view the White person’s comment and/or behavior as a reflection of their racial identity development, I find more compassion. When I can see racial identity as a process, it implies that one can grow out of or away from one’s present condition. Finally, my most profound and meaningful learning experiences have taken place when I have worked through a problem or dilemma. It was in the struggle and reflection that I gained insight into my behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. I believe that most deep learning comes out of an experience that has been transformative in nature. Transformative Learning theory best describes my orientation to adult learning. These three theoretical orientations, Critical Race Theory, Racial Identity Development, and Transformative Learning have guided and informed this study.

### *Critical Race Theory*

Critical Race Theory grew out of a movement known as Critical Legal Studies which “...sprang up in the late 1960s when a number of legal scholars and activists around the nation realized that the heady gains of the Civil Rights era had stalled and indeed were being

rolled back” (Delgado, 2003, p. 125). Civil rights cases flourished after the Civil Rights Movement as the country began to challenge school integration, housing, and other forms of discrimination. Yet the decisions of these cases did not reflect a fundamental change in the structure of our sociopolitical fabric. In fact, one could assert that the law, rather than assisting in the deconstruction of discrimination and racism actually served to sustain or perpetuate it. “New approaches and theories were needed to deal with the color blind, subtle, or institutional forms of racism that were developing and an American public that seemed increasingly tired of hearing about race” (p. 125). These new Critical Legal Studies scholars began to define or construct those new approaches.

By the late seventies, Critical legal Studies existed in a swirl of formative energy, cultural insurgency, and organizing momentum: It had established itself as a politically, philosophically, and methodologically eclectic but intellectually sophisticated and ideologically left movement in legal academia, and its conferences had begun to attract hundreds of progressive law teachers, students, and lawyers; even mainstream law reviews were featuring critical work that reinterpreted whole doctrinal areas of law from an explicitly ideological motivation. (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xviii).

Critical Race Theory attempted to address both this view of the law as a co-conspirator, which the progressive civil rights lawyers at the time failed to acknowledge, and this new left scholarship that challenged the color blind ideology. “Critical Race Theory sought to stage a simultaneous encounter with the exhausted vision of reformist civil rights scholarship on the one hand, and the emergent critique of the left legal scholarship on the other” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xix).

#### *Historical Roots of Critical Race Theory in Critical Legal Studies*

The early foundation of Critical Race Theory lay in reframing the outcome of civil rights litigation. This group of scholars assumed the task of questioning how the law, which claims race neutrality, conspires to perpetuate the conditions of racial oppression rather than

champion the deconstruction of those conditions. “Critical Race Theorists have, for the first time, examined the entire edifice of contemporary legal thought and doctrine from the view point of the law’s role in the construction and maintenance of social domination and subordination” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xi). Although there are many legal scholars and essays that have shaped this theory, I have chosen to highlight four which are generally recognized as significant in the creation and crucial to the development of Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw et al.). The first is *Serving Two Masters* by Derrick A. Bell, Jr. in 1976, *Legitimizing Racial Discrimination through Antidiscrimination Law: A Critical Review of Supreme Court Doctrine* by Alan David Freeman in 1978, *The Imperial Scholar: Reflections on a Review of Civil Rights Literature* by Richard Delgado in 1984, and *The Id, the Ego, and Equal Protection: Reckoning with Unconscious Racism* by Charles R Lawrence III, in 1987.

*Derrick A Bell, Jr.* Derrick A Bell, Jr. was among the first tenured African American law professors (Crenshaw et al., 1995) at Harvard University and his essay *Serving Two Masters* (1976) “...appropriately sets the stage for the eventual development of Critical Race Theory” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. 2). In the mid seventies, Crenshaw et al., note that “the norms of racial integration had become so powerful that they were taken to define the difference between being enlightened and being backward” (p. 2). Enlightenment or innovation and perceived ignorance regarding the best course of action for equal education were powerful divisions in separating civil rights legal strategists. In this essay, Bell (1976) explored, or perhaps exposed, two significant contradictions in civil rights litigation regarding the *Brown v Board of Education* decision and the due haste with which states were to comply.

Bell (1976) questioned that integration served the best interests of children of Color. At the time, this was perceived as pro-segregationist, or as Crenshaw et al., (1995) noted, a backward, non-enlightened position. "...[It] was thus dramatic that he would take on the liberal ideology of the mainstream civil rights movement by criticizing the effect of the enforcement of *Brown* on the black community" (p. 2). In his own words, Bell argues, "Now that traditional racial balance remedies are becoming increasingly difficult to achieve or maintain, there is tardy concern that racial balance may not be the relief actually desired by the victims of segregated schools" (pp. 471-472). Additionally, he questioned whether a lawyer in the cases of desegregation could serve the interest of the individuals while at the same time serving the group represented in the class action, hence the two masters. He gave personal examples of cases he worked on where the civil rights organizations funding the suit, most notably the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), would not fund a suit that did not involve integration.

The civil rights lawyers would not settle for anything less than a desegregated system. While the situation did not arise in the early years, it was generally made clear to potential plaintiffs that the NAACP was not interested in settling the litigation in return for school board promises to provide better segregated schools. (p. 470)

Integrated schools were the only solution considered to remedy the segregated system by the organizations that funded the anti-discrimination suits. Bell argued that the very fact no other solutions were explored denied children of Color their due process. "This theory of school desegregation, however, fails to encompass the complexity of achieving equal educational opportunity for children to whom it so long has been denied" (p. 470). Bell's arguments were and still are controversial. The lone theory of desegregation in response to *Brown* attacked White liberalism at its very core. Who and what were the civil rights lawyers and organizations serving? Crenshaw et al. summarize this when they state, "...the

exclusive focus on the goal of school integration responded to the ideas of elite liberal public interest lawyers rather than to actual interests of black communities and children” (p. xx).

*Alan Freeman.* In most instances of injustice, the general public is accustomed to identifying victim(s) and perpetrator(s). We punish the perpetrator(s) and assign restitution to the victim(s). As our justice system has evolved we have expanded our understanding to recognize that an entity, such as a corporation, can be a perpetrator towards an entity, such as a community. Freeman (1978) explored the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator and the impact these had on the *Brown v Board of Education* in his essay, *Legitimizing Racial Discrimination Through Antidiscrimination Law: A Critical Review of Supreme Court Doctrine*. He began with explaining the victim’s position relative to antidiscrimination law.

From the victim’s perspective, racial discrimination describes those conditions of actual social existence as a member of a perpetual underclass. This perspective includes both the objective conditions of life (lack of jobs, lack of money, lack of housing) and the consciousness associated with those objective conditions (lack of choice and lack of human individuality in being forever perceived as a member of a group rather than as an individual). (p. 1052)

He then contrasted that to the perpetrator’s position.

The perpetrator perspective sees racial discrimination not as conditions but as actions, or series of actions, inflicted on the victim by the perpetrator. The focus is more on what particular perpetrators have done or are doing to some victims than on the overall life situation of the victim class. (p. 1053)

Within these two perspectives, Freeman is distinguishing between a systemic stance of victim and perpetrator and an individual one. If we view discrimination as single, individual acts, then it allows us to escape a collective or a societal responsibility. We identify a single victim and we search out the perpetrator(s) and punish them. The risk of this view, Freeman writes, is that “the perpetrator perspective presupposes a world composed of atomistic individuals whose actions are outside of and apart from the social fabric and without historical continuity” (p. 1054). This view also serves the White majority in that it reinforces

an individual racist ideology, rather than a systemic definition of racism. White people can identify individual acts of discrimination and escape personal responsibility. I can identify the store owner down the street or the police officer in LA or New York as racist based on their actions and ignore the ways in which I or the White majority perpetuate a system of advantage and benefit for White people. The resolution of discrimination takes unique forms when approached from either perspective. Complexity is increased when the victim position is viewed as a condition of life rather than the consciousness associated with the condition, as noted above. This is because when the consciousness is disassociated, then responsibility can be ambiguous and difficult to attribute a direct causal relationship. Freeman further distinguishes solutions that stem from an affirmative stance or a negative one. With an affirmative stance, one would have to eliminate the conditions whereas with the negative, “the task is merely to neutralize the inappropriate conduct of the perpetrator” (p. 1053). He concludes that “in its core concept of the ‘violation,’ antidiscrimination law is hopelessly embedded in the perpetrator perspective” (p. 1053). The difference in these two positions is the attention and restitution paid to the victim(s) and the punishment handed out to the perpetrator. In the beginning of his essay he demonstrates this individualistic perpetrator view in an imaginary conversation held between the law and Black Americans:

THE LAW: “Black Americans, rejoice! Racial discrimination has now become illegal!

BLACK AMERICANS: “Great, we who have no jobs want them. We who have lousy jobs want better ones. We whose kids go to black schools want to choose integrated schools if we think that would be better for our kids, or want enough money to make our own schools work. We want political power roughly proportionate to our population. And many of us want houses in the suburbs.

THE LAW: “You can’t have any of those things. You can’ assert your claim against society in general, but only against a named

discriminator, and you've got to show that you are an individual victim of that discrimination and that you were intentionally discriminated against. And be sure to demonstrate how that discrimination caused your problem, for any remedy must be coextensive with the violation. Be careful your claim does not impinge on some other cherished American value, like local autonomy of the suburbs, or previously distributed vested rights, or selection on the basis of merit. Most important, do not demand any remedy involving racial balance or proportionality; to recognize such claims would be racist." (pp. 1049-1050)

As he continues to explore this perpetrator view, he identifies two common themes present, which have been accepted in the general criminal perspective of victim/perpetrator that we are accustomed to – that of fault and causation. “The fault idea is reflection in the assertion that only ‘intentional’ discrimination violates the antidiscrimination principle” (Freeman, 1978, pp. 1054-1055). Freeman has clearly described how intention became rooted in and ultimately affirmed White people’s understanding of discrimination. This idea of intention haunts and interferes with anti-racist work even today. It is the fundamental escape clause for White people. When White people judge their individual actions based on intention, they fail to see a larger impact. In fact Freeman is arguing that the very act of White people clinging to their good intentions is a deliberate act to maintain a privileged dynamic.

The fault concept gives rise to a complacency about one’s own moral status; it creates a class of ‘innocents,’ who need not feel any personal responsibility for the conditions associated with discrimination, and who therefore feel great resentment when called upon to bear any burdens in connection with remedying violations. (p. 1055)

In addition to fault, Freeman continues to explore causation. In this he lays the foundation for how White people once again escape blame because they concentrate on the acts of the past, figuratively throwing their hands up and wondering how in the world they could possibly be made to answer for the legacy they did not directly create. “The causation

principle makes it clear that some objective instances of discrimination are to be regarded as mere accidents, or ‘caused,’ if at all, by the behavior of ancestral demons whose responsibility cannot follow their successors in interest over time” (p. 1056).

In his essay, Freeman (1978) applies this dichotomy of perpetrator and victim to *Brown v Board of Education* to illustrate how these perspectives influenced resulting antidiscrimination law and discrimination suits. He discusses five such ways: “the color-blind constitution theory, the equality of education opportunity theory; the white oppression of blacks theory; the freedom of association theory and the integrated society theory” (p. 1065). Of these five, the color-blind constitution theory has the most relevance to this study. The question Freeman explores here is how a color-blind stance views antidiscrimination law from a means rather than an end perspective. Freeman notes that would indicate that the government was using race as a classification to separate educational services.

To explain *Brown* by invoking the slogan that the “Constitution is color-blind” reflects the means-oriented view of the equal protection clause. On this view, what was wrong with school segregation was that government was employing an irrational classification—race. This approach, however, does not explain why it was irrational to classify people by race if the purpose was to prevent blacks and whites from going to school together. How else could one rationally achieve segregation by race in public schools? (p. 1065)

Can government use race as a distinguishing factor to provide or deny services? Freeman points out that the reason the color-blind argument fails is because the government and the Supreme Court is inconsistent in the application of this theory. He identifies that the court has used racial classification as a remedy for stopping discrimination but not as a constructive measure to prevent further harm.

The color-blind theory has never become the law; the Supreme Court has in fact explicitly upheld the remedial use of racial classification on a number of occasions. Nevertheless, the theory does share certain features with something that is part of the law—the perpetrator perspective. Among these features is the emphasis on negating specific invalid practices rather than

affirmatively remedying conditions with a consequent inability to deal with ostensibly neutral practices. In addition, the color-blind theory exerts an insistent pressure on antidiscrimination law to produce special justifications for deviations from its norm and to limit their duration to facilitate a quick return to the comfortable, abstract world of color-blindness. (p. 1067)

The conclusion is that the theory is applied individually but not systemically. Freeman implies that to do that would be too costly to the powerful White majority.

*Richard Delgado.* As these scholars of Color engaged in rigorous debate on law campuses around the country, it became obvious that White males dominated the field of constitutional law. Delgado (1984), after securing tenure through more traditional, non-controversial teaching and writings of law subjects, eventually turned his attention to civil rights litigation. In attempting to become current in this specialized area, he and his research assistant began to investigate articles on civil rights. “When he [the research assistant] submitted the list, I noticed that each of the authors was white. Each was also male” (p. 561). He knew there were a number of legal scholars of Color writing and practicing civil rights law but found none who were quoted in these articles. Why were these authors silenced? He deduced, “It does not matter where one enters this universe; one comes to the same result: an inner circle of about a dozen white, male writers who comment on, take polite issue with, extol, criticize, and expand on each others’ ideas” (p. 563). Faced with this reality, Delgado began to explore reasons why scholars of Color were excluded and White scholars dominated the writings. “...why we might look with concern on a situation in which the scholarship about group A is written by members of group B” (p. 48).

This concern, about group A being defined by group B, is relevant to adult education also. It is a field in which the practitioners are predominantly White and White adult educators have dominated the scholarly writings. In essence, White adult educators are group B defining what and how group A, students of Color should be taught (Peterson,

1999). Although many issues are embedded in this dynamic, Delgado (1984) addresses the most important when he states, “Finally, domination by members of group B may paralyze members of group A, causing the As to forget how to flex their legal muscles for themselves” (p. 567). It is the power imbalance between these groups that should be of most concern to adult educators. If we practice adult education for liberation, social justice, or social change, then how we address oppression within our learning environments, including scholarship, matters. Furthermore, Delgado (1984) concluded that the gap in voices of legal scholars of Color caused the current rhetoric to be more intellectual than useful. Changes sought in practices of discrimination and racism were not grounded in the experiences of people of Color but in the *interpretation* of that experience by White legal practitioners.

A number of the authors were unaware of basic facts about the situation in which minority persons live or ways in which they see the world. From the viewpoint of a minority member, the assertions and arguments were made by nonminority authors were sometimes so naïve as to seem incomprehensible—hardly worthy of serious consideration. (pp. 567-568).

Continuing this analogy to adult education, it implies that as White adult educators our content and instructional practices are more intellectual than grounded in the experiences of our students of Color and culturally relevant (Peterson, 1999).

Delgado (1984) concludes his essay raising the question “what should be done” (p. 577)? He suggests that law students and teachers of Color should continue to challenge the quality and quantity of scholarship by elite White lawyers, particularly questioning the “biases, omissions, and errors” (p. 577) of these White scholars. These “presuppositions and worldviews should be made explicit and challenged. That feedback will increase the likelihood that when a well-wishing white scholar writes about minority problems, he or she will give minority viewpoints and literature the full consideration due” (p. 577). Delgado suggests that while there may be White legal scholars who could sensitively contribute to the

literature, he questions the validity that they make a career of it. In the absence of those scholars, he is confident that the void will be filled.

As these scholars stand aside, nature will take its course; I am reasonably certain that the gap will quickly be filled by talented and innovative minority writers and commentators. The dominant scholars should affirmatively encourage their minority colleagues to move in this direction as well as simply to make the change possible. (p. 577)

*Charles R. Lawrence, III.* In his essay, *The Id, the Ego, and Equal Protection: Reckoning with unconscious Racism*, Lawrence (1987) revisits the question of intention as applied to the 1976 *Washington v Davis* decision. In this decision, the burden is placed on the victim to establish that the perpetrators purposefully discriminated, “proof of racially discriminatory intent or purpose is required to show a violation of the Equal Protection Clause” (p. 318 n2). Lawrence argues, as he notes other constitutional scholars do also, this “places a very heavy, and often impossible, burden of persuasion on the wrong side of the dispute. Improper motives are easy to hide” (p. 319 ). The wrong side of the dispute is the victim of discrimination, this mandate of proving intention means that one has to condense complex human interaction into single actions. Additionally, Lawrence argues that harm to the victim result regardless of the intent to harm on the part of the perpetrator. As Freeman (1978) pointed out in his essay, we are accustomed to viewing injustice through the dichotomy of victim and perpetrator where the intent of the perpetrator is to harm the victim. It would be difficult to make a case that someone would accidentally hold a gun to your head and demand your money. Lawrence asks a similar question, “does the black child in a segregated school experience less stigma and humiliation because the local school board did not consciously set out to harm her” (p. 319)? The court cited these four reasons in their *Davis* ruling regarding purpose or intent that would make it unreasonable to consider.

1. This type of scrutiny would be too costly.

2. Innocent people would bear the costs of remedying the harm in which they played no part.
3. An impact test would explicitly consider race which was inconsistent with equal protection values.
4. To consider racial remedies would disproportionately be at the expense of other social interests. (p. 320)

Lawrence does not see these problems as necessarily overwhelming and proposes another way of approaching this “intent/impact debate” (p. 321). He suggests that one reason racial discrimination is not recognized is because racism is not acknowledged as “both a crime and a disease.” This lack of awareness, he suggests is due to “a reluctance to admit that the illness of racism infects almost everyone.” Lawrence summarizes the court’s position as “the Court thinks of facially neutral actions as either intentionally and unconstitutionally or unintentionally and constitutionally discriminatory” (p. 322). He argues that dichotomy is not true.

Traditional notions of intent do not reflect the fact that decisions about racial matters are influenced in large part by factors that can be characterized as neither intentional—in the sense that certain outcomes are self-consciously sought—nor unintentional—in the sense that the outcomes are random, fortuitous, and uninfluenced by the decisionmaker’s beliefs, desires, and wishes. (p. 322)

Lawrence writes that we share a common heritage that has a historical context of racial divisions of dominance and subordination and that context cannot be removed when considering the intent of any racial discriminatory act. “Because of this shared experience, we also inevitably share many ideas, attitudes, and beliefs that attach significance to an individual’s race and induce negative feelings and opinions about nonwhites” (p. 322).

Lawrence (1987) argues that because of this embedded belief system, we are all racists and are unaware of it. “In other words, a large part of the behavior that produces racial discrimination is influenced by unconscious racial motivation” (p. 322). He suggests two reasons for this racist unconsciousness. He first draws upon Freudian theory “that the

human mind defends itself against the discomfort of guilt by denying or refusing to recognize those ideas, wishes, and beliefs that conflict with what the individual has learned is good or right.” As the Civil Rights Movement drew to a close in the 1970s, the country was embracing the color-blind ideology that Freeman (1978) argued was championed by *Brown v Board of Education*. Most White people began to embrace the notion that judging a person based on race was wrong. Hence, the Freudian theory of conflict and guilt seems reasonable. Lawrence also examines cognitive psychology theory “that culture—including, for example, the media and an individual’s parents, peers, and authority figures—transmits certain beliefs and preferences” (p. 323). In essence he is arguing that racism is so embedded in the culture of White people that it is the normal or natural way of behavior for us. “...where the goal is the eradication of invidious racial discrimination, the law must recognize racism’s primary source.” This primary source is the unconscious perpetuation of racism by White people. “Therefore, equal protection doctrine must find a way to come to grips with unconscious racism” (p. 323).

#### *Current State of Critical Race Theory*

Delgado (2003) reviewed the history of Critical Race Theory and wrote about the development of this body of scholarship. He notes that after the essays mentioned above influenced a movement from Critical Legal Studies to Critical Race Theory, there was a transition that “was not fully appreciated at the time” (p. 126). He notes that an influx of new scholars brought with them new directions. “Scholars focused on how media images shaped the way Americans understood race. They examined the role of multi-racialism, census categories, intersectionality, and hate speech. Words, categories, narratives, and mindsets—in a word, discourse—moved to the fore.” Delgado directs our attention to Lawrence’s

(1987) intent argument, that while a more burdensome test, Lawrence asserts it could be met because White people “harbored an unconscious intent to disadvantage the black” (p. 127).

Delgado comments on a shift in priorities as the influence of this discourse took hold.

In short, the term race, and the language, terminology, and mindsets with which society frames racial issues replaced the study of race and racism in the real world. Ideas, words, categories, and symbols replaced nationalism, interest convergence, history and similar tools that had served as Critical Race Theory’s stock in trade until then. (p. 127)

He outlined that Critical Race Theory fractured into a series of specialized study groups such as Lat/Crit theory and more recently Critical White Studies, which are reviewed heavily in this study. He notes that after initial success, the movement began to be criticized, “Is the notion of a unique minority voice not essentialist? ...Does narrative scholarship degrade constitutional discourse? The movement defended itself...but momentum slowed” (p. 130).

Delgado (2006) suggests that, at this point, the direction for scholarship lay in examining “...actions that do not discriminate against such groups [people of color, women, and other outgroups] but instead entrench white privilege” (p. 1279). He writes first of an example of discrimination by a White person to a person of Color that denies service or resources. He then poses another, more subtle example of discrimination in which the White person does not deny services but instead favors another White person.

Suppose, however, that the member of the dominant group acts not to disfavor such an individual, but to benefit another member of his or her own group? This ubiquitous practice raises the issue of white privilege: a series of interlocking favors, courtesies, benefits, and customs by which the dominant group confers gains on one of its own. It includes the artfully crafted letter of recommendation that a teacher writes for a favorite white student, but does not write for the black student in the rear row who shows flashes of real talent. (p. 1279)

Delgado fundamentally asks if this is “a civil-rights issue” (p. 1280). He states that “White privilege acts, like discrimination, as a socially stratifying force, but from the opposite

direction. By concentrating wealth, comfort, and well-being, it polarizes society and widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots.” He argues that racism and racial privilege are “two sides of a coin.” Both are embedded in our social interactions in similar ways with similar outcomes. “One operates to submerge and eliminate the competition; the other to elevate and favor one’s own kind.” White people find it easy to deny being racist and can support that claim by their good intentions, their enlightened world-view, and their antidiscrimination practices. But, as Delgado notes, “it is harder to deny that one is the beneficiary of privilege or that one has on occasion doled it out to a favorite friend or relative.” That takes a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of how embedded the phenomenon of racism is in our country and the nuances of how it gets acted upon. It is in this scholarship of White privilege that Delgado envisions Critical Race Theory will next be challenged.

### *Principles of Critical Race Theory*

The dynamics of racism and White privilege can be understood through a more thorough understanding of the principles and beliefs that have shaped and informed Critical Race Theory. This theory challenges three of our fundamental beliefs about racial injustice. The first “...is that ‘blindness’ to race will eliminate racism” (Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002, p. 1). These authors argue that this blindness generates from the individualism many scholars have that leads to resisting group identity. “Critical Race Theorists have challenged this belief, asserting instead that self-conscious racial identities can be—and have been—the source of individual fulfillment, collective strength, and incisive policymaking.” The second challenge is that racism resides in our social *systems* rather than in *individuals*, although certainly individuals can and are racist. Critical Race Theory challenges that racism resides

*only* in individuals. “The goal of antidiscrimination law, as understood historically and currently by courts, was to search for perpetrators and victims: perpetrators could be identified through ‘bad’ acts and intentions, while victims were (only) those who could meet shifting, and increasingly elusive burdens of proof” (p. 2). Additionally, it challenges the premise that “one can fight racism without paying attention to sexism, homophobia, economic exploitation, and other forms of oppression or injustice” (p. 2). In other words, we are more than just our racial identities.

Critical Race Theorists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) have identified six principles:

1. Racism is salient or a normalized experience
2. Racism is addressed only when there is an interest convergence between the White majority and people of Color; when it is in the best interest of White people to address it.
3. Race is a social construction rather than a biological or genetic difference.
4. The recipients of racism and not the perpetrators have the authoritative voice to describe the experience of racism; people of Color are the experts regarding their own experiences and the use of narratives and counter-narratives can lend power to these experiences as they oppose the hegemonic stories of our (White people’s) lives.
5. Differential racialization refers to how the dominant society changes the way it racializes different groups of Color over time to serve the political and social needs of the White racial majority.
6. Race is only one way in which our identities intersect; no one belongs to only one demographic group.

These six tenets are described in more detail in the following sections.

*Racism is “normal”*. Racism is so entrenched within our society that it is natural. It is not an atypical social condition; instead it is “...the usual way society does business...” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). This normalcy is deeply fixed in our legal systems, cultural values, and in our psychological mind-sets (Delgado & Stefancic) and becomes

almost impossible for White people to *see*. This commonness makes it difficult to address (Freeman, 1978; Helms, 1992). As the scenario in the introduction demonstrated, the subtlety of the store clerk asking for additional identification of the person of Color and not the White person would go unnoticed by most White people; it is too widespread to stand out. The degree to which racialized experiences are transparent to White people is vital in understanding the nuances of how race and privilege can play out in everyday experiences. Peggy McIntosh's (1988) essay on the invisible knapsack was her attempt to make visible the taken-for-granted privileges she experiences as a White person. If the White majority would place race at the center of thinking and reflection on experiences, it could force an acknowledgement of how often and in what ways White people are privileged.

