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Vickie S. King

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THE CONFRONTATION OF WHITE SUPREMACY:
A CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING GROUP EXPERIENCE

by

VICKIE S. KING

(Under the Direction of Delores D. Liston)

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the responses of six white female high school teachers in a small, rural community in southern Georgia to discussions about and challenges to their belief systems concerning racial issues and the racial climate of their school. These women were part of a multi-session consciousness raising focus group experience. The theoretical framework for this study was black feminist theory. Black feminist theorists' emphasis of the importance of lived experience and dialogue in questioning the structures of dominant powers was an important component of the study. Qualitative research was employed in an effort to capture the fullness of the experience of the participants. The analysis and presentation of the data and findings involved biographical sketches and thematic patterns drawn from the participants. White identity development models were used during the analysis of the data. The importance of critical self-reflection and culturally relevant pedagogy was also discussed. Connections between the participants' lived experiences and the stage of development of their white identity and their responses to these challenges to their belief systems was evident. This connection illustrates the need for a more systematic approach to racial awareness for pre- and in-service teachers.

INDEX WORDS: Consciousness-raising focus groups, Black feminist theory, White teachers, White identity development, and Cross-cultural relationships

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A CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING GROUP EXPERIENCE

by

VICKIE S. KING

B.S. Ed., University of Georgia, 1987

M. Ed., Georgia State University, 1991

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in
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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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by

Vickie S. King

Major Professor: Delores D. Liston
Committee: Ming Fang He
Yasar Bodur
Frank Erik Brooks

Electronic Version Approved:
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving husband, Jim, who consistently supports my efforts in all areas of growth...including this work. I appreciate and love you with my whole heart. I also dedicate this dissertation to my son, Turner, and my daughter, Madison. The two of you are the greatest joys in my life. For both of you, I wish lives rich with meaning and purpose, and the recognition of your own worth as well as the worth of others.

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CHAPTER ONE: PERCEPTION CONSTRUCTED

Formals to Focus Groups: An Introduction of Inquiry

In Spring 2010 many students at South Georgia High School, like juniors and seniors across the nation were preparing for their high school prom. However, the process for the students at South Georgia High School (pseudonym) involved a unique step. During early Spring, the principal invited all juniors and seniors to a meeting in the cafeteria. At this meeting the students were asked to vote for their choice of how to organize the Junior-Senior prom and senior recognition walk (an entrance walk seniors and their dates) for the 2010 year. Until this year, there had been two proms and associated walks. For over fifty years, the white students of our school have held a private prom and senior walk. During most of those years African American students also held their private prom and walk. Eleven years ago, an effort was made by the school system to attempt an integration of the two proms. This plan included a school sponsored dance for juniors and seniors and a recognition walk for seniors and their dates. The year the school prom began, the private African American prom ended...however the private white prom has continued. During Spring 2010, the students were asked to revisit the decision to continue this tradition. A vote was taken. The secret ballot choices included: 1) continue separate private and school proms complete with separate senior walks, 2) continue separate private and school proms, but have one united senior walk, or 3) have one prom and senior walk held at the school and discontinue the private prom and private walk. The vote was close, but the only integration for the 2010 prom season was the senior walk. A united integrated senior walk was seen by many as a small victory. The private, and traditionally white prom, continued to be held at the local Community House;

while the school, and traditionally African American, prom was held in the school's cafeteria. Sadly, by the time the actual proms took place, the private white contingent had added a private senior walk back to their agenda. Thankfully, an overwhelming majority of our white students chose to take part in the school's senior walk before being whisked away to their private affair. The existence of these segregated proms in the 2009-2010 school year (my son's senior year), speaks to the progress and lack thereof, in the area of race relations in our community...a community which began integration of its public schools with the 1971-1972 school year (ironically, the year I entered the system as a first grader).

This school system and its community serve as the backdrop for my research. My research involves the formation of a consciousness-raising focus group of 6 white, female teachers from this small rural high school in southern Georgia. The homogeneous grouping promotes more comfortable, focused, and frank discussions among group members (Michael & Conger, 2009; Morgan, 1998; Tatum, 1997), and was therefore used in participant selection for this research. (The use of an all-white, female group is discussed further in the Chapter Three.) The number of group members was small in an effort to focus on the depth of the group members' personal experiences. Participants engaged in a group discussion concerning general racial issues and the specific racial climate of our high school during the initial group meeting. The subsequent meeting was approximately three hours in duration and included the viewing of *The Essential Blue Eyed* (2004), a video documentary concerning Jane Elliott's Blue Eyed/Brown Eyed experiment. After viewing the video, participants engaged in a discussion of racial issues. I also shared a list of white privileges (McIntosh, 1990) with group members and ask that

they keep a log listing instances in which they discern white privilege in action over the next couple of weeks. An individual interview was conducted with each participant within two weeks after the video was viewed. When all individual interviews were completed, the group met for a final discussion which lasted approximately two hours. I expected some teachers to modify their perception of racial issues in general (and issues at our school in specific) after viewing the video, completing the log, and participating in the discussions. I also expected that some teachers would exhibit some signs of disequilibrium, such as guilt and/or avoidance, when confronted by the information in the video and discussions.

My research question was:

How do white teachers respond to discussions about and challenges to their belief systems concerning racial issues and the racial climate of their school?