*Interest Convergence.* Sometimes solutions to problems or conditions happen because of a moral or ethical desire on the part of all parties to resolve the issue. Sometimes solutions take place because it is in the best self-interest of the party perpetuating the condition or the party that has the power to resolve it. This latter condition describes "interest convergence or material determinism" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Applying that to the racism in our country is to understand that racial oppression continues because the White majority benefits from it. Racial marginalization will only be resolved when the White majority finds a reason to dismantle it, while maintaining the privilege it affords them. Derrick A. Bell, Jr. (1980) offers a compelling argument that interest convergence was the reason for the reversal of school segregation in *Brown v Board of Education* by the Supreme Court in 1954. In an article he wrote for the *Harvard Law Review* in 1980, he suggested that it was in the best interest of U.S. to rule in favor of *Brown*. He advanced three suppositions about why this decision was determined based on U.S. self interest rather than a moral or just

interest of how segregated schools might be harmful to African American children. The first was that U.S. foreign policy, namely the emerging cold war, created pressure to uphold an international appearance as a just nation. Additionally, there was a threat of domestic upheavals because African Americans returned home from the war, having been so crucial to a U.S. victory, only to experience mistreatment and denial of veteran rights and privileges. Finally, there was an economic gain for the South to integrate (pp. 524-525). Delgado (2003) later notes that Mary Dudziak “unearth[ed] hundreds of memos, press releases, and letters from the State Department and other sources...proved what Bell...had only suspected” (p. 128). Delgado and Stefancic have also challenged that so called legal neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, and/or meritocracy disguise antidiscrimination efforts because they interfere with the self-interest of the White majority.

*Race is Socially Constructed.* What is race and what does it mean to belong to a race or be a raced person? Critical Race Theorists define race as a “social construction...products of social thoughts and relations” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). This means that race is not a condition of skin color but a manifestation of how we treat each other. If one believes that race is a social construction, then perhaps one can also believe racism and privilege can be deconstructed. It is in this principle that I think rests the most hope for emancipatory education or education *that is free and safe*. The hope is that the ability and responsibility for change begins with me.

*Voices of Authority: Narratives/Counter-narratives.* The explanation of this principle concerns the voice or the manner in which racism and privilege are discussed. This, perhaps, is the most passionate principle for me. In our schools, we teach that classrooms and teachers are “objective, historically accurate, and universal” (Roithmayr, 1999, p. 4). This

universality creates problems for White people because we assume our own experiences are the standard of measurement for all other experiences. We tend not to listen to people of Color (hooks, 2003). If we do listen, we are likely to make a “race card” accusation when people of Color try to describe racialized experiences (hooks, 2003; Wise, 2006). Critical Race Theory, instead, places the authority of who can and should speak about racism with those who have the direct experience of oppression. Our role, as the White majority is to listen and believe, instead of denying what we hear. I saw the power of listening as I witnessed the victims and perpetrators of crime engage in dialogue. The most powerful was when sexual assault victims confronted their attackers; to be believed seemed to be a powerful and healing experience. As with the centering of race in critical analysis, voice and listening belong there also. I think the burden of social change regarding privilege rests with White people; those who understand must reach out and assist those who don’t. If White people are speaking to each other about White privilege then there is no space for “race card” or other such denial tactics. We must serve each other in order to reach an emancipatory education system. Additionally, Critical Race Theory advocates for the use of storytelling, narratives, and counter-narratives as a way to “cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). I think White people can also use storytelling in much the same way as I have done throughout this document as we critically reflect on our experiences of racial power and privilege. Although storytelling may be effective, White people have a long, rich history of denial and blame, so the object lessons of the stories must also have within them the process of making what is implicit, explicit.

*Differential Racialization.* As the needs of the White majority shift, the stereotypes of racial subordinates groups change. The stereotypes serve a specific purpose in maintaining racial dominance.

Popular images and stereotypes of various minority groups shift over time...in one era, a group of color may be depicted as happy-go-lucky, simpleminded, and content to serve white folks. A little later, when conditions change, that very same group may appear in cartoons, movies, and other cultural scripts as menacing, brutish, and out of control, requiring close monitoring and repression. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 8)

Since different racial groups have been racialized in various ways, they have had to endure different laws and legal policies. This makes the dismantling of those laws much more difficult. For example, English only laws are directed toward Latinos/as; specific drug possession laws target African Americans. Throughout history the needs of the White majority have changed as the country evolved and the demands for prosperity shifted. For instance when White people took Native lands, they depicted the Indian as vicious warriors and when reparations and broken treaties were contested in court, the images changed to portray American Indians as drunk and lazy or comical icons in full headdress. These images served to reinforce the position of the White majority as they took land from people depicted as *savages* and justified their broken treaties from people who were depicted as *incompetent* or *foolish* (Delgado & Stefancic).

*Intersectionality.* I am White; I am a woman; I am middle aged; I am able bodied; I am Christian; I am part of the economic middle class; and I am heterosexual. In most ways I am privileged but regarding my gender, I am part of the disenfranchised. Critical Race Theorists believe that “intersectionality” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 8), is the merging or meeting of our multiple social identities. Some of these identifiers come with privilege and some come with oppression. As a White person, I am privileged, as a woman, I am

marginalized. I learned the lesson of intersectionality best while working with offenders. A prisoner who was a clerk in the education office spent many hours with me learning word processing and database programming. I liked him; he was pleasant, interesting, humble, and smart. He was serving a 25-year sentence for sexually assaulting his granddaughter. Until working in prison and meeting this man, I thought someone who sexually assaulted children was an evil person. Meeting and liking this man challenged that belief. How could this pleasant, unassuming man have been the same man that committed such violence? There were many of these same experiences in prison; people I respected in one setting that were violent and hurtful in other parts of their lives. All our behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and values meet or intersect within us to make us who we are; “No person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity” (Delgado & Stefancic, p. 8). While on the one hand, I am advocating that race is central in the critical analysis of educational systems, I also acknowledge that on individual levels, we are not just one thing. We are complex, just as our realities and experiences are complex. Furthermore, as we deconstruct racism and privilege, the presentation of that should include and highlight those complexities.

#### *Introduction of Critical Race Theory to Education*

This study examines White privilege as experienced by White people in an effort to learn how this racial privilege affects adult learners and educators. It was important to begin the discussion of Critical Race Theory within the discipline in which it was conceived, legal scholarship. The application of this theoretical framework to education is also important. How did this theory make its way into educational discourse? To explore that, I first begin with the introduction of Critical Race Theory in elementary and secondary education by Ladson-Billings and Tate, IV (1995) in an article written for *Teachers College Record*. Four

years later, Peterson (1999), used Critical Race Theory in her discussion of how Adult Basic Education and other adult learning programs were neglecting the relevance and voices of adult learners of Color.

*K-12.* Critical Race Theory is introduced into K-12 education by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate, IV (1995) in an attempt to bring race to the forefront of the discussion of inequity in education. Their premise was that “despite the salience of race in U. S. society, as a topic of scholarly inquiry, it remains untheorized” (p. 47). They further contend that while there is great disparity between White middle-class students and students of Color, “these inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized.” The article is outlined to discuss three central ideas:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining the inequity in the U.S.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool through which we can understand social (and consequently, school) inequity. (p. 48)

They support the first proposition with demographic and other statistical data and acknowledge that they draw upon the works of Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. Du Bois, both of whom in the early twentieth century brought race into the discussion of inequality and particularly into the discourse about educational disparity among White and Black students. The article focuses mainly on property rights and how race should be a central theme in that analysis.

As they introduce their discussion on property rights, Ladson-Billings and Tate, IV (1995) begin with the examination of “legal scholarship and interpretations of rights” (p. 52). It is here that they apply Critical Race Theory to the question of property rights and “in our analysis...add another aspect to this critical paradigm that disentangles democracy and

capitalism” (p. 52). They critique “traditional civil rights approaches to solving inequality” because they “have depended on the ‘rightness’ of democracy while ignoring the structural inequality of capitalism.” They point out that democracy can happen without capitalism but that the U.S. was founded on democracy *and* capitalism. Because the country was founded on both, White men with property held political and economic power. “When civil rights leaders of the 1950s and 1960s built their pleas for social justice on an appeal to the civil and human rights, they were ignoring the fact that the society was based on *property rights*” (p. 53). This argument that property is connected to race is an important one.

The grand narrative of U.S. history is replete with tensions and struggles over property—in its various forms. From the removal of Indians (and later Japanese Americans) from land, to military conquest of the Mexicans, to the construction of Africans as property, the ability to define, possess, and own property has been a central feature of power in America. (p. 53)

Having established connections between property rights and capitalism the authors establish the connection of property to education. Obviously, property is intricate to school funding through taxation and more affluent communities have a larger tax base upon which to draw for educational services. Their real argument lies, though, in expanding the definition of property. “For example, curriculum represents a form of ‘intellectual property.’ The quality and quantity of the curriculum varies with the ‘property values’ of the school” (p. 54). They provide an example of two students preparing to choose high school courses and the stark differences in their respective school curriculum offerings. Even though there are federal mandates that schools be equipped with “science labs, computers and other state-of-the-art technology, appropriately certified and prepared teachers,” schools that serve poor students of Color are unable to meet that mandate due to limited financial resources that stem from access to property.

At this point, the authors use Critical Race Theory to demonstrate racism within education. To do so, they begin with the Critical Race Theory principle that racism is not an isolated, individual condition.

While some might argue that poor children, regardless of race, do worse in school, and that the high proportion of African-American poor contributes to their dismal school performance, we argue that the cause of their poverty in conjunction with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism. (p. 55)

They suggest that since *Brown v Board of Education*, “today, students of color are more segregated than ever before” and “instead of providing more and better educational opportunities, school desegregation has meant increased white flight along with a loss of African-American teaching and administrative positions” (pp. 55-56). To demonstrate this argument they use “Lomotcy and Stalcy’s examination of Buffalo’s ‘model’ desegregation program” (Lomotcy & Stalcy, 1990, as cited in Ladson-Billings & Tate, p. 56). What was found in Buffalo was that “African-American and Latino students...academic achievement...failed to improve while their suspension, expulsions, and dropout rates continued to rise.” Ladson-Billings and Tate, IV, wondered why Buffalo was such a model desegregation example. Their conclusion was that “the benefits that whites derived from school desegregation and their seeming support of the district’s desegregation program” (p. 56) was the determining factor for judging success. “Thus, a model desegregation program becomes defined as one that ensures that whites are happy (and do not **leave** the system altogether) regardless of whether African-American and other students of color achieve or remain” (p. 56 bold formatting added).

Ladson-Billings and Tate, IV (1995) now draw upon another principle in Critical Race Theory to continue to demonstrate racism within educational settings. This is the principle that the voice of racism belongs to the oppressed. “As we attempt to make linkages

between critical race theory and education, we contend that the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system” (p. 58). Similarly to how Delgado (1984) drew the legal community’s attention to the lack of acknowledged scholarship by White legal scholars of legal scholars of Color, so have these authors drawn the attention to how authority and voice of educational scholars of Color are silenced.

The article continues as Ladson-Billings and Tate, IV (1995) make the connection between racism and property stronger; this is where the potency of their argument and significance of this scholarship lie. “...we argued that race is still a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States and that the society is based on property rights rather than on human rights” (p. 58). They begin by reminding us that

Slavery linked the privilege of Whites to the subordination of Blacks through a legal regime that attempted the conversion of Blacks in objects of property. Similarly, the settlement and seizure of Native American land supported White privilege through a system of property rights in land in which the ‘race’ of the native Americans rendered their first possession right invisible and justified conquest. (Harris, 1993, as cited in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58)

Furthermore, the authors use Harris’ description of how property functions as whiteness, which are: (1) rights of disposition; (2) rights to use and enjoyment; (3) reputation and status property; and (4) the absolute right to exclude. Ladson-Billings and Tate, IV take each of these properties of Whiteness and place them in the context of education. For the first one, the right of disposition, the authors note “when students are rewarded only for conformity to perceived ‘white norms’ or sanctioned for cultural practices (e.g. dress, speech patterns, unauthorized conceptions of knowledge), white property is being rendered alienable” (p. 59). For the second, they note that “legally, whites can use and enjoy the privilege of whiteness” and that when enrichment programs are disproportionately populated by White students, then the use and enjoyment of curriculum is rendered as property. Regarding the third, reputation,

the authors use the example of the difference in status and reputation between English as a second language and foreign language learning. Additionally they draw our attention to the use of the word urban and the association that has to mean Black and when these urban students are bussed to suburban schools, “these schools lose their reputation” (p. 60). The final one, the right to exclude, the authors draw our attention to special education programming. “Within schools, the absolute right to exclude is demonstrated by resegregation via tracking, the institution of ‘gifted’ programs, honors programs, and advanced placement classes. So complete is this exclusion that black students often come to the university in the role of intruders—who have been granted special permission to be there.”

Ladson-Billings and Tate, IV (1995) conclude their article with a discussion on the multicultural education movement. They first analogize the tension in the legal community between civil rights legislation and Critical Race Legal Theory to the tension between Critical Race Theory in education and “what we term the multicultural paradigm” (p. 61). The tension derives from a critical lens of analysis in Critical Race Theory in education and the tendency to “reduce it [multicultural education] to trivial examples and artifacts of cultures such as eating ethnic or cultural foods, singing songs or dancing, reading folktales, and other less than scholarly pursuits of the fundamentally different conceptions of knowledge or quests for social justice.” Further complicating this tension is the move from the “attempt to bring both students and faculty from a variety of culture into the school (or academy) environment” to “the term used interchangeably with the ever-expanding ‘diversity,’ a term used to explain all types of ‘difference’—racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic,

ability, gender, sexual orientation.” The authors suggest that what happened in the law with liberalism is happening in education.

We argue that the current multicultural paradigm functions in a manner similar to civil rights law. Instead of creating radically new paradigms that ensure justice, multicultural reforms are routinely sucked back into the system and just as traditional civil rights law is based on a foundation of human rights the current multicultural paradigm is mired in liberal ideology that offers no radical change in the current order. (p. 62).

I found myself immersed in this tension this past fall when I was teaching a course in human relations to preservice educators. Although not titled as such, the course objectives were explicit in using race as the lens for analyzing human interaction and preparing these instructors to teach in diverse K-12 classrooms. As I outlined the course and assigned readings, I deliberately introduced the multicultural paradigm of social justice education rather than the limited paradigm of cultural appreciation through the use of artifacts, food, language, etc. Having a critical background in analyzing human interactions within the classroom and my philosophical grounding in Critical Race Theory, I began by introducing race as a social construction. As the semester progressed and I constantly used race as a means of analysis, some White students challenged me. If race is a social construction, why use that term and why categorize individuals. This was a predominantly White group of students, with two students identifying as members of a racially oppressed group. I found it difficult to make practical all the theory I had spent so many years learning and writing about. This article by Ladson-Billings and Tate, IV (1995) and particularly the section on multicultural paradigm resonated with me deeply. I had to take the theory into the practical realm as I had experienced this tension they spoke of and answered the questions of why it was so important and vital that we speak about race separately, why it deserved its own college course, and why we should use the term race instead of ethnicity or cultural identity.

*Adult Education.* Elizabeth A. Peterson (1999) uses Critical Race Theory to inject a more critical perspective for adult educators in an effort to provide more relevant education to adults of Color. Peterson begins her article by outlining the African American adult educators and the roles they have played to shape the field of education. She also notes the failure of desegregation but does so with the benefits that segregated school offered to African American children.

The dream was for African Americans to have the benefit of the same (and it was assumed better) education as whites. Unfortunately, this also meant that African American students, who had previously been taught and nurtured by African American faculty who understood their needs, were now often taught by white teachers who had not developed a sensitivity for their new students. They often judged differences in appearance, speech and mannerisms as inferior to the white students with whom they were more familiar. (p. 83)

She notes this preferential treatment as “racial nepotism” (Bell, 1992, as cited in Peterson, p. 83). It is through this explanation that she introduces the reader to Critical Race Theory and argues that this theoretical framework can change the dialogue in adult education. “CRT supports the need for an expanded dialogue on the role of education in the African American community” (p. 85). She asserts that “one thing is clear: whites have benefited throughout history from treating all African Americans as if they are exactly the same, with little regard for regional, socioeconomic, and gender differences” (p. 85). She argues that this has resulted in educational programming for adults that looks the same regardless of the racial diversity of the adults in the learning environments. Peterson also notes that most Adult Basic Education and literacy programs use a deficit approach to education, looking first at what a student fails to do or achieve rather than considering their rich life experiences. This focus on lack of skills prevents adult educators to consider “...other problems that have an impact on adult literacy...(for example, adult learning disabilities, the poor quality of some schools and academic tracking)” (p. 85).

Peterson (1999) suggests we can change adult education by evaluating four aspects of program design. The first is curriculum and understanding that often content adult educators chose is biased and uses a historical perspective that silences, dismisses, or distorts the experiences of people of Color. The next is that instructional strategies are often employed based on the deficit mind-set. White instructors are particularly prone to do this with students of Color because these students are often labeled at risk. “The ‘at risk’ label follows the African American student throughout a lifetime of educational encounters” (p. 86). Additionally, assessments should be examined because they can also be biased and may fail to accurately measure achievement. Finally, funding should be scrutinized. Adult Basic Education programs “which are perceived as a program that enrolls a larger proportion of African American students than other public and private adult education programs is often underfunded” (p. 87).

She concludes her article by noting that “whites and nonwhites cannot share an experience of ‘race,’ so differences must be mediated through education. Education becomes relevant when it creates an opportunity for us to better understand and appreciate one another” (p. 90). Although the article spoke to African American adult educators, as a White adult educator, it affirmed the need for continued and critical dialogue about race and equity in adult learning environments.

My son was born prematurely and so I took an extended parental leave of absence. It was during this time that the trial of O. J. Simpson took place and since I was at home, I watched much of the proceedings. I was not surprised at the verdict of not guilty and had long discussions with my partner/husband where we both expressed our understanding of how a jury would believe that a White police officer had planted evidence on a Black man in

order to make an arrest. Furthermore, we understood how that would give the jury reasonable doubt for conviction. Although many of my White friends did not understand this, having watched much of it on TV, I often said that I would have acquitted him also. Some years later, I was teaching adult literacy to a class of predominantly students of Color. They expressed interest in learning about the universe and so we put together a curriculum on the planets, stars, etc. I thought it appropriate to include the U.S. space program and the moon landing. During a discussion about the moon landing, I was shocked to find out that my class did not believe that Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, they believed it was staged. I was so shook up that I did not know how to respond in the moment and so sat in silence as they talked about this. After class, I regrouped and strategized how I could expose them to information that would change their mind. It was many hours later that I came to draw on my experience of the O.J. Simpson trial and realize that my students' experience of the government and mine were completely different. While I could not conceive that the moon landing was a hoax, these adult learners so distrusted the government, that it was not only possible, but probable that the government staged the whole experience. There was a cultural divide I was never going to cross within that learning environment. As Peterson (1999) said Whites and people of Color cannot share an experience of race; therefore, as a White adult educator I cannot take race out of the equation when I'm teaching. These students of Color had a different reality of the government than I did and their reality was the one that mattered in that learning environment. My understanding will always be limited by my race; I can understand more, but I will never understand completely.

### *Special Studies within Critical Race Theory*

We (White people) frequently identify racism as a problem of *not being White*, deny responsibility for the status of race relations, and seldom admit or acknowledge the privilege associated with Whiteness. There is a relatively new body of literature called Critical White Studies or Whiteness Studies, which explores these issues of being White and racially privileged in our society. Doane (2003) describes this new scholarly focus: “what is new and unique about ‘whiteness studies’ is that it reverses the traditional focus of research on race relations by concentrating the attention upon the socially constructed nature of white identity and the impact of whiteness upon intergroup relations” (p. 3). Gabriel (1998, as cited in Doane) writes that this concept of Critical White Studies is “in contrast to the usual practice of studying the ‘problem’ of ‘minority groups,’ the ‘whiteness studies’ paradigm makes problematic the identity and practices of the dominant group” (p. 3). According to Margaret Andersen (2003) there are three themes in this literature: 1) a perspective that White is normal, 2) a system of White privilege, and 3) an understanding that race is socially constructed. She adds that, while “people of color have been ‘racialized,’ so have white people although with radically different consequences” (p. 24). . To explore Whiteness critically, two additional themes should be included. These are, the ways in which White people discuss and/or avoid discussions about race and the connection of racism and privilege to White supremacy. These are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

### *Transformative Learning*

Learning is inherently experiential; we learn by *doing* something – listening, reading, thinking, touching, etc. Deep learning comes from experiences that dramatically alter our values, judgments, beliefs, and/or attitudes. Cranton (2006) quotes Mezirow (1978) as

identifying this as “a structural reorganization in the way that a person looks at himself [herself] and his [her] relationships” (p. 21). This level of learning was initially termed by Mezirow as Perspective Transformation but has now become part of a larger adult learning theory called Transformative Learning Theory and is known as constructivist in nature (Cranton). This means that we create our learning from internal sources, our experiences, rather than external sources, for example – books, and build that knowledge rather than have the learning dispensed to us. “We develop or construct personal meaning from our experience and validate it through interaction and communication with others” (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 23). The interaction is an important piece of Transformative Learning because it clearly outlines that learning is social and does not take place in isolation or a vacuum. Additionally, the communication with others constructs deeper understandings within us.

Transformative Learning is a process rather than an achievement, and is characterized by “examining, questioning, validating, and revising our perspectives” (Cranton, 2006, p. 23); it may also be “understood as a continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 3). Initially, the formation of our perspectives or meaning constructs happened as we grew and developed although it was in the absence of any real examination. Consequently we have these “uncritically assimilated ways of knowing, believing, and feeling” (Cranton, 2006, p. 23). Mezirow (2000) cautions that is why adult education should stress “contextual understanding, critical reflection on assumptions, and validating meaning by assessing reasons” (p. 3).

Within this theory are two significant tenets that are applicable to this study. First, transformative learning is most often “triggered by a significant personal event” (Taylor, 2000, p. 298). It has been referred to a “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22) or

“any encounter with an unexpected or contradictory point of view” (Cranton, 2006, p. 61). If the White customer had turned to the store clerk and asked why additional identification was required for the customer of Color and I, as an additional White customer, stepped to the counter to ask the same question, the clerk might have experienced a disorienting dilemma. The clerk would not have expected two White allies to step forward and ask about his/her behavior; it would have contradicted most experiences where White people are silent observers.

Secondly, critical reflection follows the event. This questioning of our previously unquestioned perspectives or assumptions is when learning takes place and new insight gained. This exploration of these contested meanings drives the individual to form new more critically sound positions. Those remain until another dilemma triggers more reflection (Cranton, 2006). The fact that two White people acted in unexpected ways would likely have not been enough to change or transcend the consciousness of the White store clerk; there was a need for something more. Bennis and Tomas (2002) stated that “the crucible experience was a trial and a test, a point of deep self-reflection that forced them to question who they were and what mattered to them” (p. 40). Brookfield (1995) believes that critical reflection begins with “hunting assumptions” (p. 2). For Parker Palmer (1998) it appears that reflection is a process of “identity and integrity” (p. 10). As I have come to appreciate my own experiences in understanding and acting against or outside my own privilege, I can link specific learning to incidents that have shaken my assumptions about how people are supposed to act or treat each other. Other White authors have confirmed that it is through an experience, and reflection of that experience, that the level of consciousness regarding privilege is raised and behavior changed (Jensen, 2005; Kendall, 2006; Wise, 2005). This

study will use Transformative Learning Theory to help explore what, if any, experiences triggered significant awareness and action of the participants.

### *Racial Identity Development*

Knowles and Peng (2005) define racial identification as “one’s sense of belonging to a racial or ethnic group” (p. 223) and have noted that most of the study of racial identity has focused on the racial identity development of people of Color. Marshall (2002) states “the construct of *racial identity* describes our inclination to identify (or not identify) with the racial group to which we are assumed to belong” (p. 9). As she describes it our racial identity is as much a part of how others categorize and treat us as of our own self-identification. If I am assumed to be White, then I will be treated as White and will have a White racial identity. One cannot complete a study of racism and White privilege without paying attention to the development of racial identity. “...personality and social psychologists have tended to explain [racial inequality and discrimination]...in terms of the dominant-group members’ negative attitudes toward subordinate groups...little research has focused on Whites’ experience of their own racial identity, independent of their views about [other racial groups]” (Knowles & Peng, 2005, p. 224). Knowles and Peng identify this as a prejudice perspective of racial identity. The negative attitudes are the stereotypes and racial images of people of Color that White people have grown accustomed to without critical examination; these form the basis of our own racial identity.

Researchers of different disciplines have formed models and theories of racial identity (Hardiman, 1982, 2001; Hardiman & Jackson, 1992; Helms, 1992, 1993a, 1995; Knowles & Peng, 2005; Marshall, 2002; Tatum, 1997). As human beings, we change and evolve over time; this is the essence of most developmental models. I think growth and

maturity is not a direct linear experience, rather it is similar to the ebb and flow of sound waves; although always becoming more complex or mature, we go between the stages and/or phases of development rather than progressing from one stage to another as one might climb a staircase. This is also true of our positionality, race, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.; each of these makes up our social identities. Hardiman and Jackson (1992) when writing about the development of racial identity agree that “as with other developmental processes, one’s racial identity changes over time to become more congruent with one’s range of experiences, personal beliefs and other dimensions of one’s self-identity” (p. 23).

Racism is so prevalent in our country that all racial identity is shaped by it. Helms (1993b) states that “The development of White identity in the United States is closely intertwined with the development and progress of racism” (p. 49). It would seem, then that a closer examination of racism would assist in a deeper understanding of White racial identity.

J. M. Jones, as cited by Helms (p. 49), distinguished among three types of racism:

- (a) individual, that is personal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors designed to convince oneself of the superiority of Whites and the inferiority of non-White racial groups;
- (b) institutional, meaning social policies, laws, and regulations whose purpose is to maintain the economic and social advantages of Whites over non-Whites; and
- (c) cultural, that is, societal beliefs and customs that promote the assumption that the products of White culture (e.g., language, traditions, appearance) are superior to those of non-White cultures.

As one explores these definitions, one can begin to understand that racism is a multi-layered condition embedded in our individualism; social, business, and political systems/structures; and the very traditions we partake in. As the dominant or majority race, White people have absorbed racism in much the same way a sponge absorbs water; it appears to happen naturally, without intention or deliberate action. This very seamlessness is what makes it so

difficult for White people to not only perceive it within themselves, but also to recognize it in other members of the White majority (Tatum, 1997).

The formation of identity is complex and involves family, geography, time, and historical, political, and social contexts (Tatum, 1997). In my doctoral studies, we were continually asked to reflect on identity: Who am I? Who am I becoming? Whom do I serve? What are my commitments? At any given moment during the course of my schooling, my answers would be radically different. As Tatum suggested, my identity was constantly shifting and complex. This was not necessarily a developmental or linear process, although the insights I had seemed to build upon earlier insights. Included in the various answers to these questions were reflections about my race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ambition, and family obligations and my growth and maturity in those areas. These are typical ways in which all human beings grow and change over time. Pertinent to this study is the development of racial identity for White people. A common question that I ask learners as we begin to study race, racism, and White privilege is, when do you first remember thinking of yourself as White? Most of the White students aren't able to think of a time or the first time is relatively late in adolescence or early adulthood (Hardiman & Jackson, 1992; Helms, 1992; Tatum, 1997). Most White people begin the journey to racial identity in a state of not-knowing (Helms, 1993b, pp. 51-52). There appears to be a general awareness that there are other races, but White people do not attribute a race to themselves.

Hardiman (1982; 2001) began work in the late 1970s on a model for White Identity Development in an effort to explain the effects of racism on White people. She was a White woman conducting education research and scholarship. This interest came out of her own awareness of how racism had affected her. "I was self-aware enough to know that not only

was I prejudiced, having believed lies, stereotypes, and distortions about U.S. racial history but also that those beliefs, attitudes, and feelings were not of my own making” (2001, p. 109). Her work was unique in that it turned the attention or discourse of racism unto the dominant racial group, the oppressors, rather than the subordinate or oppressed groups. She acknowledged that her understanding of sexism, as a condition of relationships rooted in the imbalance of power, would not be undone by studying women, the subordinate or oppressed group, or that women would be able to dismantle the oppressive condition. She transferred those same principles to racism. She also notes that “I wanted to understand whether and how Whites could escape from the effects of their racist programming” (p. 110). Additionally she wanted to “contribute to the construction of a new way to be White that was not dependent on the subjugation or denigration of people of color.”

The White Identity Development model has five stages (Hardiman, 2001, p. 111). The first stage is “*No Social consciousness of Race or Naivete*” and manifests itself by White people acknowledging no visible difference in race. In this stage, Whites do not recognize the social value placed on one race over another. This usually ends in early childhood. The next stage is “*Acceptance*” and understands differences in races and learns that the White race is a superior one. This is the result of internalized racism for White people. After being taught from a Eurocentric position in school, which used all White role models to mark invention, intellect, and strength, we internalize, subconsciously that White is better than any other race. This is reinforced by our parents and extended family because they too, have internalized this supremacy. Hardiman states clearly that this model of racial identity assumes that White people are not able to escape this stage; there is no choice because it is a salient part of our society.

The third stage, “*Resistance* (Hardiman, 2001, p. 111)” is characterized by the White person who begins to question the “dominant paradigm about race, and resisting or rejecting his racist programming.” This is usually the stage in which Whites can actively seek to deconstruct or dismantle racism as they begin to challenge racism. This is also the stage where we experience “embarrassment about one’s Whiteness, guilt, shame, and a need to distance oneself from the White group.” We begin to reject those we determine are in the acceptance stage. It often reminds me of reformed smokers who become overly critical of other smokers. As the White person moves out of acceptance, they begin to reject those White people who are still in that stage, I think because the wounds are raw. In this stage I wanted someone to pay for the harm that had been inflicted on people of Color and while I absorbed a lot of the guilt, I also would, and still do, get angry at White people who just haven’t moved out of this stage and *gotten it*. It is also in this stage that some White people will begin to assume behavior or mannerisms or in some other way identify with other racial groups. When in this stage I also decided that I was Native American. My grandmother told me that some generations back we had some Oglala Sioux in our heritage and so I clung to that in an effort to separate myself from my White ancestors.

The fourth stage is “*redefinition*” and “occurs when the White person begins to clarify his own self-interest in working against racism, and begins to accept and take responsibility for his Whiteness.” In this stage, White people cross back over the divide to embrace other White people rather than reject them. It is in this stage that I find peace and the energy to do antiracist work. I’m not rejecting myself or other White people. I embrace a future full of possibility. I concentrate on the legacy I can leave my sons rather than the inheritance I received from my ancestors. The fifth stage is “*Internalization*” (p. 112) and is

characterized by the full integration of race into all other aspects of our lives. I view myself as a White, heterosexual, able-bodied, woman.

Hardiman (2001) cautions us that this model was developed at a particular time and that social and historical context influenced its creation. This model was reflected in a small sampling of White participants in her dissertation research in the late 1970s and early 1980s. “It is grandiose and a gross oversimplification to say that the WID [White Identity Development] defined the racial identity experience for all Whites” (p. 112).

In another discipline, counseling psychology, Janet Helms (1992; 1993a; 1993b; 1995) also developed a model of White Racial Identity Development in her research in 1984. She was an African American woman and was researching “a theoretical framework for considering racial identity development of Blacks and Whites. I also proposed a counseling process interaction model that subsequently was expanded to describe other types of social interactions” (1995, p. 183). Originally her work included stages of racial identity but she later came to rename those “status (of the ego)...without intentionally changing the essential meaning.” Helms notes that “members of all socioracial groups, regardless of specific racial or ethnic group classification, are assumed to experience a racial identity developmental process that can be described by several statuses.” She states that in the US, Whites are among the entitled or privileged group and therefore, “the general developmental issue for Whites is abandonment of entitlement, whereas the general developmental issue for people of color is surmounting internalized racism in its various manifestations” (p. 184). Both Helms and Hardiman (2001) envisioned the goal in racial identity development would be that White people acknowledge and deconstruct their privilege. Additionally, both implied that the stages and statuses allowed the developing White person to process more complex racial

concepts and information. Helms identified this as “complex management of racial material.”

Helms (1992; 1993a; 1993b; 1995) describes six statuses in her model (1995, p. 185). The status describes the attitudes, behaviors and/or values the White person has or demonstrates during that status. The Information-Processing Strategy she describes as the behaviors “for responding to racial stimuli” (1995, p. 188). The first status, “*Contact*” (p. 185) describes a person that is satisfied with the status quo, is oblivious to racism and the participation of White people in that condition. She identifies that the Information-Processing Strategy is obliviousness. In the second status, “*Disintegration*,” Helms describes this as a disorientation and anxiety caused by racial dilemmas that seem irresolvable and cause moral distress. The Information-Processing Strategy is suppression and ambivalence. In the third status, “*Reintegration*” a White person idealizes our own group and has intolerance for other groups. Racial factors may have a strong impact on decisions. The Information-Processing Strategy is selective perception and negative out-group distortion. The fourth status, “*Pseudoindependence*” is characterized by an intellectual commitment to our own group and yet may have a deceptive open-mindedness of other racial groups. This is the status where White people may choose to help those that are underprivileged. The Information-Processing Strategy is reshaping reality and selective perception. The fifth status is “*Immersion/Emersion*” and is the point where the White person searches for personal understanding about racism and the ways in which White people benefit. It is also at this status that the White person begins to redefine what it means to be White. The Information-Processing Strategy is hypervigilance and reshaping. The last status is “*Autonomy*” and is characterized by a positive commitment to one’s own racial group,

develops internal standards for action that do not align with racial norms that we have been raised with. It's the point in which we have the capacity to give up our privilege. The Information-Processing Strategy is flexibility and complexity.

Both models demonstrate that racial identity is complex, changing, and difficult to navigate. I tend to gravitate more towards Hardiman's (1982; 2001) model. In both, though, White people experience a range of emotions from guilt and superiority to capacity and integration. I find, though that I flow easily in between the stages and statuses, although I experience the earlier ones less and less. I long for a time when I am able to say in the most evolved stage and status.

#### The Formulation of a Definition for "Race"

The definition of race has changed throughout history. Each definition has reflected the historical context in which it occurred. Luther Wright Jr., (1997b) writes that the statutory definition of race in America was officially formulated when Virginia created a legal description of race in 1662. This law determined the status of children fathered by Englishmen and mothered by Africans or American Indians. The pertinent part of that law read:

Whereas some doubts have arisen whether children got by an Englishman upon a negro woman should be slave or free. Be it therefore enacted and declared by this present grand assembly, that all children borne in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother...(p. 167n2).

Inheritance issues and property rights became the primary concern. Wright believes that this precise categorization of Whiteness was at the center of Americans enslaving Africans and establishing a system of White dominance. He suggests the development of these laws for defining race came from two distinct purposes: "the decision to deny blacks and Indians the same treatment as whites under the law", and "the birth of children who had only one white

parent or who had ancestors who were not white” (p. 164). Wright attributes that much of the reason for defining race grew out of familial connections and decedents. The determination of a person’s racial group membership linked directly to the rights a person could assert.

Reginald Horsman (1997) thinks that the definition, or at least the understanding of race, changed in the early to mid 1800s. He attributes the “superiority of the American Anglo-Saxon branch of the Caucasian race” to the change in how Americans justified the expansion to the West. He states that “the contrast in expansionist rhetoric between 1800 and 1850 is striking” (p. 139). The rhetoric of the articulation and definition of race, from the American Revolution to the early 1800s, concentrated on the belief that Americans were destined to expand. Horsman states that such rhetoric lacked the racial tenor that “permeated the debates” (p. 139) between 1800 and 1850. He also points out that by “1850 the emphasis was on the American Anglo-Saxons as a separate, innately superior people who are destined to bring good government, commercial prosperity, and Christianity” (p. 139) to America and the rest of the world. The ideas of “superior and inferior races,” and a world mission, were widespread, and influential in how White Americans viewed their own destiny. In addition, these ideas were also present in the rhetoric and thinking of “English and of Western Europeans in general” (p. 139) during the same time period. Horsman has credited that the definition of race lies in the idea that White people have a moral right or providence to be in the position of dominance, influence, and wealth. Both authors have focused upon legal rights and material possessions in the definition of race and the need to have such a definition.

Feagin and O'Brien (2003) add to our understanding of race as they describe the legacy of racial ideology.

From the seventeenth century onward, the system of labor exploitation and oppression, initially developed by whites for Native and African Americans, was rationalized in shared understandings and ideas, in a collective racial ideology. People often engage in extensive "symbolic labor" to construct a range of fictional representations used to defend or hide important societal realities.

The term symbolic labor is used to describe how White people began to create the stereotypes and myths about people of Color, particularly in terms of work ethics. "Such socially constructed fictions often conceal the underlying realities as normal and natural. Sincere fictions operate to prevent people from seeing clearly, that their society is pervaded by discrimination and oppression" (p. 10). This creation of a distorted or contrived view of people of Color is the foundation that supports the racial ideology necessary to sustain White privilege and supremacy. "Today, as in the past, a broad racial ideology and consciousness provide the umbrella framework of knowledge about racial matters. Stereotypes and prejudices do not exist alone but group themselves in sets, which are in turn part of the collective ideology and consciousness" (p. 10). This ideology has been passed down generationally leaving a legacy of an entrenched misunderstanding of the racial history of people of Color.

### *Racial Supremacy*

In addition to economics and legal rights, there is a concept of racial superiority embedded in the definitions of race. Dorothy E. Roberts (1997) writes that the only way Whites could justify the enslavement of Africans, in lieu of the rhetoric of liberty and equality during the American Revolution era, was to assert a ranking of racial groups or categories. Roberts identifies this as scientific racism, which "places a great value on the

genetic tie, as it understands racial variation as a biological distinction that determines superiority and inferiority” (p. 186). She notes that in the 1700s legal and ultimately constitutional definitions of race were based on “ancestry, or genotype” and that a “person’s race depended on the proportion of white, black, and Indian blood he or she inherited” (p. 187). Both Horsman and Roberts attribute some of the historical basis of race determination on physicality and the moral and cognitive supremacy of Whites.

In the early sociopolitical evolution of the United States, race was an essence, something that one could and did prove through ancestry; one had all White ancestors or one didn’t. In addition, White people were superior and therefore entitled or destined to govern and control the resources and material wealth of the country. The definition of White was one of pure blood and a superior race. Likewise, the definition of other races was the absence of White, one who had African or Indian parentage, one who was inherently inferior compared to one who had White ancestry, and therefore not entitled to govern or control wealth. These authors make clear the historical connection of privilege and supremacy. This ideology validated and legalized racist attitudes and behaviors.

As the United States expanded and the enslaved Africans freed, the American Indians exterminated and placed on reservations, the Mexicans conquered, and the Chinese imported for labor, racial delineations became more complex. Relying on blood lines to determine race became more difficult, although those laws continued in state constitutions until the 1980s (Omi & Winant, 1994; Wright, 1997a). It became more evident that race was a political distinction rather than a biological one. The emphasis was no longer on inheritance and ownership of property, but on placement in social hierarchy.

*Social Construction of Race*

The shift to a definition of race as a sociopolitical one, evolving in an historical context, has much support in the literature. Critical Race Theorists (CRT) define race as a “social construction...products of social thoughts and relations” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). This means that race is not a condition of skin color but a manifestation of how we treat each other. Delgado & Stefancic (1997) trace the changes in the depiction of people of Color in literature, film, and art over time. These changes demonstrate that race is constructed differently at different moments in history. Derrick Bell, Jr., a CRT scholar (2000) notes that racial identifiers for African Americans have been invented and re-invented many times. He states “as a consequence, we are shaped, molded, changed, from what we might have been...into what we are” (p. 71). These consequences include the exploitation of Black labor, denial of access to opportunity, and blaming African Americans for the condition of their oppression. López (2000a) concludes that the interaction that humans engage in defines and perpetuates the definition or formulation of race rather than any natural, biological, or genetic difference. He lists four components to explain this social construction of race. They are:

1. Humans rather than abstract social forces produce races.
2. As human constructs, races constitute an integral part of a whole social fabric that includes gender and class relations.
3. The meaning-systems surrounding race change quickly rather than slowly.
4. Races are constructed relationally, against one another, rather than in isolation (p. 168)

Omi & Winant (1994) propose that we understand race as a changeable set of social meanings constructed by the political and social struggles of a particular historical setting or

time. These authors have noted that race is more about what one *thinks* it is, than about scientific truth. Characteristics of face, hair, and phenotype may contribute to initial identification of racial groups. These characteristics do not explain experiences of oppression, coercion, and hatred that people of Color have suffered because of their racial group membership. Nor do these characteristics explain the attitudes of White people in America with regard to race. The initial racial distinctions based on supremacy and the right to govern and control resources however, is a more reasonable explanation of these attitudes. Omi & Winant connect “racial formation to the evolution of hegemony, the way in which a society is organized and ruled” (1994, p. 56). This long history of entitlement and privilege of White people in America explains the entrenched and systemic nature of racism. A White person born in America and raised in this culture can not escape being anything but racist.

As the government systems and sociopolitical structures formed in this country, so did the definitions of privilege, supremacy, and race. While these definitions have evolved and changed over time, the promotion of race as exclusively biological, and the denial of White supremacy remain. For the purposes of this study however, exploration of race, privilege, and supremacy will be as social constructs, the roots of which lie in the dominance of White people in political, governmental, economic, social, and educational systems.

#### The White Experience of Race

In a class discussion recently when asked about racial heritage, a White student claimed she didn't know her racial heritage. Receiving puzzled looks from some in the class, she clarified claiming that she didn't know it like African Americans, Asian Americans, Arab Americans, Latinos or American Indians did; she didn't have a culture like that. It is well documented that White people are often puzzled and silent when asked to reflect on their

own racial heritage (Feagin & Vera, 2005; Flagg, 1997; Grillo & Wildman, 1997; Helms, 1992; Katz, 2003; Kivel, 2002; McIntosh, 2005; Rothenberg, 2005; Tatum, 1997). White people frequently see others as raced but themselves as “normal.” If one sees oneself as normal, then those who are not the same are *not normal*. More importantly, it focuses the attention on the other not normal group. For Whites, this denial of racial group membership prohibits further examination into race and/or racism, privilege, and supremacy. In this next section, the exploration of the literature focuses on the components of privilege and supremacy.

### *Elements of Privilege*

As human beings living in a socially constructed and complex world, we have multiple identities and positions in society. In some ways, we are advantaged while disadvantaged in others. I am White, so a member of the advantaged race, I am female, a member of the disadvantaged gender and heterosexual, a member of the advantaged sexually oriented. I belong to those that make up the power systems for race and sexual orientation but not for gender. That’s where the complexity of my identity arises; I can’t be compartmentalized. I remain the entirety of these interconnecting identities of which I share power and oppression depending on my interactions with others. In this study, the emphasis is on race and racial privilege. Privilege and advantage of any kind have common themes that make up their structure. Wildman and Davis (1997) state three common elements:

- First, the characteristics of the privileged group define the societal norm.
- Second, privileged group members can rely on their privilege and avoid objecting to oppression.
- [Third] privilege is rarely seen by the holder of the privilege (pp. 315-316).

There are different models of White racial identity but all seem to begin with the White person in an unknown state of racial awareness (Helms, 1993b, pp. 51-52). There appears to be a general awareness that there are other races, but White people do not attribute a race to themselves. The confusion of the woman in class about her racial heritage demonstrates this lack of a racial understanding and implies that she defines her own experience as the societal norm.

*White = "Normal" → Privilege*

It seems reasonable that if White people see themselves as normal, see themselves as Americans, then, they would tend to limit the definition of American; White is normal, normal is American therefore White is American. Takaki (1993) illustrates this as he begins his book on a multicultural history of the United States. He recounts for us a taxi driver that asked how long he had been in America because "his English is excellent" (p. 1). He notes that these questions are always troublesome, and offers the explanation that, to the taxi driver, he did not appear "American" (p. 1) even though his family had been in America for over a hundred years; possibly longer than the taxi driver's ancestors. The taxi driver's privilege is subtle in this example. Privilege begins with thinking that what one is or has is the standard of comparison for others, their positions, and possessions; "the characteristics of the privileged group define the societal norm" (Wildman & Davis, 1997, p. 315). Most White people are not accustomed to questioning themselves about their race or normativity. The taxi driver saw himself as normal/American and saw Takaki as something different, therefore to question Takaki's position or Americanism seemed harmless. The privilege was in the very essence of the taxi driver's belief that he was in a position to ask the question. Different meant *not* being something the taxi driver assumed himself to be.

If White is normal, then the determination of White becomes an important aspect of the inquiry. When speaking about this determination, Kivel (2002) states, “in American society there is a broad and pervasive division between those of us who are **treated** as white people and those of us who are **treated** as people of color” (p. 9, bold format added). This supports that race is a constructed social dynamic and further explains some of the subtlety of the White taxi driver’s privilege. He was accustomed to treatment as a White person and to *deciding* who was a person of color; the act of *deciding* likely went unquestioned for him. There are two acts the taxi driver performed that give privilege its power. The first is the act of judgment, the decision that Takaki (1993), because of his race, might not speak English. The second is the righteousness or confidence that made the first act possible.

Kivel implies that Whites learn about privilege through repeated experiences of different treatment all throughout our formative years. This process produces what perspective transformation theorists would label as habits of mind. Cranton (2006) describes these as the assumptions we have that “are uncritically absorbed from our family, community, and culture” (p. 37). Embedded in these are “our values and sense of self...they provide us with a sense of stability, coherence, community and identity. Consequently they are often emotionally charged and strongly defended” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18). These are not easy for us to untangle or deconstruct because they resonate with our experience. If I am treated as a White person, I come to expect that treatment and only question the absence of it; my world-view (habits of mind) is consistent with my lived experiences (treatment and privilege as a White person).

*Choice*

Embedded in privilege is the factor of choice. Since White people are not the target of racial oppression, then the decision *not* to effectively challenge, is one that rests exclusively with the privileged. White people do not have to answer questions about how long they have lived in America as Takaki did in the taxi; the assumption is that because of their Whiteness they *belong*. Wildman and Davis (1997) give another, more obvious example of privileged choice. When asked to serve on a jury, Wildman describes the following incident. During attorneys' questions to determine qualification to serve, one lawyer asked "each Asian-looking male prospective juror if he spoke English" and yet "no one else was asked" (p. 316). Wildman toyed with the idea of introducing herself "by saying, 'I'm Stephanie Wildman, I'm a professor of law, and yes, I speak English'". She did not; "I exercised my privilege to opt out of engagement" (p. 316). I wondered why she opted out of engagement. Was it possible that she determined this place and time were not appropriate to draw attention to "the subordinating conduct of the attorney" (p. 316)? Yet I think if every White person, in every situation did engage and it became less socially acceptable to racialize social interactions, then the perpetuation of racism and oppression would end. Wildman points out that the Asian Americans asked the question had to answer it, she did not have to volunteer the information. She chose to remain silent but that was not an option for the Asian Americans during this phase of jury selection. Likewise, Takaki was subjected to answer a question about his heritage because the Taxi driver assumed, by the way he looked, that he did not speak English.

Unlike the agents of oppression or privilege who can exercise choice, the oppressed default into engaging because they are the targets. The attention falls on the other to explain

their difference. The “Asian-looking” prospective jurors had to explain their English speaking skills; the non-“Asian-looking” did not. Additionally within this choice lies the power inherent in privilege. The power is to ask but not be asked. White people witness repeatedly that others explain themselves yet, they do not; this lack of explanation turns into a perception that *what I can do* has no connection to *who I am*. White people disassociate the advantage they receive with their membership in the power structure and re-name the advantage as individual merit.

### *Invisibility*

One generally doesn't question the ordinary; one is more likely to question something unordinary or extraordinary. Wildman and Davis (1997) explain that “privilege is rarely seen by the holder of the privilege” (p. 316). White people view their Whiteness as normal or ordinary and have no precedent for the examination of normal. This normativity is what makes White privilege invisible. It is so much a part of White people's assumptions that it seems odd or unusual to think about it. “Empirical psychology's stance toward White identity appears to echo the now-criticized sociological view of Whiteness as inherently ‘invisible,’ ‘transparent,’ or ‘unmarked’—an attribute that, despite its power to shape lives, is seldom noticed by those who possess it” (Knowles & Peng, 2005, p. 223).

Peggy McIntosh (1988) revealed some of her insights into the invisibility of Whiteness when she began to analogize male gender privilege and White privilege. She noted that males she encountered, who were able to understand that women were disadvantaged, did not reconcile the existence of that disadvantage with male advantage. Advantage or privilege is the natural opposite of disadvantage or oppression; neither can happen in isolation of the other. This racial cloak of invisibility allows White people to

acknowledge the existence of racism and harm that people of Color have experienced while denying that, by the very existence of oppression, there is privilege accrued by the dominant race.

The seduction of privilege for White people is that, as human beings, we get accustomed to things incrementally over time in such a way that we stop questioning. As White people, others have treated us as White in ways that are too many to separate. We are used to and expect that treatment. It is similar to walking; we no longer tear down and think about the process of how to move our legs, shift our weight, and position our feet. We concentrated very hard on that as we took our first steps but now it has become routine and to such a degree, we no longer need that same level of concentration to produce the results we expect. In White-Washing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society (Brown et al., 2003), the authors use another analogy, “according to a well-known philosophical maxim, the last thing a fish notices is the water” (p. 34). If White people are to dismantle and examine racism and racial privilege, we have to break down every experience and evaluate all its components to seek out the identification of the advantage afforded us.

### *White Supremacy*

In the beginning of this study, I wrote, studied, and talked only about White privilege. When questioned why I used the term privilege and not supremacy, I mumbled some excuse. The real reason was that I could not reconcile myself with White supremacy. I have vivid memories of watching news clips with men in tall White hats, burning crosses, and lynched African Americans. That was White supremacy. Those memories changed to images of shaved heads, tattooed limbs, and steely eyes as the term “skin head” became synonymous with White supremacy. I could admit I was racist, I could admit and identify my privilege as

a White person, but I could not reconcile these images of White supremacy with myself. However, as I researched and studied, I realized that one couldn't really address racism and privilege without understanding and believing that White supremacy is at the foundation of both. I also began to recognize that I had a narrow understanding of White supremacy and that narrow definition contributed to my justification not to study it.

The issue I began with was the definition of White supremacy. I found some answers in Christianity, imperialism, and colonialism. All three have strong doctrines in a superior race, a righteous destiny to govern, and mandates to witness – spread and share their beliefs with others. Horsman (1997) describes this as he explains how the early colonization efforts by America was defended both as morally and economically advantageous. He states, “it was the means by which the superior Anglo-Saxon race could bring Christian civilization and progress to the world as well as infinite prosperity to the United States” (p. 144). Ruth Frankenberg (1993) in her study of White women found the influence of imperialism still present in the stories and interviews she analyzed. She points out “that in modes of knowing associated with racial domination, there continue to be close ties in the United States between racist and colonial discourses, as well as between constructions of whiteness” (p. 16). Furthermore, she notes that a racial hierarchy was associated with the entitlement that White Americans felt to establish and maintain control of an emerging nation. She explains that “assertions of racial difference and superiority were grounds for Euro-American claims for economic and political advantage” (p. 73). In addition she draws attention to how “Anglo colonizers of what was to become the United States brought with them arguments for white racial superiority articulated in the language of Christianity” (pp. 72-73). Both Horsman and Frankenberg, along with many other authors (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Kivel, 2002;

López, 2000b; Takaki, 1993; Wright, 1997b), offer writings and images of White in biblical phrases, art, music, and common language that implicitly and explicitly describe White as pure, Black and other people of Color as not. López (2000b) notes that for each “negative characteristic ascribed to people of color, an equal and opposite positive characteristic is imputed to Whites” (p. 632). There is little question that the dichotomy of superior and inferior race is at the center of White supremacy. Christian tradition and economic and social expansion clearly espouse a superior race.

The European American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness (2007) (ECCW), a group of White scholars, concur that colonialism helped to shape our experience of White supremacy. They acknowledge the influence of colonization as they state, “it [the United States] remains rooted tenaciously in the colonizing influences of Great Britain and other western European countries” (p. 389). They emphasize that those past influences reveal themselves in a “white supremacist consciousness, a web of assumptions based on values and beliefs held by white, Protestant colonists that have evolved and been normalized” (p. 389). This normalcy and/or invisibility of “white supremacist consciousness manifests a profound *unconsciousness* about race privilege and hegemony” (p. 389). In contrast, they define White supremacist to be an individual and White supremacist consciousness to refer “not to a person, but to the system of thought that grows out of the values and norms associated with the nation’s white founders.” Interestingly, they also note that this system of thought is not exclusive to White people but that people of Color have also “internalized these standards.” They refine this definition “as dualistic thinking, the privileging of the individual, and the presumption that white values are universal...from the treatment of the environment to efforts to transplant US style democracy to other cultures” (p. 389). The ECCW provides

further evidence that Western European traditional thought and behavior contributed to the continued evolution of White supremacy in the United States.

The foundations of White supremacy may reside in Christianity, imperialism, and colonialism but support also lies in the law for the superiority of a White race. Most notable are the court decisions surrounding the legal definition of White as it pertains to naturalization and citizenship. López (2000b) remarks that the category of White in the law “was constructed in a two-step process that ultimately defined not just the boundaries of that group but its identity as well” (p. 631). The first step was in defining who was not White. This can be traced back to the limitations set by Congress in 1790 when it limited “naturalization to ‘white persons’” (p. 626). This led to many legal cases as immigrants tried to prove they were White. The court decided each case on its own merits but used two rationales to justify their decisions: “common knowledge and scientific evidence” (p. 628). Common knowledge meant the courts assigned race based on a definition which “appealed to popular, widely held conceptions of races and racial divisions” (p. 628). Scientific evidence relied on “knowledge of a reputedly objective, technical, and specialized sort” (p. 628). One case “*In re Ah Yup*” (p. 628) used the definition of White from the Webster Dictionary as scientific evidence because, I assume, it was identified as reputedly objective.

The second step was “also by denigrating those” (López, 2000b, p. 631) who were found not White. López notes in, “*United States v Thund*”, that “common knowledge held South Asians to be non-White but that in addition, the racial identity of South Asians ‘is of such character and extent that the great body of our people recognize and reject it’” (p. 631). López concludes that, in essence, the courts “labeled those who were excluded from citizenship [non-white]...as inferior; by implication, those who were admitted (White

persons) were superior” (p. 631). The result of this two step process upheld the doctrines of Christianity, imperialism, and colonialism. These principles gave the Courts the rationale to rule as they did.

### *White Racialization*

The racialization of White people is through their experiences of privilege and advantage because they are White. The invisibility of privilege and the supremacy connected to Whiteness has resulted in White people ignoring their culpability in oppression. Grillo and Wildman (1997) claim that:

Whites must confront their role as oppressors, or at least as beneficiaries of the racial oppression of others, in a race-based hierarchy. The pain of oppression must be communicated to the dominant group if there is to be any understanding of racism/white supremacy. (p. 624)

These authors also note that liberal Whites cannot reconcile a view of themselves as prejudiced or racist. Consequently, they do not “acknowledge the ways they contribute to and benefit from the system of white privilege” (p. 620). If liberal Whites, who tend to self-identify as working towards social justice, are not able to see their own prejudice or racism as these authors assert, it seems reasonable that those not devoting their attention to issues of race, privilege, and supremacy would also fail to recognize it. The question begs which Whites will; which Whites will be motivated to examine and give up or dismantle a privileged system that benefits them? One may be able to acknowledge oppression and the harm that causes but fail to admit the corollary system that makes oppression possible.

There are scholars who have written that we have not escaped harm from being White and privileged in our society (Helms, 1992, 1993b; Katz, 2003; Kivel, 2002; Tatum, 1997). Katz has noted two psychologists (Allen, 1971 and Bidol, 1971 as cited in Katz) who have written that it is “a form of schizophrenia in that there is a large gap between what whites

believe and what we actually practice, which cause us to live in a state of psychological stress” (p. 13). She notes another who tells us “that at the heart of racism in the United States [there] is a discrepancy between attitude and action, between thought and deed” (Myrdal, 1944 as cited in Katz, p. 13). For Whites who are concerned with social change and justice, this dichotomy proves difficult to reconcile. The subtlety of racism for Whites can pull them back into the behaviors that perpetuate and strengthen it. Consequently, while these White, social justice workers may self-identify as anti-racist, they may continue to work in unperceived ways that actually work against their own values and beliefs.

#### Whites’ Reactions to Discussions of Race

Most White parents did not talk about racial identity with their children (Tatum, 1997); their parents didn’t talk to them about it. They might have talked about the racial identities of others and they might have talked about how racism targets people of Color. They would likely have failed to talk with their children about the ideology and perpetuation of racism. Most White children did not grow up learning how to discuss their race and racial privilege and consequently lack the words and understanding to carry on such discussions. We can often trace violence in families back generations. Parents who assault their children often produce children who assault their own children. This intergenerational cycle continues until some child in the family stops the violence and interrupts this cycle for that strain of the ascendants. I think this is true of White family discussions about race and privilege also. In order to be comfortable with the examination of race and privilege, White children will need experience in the language of such discussions. Since most White children do not have this experience, they grow to be White adults who tend to react in some

predictable ways to conversations of racism and privilege. This next section explores the literature about these patterns of attitudes, feelings, and behaviors White people exhibit.

*That was Then; This is Now: White Guilt & Shame*

The young woman in class was puzzled and confused when asked about her racial heritage as a White person. While puzzlement is generally a first reaction of White people as the discussion of race begins, other, deeper reactions set in as the discussion moves from racial group membership into racism itself (Tatum, 1997). When I first began to admit my own racism, I felt immense guilt and shame. The literature supports this reaction (Feagin & Vera, 2005; Flagg, 1997; Grillo & Wildman, 1997; Helms, 1992; Katz, 2003; Kivel, 2002; McIntosh, 2005; Rothenberg, 2005; Tatum, 1997). When I heard people of Color speak about the results of oppression on their ancestors and the tremendous courage and fortitude that their ancestors showed in their various fights against oppression, I remained silent. My White ancestors caused the condition; what could I possibly contribute to that discussion? I couldn't speak with pride about my ancestors' courage because I judged they had none. I thought they were weak, cruel, violent, and disgusting. I wanted no association with the White people who enslaved Africans, exterminated American Indians, and exploited the Chinese and Mexicans; I wanted as much distance from those people as I could get.

Kivel (2002) eases this guilt as he acknowledges that we do not choose our race, culture, or native language. We are born or raised into those from birth; we have no choice. "You are not responsible for being white or for being raised in a white-dominated, racist society" (p. 12). Robert Jensen (2005) believes there are two reasons why White people get stuck in guilt and shame. He writes that if White people keep focused on the acts of racism I

named, the ones that are distant and intangible, then we avoid the feelings of guilt for current acts of racism. We avoid our responsibility in the perpetuation of racism.

This guilt and shame also stops action; White people feel paralyzed because there is nothing that we can really do about the past acts of enslavement, internment, genocide, or exploitation. Instead, Jensen reframes this guilt in much the same way that Kivel does. Both agree that White people should acknowledge that they are White through no fault of their own; they were not the one's exterminating American Indians. Instead, they advise that we focus on our own individual racist and bigoted acts and assume responsibility for those. I experienced these identical feelings and behaviors as I examined my own racism and privilege. When I could acknowledge that my Whiteness is not something I did or didn't do, my guilt lessened. I started to listen differently as I heard people of Color talk proudly about their ancestors. I began to understand that these acts of heroism were as much of part of my history as those acts of hatred and cruelty. I was not responsible for either, yet I am obligated to acknowledge both. When I released this guilt, the work on my own racism seemed less troublesome. I was more honest as I reflected on my actions and inactions. The burden I carry is the one I make or perpetuate, not the ones that generations before me made.

*The Problem is Not Being White*

Ruth Frankenberg (1993) conducted a study with 30 White women in an effort to better understand the role race plays in White women's lives. She concluded that the formation of Whiteness, the "cumulative name...given to [how] race shapes women's lives" (p. 1) has a "set of linked dimensions." There are three of them:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint," a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p. 1)

The standpoint she writes from is that White people see race as a problem of *not being White*. One of her participants described it in this way, “They [people of Color] are different, but I am the same as everybody else” (p. 198). Doane (2003) notes that “consequently in a discourse that focuses upon differences and the racialized ‘other,’ white becomes a default category—whiteness is defined through boundaries and exclusion, by being ‘not of color’” (p. 8). When Whites are questioned, formally or informally, about what it means to be White, they often respond in a perplexed manner, commenting that they had never really thought about it (Doane, 2003; Feagin & Vera, 2005; Katz, 2003; Tatum, 1997). Analyzing an interview with a mother, Lewis (2003) draws our attention to the mother’s response about her racial identity. The mother is unable to articulate it because she said she had not been around people of Color. “When I asked her whether she ever thought of her own racial identity, she explained that she just had not been around it much in her life. The ‘it’ here is a reference to racial others. As far as she was concerned, race was about others” (p. 193).

Additionally, Doane notes that

Unlike members of subordinate groups, whites are less likely to feel socially and culturally ‘different’ in their everyday experiences and much less likely to have experienced significant prejudice, discrimination, or disadvantage as a result of their race. Given that what passes as the normative center is often unnoticed or taken for granted, whites often feel a sense of culturelessness and racelessness.

Bonilla-Silva (2006) reports on research conducted in the late 1990s with college students.

In that study, he gives an example of how a White student sees race only in terms of people of Color.

Rick...said...“because I grew up in a white neighborhood, I really didn’t see race.” What allows Rick to say that because he “grew up in a white neighborhood” he “didn’t see race” is that he interprets “race” as something that only racial minorities have. (p. 116)

In these studies, the White people involved were only able to articulate race and their racial identity by classifying or distinguishing those who were not the same. Furthermore, they understood that the *problem* with race was not that they were White but that others were not White.

*Minimization – Meritocracy: A Country Founded on Equality*

From very young ages, most White children learn two principles that serve as the foundation of the United States, “all men are created equal” and all Americans have an inalienable right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Both imply that any American citizen has an equal or the same opportunity to do or become whatever they choose; it implies that merit alone is responsible for success or failure in our country. This meritocracy is not a consistent reality. Amendments to the constitution had to be passed in order to ensure that all Americans could vote and not be discriminated against for housing, employment, or lending practices.

DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, & Post (2003) in a research study of 246 randomly selected Whites from NJ, OH, and TN, asked participants to respond to questions about “changes that have occurred in access to education and jobs in the last several decades” (p. 192) for African-Americans, women, and immigrants. While these interviewees espoused all Americans deserved equal opportunity that shouldn’t be denied because of race, very few of them talked about jobs, etc. they had gotten based on their own merit. Instead, they recounted that social networks of friends and/or family members assisted them in securing employment; “that is, the interviewees argued that equal opportunity should apply to people in general, but they did not apply it in their own lives” (p. 194). When asked about this contradiction, “most of the interviewees minimized or discounted the help that they had

received by comments such as: ‘but that just got me in the door, then I had to prove myself’” (p. 194). In their analysis, DiTomaso et al. noted that “they emphasized dispositional or personal characteristics as the basis of their life outcomes while they minimize or forgot to mention the situational or contextual – the structural – advantages of which they were able to avail themselves (pp. 194-195). As stated previously, privilege is generally invisible to White people and therefore these interviewees did not attribute the help they received to being White; “ they primarily constructed an understanding of their life experiences as being the result of their own effort, hard work, and talent” (p. 195). These interviewees believed that they got jobs because they were the best person and those who didn’t were just not suited. These conclusions minimize and discount the experiences of people of Color told they were not the right person or were not suited for the position.

In another study about affirmative action practices, Pierce (2003) examined how Whiteness operates within contemporary American workplaces and organizations. Data collection for the study took place in 1988 and 1989, and 1999 with 150 lawyers in a large in-house legal department of a corporation in San Francisco. She compared the interviews between African American lawyers who no longer worked in the department with White lawyers who did. Although the study focused on affirmative action policies and practices and the feelings of the lawyers about those, the differences in experiences between the two groups is relevant to how White people often identify success or failure as one of individual merit. To illustrate this Pierce explores the differences between a number of White lawyers and one African American lawyer regarding his employment in the department. She found that many White lawyers, who had very little contact with him, isolated the experiences; “for these White men, each of whom had two, maybe three, interactions with Kingsley [African

American lawyer], the issue was reduced to one of style and personality, and Kingsley just didn't 'fit in'" (p. 211). Kingsley, as one of three African Americans who left the firm, on the other hand experienced a pattern to these encounters. Pierce concluded that this "demonstrates that what looks individual to members of the dominant group is often 'experienced as systematic bias by nondominant group members' (Calvert and Ramsey, 1996 as cited in Pierce, 2003, p. 211). Pierce notes that:

This helps in part, to explain why many of the white men I interviewed claimed to be innocent of racism. They are "innocent" in the same sense that they are oblivious to the consequences of their actions. They simply do not experience the sum total of their actions toward Kingsley or their statements about him. Because they can treat each meeting as an isolated incident, it is difficult for them to see how making jokes or comments about his style of dress can be construed as racist. They simply act out of a sense of their right to act. As a consequence, they fail to see how they participate collectively in constructing what Kingsley experiences as an unfriendly work environment. (p. 211)

These White men's explanations of Kingsley's behavior were consistent with a meritocracy ideology. Kingsley's actions resulted from his free will; he didn't fit it because he chose not to fit in. His merit or worthiness was the only explanation for his experiences.

In both of these studies, White people failed to identify any alternative explanation to the contradictions in "merit" behavior that the interviewers called to their attention. Katz (2003) identifies this as an inability "to step outside our own experience—which we have long perceived as the one right way" (p. 13). This limitation – to understand that experiences of merit differ based on color – minimizes the experiences of people of Color by acknowledging that only the White experience is the true or correct reality.

#### *Individualism and Universalism*

In research conducted by DiAngelo (2004), she studied how White preservice K-12 teachers responded to discussions that were explicitly about race. She used discourse

analysis which she describes as “the study of language and the making of meaning in action and social contexts” (p. 23). She observed 13 participants, eight of whom were White. Two discourse patterns emerged that, were consistent with literature about how White people engage and/or respond to discussions involving race and were consistent with the White participants in her study. These were *individualism* and *universalism*.

DiAngelo (2004) notes that *individualism* has foundations in the beliefs and values of how White people conceptualize life in the U.S. “The legitimacy of our institutions depends on the concept that all citizens are equal” (p. 215). This set of values is about how, as individuals, White people believe that anyone has the power to overcome circumstances – institutions, policies – and reach any goal. It negates that race or any other social identity marker has the capacity, by itself, to interrupt or stop the individual from achieving the goal. “This narrative posits that there are no intrinsic barriers to individual success, and that failure is not a consequence of systematic structure but of individual character” (p. 215). When the focus is on the individual, then one does not have to or need to examine any other or additional reasons for failure. “It also teaches that success is independent of privilege, that one succeeds through individual effort and that there are no favored starting positions that provide competitive advantage” (Flax, 1998 as cited in DiAngelo, pp. 215-216).

In her research, DiAngelo (2004) explicitly examined how this *individualism* became part of the discourse for the White people in her study. She describes a set of internal statements or rules that White people employ that sustain *individualism*. These are:

- Everyone starts life on level ground and has the same chance as everyone else. Different outcomes are the result of differences in effort and talent.
- I am an individual. To suggest that being White has any bearing on my life or perspective is to make generalizations about me. Generalizations are bad.
- Group status doesn’t matter and cannot be acknowledged.

- People of color are representatives of their group.
- History has no bearing on this moment in time
- Your past is not relevant. You must get over the past. (p. 220).

She notes that, although familiar with this discourse of *individualism*, this finding caused her the most surprise. “I did not realize how deep this discourse runs or how tenaciously it is clung to when challenged. It appeared that the White preservice teachers in my sample were either unwilling or unable to hold a concept of group identity, or if held, sustain it for any length of time” (p. 221).

DiAngelo (2004) describes *universalism* as the representation of what constitutes normal – that position from which all other positions are judged to be different, deficient, and/or missing some critical characteristic. There is power in naming the norm and thus power in identifying what is not normal. “The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can’t do that – they can only speak for their race. But non-raced people can for they do not represent the interests of a race” (Dyer, 1997, p. 2, as cited in DiAngelo, p. 221). As with *individualism*, she describes a set of internal statements or rules that White people employ that sustain *universalism*. These are:

- I know what the rules are.
- All rules apply to all people equally. No exceptions.
- To treat everyone equally is to treat them the same.
- Everyone starts life on level ground and has the same opportunity as everyone else.
- Different outcomes are the result of differences in effort and talent.
- Group status doesn’t matter and cannot be acknowledge.
- People of color are representatives of their group.
- Acknowledging power divides us. Power must not be acknowledged. (p. 224)

This set of beliefs, when enacted or acted upon, reinforce that White people are merely people but people of Color are different because they are members of a racial group. Although she describes that these beliefs or rules are very similar to those of

*individualism*, she found with her White participants that “all of these rules were circulating in the dialogues and undergird the discourse of universalism that holds Whiteness in place” (p. 224). These patterns of discourse she studied were ways that White people maintained their privilege and social systems of power through language. As she noted, language assists in the definition of social and historical contexts.

### Personal Reflection: Just Another White Person

*It was the early nineties and I was teaching adult incarcerated male offenders in a minimum security prison facility. I had 25 students, two of whom were African American while the rest were White. There came a day when I called one African American student by the other African American student's name. I observed them as this ancient look of disgust crept over their features. The thought that flitted through my mind was the stereotype, "they all look alike". I was embarrassed. I said nothing, went on with my teaching. Within a week I had done the same thing. Again, I said nothing and went on with my teaching. The third time it happened, I decided I couldn't ignore it.*

*I talked privately to the two men involved. In that discussion, I said that I often get names mixed up but that I knew getting two White people's names mixed up wasn't the same as confusing the only two African Americans. They were both very gracious. I thought that was the end of it; I had made amends, admitted my mistake, and thought I could put it to rest. It happened again and when I saw their faces, I knew I had to do more. I stopped class. I told the students that I had already talked to the two African American men but since my comments were public, they deserved a public acknowledgement. It was the beginning of my realization that race and racism were unexplored dynamics in the prison, my class, and my own instruction.*

*This incident taught me at least three things. In the beginning I was focused on my embarrassment and that I had been "caught"; I thought I was more enlightened. I came to understand, though, that it was really about these men and that I had become another White person, in a long line of White people that did not **see** them. I also learned that day that I must speak aloud about my own racism. Although I understand now that I will never escape my own racism, I learned that day acknowledging and admitting my behavior, and making amends makes it more bearable.*

## CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY

This was a phenomenological inquiry. It was exploratory and descriptive in nature; built on the context and setting of the participants' lived feelings, actions, and beliefs; and searched for a deeper meaning of the phenomenon of White privilege and its relationship to racism. My research questions were:

1. How do White people experience being a member of the racially privileged?
2. What are the essential characteristics or elements of an experience that cause a change in consciousness about White privilege?
3. In what ways or to what degree does a change in consciousness regarding White privilege serve as a catalyst to action?

This study began with my own journey, curiosity, and experience of being White.

Max van Manen (1997) acknowledges that the natural or logical starting place for a phenomenological study is self because "My own life experiences are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's are" (p. 55). Additionally Clark Moustakas (1994) states that "as a learner, to know *initially* what something is and means, I listen to my inner dialogue, purified as much as possible from other voice, opinions, judgments, and values" (p. 62). As described, I see the world in a particular way, I experience learning in a particular way, and I explain Whiteness in a particular way. It is through these paradigms or theoretical frameworks that I situated this study because they are natural to me; they are the way in which I breathe in and exhale the world.

The purpose of this study was to expand the body of research and literature that explores, explains, and creates social action that alters the dynamics of racial oppression. Merriam & Simpson (2000) affirm this purpose of research when they state "research is

central to the development of any field of study” (p. 1). More importantly, however, I think its goal was to advocate to White educators that they find additional ways in which to address topics of White privilege and racism explicitly in the classroom. Instruction can be a natural environment where we don’t have to get it right immediately; we can take time to mess up, study more, and try again. As teachers we can construct this setting to be one in which it can be comfortable to practice and/or rehearse our (White people’s) responses to racialized experiences.

### Qualitative Research Paradigm

The definition of qualitative research “can be categorized into those [research methods] focusing on (a) *individual lived experience*, (b) *society and culture*, and (c) *language and communication*” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 55). This study fit all three of those categories or criteria. It studied the individual White person’s experience of being privileged as a member of the dominate race in the US. It examined culture and society because of the embedded nature of racism in our sociopolitical and socio-cultural structures and practices. It evaluated language and communication through interviews and text analysis.

The intention of qualitative research is to explore relationships and to focus on how two or more experiences may be connected. It is process oriented rather than emphasizing measurement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and “stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situation constraints that shape inquiry” (p. 10). These kind of researchers seek out the “value-laden nature of inquiry” and “seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (p. 10). As Critical Race Theorists have argued, race is a social

construction. Additionally, the research questions for this study examined the nature and experience of being White and part of the racial majority, both of which explored a social experience and the meaning the participants gave to that experience. Therefore, it is appropriate to use a methodology that aligns with the theoretical position that our life, our history, our very understanding of our world is socially constructed.

### *Phenomenology*

Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research. The term originates from phenomenon and logos. Phenomenon comes from the Greek root of *phaenesthai* which Moustakas (1994) notes is “that which appears or shows itself” (p. 26). Logos, in philosophy, means principles that govern or develop the world. Together, they mean “what is to be disclosed” or “the disclosing of that” (p. 26).

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is generally recognized as the founder of phenomenology (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Moustakas, 1990, 1994; van Manen, 1997). Max van Manen (1997) defines phenomenology as the study of “lived experience or existential meanings” (p. 11) and Creswell differentiates it from a narrative inquiry, which looks at the life of one individual, because it “describes the meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 57). The roots of this research methodology reside in the notion that up to the point that Husserl first introduced phenomenology, science was a study of objectivity and had not considered the importance or even existence of the subjectivity of knowledge. This is because researchers “failed to take into account the experiencing person and the connections between human consciousness and the objects that exist in the material world” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 43). Husserl, as Moustakas notes, “pointed to a new way of looking at things, a

return to things as they actually appear” (p. 45). A number of scientists and researchers expanded upon Husserl’s ideas “such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty” (Spiegelberg, 1982 as cited in Creswell, 2007) and “Borgatta & Borgatta, Giorgi, Moustakas, Nieswiadomy, Polkinghorn, Oiler, Stewart and Mickunas, Swingewood, Tesch, and van Manen.”. Although each of the researchers who expanded upon Husserl’s work added different philosophical elements, we can identify some common themes.

One theme is that of consciousness. Moustakas explains Husserl’s approach to phenomenology as using “*only* the data available to consciousness—the *appearance* of objects” and that “it is considered ‘transcendental’ because it adheres to what can be discovered through reflection on subjective acts and their objective correlates” (p. 45). The “things” that Husserl spoke of in his “way of looking at things” is consciousness itself, in other words we are always thinking, our minds are always experiencing and recording and categorizing sensations, information, and feelings (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1990, 1994; van Manen, 1997, 2000). Husserl (as cited in Moustakas) believed consciousness was the essence of experience and “what appears in consciousness is the phenomenon” (p. 26).

Within this tenet of consciousness is the suspension of our judgment. In this methodology, there is an attempt to shelve or hold off these assumptions in order to reach a condition of openness, absence from the influence of personal or social values, bias, or ideologies. Moustakas states:

phenomenology, step by step, attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudice, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience (1994, p. 41).

Additionally, he noted that “Husserl asserts that ‘an epistemological investigation that can seriously claim to be scientific must...satisfy the *principle of freedom from suppositions*’” (1970b pp. 263 as cited in Moustakas, p. 45).

As explained in defining qualitative studies, such researchers believe that reality is a social construction. Phenomenology adhered to this and moved away from the duality of subject-object to focus not on whether an event took place, but the *experience* of that event by the actors of the event. Max van Manen (1997) describes it in this way:

It is important to realize that it is not of great concern whether a certain experience actually happened in exactly that way. We are less concerned with the factual accuracy of an account than with the plausibility of an account—whether it is true to our living sense of it. Once we know what a lived-experience description looks like, we can go about obtaining such descriptions of individuals who have the experiences that we wish to study (p. 65).

Moustakas states the view of reality in this way, “from the perspective of phenomenology whether the object actually exists or not makes not difference at all” (p. 50). Accordingly, the goal of phenomenology is the discovery and description of experience through the process of suspending the researcher’s suppositions and adhering to the concept that reality is a constructed process. In other words, it is the study or research of the multiple realities of the phenomenon, which aid at uncovering the essence of the experience.

#### *Methods and Procedures*

As stated, many researchers have expanded on Husserl’s initial ideas. For the purposes of this study, the methods I chose to use were a combination of Hermeneutical phenomenology as outlined by van Manen (1997) and Transcendental phenomenology as outlined by Moustakas (1994).

*Hermeneutical Phenomenology Methods*

In van Manen's (1997) description of Hermeneutical phenomenology, there are no specific methods or procedures offered. Instead, "its method requires an ability to be reflective, insightful, sensitive to language, and constantly open to experience" (p. xi). He believes "that human science research in education done by educators ought to be guided by pedagogical standards" (p. 4). He states that "hermeneutics describes how one interprets the 'texts' of life, and semiotics is used here to develop a practical writing or linguistic approach to the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics" (p. 4). He thinks that research and writing are interconnected and are essential pedagogical standards. "The type of reflection required in the act of hermeneutic phenomenological writing on the meanings and significances of phenomena of daily life is fundamental to pedagogic research" (p. 4).

When van Manen writes of pedagogical standards, he draws a distinction between human science research and research conducted for education. Although he writes specifically about phenomenological research in terms of children's education, one can draw upon the general principles and apply them to phenomenological research in adult education. "To be unresponsive to pedagogy could be termed the half-life state of modern educational theory and research which has forgotten its original vocation: that all theory and research were meant to orient us to pedagogy in our relations with [students]" (p. 135). As teachers, he reminds us that although we may have "an eye for the phenomenological or ethnographic meaning dimensions" of a student's experience our "eye would first of all be trained by a pedagogic orientation" (p. 137). This means that our understanding of what we are researching cannot be separated from our practice of teaching, "it is done *by* rather than *for* the people" (p. 156). It is about the choices we, as adult educators, make for content,

activity, knowledge construction, and dialogue. By insisting we pay attention to pedagogical standards in our research, we view research from two positions, that of human scientist and educator (p. 137). I am drawn to his discussion of pedagogical standards because it resonates strongly in how I view the world. I am present in the moment – reflecting and thinking about the implications of what I’m experiencing and connecting that to adult learners and adult education. I often feel as if I am in constant researcher mode; I am always “on” wondering how this or that experience shapes knowledge and action. “Whereas hermeneutic phenomenology has often been discussed as a ‘mere’ descriptive methodology it is also a critical philosophy of action” and “hermeneutic phenomenological reflection deepens thought and therefore radicalizes thinking and the action that flows from it” (p. 154).

Instead of rules or methods, van Manen “discusses phenomenology research as a dynamic interplay among six research activities” (Creswell, 2007). These are: 1) deep curiosity in the phenomenon, 2) research the *lived experience* rather than the *concept of the phenomenon*, 3) reflection on the essential characteristics, 4) description through writing, 5) orient the pedagogical relation to the phenomenon, 6) maintain the context by balancing the parts and the whole (van Manen, pp. 30-31 [emphasis added]). In addition to reflection, the importance of writing as a means of research and the balance of part and whole attracted me to this orientation of phenomenology.

This strong orientation to personal reflection and writing drew me to hermeneutic phenomenology. “To be full of thought means not that we have a whole lot on our mind, but rather that we recognize our lot of minding the Whole—that which renders fullness or wholeness to life” (van Manen, p. 31). It seems that I have inexhaustible energy for thinking about what I experience. I have a deep curiosity to *know* (Brainard, 2007). It was through

reflecting on and writing about my own experiences as a White person struggling to understand the supremacy and privilege of Whiteness that caused me to be curious about others. Max van Manen summarizes this as a research method that “is a being-given-over to some quest, a true task, a deep questioning of something that restores an original sense of what it means to be a thinker, a researcher, a theorist” (p. 31). Additionally, van Manen notes “a phenomenological description is always *one* interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* description” (p. 31). This elusiveness or incompleteness fuels my research. The journey is about the *possibility* of another experience that will add to my own or give me a deeper understanding.

Language has always intrigued me (Brainard, 2007). I once described that I fall in love with words and phrases and that I will repeat them as I integrate my discovery into my inner self, until they become a comfortable part of my vocabulary. When describing hermeneutic phenomenology, van Manen states “to *do* research in a phenomenological sense is already and immediately and always a *bringing to speech* of something” (1997, p. 32). Revisiting the root of logos in phenomenology, van Manen notes that “*logos* has retained the meaning of conversation, inquiry, questioning: of questioningly letting that which is being talked about be seen” (p. 32). Therefore, the importance of language van Manen describes aligns with my experience of language and the connection between meaning and reality.

#### *Transcendental Phenomenology Methods*

Moustakas (1994) describes four processes or methods for transcendental phenomenology. These are: “Epoche, Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation” (p. 33) and “Synthesis” (p. 101). I applied each of these to this research project.

Epoche is what Husserl identified as the setting aside of assumptions. Moustakas explains that “in epoche, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naïvely, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego” (p. 33). One does not get rid of these suppositions, but suspends them or metaphorically puts them on a shelf as one immerses oneself in the research. Moustakas clarifies by stating “Epoche does not eliminate everything, does not deny the reality of everything, does not doubt everything—*only the natural attitude*, the biases of everyday knowledge, as a bias for truth and reality” (p. 85). The combination of Epoche and van Manen’s self-reflection requires the researcher to compartmentalize; in other words, my self-reflection guides me but does not close my mind to additional possibilities. Moustakas notes, “the challenge of epoche is to be transparent to ourselves, to allow whatever is before us in consciousness to disclose itself so that we may see with new eyes in a naïve and completely open manner” (p. 86).

Phenomenological reduction is the second method that Moustakas describes. “The term ‘reduction’ derives from **re-ducere**, to lead back” (van Manen, 2000). It is this process of reducing or distilling that ultimately reveals the *essence* or core of the phenomenon. It involves the activity that van Manen (1997) described as remaining true to the context of the phenomenon through balancing the part with the whole. Moustakas (1994) describes it as such:

Although there is always an overlap between looking from one perspective and viewing something as a whole, it is possible to separate the object as a point of focus from any experience of it as a whole, to take on angle of it and look freshly once more, and then another angle, connecting each looking with my conscious experience. I continue this process to the point of unifying the parts into a whole (p. 93).

Reduction combines contextual balance with a process of repeated examination. “When the looking and noticing and looking again is complete a more definitely *reflective* process occurs, aimed at grasping the full nature of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, p. 93). The repeated examination of the phenomenon reveals more of itself much as distilling salt from water happens when heat is applied; eventually the water is gone and salt is left, “things become clearer as they are considered again and again” (Moustakas, p. 93).

The application of this layered analysis to the phenomenon results in an understanding that meaning can be inexhaustible. Moustakas (1994) identifies these different layers as horizons, “a new horizon arises each time that one recedes. It is this never-ending process and, though we may reach a stopping point and discontinue our perception of something, the possibility for discovery is unlimited” (p. 95). In the application of this method, “every statement initially is treated as having equal value” (p. 95). Eventually one removes the duplicated statements or sentiments and combines the unduplicated statements into themes or clusters (p. 95). Ultimately one is left with “textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon” (p. 95).

After reduction, Moustakas suggests the use of imaginative variation (1994, p. 95).

He states that:

Imaginative variation is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions. The aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced: in other words the “how” that speaks to conditions that illuminate the “what” of experience. How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is (pp. 95-96)?

Creswell (2007) also identifies this as *structural description* and indicates that after combining the clusters in the horizontal procedure, “they are also used to write a description

of the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (p. 61). The goal of a phenomenological study is to get to the essence of an experience or phenomenon, in order to further that goal, Moustakas notes that “in this phase of the process the structures of the experiences are revealed; these are the conditions that must exist for something to appear” (p. 98). In theory, the rational or logical mind is set free because “the thrust is away from facts and measurable entities and toward meanings and essences; in this instant, intuition is not empirical but purely imaginative in character” (p. 98). As the analysis of themes and clusters ferreted out in the reduction process continues, the next step is to view the information through multiple means; in other words try to look from various perspectives or outlooks, to apply various meanings such as opposing or opposite meanings or roles, and to employ various structures like time, space, and relationships. The creation of a structural description adds context, depth, and breadth to the themes and clusters made during the reduction procedure. Moustakas states, “imaginative variation enables the researcher to derive structural themes from the textural descriptions that have been obtained through phenomenological reduction” (p. 99). This process explores creative ways of arriving at the multiple realities that are descriptive of participants’ lived experiences.

The fourth procedure in Moustakas’s (1994) phenomenological method is synthesis of meanings and essences. This is where integration between or amongst the reduction and imaginative variation methods takes place to unearth what is common for the participants as they experience the phenomenon; the *essence* of the phenomenon. Creswell (2007) states “the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of universal essence” (p. 58). Max van Manen (1997) defines essence to be “that [which] makes a thing what it is (and without which it would not be what it is); that

what makes a thing what it is rather than its being or becoming something else” (p. 177). Synthesis is the method that assists the researcher in achieving the essence.

#### *Limitations*

The possibility that one can completely suspend one’s judgment and set aside or bracket one’s own cultural context is not likely. Giorgi (1985) notes that even Husserl came to admit that and over time he changed some of his own methods because of it. Still, the attempt and practice of epoche and bracketing beliefs is a necessary phenomenological exercise for the researcher and I attempted to do both.

#### Data Collection

This study employed participant interviews as the data collection method. This captured the phenomenon of White privilege by participants in their own words. Interviews are consistent with a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1990).

#### *Epoche*

As described, Epoche is the process of setting aside one’s assumptions, beliefs, cultural contexts, and judgments. In order to do that, one must first recognize and state one’s beliefs and assumptions. For this study, the conceptual framework I introduced in Chapter Two was a means to acknowledge and inform the reader of my own positions regarding how I think about White privilege, race, racism, and White supremacy. Additionally, it outlined my assumptions and beliefs on racial identity and significant learning processes. Having studied and reflected upon those assumptions and values, I then took a number of steps to suspend them and allow my curiosity and engagement with the subject matter and participants to guide and inform the methods of investigation, data collection, and data analysis.

I employed the process of epoche in two deliberate ways during this study. First, I spent quiet time with myself or meditated before each interview in order to clear my mind; the process of emptying myself of my own biases. Second, I involved or immersed myself in the interview as if I was talking about the privilege and supremacy of Whiteness for the first time. It was through this total curiosity that I tried to become open to the experiences of the participant. It was in my first interview that I think I discovered or truly understood epoche.

In my first interview, I diligently prepared a set of questions, checked, and re-checked my digital recorder and prepared to sit with the participant and question them. In doing this, I completely removed myself from the interview; I became an empty voice asking prepared questions that did not generate from a curious place; it reminded me of the times I had seen lawyers question witnesses. Their questions were also meticulously prepared and delivered, yet the lawyers interrogated rather than involved the witnesses in a dialogue. In the end, I think I objectified the participant and the process because I prepared to *question them*. In the middle of this interview, we took a break. I reflected on how awful I felt and tried to explore why that was. I felt as if I wasn't even in the room with this participant. I didn't understand what I had done "wrong" or why this interview felt so alien or foreign to me, why I felt so distant and removed from the process. I paid attention to those feelings and consequently discarded my prepared questions. I started to ask questions that I really wanted to know the answer to, feelings and experiences the participant had that I was curious to know more about; I tried to conduct a dialogue as if I were in a coffee shop with a friend and we were exchanging ideas. John Schostak (1995) describes the shift I made when he reframes interview to inter-view in qualitative research, "the Inter-View, as I want to develop this term, is the condition under which people can enter into dialogue and mutually explore each

others' ways of seeing and constructing the world about" (line 2). Although at the time, I hadn't read about Schostak's inter-view, I restructured the interview to be a more organic discussion, one that flowed from the participant and myself as we came together to create a deeper understanding of our experiences. I later understood that to be Schostak's supposition as a more appropriate and ethical interview method. This inter-view seemed more natural and in the spirit of epoche and openness, as described by van Manen (1997; 2000) and Moustakas (1990; 1994), then the prepared question format in which I had begun. Starting with the second part of my first interview, I conducted all interviews using this organic method of inter-view that I thought combined van Manen's activity of deep curiosity and Moustakas' method of epoche or openness. I conducted the other interviews by opening myself up to the natural rhythm of a dialogue with each participant.

At the conclusion of each interview, I wrote field notes. During that time, I again tried to empty myself and set aside the noise or chatter in my mind that naturally flowed from the discussion because I seemed to gravitate toward analysis immediately. I wrote observations I made of the participant, my feelings, and described the environment. I found this process of epoche every bit as difficult to do as Giorgi (1985) indicated as he described some of the limitations of phenomenology. In the end, I think I accomplished the spirit of epoche with meditation, inter-view, and field note records.

### *Participant Selection*

Participants of this study were White people, with no other specific demographic criteria. Seven people interviewed. I stopped interviewing at the point where I thought I had achieved a saturation of data; where the stories and experiences I was gathering were not leading to any additional insights. I used a purposive sampling technique, since I was

specifically looking for participants who were part of a pre-defined group. Additionally, I selected individuals who:

- could articulate their understanding of White privilege and critical incidents that led to consciousness-raising of that privilege;
- intentionally acted to neutralize their privilege; and
- were willing to engage in a lengthy one on one interview of their lived experience about White privilege.

To find interview participants, I used a snowball sampling method due to the difficulty of finding White people who understood their privilege, could identify critical incidents, and were willing to talk about that with me. I relied on people who were aware of the study and initial participants to generate additional participants. Two participants I have known most of my life, one participant I have known for more than twenty years, and four participants I had no previous knowledge or interaction with. For the participants I did not know, I relied on people who knew of my study to suggest potential participants. I conducted an initial phone call with the four that I had no previous contact with to determine if they could articulate their understanding of racism and White privilege. I had no formal set of questions during the phone screening and used my own judgment after the phone call to determine if the participants had the level of understanding and the reflective ability I thought was necessary for the study. I conducted one interview that I determined not to use because the participant was unable to articulate their privilege and to self-reflect on their experiences.

Once a participant had agreed to be part of the study and prior to the interview, I mailed or emailed a short demographic questionnaire and the informed consent document. In the beginning of the interviews, I explained the informed consent and cautioned participants that snowball sampling meant there were others that knew they were participating in the

study. I emphasized anonymity would be maintained in the written document, in other words they would not be identified by name in the study, but advised that anonymity of inclusion in the study could be limited as a result of snowball sampling.

### *Interviews*

Moustakas (1994) identifies three interview styles: informal conversational, general interview guide, and standardized open-ended interview (p. 114 & 181). The informal conversational is more natural with the ebb and flow of questions and conversation forming out of an unstructured dialogue between researcher and participant/interviewee. The general interview guide lays out a specific subject matter to be explored, which is often shared with the participant as the interview progresses. This focuses the interview on the desired information that is common among participants. The standard open-ended interview is one that is carefully prepared by the researcher and unfolds in a more structured sense; all participants are asked the same questions. As mentioned previously, I learned quickly that the informal conversational style was more appropriate and comfortable for me and the topic of this study. In this way, I sought to maintain a spontaneous, free-flowing discussion.

In addition to the informed consent and caution about anonymity, I used common interests to establish some rapport with participants. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Moustakas (1990) advises that the analysis of the interviews should be through the identification of “themes, and essences of the experience” (p. 49), in addition to the observations and notes of the researcher immediately following the interview.

## Data Analysis

The purpose of analysis was to reduce and uncover the essence of each participant's experiences and descriptions as we discussed racial privilege. The reduction of participant interviews allowed the common threads of those experiences to emerge. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. I transcribed five and I used a transcription service for two. I reviewed the data many times and in multiple ways. Initial analysis was through the transcription process. I then re-read the transcripts many times and listened to the interviews multiple times. Field notes were used to provide context for the data.

I used field notes combined with participant words to write out dense descriptions of each interview, as if someone were watching the discussion from a perch on a shelf in the room, or a *mouse in my pocket*. From the field notes, I was able to include gestures, facial expressions, emotions, and the surrounding atmosphere. Using these methods, I practiced Phenomenological Reduction, which Moustakas (1994) describes as a “task [that] requires that I look and describe; look again and describe; look again and describe...” (p. 90). I found that writing out each interview, while time consuming, provided a profound intimacy with the data. Moustakas likens it to graded reflection that ultimately uncovers the essential nature of the phenomenon. Using NVivo software, I then began to code the data into essences or themes. These themes were grouped together and are presented in the next chapter.

### *Presentation of the Data*

In any discussion, the actors speak with pauses which may or may not indicate punctuation or suggest meaning. In this transcription process the natural flow of conversation made it difficult to discern when clauses, complete sentences, and/or phrases

began and ended. In presenting the data, I have tried to assist the reader by taking some formatting and editing liberties. In some lengthy quotes I have edited ideas into paragraphs and added or clarified words. An added [bracketed] word or phrase is incorporated into the quotation in an attempt to retain intended context. Sounds, such as laughter, were noted in (parentheses). An ellipse signifies a partial idea taken from a longer thought or discussion point, for brevity sake.

### *Participant Profiles*

Upon the agreement to participate in the study, each person interviewed completed a short demographic form. This provided background and context for each participant. In order to give you a better understanding of these participants and the role place played in their lives as White people, I have profiled each by identifying them by race, class, geographical location, and age.

Rocco identified himself as White and Italian-American. He said, “Really, I’m the easiest interview you’ll ever have.” He is 64 years old. He lives in the same Northeastern community in which he was born, which has a current population of approximately 170,000. He describes himself as married with two dogs. He is a retired English teacher currently employed in an art gallery as an oil painting salesperson. He holds a graduate degree and has an income range of \$100,000 or more. He characterized his religious affiliation as a devout atheist.

Norah describes herself as White and 49 years old. She was born in a Midwest community with a population of approximately 16,000. She currently resides in a college community with a population of approximately 50,000. She describes herself as single, living with her partner, who is Black, and the father of her two children. She is a college

professor with a graduate degree, and has an income of \$100,000 or more. She identified no religious affiliation.

Tonya identified herself as a White person with multiple ethnic heritages of Danish, Portuguese, Scottish, Irish, and German. She is 40 years old. She was born in a Mid-Atlantic community with a population of about 300, close to a larger community of about 12,000. She currently lives in a Northeastern community of about 40,000. She describes herself as married with no children. She holds a graduate degree and is currently a professor at a state college in the Northeast close to the community in which she currently resides. She has an income range of \$100,000 or more. She described her religious affiliation as Lutheran and noted that while she doesn't currently attend church, she has a Christian faith system. Sadie did not describe her ethnicity on the demographic form and indicated in the interview that she identifies as White; "My mother is a Russian Jew and my father is a Syrian and Lebanese Roman Catholic, as he would say." She is 55 years old. She was born in a large city of approximately 2 million on the Eastern seaboard and has remained in the New England area. She currently resides in a community of approximately 170,000. She describes herself as married with a graduate degree and her occupation is in property management although she noted in the interview that she is a part time, adjunct faculty for a small private college in the area. She indicated that her income range was \$75,000 - \$100,000. She described her religious affiliation as Jewish.

Louise describes herself as Caucasian and one quarter Native American. She said that although she is of Native American descent, she has identified herself and believes others identify her as White. She is 52 years old. She was born in the Midwest in a community with a population of approximately 100,000. She moved to another Midwest

community with a metropolitan population of approximately 500,000, and attended high school there. She describes herself as married with two children. She identified her occupation as priest and her vocation as mother and partner. She holds a graduate degree and has an income in the range of \$75,000 - \$100,000. She defined her religious affiliation as Christian with the added note of Episcopalian.

Beth describes herself as having multiple ethnicities – Swedish, German, Irish, and Scottish. She is 38 and was born in a Northeast community which has a current population of approximately 170,000. She currently resides in a suburb of that community. Beth describes herself as married with one child, age two and a half. She has a graduate degree and is a part time, adjunct faculty with a college located in the city in which she resides. She indicated her household income range as \$50,000 - \$75,000. She identified no religious affiliation.

Steven describes his ethnic heritage as half German and English with other unknown origins. He is 81 years old. He grew up in a large Midwest community with a population of approximately 300,000 surrounded by a metropolitan area of close to 3 million in 11 counties. He describes himself as married, the father of two women both of whom are social workers and has three grandchildren. He is an only child whose 104 year old mother is currently living in a nursing home in the same town in which he resides. His wife is a Native American. Steven currently lives in a community of about 16,000 and has lived there over 40 years. He is a retired Episcopal priest with a graduate degree. He indicated that his income range is \$50,000 - \$75,000. He described his religious affiliation as a lifelong Episcopalian.

These participants were chosen for their level of understanding of their racial privilege, ability to articulate that understanding, and willingness to engage in a lengthy conversation with me. In the next chapter I present the findings of the study organized around the themes that were identified through the phenomenological practice of reduction.

## Personal Reflection: I'm the Other

*I moved to the Southwest in the mid-nineties. The background of another language suddenly surrounded me. It became a steady background hum, as if the radio was constantly on but I wasn't listening to the specific words and music. Spanish seemed present in all spaces other than my home. I continued working with incarcerated offenders. While in the Midwest prison system, if an offender spoke another language, it was an immediate reprimand. In this new setting, Spanish was always spoken.*

*I have always believed that learning and calling students by name was important, particularly in prison. It was a way in which I could easily show respect. On my first day, in my new surroundings, I was confronted with a class list of names I couldn't pronounce. As I struggled to say the names, the men laughed at me. They spoke to each other in a language I couldn't understand. I faced a sea of faces that were Black and Brown. I was the only White face. I was unsettled, uncomfortable, and unprepared to find myself in a situation in which I was a racial minority. I suddenly understood that language and race were connected and that language was an expression of heritage and culture. This new culture automatically and systematically excluded me. I was "the other." If I was to survive and be successful in this new environment, I had to learn some of this language.*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS: RELATIONAL ORIENTATION

The participants in this study were chosen because they demonstrated a high level understanding of their racial privilege. Additionally they shared other characteristics. All had advanced degrees, identified themselves as middle to upper middle class, and were in a long-term (more than five years), significant relationship. Through the course of our conversations, all but two disclosed they had children. Most significantly, though, they each shared a *relational orientation*. This relational orientation seemed to be part of their nature and was more than just the occupation they chose. It was a particular way in which they interacted with their world. It appeared in *how* they described themselves, the stories they chose to share, their desire to grow and become better human beings, and, perhaps most importantly, their desire to assist others to become better so that the socio-cultural structure of human interactions would change. I chose this descriptor as a title for this chapter because it permeated my conversation and interactions with them. Although an intangible quality, it was clearly present to me.

#### Unearned Privilege – Hidden and Unhidden

As I engaged in dialogues with the participants in this study, it became clear that as White individuals, they had made it through the world with what appeared to be unearned privilege which provided them with hidden or unhidden advantages. Although the question was not posed directly, at some point in the interview, participants and I explored their experience of membership in the racially privileged. Two common responses emerged as participants talked about how they initially came to understand their Whiteness. First, as participants talked of their racial group membership, and of racial difference, their

understanding seemed to stem from their experience with people who were not White. Second, these participants generally had limited experiences with people of Color growing up.

*The Other: Skin Color, does it Matter?*

Participants first talked about their understanding of racial privilege by talking about their experience with *others* who did not share the same skin color. As we talked about racial privilege and group membership, participants spoke not only in terms of their first or significant experiences with those who were not White, but specifically those who were African American or Black. Rocco spoke of his early experiences with Black kids who lived close to a Black neighborhood.

So anyway I didn't really deal with any Black people until I think, I went to a boys club when I was in the sixth grade. That was the first time I saw a Black kid, because the boys club was near the Black neighborhood. And then in high school there was some Black students in my high school. But I didn't really deal with them because they played basketball and I played baseball.

Rocco referenced the segregation he experienced and internalized growing up as he mentions a Black section of town and that Black kids played different sports than White kids. His thoughts about his own racial privilege came not from how he benefits from his White skin privilege, but from his limited early experiences with Black people.

Norah spoke of her understanding of racial privilege and group membership by telling me first that her community had only one African American family and then of her first experience with someone from that family.

I remember it clearly. I was in junior high. There was one Black family [in our town], he was the mailman...he had some kids but they were older. I went to this movie and some of the [family] was there. I remember coming home and running in

and telling my mom about this really cute boy and at first I didn't say who it was. I was like, oh he was so cute mom...and then I said who it was. You know she was like, who is this? I said well, it's like a cousin of the [family] or something. And she was, she was sort of you know happily listening to me and then she went, what? And she reacted in a way that I was just completely astounded. I didn't know what, I had not anticipated in any way that there would be any sort of reaction and I didn't think of him in any way different. And she said, what? You know, he's Black! And I was like, well I guess so. You know, (laughter) now that you point that out. And she was appalled, and she said you would, you thought he was cute? And I went, whoa? I remember saying something like, is there something wrong with that?

Norah expressed surprise that her mother reacted so strongly to her crush on this Black teenager. More significantly, she never mentioned the racial group membership of the young man, only his last name but from that, her mother knew immediately that he was Black. Had Norah mentioned a common White, European name like Smith or Jones, her mother would likely not have known which family she spoke of or at least it might have taken her mother a bit more time to figure out to whom Norah referred. Later in our conversation, Norah expressed her curiosity at what it must be like to be so noticeable, to stand out constantly. The racial privilege in this scenario is that her mother could immediately identify that the teenager Norah met was Black because there was only one Black family in town and Norah had used that name when describing the young man. Like Rocco, Norah spoke only of her experience with an African American when she talked of her racial privilege.

Tonya explained her understanding of racial privilege by relating a story about the use of a racial slur.

I was raised in a kind of all White environment at home, [mid Atlantic state] a small town of about three hundred people; it's actually a – Scandinavian community – very weird. Everyone kind of in my immediate world in [the community] was White. ...and [my mom] didn't allow us to the use the word Nigger at

all, that was just not – so it was around constantly but we were not allowed to utter it. And I went to kindergarten in [this community], it's anywhere from a sixty-forty mix to forty-sixty [Black/White] mix depending on, you know, where you're at. And I came home within a week using the “n” word. And my mom was horrified, horrified and she explained to me we don't use that word so that was kind of my – we weren't allowed to use the word but we didn't have Black people over to the house. We didn't have Black friends.

In Tonya's conclusion of the story, she learned that the racial slur was unacceptable but noted that no other effort was made to include Black people in her family's life. She had no Black friends and she experienced no Black people in her home. She grew up in a community that had more people of Color than the other participants, yet she described that in her immediately world everyone was White. Although she described a high ratio of Black/White kids in her school, she never had a Black friend; she was able to remain separate or segregated. Tonya's mother made an effort to stop the use of the racial slur because Tonya mentioned that her mother had been a victim of ethnic slurs herself. The unspoken privilege in this example is the ability that White people have to choose when to have contact with people of Color, and when not to. Just as Rocco was not involved in the *Black* sports or hung around in the *Black* section of town, Tonya was not encouraged nor was it modeled for her to have *Black* friends.

### *Isolation*

Sadie began by asking if I knew what *White flight* meant. I did. As two White women discussing racial privilege, we had a common language and understanding about the privilege of choice and interaction that White people exercise.

I grew up in a community of White flight as a child. ...It never really made sense that the Black people were lower than, or thought of as lower than...you know your real estate values would go down. And so I grew up with all of this kind of

mentality. And even another mentality was that somehow there was a hierarchy and that it was Jews and then Black folk, within the context of that hierarchy, right? I can remember, probably being nine or 10 years old and maybe desegregation was being talked about a great deal before it happened. Um, I hate saying this on tape, I was a little Jewish girl in a world where little girls were really only valuable for one thing. And that, within that context, the only worst thing that I could have been was Black.

*White flight* was similar to what Tonya experienced regarding when, and in what manner, White people can choose to interact with people of Color. Sadie knew at a young age that *White flight* meant her parents chose to relocate based on the racial make up of the neighborhood, and specifically, to avoid racial interaction. The lesson was that when racial interaction became uncomfortable or too frequent, one simply moved to avoid further interaction. In addition, Sadie spoke about the hierarchy of White superiority or supremacy. Although she was in a targeted religious group, she understood that being Black was worse than being Jewish. Although not stated explicitly, Sadie added a dimension to racial privilege, which other participants did not speak of directly. She knew, at a young age, where girls, particularly Jewish girls, ranked in that social hierarchy. She understood that her level, although not on top of the hierarchy, was also not at the bottom. Sadie understood that the groups beneath her were people of Color, and specifically Black people.

*All the People are White, aren't They?*

Louise demonstrated again the Black/White binary. She began with an example of “*seeing*” a Black person for the first time.

My first memory of seeing a Black person was when I was in high school. There were three Black kids, two boys and one girl who went to my high school. And my memory of myself during that time is that I tried to have a diversity of friends...it was just something that I always strove for. And I couldn't make a connection with any of these people, some of it was

fear, not knowing how to do it, some of it was a fear that they would feel that I was trying to be friends with them just because they were Black, which was true.

In this example, Louise's relational nature emerged as she sought to try to have socially diverse friends. Prior to actually knowing a Black person, diversity for Louise, meant having friends who had different interests, hobbies, and/or involvement in extra curricular activities. When she mentioned these friends, she did not identify them as White because the assumption was that I would know they were White. As two White women reminiscing about our youth, we had a shared understanding that unless Black was identified, we were talking about White people. Like Tonya, Louise didn't have the experience or knowledge of people of Color to create the friendships she sought. She admitted that it was difficult, and that she experienced some fear in her efforts to seek out such relationships. Embedded in her desire to have diverse friends, may also have been other motives. There may have been an exotic component of Blackness that she was attracted or curious about. Additionally, she may have seen that to befriend these Black students would not please other White people, and that was a desirable outcome for her. As she acknowledges, she was interested in befriending them specifically because they were Black.

Beth begins by acknowledging that she had little awareness of herself as a White person, because she grew up in a predominantly White community.

I grew up right around here in the town, very homogenous, White basically and really didn't have any awareness at all. One of the first things I remember [was] having a fascination with people of Color but I'd really only seen them on TV. I remember that on Sesame Street I saw Black kids. I remember there was this one little girl on Sesame Street that was Black and she was kind of like an imaginary friend; like I imagined she was my friend. So even at that age, I had some kind of like attraction to difference. That's some of who I am I guess.

Like Louise, Beth described a curiosity or fascination with people of Color, particularly Black people. Since there were no Black children around, the TV and her imagination became her window to the world of diversity. In addition, like Louise, Beth seems to acknowledge that even at a young age, her relational nature began to emerge – she sought out relationships with people who were different from her.

Steven simply stated that he knew there were Black people in his high school but he did not interact with the Black students.

I know there were Black students in my high school but I cannot remember knowing a Black student in that high school.

Steven, once again, demonstrated the choice embedded within membership of the racially privileged – we can choose to interact, or not to interact, with people of Color.

### *Hidden Identity*

All participants spoke of their understanding of racial privilege by referring to Black people. Doane (2003) considers that White people have a “lower degree of self-awareness about race and their own racial identity than members of other racial-ethnic groups” (pp. 6-7). He also labels this as a “hidden identity”. Although these participants were highly conscious of their racial privilege and identity, they reverted to describing their understanding by first looking at what/who they were *not*. Frankenberg (1993), in her study of Whiteness, had a participant remark, “They are different but I am the same as everyone else” (p. 198). It was in contrast to Black or through their awareness of Black, that these participants spoke of their racial understanding.

Having conducted this study and research on racism, White privilege, and supremacy, plus the many years of my own reflections, I still find myself doing the same thing. When asked about who I am, I will often not mention my race. It takes vigilance on my part to state

my racial identity. I will always identify as a woman, but I am less likely to say I am White unless I am being particularly attentive to race in that moment.

The fact that all these participants spoke only of Black people is significant. Kivel (2002) acknowledges that “In the United States we tend to identify racism with the relationship between African Americans and Whites” (p. 81). This Black/White binary has its roots in our formative years. Primary and secondary schools presented history, which influenced and shaped how we think about race. Kivel notes “The existence of slavery and Jim Crow segregation, and the struggles for justice led by African Americans have been defining historical forces in our development as a nation. African Americans have powerfully and unrelentingly challenged the myths of American democracy and economic opportunity” (p. 81). Our schools celebrate the month of February as Black history month. When my son took American history last year in high school, it was organized in a chronological manner, except for the history of African Americans. Only in February were the historical events that included Black people studied. During that month, his class covered the Civil War, reconstruction, the early Civil Rights movement of Du Bois and Booker T. Washington and the creation of the NAACP, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. The implicit message is that Black history is not a part of our collective history; instead, its examination is separate. This perpetuates the Black/White binary.

#### *Limited Experience with People of Color*

As noted previously, participants generally had limited experiences, other than observation and occasional, brief conversations, with people of Color growing up. They had specific stories that stood out about first encounters or first meaningful encounters. For these

participants that were over 45, the occurrences generally happened in young adulthood between 18 and 25; for those that were under 45, the occurrences happened before they were 18.

Rocco grew up in predominantly White community, although he spoke of some brief interactions with Black people as described earlier. His first racialized experience happened in Miami. As he traveled from the North to the South, he began to gain a different understanding of the relationship between Black and White people when he saw segregated signs.

But I would think the watershed moment in my life was when I was just about 18, I graduated from high school in January, and I had six months before I started college. I had a cousin who lived in Miami so she invited me to come down. I went down to Miami on a bus. It took 44 hours and the bus stopped along the way, of course, it stopped every few hours. When it stopped in Maryland, I got off the bus, I was 18 years old, I got off the bus into the bus terminal, and I saw the sign and it said colored rest room, White restroom, Colored below the drinking fountain, White. Colored waiting room, White waiting room, everything was segregated and that just blew my mind. I'd never seen anything like that. I saw that all the way down to Florida. So I think I kind of wrote that off as that's just the South, it's not like that [in his community].

Rocco described this as a *watershed* moment; it was the beginning of his life long journey and awareness of racism and his racial privilege. It was impressionable as he saw the physical signs of segregation that he had probably heard about and perhaps even studied some in school. The significant moment came, though, on a bus ride across the city of Miami and experiencing the physical segregation rather than merely the signage.

When I was in Miami, I didn't have a car so my cousin told me I could take a bus to this nice beach, a 25 mile ride. So I got on the bus and it was going down a highway and the bus started to fill up, so this lady is standing there and the bus is swaying back-and-forth; being a gentleman, I was a gentleman back then, I got up and gave her my seat. And I looked around at the back of the bus and the back of the bus was empty except for one Black guy sitting in the

back. And I realized this lady would rather stand up, sway on this bus for 25 miles, then go sit in the back with the Black guy.

As this trip unfolded and he had more interaction with people of Color and observed interactions among White people and people of Color, he began to draw conclusions. Upon these realizations, he took his first social action. He went to sit and talk with this man.

So I went and sat in the back of the bus with the Black guy and I had a nice conversation with him. So that was the first experience I had with you know, realizing that I was White. ...When I was in high school there were a lot of veterans that came back on the GI Bill and I had this old - old, he was probably in his late 20s - but he was married, and he was really sharp; he carried an umbrella to class. He sat behind me in English class. I used to talk with him all the time. And yeah, so that was high school. I did talk to that guy. But, no I, remember up to high school, up to 18, I really hadn't had any kind of dealing with Black people.

I wondered if this was the first conversation he had with a person of Color and so told me about the Black man with the umbrella in his high school class. The difference was that talking with the Black man in high school took no effort on his part; he merely had to turn around while with the man on the bus he had to move to interact. He also understood that moving to the back of the bus, as a White man, was significant. This insight, as he described, was a turning point for him; he recognized for the first time a real difference between how Black and White people were treated. The experience stands out because he had limited experiences up to this point with which to compare it.

Norah grew up in a community of 16,000 and could count the families of Color on one hand. She had almost no interaction with people of Color growing up and very limited during her college experience. Her major was a male-dominated field and at the time of her study, there were no people of Color in her area of study. Although her current partner is an African American man, she began to understand her privilege and/or her White identity

when, earlier, she dated another Black man. She described a more subtle moment than Rocco, which involved this other man, his family, and her confusion at about racial identity.

So, I would say the next big thing I remember and this was after I had graduated and I was just starting in my job here at [the university] so it was maybe [19]84. Before I met [my partner] I had already dated [another man], a Black guy. I guess dating [this other man] made me think a little bit about it. I don't remember [it] being so dramatic. It wasn't an issue to me, it was to people around me. So [this other man] came from a very mixed family. I mean his parents were both Black but then his parents were divorced and his father married a White woman and his siblings, a number of them, married Native Americans. And he was, I think I came to realize, his personal racial identity was confused. He had many issues, personal issues but that was one of them.

Norah related that she believed her dating a Black man was an issue to people around her but she did not think it was significant to her. She seemed to assume that because he had a family where there was a lot of interaction with people of other races, this young man would have no difficulties with her, or his own identity.

I was somewhat confused by that; like, I didn't understand what his problem was and I didn't in any way understand, I don't think I even then had any experiences of understanding privilege. It was all just a concept, this whole racial thing. I thought it was other people's issues not mine. My parents were kind of, clearly showed some, they liked him but they weren't entirely happy with this [dating relationship].

Norah disclosed her puzzlement about the "*whole racial thing*" and there was some implication that her uncertainty stemmed from his confusion over his racial identity rather than anything within her, "*I thought it was other people's issues not mine.*" She supports this by giving the example that her parents had some concern but the signals were ambiguous. Although she received subtle hints from her parents and observed that other people seemed to be uncomfortable with the relationship, she did not attribute those issues to her race but rather to his.

Tonya grew up in a racially diverse school district and in her formative years her friends were all White. Most of her teachers were White although she noted that she did have some Black teachers.

I had Black teachers [in elementary school]; Black women but they were different than – in my mind I can remember they were different than the White teachers. They were – I don't know why – I don't think there was any other indication other than race that would make me think that way. So I had a couple of Black friends in high school who hung out with us. Which in retrospect must have been hard for them because it pretty much meant losing their cultural identity to be with us, to run with us.

In this example, Tonya acknowledges that she sensed a difference in her Black and White teachers, but didn't remember why and concluded that it must have been due to racial differences. While she had some a couple of Black friends in high school, she acknowledged that she now understands that must have been difficult for those Black students. It wasn't until she was in college that she had her first meaningful and sustained interactions with a people of Color.

In college, my sophomore year I had a roommate from Trinidad. Then my senior year in college I was friend's with [a man], a Black guy. We had been friends all of junior year and we started dating our spring semester of our senior year. He was in the Marine Corps and a pilot and we got engaged about a year after college. He went to flight school and I moved to [the Midwest]. [We broke up]. He said are you comfortable with people calling you a Nigger lover? We had confrontations [like that] while we were dating. That didn't bother me as much as I knew in my heart I wasn't meant to be with him; I wasn't cut out to be a military wife. So it's easy now, it's easy to say that race didn't have a factor in the break-up but I don't know; I don't think that's a fair assumption on my part. Clearly it probably had to.

Tonya described her thinking at the time of the incidence compared to her thinking now. She notes at the time, she did not attribute her break up with this young Black man to be about race. Upon more growth and understanding, she suggested now, that it did have to do with

race. Norah and Tonya both had intimate relationships with African Americans and did not credit any relational problems to racial differences.

*The only White – An Oppositional World View*

Coupled with limited experiences with people of Color, participants spoke of times when they were either the only White or one of the only Whites, in a space dominated by people of Color. This was usually a central event in their growth and understanding of their racial privilege. Steven provides this example.

The year I graduated from the university I had decided to try seminary. So I applied to the diocese. And I got a call from the Bishop that summer and he was, they were doing a project up there [in the Indian missions] that was new and they were sending seminarians up to be in these Indian missions during the summer to run vacation church schools. So he thought that would be something I should do. We went up there; I got trained for a couple of weeks and had very little understanding of what we're doing or why we're doing it. A big thing we had to do, we had to have vacation church school everyday, well four or five days a week and then we had evening prayer every night. We were pretty busy and that was my first exposure. I think I only knew one Indian before that. I would have called them Indians because that was [my wife] calls herself, an Indian, and I have called her Indian. Up on the reservation they generally call each other Indians except when they get into a situation [outside of the reservation] where they call themselves Native Americans. I'll tell you about my first day there. We'd driven all the way from the southern [part of the state] which is probably about three or four hundred miles. We were tired and hot and they took us there and they dumped us off and we were standing in a cottage where the White teachers lived during the winter time. So we're there and we're fixing some supper for ourselves and the Indian priest came in and he said we're having a Pow-Wow tonight over at the gym and why don't you come over and meet some of the folks. So after supper, about that time one of the humungous thunderstorms was coming up and the lightening flashing; it hadn't started to rain yet but it was pretty scary. We got to the gym and looked around and we were the only two White faces there.

Significant in these examples was the limited experience participants had with people of Color and the ramification that had on their racial privilege consciousness. The fact that

these participants did not have many, if any, interactions with people of Color growing up is consistent with findings Bonilla-Silva (2006) describes in his study of White and Black college and community members at the University of Michigan and citizens of Detroit.

“Thus far I have shown that Whites have very little contact with Blacks in neighborhoods, schools, college, and jobs” (p. 111). In his discussion of this, he concludes that White people do not see this limited contact or interaction as a “*racial* phenomenon” (p. 112). In his study, as the White respondents became aware of their racial isolation, many became defensive and/or rationalized their behavior as *not* racist or racially motivated in any manner.

However, the participants in this study simply stated this isolation as facts, with neither denial nor defensiveness. These participants were well aware that their limited contact and experience with people of Color played an essential role in their growth from racial and privilege obliviousness to consciousness. Tonya best exemplified this as she described what she thought her reasons for ending her engagement at the time were and then her acknowledgement during the interview that race had to have played a role. Her tone was not one of defensiveness or denial but curiosity and interest as she realized that race had to have played a role. The fact that many White people have limited experiences with people of Color is demonstrated consistently in both studies. The difference appears to be in how respondents reacted to the phenomenon. Each of the individuals that participated in this study with me appeared very curious, attentive, and reflective about their experiences and were not interested in rationalizing their earlier behavior.

The more subtle by-products of privilege are that White people choose when and in what manner to interact with people of Color. In a White dominated world, people of Color do not experience that choice to the degree that White people do. Bonilla-Silva (2006) found

many examples of this in his study, “Many used the demographic excuse to explain why they did not interact with minorities...Kim, a housewife in her late twenties...grew up in various cities...with few Blacks around and had no interactions with them. When asked if she had Black friends in school, Kim said, ‘I never had chose Black friends’” (p. 114). This was a typical response of White participants in his study.

### *The Choice is Mine*

Inherent in the examples which these individuals shared with me throughout the course of this study was this phenomenon of choice. The very fact that Rocco *chose* to sit with the man in the back of the bus was indicative, perhaps most dramatically, of this. The choice of interaction is so embedded and normalized in the experience of White people, that when White people find themselves in spaces dominated by people of Color, it becomes a noteworthy and often disorienting experience as Steven described. Most participants shared a similar experience where the role of majority and minority were altered and this was a turning point in their understanding of racial privilege. In many instances it was a vehicle for further growth as they gained an appreciation for what the experience of majority/minority status might involve.

Throughout this study, I found that all the participants ultimately began talking about their racial privilege in relation to Black people – by contrasting who they were with who they were *not*. Additionally, they shared examples of their limited experience, and therefore understanding of the lives, of people of Color. I pointed out that these first interactions awakened curiosity and reflection in these participants as they grappled with what significance these experiences had to them. Characteristics of these experiences that may influence a change in consciousness about White privilege are discussed below.

## Change in Consciousness

Just how do White people experience their development of racial awareness?

Although not asked directly, at some point during the interviews, this issue became more prevalent as they shared their stories with me. For each of them, there was an identification or transformation that had occurred or was occurring in their lives. They believed that these experiences led to a growing sense of racial identity and change in their racial perception of themselves and members of other races. In the retelling of their stories, similar thought processes appeared. Additionally, as these participants shared their understanding and growing awareness of their racial privilege, other elements tangential to the stories seemed to emerge. As they discussed their experiences, the following stages of development appeared to be evident.

1. **Critical Incident** – Moments or experiences which were significant, may have been disturbing, and appeared to result in an increased awareness of their racial privilege. These experiences appeared to have followed a common process.
2. **Dialogue** – Discussion and discourse which appeared to be a *primary* means of gaining knowledge and awareness as contrasted to reading or some other solitary activity.
3. **Empathy** – In addition to **Critical Incidents**, many participants came to understand their racial privilege by applying lessons learned in other oppressive states such as sexism, classism, or heterosexism.
4. **Reflective Process** – a strategy developed by these participants specifically to learn and grow, and change interactions.

These four themes are described in more detail in the following sections.

### *Critical Incident*

Through discussion of the Critical Incidents a similar process emerged that had common aspects. This is a description of these shared components.

- **Reflection** – Following a **Critical Incident**, each participant reflected deeply about the event. Within this component, the participant often labeled the incident

as inconsistent or incongruent with previous experiences or understanding, or was very significant. The specific words used to describe the incident gave some indication of the degree to which it was significant or meaningful.

- **Mentorship** – Many **Critical Incidents** involved a relationship with a person of Color who acted as a teacher and/or mentor, and assisted in the participant's increased understanding of racialized experiences.
- **Regret** – Some participants experienced dissatisfaction or remorse about a **Critical Incident** and expressed a desire for the ability to go back and apologize or make amends regarding their attitude and/or behavior.
- **Relational Orientation** – The **Critical Incident** may have occurred because of the nature of the participant. Each has an occupation or vocation which involves social interaction and a commitment to the development and improvement of the human condition.

As these participants retold their stories, they identified experiences that were startling to them. At first, it may have only been an echo, a slight disturbance, but became more unsettling with sustained immersion in the experience. Within or during the experience, a reflective component occurred in which these participants took more notice of the event; there was an awareness that something significant was happening. An additional reflective piece sometimes took place *after* the incident. Often that post-event reflection involved debriefing and/or gathering more information from a person of Color. With this additional reflection and perspective, these participants replayed the event or experience, sometimes immediately and sometimes as much as years later. As the experience was replayed and reexamined, conclusions were formed which impacted future attitudes and behavior. The incident then became part of a bank of memories and repertoire which they drew upon as other, often similar, events unfolded.

Norah describes an experience she had while on a recruiting trip for her university. She teaches and prepares students for the predominantly White male field of engineering. She was flying to a large Midwestern City and was to visit a high school to recruit

underrepresented groups for attendance at the university in the school of engineering. In her re-telling of this incident, she begins with some background and things she noticed that made an impression on her.

We flew there, the woman picked us up and drove us to this big, historic brick high school and school's in session. The doors are locked and chained. And I'm like, what? What? How do we get in? And she has to call someone and they have to come. And so it seemed like a fortress to me and that was odd.

The incident caused a small ripple in her awareness and seemed to alert her that something was unusual; although at that time she did not fully recognize what that might be. This was the initial **Reflective** component. She asked herself questions, used the word "fortress," and concluded it was "odd."

We go and meet with staff and people and most of the people we were meeting with were White. I didn't think anything and then we walked out in the hall and the bell rang. The halls were suddenly flooded with students, 100% Black. We were walking sort of against them. And I had never felt like that before. This, was like, oh my God, everybody's looking at me and I'm so totally feeling singled out and different. Wow. This is really weird and all the staff's White and that was a weird thing too.

When she saw the Black students pour into the hallway and walk towards her, she became aware not only of her difference in skin color but that it was suddenly more noticeable to her. In this **reflection**, she takes special note of the difference in skin color and that she is in a racial minority and labels this as "weird." As she continues her story, she added that while she observed all students were Black, she noted all teachers were White. Again, she questioned racial imbalance and sought additional information from her partner, a person of Color (**mentorship**).

I suddenly became aware of, you know. Wow, they [the teachers] don't look anything like the students (chuckling) you

know. That's odd to me. Why? You know if we're in this area of town, why aren't there more [Black teachers] and [my partner] who grew up in this city, later told me that he didn't have a single non-White teacher all through his education.

The information about the experience of her partner not having any non-White teachers added to her racial awareness. She concluded her story with deeper reflection.

Um, so that was a jarring experience for me. It just made me think a little bit more about what this might be like for someone like, like [my partner] to be in a town like, to experience that all the time. To know that you are always remembered, noticed, if it's just in a store or just in any public thing.

At this point, she has had an experience that she **reflected** on, **labeled** as incongruent, and sought more information from a person of Color to help explain or make sense of the incident – **mentorship**. The descriptors “*jarring*” and the phrase “*it just made me think a little bit more*” were consistent with how these participants described their incidents. There appeared to be a connection between the tone of the descriptors and the degree of significance attributed to a **critical incident**. In this incident she also displays the element of **empathy** as she notes how it might feel to “*always be remembered, noticed, if it's just in a store or just in any public thing.*” Other participants described similar processes.

Beth described a critical incident in which she took special note of things she accepted as normal or as she said, “*take for granted*” that led her to take note of her White privilege. During college she took a trip to India. As she recounted the story, she began with descriptors of the significance of her experience. “I went on a trip to India and that was a life changing, eye opening, experience...I get to take for granted clean running water, I get to take for granted sleeping on a bed that isn't infested.” She noted that this event was “*life-changing, eye opening.*” These descriptors indicated or measured significance and were part of that **reflective** component. As she continued the story, there was some disorientation or

discomfort with being in a foreign country and unused to the ways in which the indigenous people acted. There were times that Beth reacted negatively to these differences. This discomfort was consistent with Norah's experience of chained school doors. Beth continued.

At first I hated it; when I first got there I was just like, why on earth did I do this? I had voluntarily sent myself to prison. This is horrible, like what a horrible place this is cuz' it was chaotic, and dirty and it's mostly just the chaos of it is that really strikes you; like the disorganization and I had my moments. My least proud moment of my life was one time I was in the train station and trying to get a train ticket. People are just running everywhere and getting in your way and I said, didn't the British teach you people how to queue? I'm totally ashamed that I did that but that feeling came up, like White privilege feeling came up, like oh my God you don't even line up; like hello.

Beth expressed some **regret** about her attitude and/or behavior indicated by her words, "*least proud moment of my life.*" As she continued, she gave an example of how she came to understand her privilege economically coupled with her skin color. Similar to Norah, Beth noted a time she was the only White person in a situation. This was not unusual with these participants. This played some part in the heightening of awareness.

I definitely had the experience of being the only one, like the only White person around. When I was in Boston I'd see it all the time; you'd be on the train with mostly White people and a Black guy would get on and another Black guy would be like, hey, you know, like you're Black too. [And I'd think] do they know each other or what? But I felt that experience when I was in India. You'd see another White person and you'd be like hey, White person (laughter). You know, so I got that, that kind of experience of when you feel so, the only one, and isolated.

Both Beth and Norah described a sense of *getting it* in regard to the isolation that people of Color may experience as they navigate through a White dominated society (**empathy**).

Rocco described a critical incident that took place while he taught at a junior high school. He did not express the initial disorientation or surprise that Norah and Beth did,

which may be in part because, at first, he attributed the incident to some other cause. Later, upon more reflection and greater understanding of racialized experiences, he realized that he misunderstood or discounted the racial significance of it.

He was a really good disciplinarian, he was a really good principal, but I realized all these years later that his problem was racism. ...He straightened out all the kids. [Before they hired him] the school was in chaos so they got rid of this [other] principal and they brought this Black guy in, an older Black man. He straightened out that school and in no time. The kids were afraid to death of him but he couldn't leave well enough alone. He had to go and terrorize the faculty. And he did. He terrorized the faculty. Of course [with] my personality, we were butting heads and I remember being in his office and [telling] him – you know the reason people don't like you is because you are a jerk.

In the conversations with this Black principal, Rocco didn't attribute the discontent among faculty to have any racial nature to it. Yet, with time he began to understand racialized experiences differently. He credits part of this re-education to his wife, who is Black (**mentorship**).

But years later, after all these experiences of being married to [my wife] I realized that he was right. He was the first Black principal in the city and the only Black principal in the city. So, I can imagine what that guy [has been through]. He was 70 years old in 1976, so he was born in 1906. You can imagine what he came up through. But you know, I was not all that, uh with it at the time. I just told him, if he only had done the job, he was great at the job but he always had to have a vendetta. So, there was so much that I did then, and now that I know how much I didn't know then – well I wish I had known then.

With that understanding, also came **regret**, “Because you know now I would apologize to this principal if I could, if I could meet him again but he died a long time ago.” Rocco demonstrated the **reflection** that took place over the course of time. It was many years later that he attributed a racial component to the way in which this principal was treated. Within

that insight there seemed to be an admission of his own culpability in misunderstanding the situation and mistreatment of the principal.

The **relational orientation** of these participants may be noticeable by the nature of their occupations and vocations – two priests, five teachers (two in social service professions) – because they involved social interaction. Additionally, inherent in these professions is the commitment to humanity; a dedication to serve society. For Beth and Rocco, the involvement with the people Color seemed to have added an intensity to the experience, evidenced by the regret or humility they expressed. Beth tries to describe this **relational orientation** in this way.

And that's...my training was in social work so you know you kind a want to be able to find a place where you can connect with people and not be angry and care about them. I mean in order to really do any good diversity work you have to be sympathetic to where people are and when you kind of do that...well, the fight thing doesn't usually go too well. ...The most rewarding, the best things in my life have been like, connections, when I really feel connected to someone or something. ...I'm not a fan of making people uncomfortable really, you know, I want everybody to feel happy and nice and connected.

Louise describes her **relational orientation** in this manner, “That’s how I learn. That’s how I build relationships...build capital or build whatever it is. That’s how I invest in a human being.”

### *Dialogue*

One of the tangential elements that emerged was the way in which these participants interacted with others through **dialogue**. As explained, each seemed to have a relational orientation, and part of that paradigm included attentiveness to discourse and discussion. This thoughtfulness towards dialogue seemed to be rooted within these participants’ occupations and vocations and their very nature. It seemed the significant purpose was the

process of seeking knowledge, and understanding and sharing that with others. Therefore, by their very nature, these were participants who had a high level of commitment to discourse. They seemed to rely on this method as a primary means of making sense of interactions with, and learning about, others. This **dialogue** was consistent in their journey towards an increased awareness of racial privilege and racism.

Tonya, at one point in the interview commented, "...I think it's only by the grace of God that we have conversations with people of...Color." She was describing a class she was teaching in which there were White students and students of Color discussing art and literature of the Harlem Renaissance. She was expressing how much in awe she was of the "sanctuary" she believed had been created.

I thought, it's a miracle, we're here in a classroom with people of...Color, talking about this; it's a miracle. Who blames – how can you blame [people of Color] for being angry, how can – you know?

Three different types of dialogue emerged. One was a **deliberate** discussion sought by the White person with a person of Color, with the intent of learning about racialized experiences. In this vein, the White person came to the discussion in an open and communicative manner, and was intent on building comprehension or knowledge. Another type of dialogue seemed to be **accidental** in nature. The conversation began about something else, but race surfaced in the discussion and made an impression on the White person. The last type of dialogue was even more subtle. It was conversation that came from a deep relationship with a person of Color and the distinguishing factor seemed to be **humor**. The relationship reached a level in which the White person could relate to the person of Color with humor about their Whiteness. The actors in the discussion seemed to have

reached a level of understanding or perhaps trust, which allowed for the use of humor. The humor tended to be ironic in nature.

Tonya demonstrated these components of dialogue through some of her relationships. At first she talked about her roommate in college who was from Trinidad.

My sophomore year [in college] I had a roommate from Trinidad. That was kind of my first, like going to Black parties or like being able to ask questions about Black culture. She was my – that was my first person to really be a confidant, in a place where I could explore that. Because I think that's one of the issues you want as a conscientious White person to ask questions but you don't want to offend anyone.

She described that, based on her relationship with this woman, she began to feel comfortable in exploring racial issues; this is an example of the **deliberate** dialogue. She described a hesitancy to ask questions until she established a level of friendship in which she could deliberately explore another culture with a person from that culture. That friendship seemed to influence her, perhaps it built confidence and encouraged other relationships with persons of Color.

So when I was working in [the Midwest], I had another Black friend, and we were able to have conversations. When I went to graduate school [in a Southern gulf state] my first day I met [and] sat down by this woman in our kind of orientation session and I said hi, my name's Tonya. She said [her name] and my daughter's name is Tonya. And we were like just tight from then on. Just super tight friends and that's really where my awareness of the privileges of being White came in. I had kind of no idea. I was sensitive to race issues but I had no idea but watching her – something happened with Tonya, her daughter, at pre-school where another little girl said my mom said I can't play with you because you're Black. So [my friend] went to pre-school and addressed this with the teachers. But her assumption was that it would not be addressed. Where if you're White and you address something with someone in authority your assumption is it is taken care of. ...And I was blown over by really what it meant to be Black in the day-to-day world. We would go to Wal-Mart or to the mall and people would stare at us. All of a sudden you're very aware of

who you are and who you're with. So we've been friends now for ten years and it's led to great conversations.

In that example, Tonya discussed her understanding of privilege and racialized experiences as an observer rather than an actor. Tonya talked about a dimension of racism previously unknown to her; it was an **accidental** type of learning. Tonya described how this relationship reached an even greater level of intimacy and racial understanding as demonstrated through the use of **humor**. She and this friend were fixing dinner together.

...She was open to discussion. So we're cooking dinner and I say grab the salad spinner would you. She said what? Like the salad spinner, it's the purple Tupperware thing down there. She looked, she [said] you're so White. Once we got to a point where we could joke, we got to a point where we could really have good conversations about what it [racism, Whiteness, racial privilege] meant .

These friendships led Tonya to seek out a relationship with a person of Color during her orientation at the college where she now teaches. There was a **deliberateness** to her actions and she explained her reasons.

There were key experiences or steps that I went through that made me open to sitting down next to the one Black woman [at this college]. I did it with [her] and I [said] how's it going, because there are no Black people in this town. Frankly when I got to the orientation session [and] I met her, I said, hello Black person. But we became instant friends. I sought [the relationship] out because there are no Black people in [this community] and very few Black people on campus. And so now because of [my friend from the Gulf state], I'm sensitive. I mean it's weird for me that there's no Black culture here. It feels very odd. So yeah, I seek out that friendship with [my friend at this college]. I think one, because it was like oh, a Black person, just like I was craving it, Black culture. And two because – it must be really hard – to always wonder [who will] be that safe person; so I say hi, I'm Tonya. Of course it's my duty as a Lutheran to make sure everybody's comfortable.

Rocco attributes much of his learning to the experience of being married to an African American; this is a deeply intimate and **deliberate** relationship. He told a story that

demonstrates both the **deliberate** and **accidental** aspect of this kind of dialogue. In this experience, a question he asks leads to a racial understanding he'd not had before.

Once I married her, she started to teach me, in a subtle way at first about what it was like to be Black and I started to see the world through her eyes. The first thing I remember was we were in a Sam's club, shopping around and, there's a BJ's warehouse which must be closer to the house. I said to her, walking around Sam's club, why are we coming all the way out here when there's a BJ's [and it's] the same thing. She said, I like Sam, I think he's cute. There was this picture of Sam Walden [and] there was his autobiography. I said he's cute? He's dead! She said, well, I like coming out here because they hire Black people. And I'm like, a light went on. And I said what? I looked around and sure enough, there were Black people and I realized this was something I was completely oblivious to. ... You just assume, you just don't even think about it but being Black you do notice it. So, now, you know, I can't go anywhere without looking around. It's the first thing I do. I look around and I see who's who and what's what and what the make up is. It's very interesting and I [have] converted other White people into doing that because I taught that in a workshop. I had people tell me, I'm doing that now. I was over here and there were only three, they'd tell me, they're counting (laughter).

He elaborated, "I mean I had the basic outline but she filled in all the details, you know."

Sadie described another way in which, discourse changed her thinking and ultimately her behavior. She did some diversity training for a social service agency. It was the policy of this particular agency to pair White people and people of Color together. This is an example of both a **deliberate** dialogue because of the strategic pairing, and **accidental**, as learning took place through observation of how the person of Color handled a racialized experience.

I did workshop training for NCCJ [National Conference for Community and Justice] they always paired you up a person of Color. [I was] paired with a woman who was very dynamic and well spoken, well dressed; well spoken, very solid within herself. We were doing a workshop for [our community] in some form or other and they were challenging her. Well she

was so well versed and she had such a sense of presence that I, as the White woman co-facilitating with her, just sat and I was in awe and didn't realize until afterwards I had totally neglected my work in my position in that room.

Upon reflection, Sadie stated that she had not fulfilled her role in the exchange that took place. As the White person in the training event, she was to have stepped in so the person of Color was not the focus of hostility. She went to the person in charge of her training and explained what happened.

My self-reflection brought it to me. [My training supervisor] was like you named it now that's good. It was early in my [training with them] and this woman probably said something already, I don't know. I said to [my training supervisor] oh she's gotta think I'm, because I didn't step in; I was in awe of hearing her speak so clearly. I was learning, I was absorbing it, and I was leaving her out there all on her own. I never realized. I would never have done that, it's just not who I am. But from that I got an opportunity to again train [in my community] and this time the participants were from the housing authority and I'm co-facilitating with [another] Black woman and again, she's got a great sense of style and a great way of presenting – engaging. This wasn't an all White group but we had a number of White men, older White men and I recognized they bated her on the Italian immigrant and the Irish immigrant [experience]. I was able to step in. I was able to join her so she didn't need to be there without it taking over her. It was an awakening for me too, you know aha!, on some level. That was probably about six, seven years ago and the time before that had happened was probably two years before that. So it's that kind of a learning curve and then you really feel awful because then you feel like you have to step in it in order to appreciate the total stupidity; it's ignorance, it really isn't from being malicious or stupid or not wanting to do what's right or any of that you know.

In this instance Sadie learned how and what to do by watching and learning from a person of Color. This co-trainer was similar to a role model for her as she learned when and how to intervene in training when White people would try to co-opt the agenda.

Beth spoke of significant relationships with people of Color also. She spoke of an advisor she had in college who was Native American. He served her in a professional role, she sought additional **deliberate** opportunities to learn from him.

My advisor in college was really instrumental too. He was Native American and you know, kind of really looked Native American, really identified that way. I really felt a strong connection to him; really liked the guy. You know [I] took every class he offered. I think that made a big difference too in terms of [my] thinking. He definitely got it and was you know really trying to help other students, to help [White] students get it. So, that was powerful.

Louise also had a college professor that had an impact on her understanding, and she too, sought out **deliberate** opportunities to learn from him.

But you reminded me of another experience when I was in college I had a professor. He was my favorite teacher in college. Because he was so brilliant. In my book, people who are smart often don't have good common sense or compassion because they can't mix the two well. They don't have social skills. He had both. He was just an anomaly. Here he was the only Black professor in [this predominantly White] college with White students and I took every single course that he had to offer because he was so brilliant.

### *Empathy*

Although most stories involved direct interaction with issues of racial privilege and/or racism, some participants gained a more complete understanding, through experiences with other forms of oppression. They became **empathetic**. This door or gateway came from their ability to transfer direct or indirect experiences of sexism, classism, able-ism, heterosexism, and other oppressive states, to the experience to racism and White privilege.

Sadie speaks of how she sees similar issues between her work with sexism and feminism to her work on race and racial privilege.

I've had a lot of life experience [that] I think parallels; it's not the same but there's a parallel so it's easier for me to

understand. I do think when you have an unreflected life experience where you're always the norm, is a problem; why you gonna look at it?

Beth and I discussed White people who seem to understand the dynamics of oppression and privilege and those who don't. She said that she thought it had to do with the degree to which people have been hurt in some way in their own lives. She associated personal struggle with an ability to understand the dynamics and consequences of privilege.

The most rewarding, the best things in my life have been connections; I really feel connected to someone or something and I really feel I think that is part of it. I think that makes it more available. If you're a White person who really does feel tied in, if you're like a real mainstream person that feels like everything around you works for you, you have [it] easy; I think people that have it easy, won't get it; I really do, because they don't have to. I've said that to students before about going into a helping profession and so I get a lot of people who are wounded; they have their own issues and they're bringing a lot of their own hurt and stuff to the table. I think that is the person who has the potential to get it more than the person who has no baggage, you know what I mean? You have enough baggage to have to deal with it and look at it and feel the hurt, feel the pain and go there and the strength to come out the other side and not just be dysfunctional, you're the best helper. If you haven't been kicked down I don't think you ever get that.

Additionally, Beth described that she also connected an experience of economic privilege to racial privilege. We go back to her story about her India trip. In that critical incident, she thought that her skin color led to assumptions about her economic status. Due to that experience she thought she got a deeper understand of racial privilege.

But also in India, I had mad White privilege; I was like a real Madonna when I was over there. I was like a student taking this low budget trip, but the assumption was I was incredibly wealthy because of my White skin. It really was true. I had a pair of \$300 hiking boots and at the time I was there that was about the average yearly income in a typical Indian family; like my hiking boots was their yearly income. I was embarrassed later, but you know I felt that whole sense of, I definitely went

to India with that whole getting to be entitled and getting to be privileged and having people assume that I had a lot of wealth. I was able to get stuff done because of my skin color. ...Even [though I wasn't] in my own country, in somebody else's country, I had privilege because of my skin color; so, that really helped me get the concept of White privilege.

Rocco spoke in general terms how he sees parallels between racial oppression and other oppressions. "It all relates, to me it all relates, sexism, racism, homophobia. You can't understand one without understanding the other." At one point, Rocco spoke about the oppression of women, enslavement, segregation, and the relationship he saw to religious oppression.

So it's all connected, see. To me, the whole thing is connected. And you know a lot of sexism is rooted in religion. Every religion makes women inferior in some way. The more fundamentalist religions, the more oppressed the women are. Whether they're Jews, Muslims, you know. Why is there no religion where men have to cover themselves? Why don't men have to be virgins? So, you see a lot of what goes on in religion goes to these other oppressions. You know they use religion to oppress gays. They use religion to oppress women. They use religion to justify slavery, segregation.

Norah articulated **empathy** as she related an experience of a man telling her that she didn't belong in engineering. In part, she came to understand her racial privilege through situations as a woman, in a predominantly male profession.

I do think I've had experiences being in a field where there are so few women and [it's] so male dominated. You know I was the only woman that graduated when I did; the only woman in the class. So I went through that and through a lot of sexism in my first job and still now. There's one guy that kind of jokes about it all the time. But it's not entirely a joke. You know, he'll say something at a meeting like, somebody gonna take notes and he'll say, well Norah can, she's the woman. ...So I feel that is an example of - I'm being treated in a certain way. To be in situations where I was treated differently and singled out, sometimes blatant and sometimes [not]. ...I had a professor tell me you shouldn't, women shouldn't, don't belong in engineering. So there is some parallel. It's

something I can't hide, the fact that I'm a woman, I can't choose. I suppose I can choose not to be but not very easily.

*Reflective Process*

These participants spoke of their **reflective process** and used many terms to describe that, such as “light bulb went off,” “unearthed,” “watershed moment,” and “eye opening.” In addition, though, they spoke of deliberate or specific strategies employed to reflect and learn. This was foundational to what caused a change in consciousness. It seems, therefore, appropriate to share some of these intentional strategies.

Louise spoke most directly about this process. It began because she would freeze in moments of surprise, “I was like locked; it was like a deer in a headlight.” Early in her life, this paralysis became unacceptable to her. It became important to her to find her voice in those times of immobility and so she started “going to the mirror.” This involved physically looking at herself in the mirror and trying to find words, tone, emotion, and voice that expressed her thoughts and feelings in that moment. It was a rehearsal of a past experience to find her voice so she could apply her voice to future experiences. She would use the mirror to practice what she would have liked to have said. She mentioned that she would stand at the mirror until she felt confident she had the words for the next time something similar happened.

I got to the place when I want something to not happen again, this is just my idiosyncratic tendency. I go to a mirror and I practice, practice, practice how I would want to do that scene differently. And I have in my gut, in my head, in my heart, I have it in my body. So when something like that happens again it comes (snap fingers) right out of my lips.

Others have commented to Louise on this ability. She is able to keep her composure at times when other people would expect not to. This self-possession is her confidence in her voice, the message she wants to convey and her ability to speak in that time of paralysis.

I'm clear when something bad happens, or when something inappropriate happens also. I don't miss a beat. I have the ability. There are often people who say to me, how do you operate like that on your feet. I mean I couldn't say a word. And it's because I have practiced; I've developed a discipline to have those words come right out of me.

Sadie spoke many times of her reflective process. In the stories she told, she would often follow those with what she would have liked to have done differently. When we talked about how she figured out what to do differently, she said that reflection is something one always has to do; one always has to stay vigilant to it.

When you think you got there, you're really only still in the awakening stage because now you have more things you have to really be conscious of and aware of and sensitive to that you can't do all at once. So I find myself always doing that reflective piece. You always fall short on some level which is okay cuz' it's about – so you can sort of open to it the next time. ...Self reflection is always a check point for me.

She traced these roots of reflection back to her childhood and attributed that to growing up with an unusual eye that people would stare at.

My mother hunted down the man to operate on her daughter, her Jewish princess, her legacy and at five years old they operated on my [eye]. She told me, my mother who loved me very, very much, told me that I was going to be fine after that surgery. Even though that woman loved me very, very much, I couldn't trust [her] in telling me the truth because she would tell me nobody noticed when I went into a room. I learned very quickly that wasn't true. I'm saying that self-reflection is always a check point for me.

Beth spoke about training she did for the National Conference on Community and Justice and the assistance she received from the person of Color who trained her. She attributes her analysis of situations to this work and the on-the-job training she received.

Diversity training gets pretty intense and you have to have a pretty good tolerance for conflict and I know [this other trainer] does. I do owe a lot to [her] in terms of my ability, my analysis of situations. You know, like I definitely analyze people's

responses to training much more by [racial and cultural group membership] than probably you might otherwise. So we kind of have that history of breaking it down and analyze where people are coming from.

In this section, important elements of experiences that caused changes in racial consciousness were identified. The degree to which these elements were a catalyst to action are addressed in research question three.

### Change in Behavior

When does a change in consciousness become a catalyst to change in behavior? Embedded in this question was a desire to explore the ways in which increased understanding of racial privilege and racism led to changes in behavior. Although not asked directly, at some point in the interview, participants and I explored this change in behavior. Participants spoke of different ways in which they took some social action based on the connection between racism, racial privilege, and social injustice. Some participants had very public ways of taking action and some less public. All, in some way, acted (and continue to act) in ways that address or confront racists systems and/or attitudes of others.

Steven spoke of a time working in the Indian mission fields in which he attributed a promotion to his racial privilege. He seemed hesitant to connect the experience to racial privilege and he knew that the church was treating the Indian priests differently as evidenced by a difference in pay. He insisted that all of their pay be the same.

While I was there the bishop, and this might be something about the White privilege thing. We had an Archdeacon who managed the whole Indian field, had thirteen missions that [he supervised]; he left and so who's going to take his place? So [our Bishop] asked me if I would do that. He [said] that you were only there two years but I feel that you, you know I trust you, I think you can handle it. In fact you could look at it a lot of ways, I mean – this is White privilege, he didn't pick one [of the] three Indian priests. He didn't pick the Indian priests, he picked me, and I wondered about that. He made me what they

called the Bishop's Vicar because [the] Archdeacon's title is venerable [in the Episcopal Church, venerable is a distinguished title that is used in conjunction with Archdeacon and means wise or very respected]. But anyway when I got there I found out that the Indian clergy were not getting [the same salary], I came and started working there at three thousand dollars a year. And the Indian clergy were getting I think like twenty-eight and they'd been there a long time. Well anyway there was a discrepancy and so I said I would do it [take the Archdeacon position] but they had to bring their [the Indian priests] salary up so all guys in the field were getting the same salary. He did that and I know again you [could] say that is White privilege.

As his experience and reputation grew, the governor of the state asked Steven to serve on the Fair Employment Practices Commission which later became the Human Rights Commission. He served on that commission in the early 60s prior to moving to the community he currently resides in. Steven kept that appointment through three governors of different party affiliations, which, I think speaks of his ability to work across political differences. During his time on that commission he worked on fair employment and housing issues with diverse racial groups. He said, "[It] was very interesting getting involved with other racial groups." Close to this same time period, Steven and his wife became interested in the number of Indian children who were sent to juvenile detention "just basically because they were truant." They chose to create an alternative facility and began plans to build a small Indian school. "We got a good big grant from the national church and from the [local] diocese." They hired a director, who remains very close to Steven today, "He was neat and still one of my very good friends." The Indian school stayed in operation for forty years although changed some in focus and Steven's involvement reduced over the years. Additionally, Steven went with a convoy of Episcopal priests to the second uprising at Wounded Knee. He spoke about not really knowing what he could do that would be helpful but felt the need to go and that he was a bit "naïve" about the danger of that situation. He contrasted that experience to his work

with Indians in the 1950s and 1960s, “I can never really remember being in a situation where I was afraid [in the Indian missions].”

In 1995, Rocco’s principal asked him to train teachers in diversity. He believed the principal asked him because of his marriage to a Black woman.

So the principal asked me if I would go for one week training...[for] a program called the World of Difference. I said okay. Because you know it was unspoken, you're married to a Black woman...who else can I ask, right? So I said okay.

He spent the week getting trained and then came back to conduct workshops for the teachers in his building. He thought the training was not worthwhile, “So I went to the training and it was so boring.” He knew he would have to come back and conduct the workshops but he was concerned about the reception of the other teachers.

So I say, what am I going to do? These people [will be] furious, this program sucks, three hours, they’re gonna kill me. You know, I’m not gonna get out of there alive. It’s gonna be so bad, what am I gonna do? So I came home from school one day, it was October 16, 1995. I was hanging around, I turned on the TV and I sat down and there on the screen is Louis Farrakhan. I didn’t even know that much about him. He’s at the million man march on Washington DC and I’m sitting there and I’m listening to this guy. Holy shit, I never heard anything like this. I ran and grabbed a tape and I put the tape in the VCR and I’m standing there, I’m just mesmerized.

Rocco decides to incorporate the tape into the training even though his wife warns him that the White teachers at his school aren’t ready for Louis Farrakhan. The reaction was controversial. The White teachers were agitated and the district told Rocco he couldn’t show the film again because the agreement he had limited the use of materials to only those of World of Difference. Even though he couldn’t show it to the teachers, he decided to show it to his students. His students of Color loved it, “they’re pumping their fists in [the air] and

just enjoying the hell out of this.” For him, though, “it was such a learning experience.” He continued to show his students.

Every year I would show it to my students whenever I taught Julius Caesar; I wasn't just being a political radical, I would tie it in to the curriculum. And then three years later, 1998, this Jewish woman who was in the first workshop...she decides I shouldn't be showing Farrakhan; they're not ready for it. I said, get the fuck out of here. So she went to the principal...and...I had a meeting with her and with him. I said look, the only person that can tell me I can't show Farrakhan is William Rehnquist and he's gonna need four other votes. Because I'll go to the Supreme Court. So [the principal] looked at the Jewish woman, what do I look like, Pontius Pilot? The following year the assistant principal [is promoted and] becomes the principal. [The new principal] tells me I can't show it because [it causes] hurtful feelings; I said what the hell kind of rationale is that? It causes hurtful feelings. So I filed a grievance. I went to the ACLU, they said they'd back me and I let it be known that it was going to cost the city about \$600,000 if this went to court. So they backed down. They sustained my grievance and when they did that, the Jewish Federation of [our community] started this campaign of letter writing, phone calls, calling the superintendent; they called day and night. They were calling up people on the school committee, the mayor, [wrote] editorials, the head of the newspaper, all these editorials against me, against what I was doing, they should fire me. All this other stuff for six months until it finally died down.

He described the viewing of Farrakhan, the grievance, and the students' reaction to the speech as an important moment in his life. He seemed to attribute it to his evolving racial awareness but also to his role as an activist writer.

[Showing Farrakhan] was a watershed moment in my life, really because I became kind of a personality. And the system of people knew me and they started to read. I was the subject of newspaper articles.

Rocco is an avid writer. He writes letters to the editor and longer pieces for his community's newspaper. Prior to our interview he had written a piece on Hillary Clinton and a letter to the Editor about Columbus, immigration, and the invasion of Texas. He notes, “The last letter I

wrote [had] 53 comments; they were commenting for 3 days.” I read some of the comments and he is right – he’s quite a personality in the community. His articles and letters get many comments and stir up discussion for those in agreement and disagreement on his positions.

Sadie teaches part time at a local catholic college. She has a masters in Social Justice Education and teaches a health class. Within that context, she addresses racial and other oppressions. Her students question her about that.

I teach personal health class and they wanna know why I spend so much time on social justice issues. I say, OK, how many people out there are health education majors? How many are in the nursing program? You can’t get out of [this college] without taking personal health. How many are in the business program? I say, well, because all of you out there, you know you’re working these different areas, you better have a good handle on social justice issues or your gonna be ineffective. Those business majors, you’re not gonna have clients or those health majors, you’re gonna hurt people’s feelings more times than not and they’re not gonna trust you. They’re not coming back because if you’re not willing to take a look at [the effects of oppression and privilege] at least to say I need to understand a little better, then you really are going to be a dinosaur in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But they got me pegged, you know what I mean? There she goes again, you know? Some can even tell you that it’s sexism that is my thing. Some will tell you racism because of the way they hear me. You know?

Beth spoke of training and teaching around social justice, racial privilege, and racism. She has done diversity training with the National Conference on Community and Justice for about ten years. She co-facilitated with a woman of Color and understood that when White trainees would say that privilege was stupid, “I would take that and not her.” She was also involved in a program called City-Year, an Ameri-Core program.

They have planned diversity; the teams are planned to put young people 18-24 year olds together in strategically diverse teams. So every team has, you know kind of like those therapeutic groups and then they do community service together. And that was a really transformative [experience]; I

saw a lot of kids getting [racism, racial privilege] because of that experience.

### Chapter Summary

This study examined the phenomenon of White privilege to describe the elements or characteristics that are present in those events or experiences that raise the level of consciousness and action for White people. As participants talked of their racial group membership they spoke initially of their experiences with people who were not White and they generally had limited experiences with people of Color growing up. Participants described critical incidents they thought were transformative in nature. These seemed to have these components to them: a) deep reflection, b) mentorship, c) regret, and d) a relational orientation. In addition, some tangential elements emerged as participants told of their critical incidents. These were: a) dialogue, b) empathy, and c) a reflective process. Participants spoke of social action in which they engaged both in public and private ways.

### Personal Reflection: Invisibility

*Shortly before I started my graduate studies I was working at a community college in an adult community literacy program. We served 16 to 70 year olds, of all races, who spoke many different native languages, who were lesbian, gay, and straight, and who were and were not able bodied. One day my boss told the program coordinators (there were three of us) that she'd had a complaint about our department. The president of the college, an African American man, told her that some students and staff of Color had said that we had a plantation mentality and that we were being racially offensive. She asked us for our thoughts on the matter.*

*I said of course we were racially biased and proceeded to name about six incidents that had happened in the past three or four days in which we acted on those biases. They all stared at me. They were amazed that I would agree with the characterization of us but I think even more than that, they were shocked that I could name these incidents. I said, matter-of-factly, that as White middle aged women, it would be pretty amazing if we weren't racially biased.*

*The other two program coordinators were appalled at the complaints and didn't believe that anyone on staff would act intentionally to be hurtful. It was at that time I began to be curious about the intentions of White people and the resulting hurt that we inflict on people of Color. I understood that offensive racial remarks and actions were cumulative in effect for people of Color, but this conversation and the reaction of the other White administrators piqued my interest in how these two dynamics, intention and the cumulative effect of racialized remarks, might be connected.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first section of this chapter explores conclusions drawn from the significant findings of these research questions. The second section of the chapter explores the implications these findings have on the construction of knowledge and practice of adult educators in terms of fostering growth in White adult learners regarding racial awareness, identity, White privilege, and racism. The last section of the chapter describes some limitations of this inquiry and offers recommendations for further study.

#### Conclusions

The goal of this study was to examine the growth and development of White people's awareness of their racial privilege in our society. Two important aspects of this process were considered. Initially, I wanted to explore what precipitated, influenced, and/or motivated this growth. Additionally, I was interested in the effect this growth had on behavior with respect to social change.

#### *Research Question One*

The first research question, *How do White people experience being a member of the racially privileged*, was intended to gather a current description of how participants view themselves racially. Participants talked about White identity and privilege by first talking about their experiences with African Americans, which reinforced or perpetuated a historical Black/White binary. Additionally, participants had limited relationships with people of Color during their formative years.

#### *Black/White Binary*

Participants began the conversation about themselves, their White identity, and understanding of privilege with stories of their experiences with Black people. The initial focus on *only* Black people by *each* participant surprised me. For these participants, it appeared, at least initially, that people of Color meant Black people. I anticipated that these participants would have developed beyond that understanding.

There is a historic Black/White binary that essentializes the issue of diversity. Delgado & Stefancic (2001) note “The paradigm holds that one group, Blacks, constitutes the prototypical minority group. ‘Race’ means, quintessentially, African American. Other groups, such as Asians, Indians, and Latinos/as, are minorities only in so far as their experience and treatment can be analogized to that of Blacks” (pp. 67-68). The cause for this may be in the normalization of Whiteness. In our formative education teachers and text books presented history from a Eurocentric perspective (textbook guy, takaki, and zinn). Emphasis was on contributions of White, European men to the industrial, economic, scientific, and social formation of our country. Although some attention was given to other racial groups’ contributions, the racial group that got the most attention was African Americans. Consequently, White people may generalize the experiences of African Americans to other racial groups. Just as the obliviousness of Whiteness is embedded in the White socio-cultural mindset, so is the Black/White binary.

As racially aware and socially conscious of racism and racial privilege participants were, they appeared to perpetuate this binary. Even in a deliberate discussion focused on racial dynamics, participants initially focused on Black people. This would suggest that even with the level of self-awareness and growth demonstrated by the participants, this is difficult for White people to move beyond. I think this is significant because of our, White people’s,

tendency to minimize or deny our participation in racism. It further highlights the amount of diligence we must have in order to not fall prey to the embedded or old racial habits we have. One of those habits of thinking is the tendency to assume, when we hear or talk about people of Color, we really mean African Americans.

### *Limited Contact*

Participants had minimal experience with people of Color as they grew up – their formative years. Katz (2003) explains how this limited contact and isolation shapes our knowledge and understanding of people of Color. Much of what we learned about history focuses on the contributions of White people. The majority of White people isolate themselves; therefore we learn by omission that people of Color had little, if any real socio-historical contributions. Katz believes this phenomenon fosters an attitude in White people that questions the very capacity of people of Color. She states that “this attitude infects all interactions with people of color and influences our immediate reactions to their competence, talents, and achievements. It poses a great barrier for Whites by preventing us from engaging fully with people of Color and by supporting a deluded view of the world and our place in it” (p. 11). The President’s Initiative on Race (1998) reports that:

The lesson of this chapter is that the absence of both knowledge and understanding about the role race has played in our collective history continues to make it difficult to find solutions that will improve race relations, eliminate disparities, and create equal opportunities in all areas of American life. The absence also contributes to conflicting views on race and racial progress help by Americans of color and white Americans (p. 3).

Both Katz and this report confirm what participants experienced. Their limited contact with people of Color seemed to contribute to their initial inability to understand marginalization.

In the present study, participants, as they matured, attempted not to isolate themselves from people of Color. Their critical incidents involved directly or indirectly experiences with

people of Color. They did not grow in their understanding of racial privilege through theoretical applications or abstractions. They learned primarily, sometimes painfully, when they were in direct contact with people of Color. In many cases, it was a person of Color who *taught* them. This *mentorship* seemed critical to their understanding. I'm not suggesting that it is the responsibility of people of Color to teach White people about racism, but participants attributed much of their learning to their level of engagement and deep relationships they had with a few people of Color. This study was designed to look closely at elements of experience that influenced participants' understanding of their racial privilege. I suggest that increased understanding of racial privilege will not happen without meaningful and engaging experiences with people of Color.

#### *Research Question Two*

Research question two, *What are the essential characteristics or elements of an experience that cause a change in consciousness about White privilege*, was intended to examine stories of the past and identify common elements among the participants in their racial awareness and growth. As participants shared their stories, elements surfaced that were common. Critical incidents that were transformative seemed to have elements that converged upon each other and created the synergy necessary for change. Participants shared how they developed a self reflective process that was critical in nature and was used specifically for reflection about racial privilege. Empathy appeared to be a necessary component of growth. Additionally, participants seemed to struggle with their own intention of not wanting to harm people of Color and their belief that other White people were inherently good and did not want inflict individual injustices upon people of Color.

#### *Convergence of Critical Incident Elements*

Qualitative researchers engage in study to learn or discover, generally through inductive methods, rather than confirm what they already know or suspect, through deductive methods. Although I entered into the research with the qualitative ideal, I did imagine that I would find separate elements of racialized experiences that could be combined to magically bestow on White people a level of consciousness needed to interrupt or eradicate racism. I found no magical or miraculous solution. I did find what appeared to be common elements within participants' stories that contributed to and influenced their growth and development in their understanding of racial privilege. More importantly and perhaps surprisingly, I found that these elements did not exist in isolation. Instead, there seemed to be a convergence of these elements that, when combined, fostered growth. As explained in data analysis, these elements were: 1) a critical incident that fit what Transformative Learning theorists label a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000) and challenged the participants previous assumptions; 2) each involved a mentor-type relationship with a person of Color; 3) participants experienced some kind of moral or ethical anguish or regret; and 4) each participant had a relational nature and deep commitment to the growth of themselves and others.

The four elements above, suggested a process that was not linear or recursive. This process appeared to be both part of the innate nature of the participant, and something deliberately pursued by them. I found it difficult to separate and study the elements in isolation. All the elements appeared to be present in the critical incidents described, however the proportion or degree to which they were present varied. At no time could I distinguish one component that appeared to be causal or appeared to the exclusion of all others. Instead, there seemed to be a convergent but unpredictable nature to the elements involved in any particular critical incident.

*Deep Reflection*

These participants were deep thinkers and observers. They reflected not only on their own behavior, but on the impact their behavior had on others around them. This was not accidental; they deliberately engaged in a reflective routine. Each created a different kind of process but a deliberate and learned routine was the common factor. Louise seemed to have the most developed process and described it as “going to the mirror.” Sadie spoke in more general terms about how reflection was just a part of how she lived in the world. Rocco did not name it even though it was present in all the stories he shared. All the other participants share, in some degree, the reflective process. The reflection was repetitive, explicit, involved dialogue with themselves or someone else. These seemed to emanate from a deep, inner place, and ended with a change in future behavior. Reflection was not limited to racial privilege and in fact started as they evaluated their own behavior in other aspects of their lives. These participants applied this reflective process consciously to the critical racialized incidents they experienced. This reflection is noteworthy because of its deliberate and pervasive nature.

Participants spoke candidly about how they came to understand their privilege through deep reflection, and ultimately turned the lens inward upon their own behavior. Their understanding and growth seemed to come, in part, from their assumption of responsibility for their own actions and thoughts. In order to do that, they appeared to focus and think about themselves. I think that can be a problematic exercise. In order to understand my Whiteness, I have to learn about Whiteness. Simultaneously, I focus on Whiteness to the exclusion and potential dismissal of the real experiences of people of

Color...once again. If we are not careful, it can be a vain exercise in which White people see themselves as individual victims and not part of a larger, systemic perpetration of oppression.

### *Deep Empathy*

As participants reflected about the critical racialized experiences they had, they had experiences in which they were the only or among relatively few White people surrounded by people of Color. This appeared to cause them to imagine what it would be like to not be White. The act of thinking and *placing* oneself in another's circumstances was the way in which they learned empathy. They imagined, they felt, and they questioned how their experiences and racial understanding might be different from people of Color. Additionally, participants appeared to come to a point at which they believed the stories of racism told by people of Color. This seemed to be an important aspect of empathy development. Participants shared how they did not always believe what a person of Color told them. They would often attribute what the person of Color was experiencing to another social dynamic instead of racism. As they reflected back on the experience, they were often regretful that they had not understood. This seemed to cause distress and sometimes they spoke of wanting to go back and apologize.

I think it is in imagining the struggle of another person that we begin to appreciate how circumstances shape other realities. It is in feeling discomfort, pain, and/or sadness that we begin to appreciate how circumstances build upon each other to create resentment and pain that can't be explained by a single experience. It is in questioning the normalcy of our own experiences that we begin to believe that multiple realities can co-exist, and to believe that no reality is less valuable than another. Empathy is created with our hearts, not our minds.

Howard (2006) describes empathy this way, “Empathy requires the suspension of assumptions, the letting go of ego, and the release of the privilege of non-engagement” (p. 77). Participants in the present study learned to embrace engagement, and risked the safety of their self-images, or egos, in order to develop new understandings. As they described, this path sometimes caused them distress. Howard continues with “In this sense, empathy is the antithesis of dominance” and “Empathy is a healing response because it allows us as Whites to step outside of dominance, to see our social position in a new light, and connect with the experience of others who see this river of diversity from a different perspective” (p. 77). In the stories of these participants, it was not in one experience or two experiences, but multiple experiences over a long period of time, in which they learned empathy.

While I think one can experience a single circumstance and extrapolate or transfer that to many experiences, at some point, one has to rely on the voices and stories of those who are directly involved to truly expand understanding. As a White person, I can experience a space that is dominated by people of Color and walk away with a slight understanding of how it might feel to be in spaces dominated by White people. I can never fully extrapolate those feelings to situations that people of Color deal with on a daily basis. I can imagine but I cannot *know*. The risk for White people is to stop there and assume because I can *imagine* one experience, I can *know* the totality of the experience of domination and oppression. I think at some point, I must learn to listen, believe, and trust in experiences I can never possibly have, affect those who do.

Additionally, empathy developed from the relationships that these participants formed with people of Color. It was through ongoing dialogue and discussion that experiences were shared and knowledge transferred. Each participant seemed to have at least one mentor of

Color that was essential in their increased awareness and consciousness of racism and racial privilege. In the President's Initiative on Race (1998), they describe in chapter one how they "...used dialogue as a tool for finding common ground" (p. 2).

Participants described three types of or circumstances in dialogue that facilitated their growth and understanding. In the first type, participants sought out a person of Color to ask questions or reflect on a critical incident. The second happened unintentionally. Sometimes while engaged in a conversation about another topic, race would surface and the discussion would turn into a critical incident for the participant. The last was humor which became an element of dialogue that seemed to strengthen the bond of mentorship and/or friendship. Each of these types of dialogue seemed to add to the participant's understanding of racism and racial privilege. The literature confirms that White people often learn about racial issues from people of Color (Tatum, 1997). What I found interesting though, was the use of humor. In some cases, it was humor directed at the differences between White people and members of a specific racial group, for example, you're so White. In other cases it was making fun of a racial stereotype, for example how White people think all Black people look alike. When participants talked about how they could laugh at themselves and with a person of Color about a racial issue, it seemed to ease their discomfort. It appeared that humor was a marker for a change in the level of intimacy with the person of Color. This level of intimacy also seemed to have an influence on their ability to extrapolate or generalize experiences which appeared to be one way they developed empathy.

### *Research Question Three*

The third research question, *In what ways or to what degree does a change in consciousness regarding White privilege serve as a catalyst to action*, was intended to find

what, if any, impact the past had on future behavior. The work of raising one's consciousness about racial privilege appears to be an ongoing process and one that is further complicated because there is no determination of completion. Additionally, the intention of the White person seems to impact behavior and action.

### *Growth is Ongoing*

Participants demonstrated a reflective nature and conversed about how their understanding of racial privilege evolved over time. They believed themselves to be more racially aware and observant at the present time than when they were younger. Although the stories did not unfold in a linear fashion, when I re-wrote the interviews as narratives, I did some sequencing of events chronologically. This allowed me to gain a clearer understanding of the scope of the participant's growth and understanding. The patterns that emerged for participants aligned with my own experiences in that I have gone back and forth between times of great awareness and social action to naïveté and obliviousness.

I think the demonstration of this fluid growth is in the discussion introduced earlier about the Black/White binary. I chose participants for this study because they appeared to have a well developed consciousness of racism and their racial privilege. Yet when the conversation began, they reverted to previous habits of thinking by speaking only of Black people. I think that demonstrated a level of obliviousness which seemed inconsistent with their level of general awareness. As the conversation continued and participants acknowledged their growth in consciousness, their rhetoric expanded to include and acknowledge more than just the African American experience. I think that demonstrated the level of awareness that I used to determine they were appropriate for the study. Additionally each spoke of how they have taken public and/or private anti-racist stands. That too, seems

consistent with the level of social consciousness I used to determine their appropriateness for the study. Helms (1995) states that “most individuals develop more than one status, and if multiple statuses exist, then they can operate in concert” (p. 188). This operation in concert means that once we learn or move from one stage or status to another, we can flow back and forth between ones that came before. This raises some interesting questions. If these statuses work in concert, can we revert back to a less evolved status and stay there? Can we get stuck or forget something we once learned? Can White people continue to be oblivious even after they have learned what obliviousness means?

Awareness and action built upon each other and grew over time for these participants. This pattern of growth seemed erratic, unpredictable, and inconsistent; this wasn't a smooth process. The nature of this growth may have been because of the reflection and support from people of Color the participant received after the critical incident. Although some participants were able to reflect on their behavior when they were involved in the critical incident, most reflection took place afterwards. Sometimes it was years after. The real significance here is that the growth was fluid, yet always in a more enlightened or evolved direction. These participants began with the Black/White binary but they did not end the conversation there. Reflection, experience, empathy, and mentoring changed their awareness and behavior. Consciousness of racial privilege and actions towards social justice increased as their experiences multiplied. Education, as in so many instances, changed thinking and behavior about racial privilege for these participants and for me.

### *The Good Intentions of White People*

Does intention matter? In the long run, does my intent to do no harm somehow make up for the harm I do? Charles R. Lawrence, III (1987) asked the question, “does the black

child in a segregated school experience less stigma and humiliation because the local school board did not consciously set out to harm her” (p. 319)? Participants demonstrated moral distress in some of their stories. In fact some stories continued to be emotional as they retold them. Some felt shame about past actions or inactions and some felt great regret and a desire to go back and make things right. Beth spoke about how she believes that most people want to do the right thing and the implication was that the right thing was not to be racist. Beth believed that most White people don’t want to be labeled racist and the participants in this study were no exception. Most of the participants acknowledged that this was a difficult subject to talk about and those that had not met me before said that it was particularly difficult to tell some of their stories to a stranger. Sadie mentioned a number of times that she was willing to tell me her stories because she trusted the person who referred her to me. She hoped that this research would help with some answers *and* she admitted that it was embarrassing to tell me these things about herself. Interestingly, all participants had reflected on their behavior but most acknowledged that actually talking about those reflections and admitting their behavior was unsettling.

I think reconciling our intention and our behavior will be one of the enduring struggles we face as White people. As so many authors have pointed out, as a White person, my racism is inescapable as much as the air I breathe is essential for my existence. What I found curious about these participants and myself is the amount and degree of regret and shame we feel about our racism. If I inherited this condition and could do nothing to alter it prior to today, why do I feel so embarrassed and distressed about it? Somehow I must find peace between my inheritance and my legacy. I am not responsible for what my ancestors did but I can assume responsibility to change the legacy I leave those who come after me.

## Implications

Critical Race Theorists suggest that we have spent the years since the Civil Rights Movement waiting for White people to understand racism and racial privilege and to take action that will dismantle it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). These scholars further suggest that this strategy has not been successful or has had only pockets of success. White people tend only to work on racial dynamics when it serves their interest. The challenge, it seems, is to either create the self-interest in White people or develop strategies that are not dependent on interest but prod White people into doing the work regardless of their self-interest. As a lone White adult educator, I may not be able to change the world dynamics of racism and racial privilege. I can, however, take some of the findings of this study and change my pedagogical practices within the learning environments I influence. This can assist White adult learners to increase their level of racial privilege consciousness and be moved to act on that knowledge.

Participants of the study learned about racism and racial privilege over time and through reflection and mentoring. If this is learned behavior, we can work to construct that knowledge within adult education settings. The way in which this knowledge is constructed has two implications relevant to pedagogical practices. As White adult educators, we can influence the learning environments within our communities of practice in such a way as to model increased racial awareness and promote social action. Additionally, we can institute pedagogical practices with White adult learners that will facilitate an increased consciousness of their racial privilege and reflection on critical racialized experiences.

*Modeling Racial Awareness and Social Action*

As Critical Race Theorists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) have concluded, we cannot wait for the law to change socio-cultural norms. We, as White adult educators, can take responsibility on a grassroots level to create that change. We can begin with ourselves, and extend that social change to adults in learning environments. The most influence I can have on teaching adults about their Whiteness is to engage in the process myself. The implication for White adult educators is to use the elements of the critical incidents that surfaced with participants to guide that process. This would mean I continue to educate myself about privilege, pursue contact and dialogue with people of Color, involve myself in explicit discussions with other White people about race, racism, racial privilege, and supremacy, and engage in deliberate, sustained reflection.

In Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher, Brookfield (1995) encourages educators to engage in specific strategies to assist in their ongoing growth and development. He is careful to note the difference between reflection and critical reflection. “Reflection is not, by definition critical. It is quite possible to teach reflectively while focusing solely on the nuts and bolts of classroom process” (p. 8). He explains that one can think about staggering breaks to capitalize on learners’ attention, what electronic equipment can be most useful in the delivery of content, and how we determine course completion standards. He acknowledges the importance of such reflection but distinguishes it from critical reflection. “Reflection becomes critical when it has two distinctive purposes. The first is to understand how considerations of power undergird, frame, and distort educational processes and interactions. The second is to question assumptions and practices that seem to make our teaching lives easier but actually work against our own best long-term interests” (p. 8).

White adult educators can conduct racial discourse without reference to the power structures that maintain and perpetuate them. Without that inclusion, we can do more harm than good, because we can validate underlying assumptions of White adult learners about racial privilege and supremacy. In order for us to teach about White privilege, we must wrestle with, and understand how these power structures play out in our lives. “We teach best what we have most to learn” (Bach, 1977). This is a philosophical cornerstone of my own practice. It reminds me that I can only teach to the degree that I have explored, for myself, that which I am teaching.

#### *Practices for Teaching White Adult Learners about Racial Privilege*

Participants gave many examples of experiences they had with people of Color over time. These experiences were startling to them because they were not congruent with their assumptions of themselves or other people. Participants saw or heard other White people act in ways they judged to be racists or they acted in those ways themselves. Upon reflection and information, for these participants this context was usually provided from a person of Color, they came to a different understanding of racism and racial privilege. It seems there are three implications in this growth process. White adult learners need experiences with people of Color, opportunity for reflection, and additional context.

#### *Critical Incidents*

These participants began with critical incidents that were just moments in time but grew into experiences they eventually sought out. As they grew, both developmentally and with time, they initiated experiences that would continue their growth. If White adult educators take to heart what Critical Race Theorists believe, then our mission to dismantle racism is clear. This means that we would assist White adult learners to have and initiate

experiences in which their assumptions about race, racism, racial privilege, and supremacy are challenged.

### *Reflective Process*

The formation of their reflective process was deliberate yet somewhat random, in other words the process was not guided. Participants just happened upon a system that worked for them. As White adult educators, we can assist White learners to create a deliberate reflective process and to practice that. Critical analysis involves taking individual experiences and seeking out systemic causes. When assisting White adult learners in the creation of their reflective process, it will be important that this component of critical analysis is embedded in the process.

### *Context*

These participants needed both reflection and context. They gained context through deep dialogue with people of Color who served in a mentoring capacity. These mentors spoke of their racialized experiences and how deeply affected they were by our racist systems. Participants needed this additional information in order for transformation to occur. The critical incidents caused the disorienting dilemma that Mezirow (2000) describes. The additional context assisted participants to reconcile their previous assumptions with the stories of how racism affected the mentors they learned to trust. Critical Race Theorists suggest that these stories or narratives and counter narratives give voice to those who have been oppressed and marginalized. These stories also provided context and assisted participants to grow beyond their own knowledge and believe in the experiences of the mentors they cared about. White adult educators can provide this context. We, White people, can stop placing the burden of change on people of Color. In the past, people of

Color have been the victims of oppression and have been relied upon by their oppressors to teach about oppression. As White adult educators, we can assume this burden through education. We can provide new historical context by expanding the Eurocentric perspective into a global perspective.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the outcome of the study, there are several directions additional research could explore. I think it could be useful to interview the same White people more than once to uncover additional layers to the critical incidents or racialized experiences. A more deliberate sampling of participants, namely White adult educators who are explicitly teaching about racial privilege in business and industry, community literacy, and higher education might suggest different implications for adult education pedagogy. It may be of benefit to investigate other strategies for teaching about racial privilege in a variety of learning environments. The participant sample in this study was small. It might be useful to expand the number in future studies. The additional data that more participants would add on critical reflection may provide the means to refine or enhance this skill.

My own research interests continue as I imagine what the tenets of Critical Race Theory as units of analysis might reveal when applied to these participant stories. I am also interested in how we can assist White people to expand their understanding of racial identity and the dichotomy of, being enlightened and good or being backward and bad. The Black/White binary and how that may be perpetuated in the language that adult educators use would be of interest to me. I am a critically reflective teacher and would like to do more research and perhaps collaborative work with other reflective teachers in an action research project around teaching racial privilege.

### Concluding Remarks

This study explored the phenomenon of racial privilege as experienced by White people. I was interested in how we, White people, come to understand our racial privilege and what action we take once we have an increased knowledge and consciousness. What I found was that the White participants in this study shared a similar process in the growth of consciousness and that resulted in either private or public anti-racist stands. Additionally, I found that even though participants were in the upper stages of White identity, they continued to fall prey to thinking that inhibits racial understanding. It suggests that dismantling racism and racial privilege requires extreme vigilance about our own behavior. The pedagogical implications for White adult educators is that we adopt practices of critical reflection that model racial awareness and social action. Additionally, we can use our learning environments to assist White adult learners to also reflect on their racial identity and influence their racial interactions.

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