I began this research with an interest in the emotional and intellectual reactions and responses of the teachers. Will they accept, modify, or dismiss the challenges? How will they interpret this process? How have their life experiences shaped the lens through which they perceive racial issues? What themes will be generated by their discussions? My research included discussions concerning sensitive racial issues which are made more sensitive when discussed in relationship to group members' own personal and professional experiences. An inductive, generative approach of qualitative inquiry was utilized during data analysis and the presentation of the data. This approach was employed in an effort to present a more comprehensive view of the participants' conceptualization of their experiences.

During this study, special attention was given to the starting points of many of these teachers. I expected the recognition of white supremacy as one of the most basic causes of educational inequity to be uncomfortable for many of the participants. Ladson-Billings (2006) describes how some people deal with feelings of anger, confusion, guilt and even outrage “because they receive information about inequity, racism, and social injustice in ways that destabilize their sense of themselves” (p. 38). This destabilization must be met with an understanding of the reaction of white guilt and a commitment to a humanistic, liberating approach to teaching. A humanistic approach demands that group members be respected for their unique value as humans who react and interact with the world based on their own unique understanding of themselves, others and the world. It was, and continues to be, important to respect each group member’s process of discovery as a unique accumulation of multiple, textured and varied life experiences and perspectives. In order that this experience was one of positive growth, it was imperative that group members felt they were heard and their ideas respected. The emotional and cognitive dissonance encountered by participants needed to be seen as a challenge and not a threat. J. D. Allen (2000) explains, “an experience that is different, but not threatening, seems best in creating a more tolerant view of diversity among groups and individuals” (p. 5). The process of this research worked as an invitation for the participants to critically examine the construction of their/our own views of race related issues. The commitment to a humanistic, liberating approach (for the purpose of this research) basically included the intent to liberate our minds from racist colonization by an imperialist education, the refusal to willfully impose racist cultural domination via education onto our students, and a reliance upon the praxis of problem-posing education for the process of this

decolonization. Near the end of this chapter, these ideas will be discussed further in congruence with the work of Paulo Freire, but first I offer a discussion of the power of perception informed by a multidimensional position.

A Struggle for the Decolonization of the Mind

In his seminal book, *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903/1994), W.E.B. DuBois offers the idea of a double-consciousness. He explains, “it is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (1903/1994, p. 2). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2003) explains this concept as not “a pathetic state of marginalization and exclusion, but rather as a transcendent position allowing one to see and understand positions of inclusion and exclusion – margins and mainstreams” (p. 403). Whites are rarely forced to view situations from such a multidimensional position. Without such experiences, Whites must consciously endeavor to gain the insight offered by a transcendent position. Through the fallacy of white supremacy, our society is grounded in the notion that the white male perception of the world is the most accurate. For antiracist Whites, the challenge of vigilant questioning of position and perception is mandatory in striving toward a more comprehensive understanding of “margins and mainstream.” Ladson-Billings (2003) explains, working toward the development of a worldview that differs from the dominant worldview “requires active intellectual work on the part of the knower” (p. 399). Yet, schools continue to “propagate and nurture whiteness by providing students with a steady diet of white ideology” (George, 2006, p.51). Our educational system includes a majority of white middleclass teachers and a growing population of students of color (Delpit, 1995). In order that students be welcomed into a classroom that reflects their diversity, it is imperative that teachers

become aware of their own acceptance of the dominant worldview and the power and privilege born of a white supremacist ideology that gives structure to that view.

The decolonization of the minds of educators is a theme in much of the critical writings that concern education (Apple, 2006; Delpit, 1995; Freire, 1998; Gay, 2000; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings & Tate 2006; West, 2001). As we come to recognize the danger of the passive acceptance of culturally based (and biased) standards and theories being applied to all people, we must work past this discomfort of destabilization in the pursuit of more socially just approaches to education. Gay and Kirkland (2003) are among the critical educators who work to

help preservice and inservice teachers to understand what they consider “just the way things are” or “the right way to behave” are, in fact, culturally determined standards of behavior, and that students of different cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds may ascribe to very different ones. (p. 186)

When teachers enforce these culturally biased standards they are, in essence, teaching as if all students “are, or should be, both white and middle class” (Irvine, 2003, p. xvii). It is imperative that teachers move beyond this limited view of reality. Becoming open to the development of a critical cultural consciousness is an important step toward expanding one’s worldview. For many white people, the ideas of racism and personal accountability have been casually dismissed with simple statements concerning what they see as a lack of personal complicity with racist actions (“I don’t tell racist jokes... or... “I have black friends.”). The resistance within this casual dismissal is a passive closing of the door to critical thought. My intentions during this research included the hope that the video,

dialogue, and activity involved in this consciousness-raising focus group would no longer allow the participants to thoughtlessly refuse critical thought on the matter of racism, but would at least open a door for their own work toward a critical cultural consciousness. My research offered participants the opportunity to engage in discussion and thought concerning cultural consciousness specifically related to white supremacy, racism, and our school. I have had both a personal and professional interest in cultural consciousness (my own and that of others) for many years.

The Merging of Two Journeys

For the past several years I have been working toward my doctorate in curriculum studies. The Curriculum Studies program at Georgia State University has been filled with philosophies and theories which offer explanations of cultural and educational systems. I found that my life experiences contrasted with some of these explanations, while supporting others. I rejected some of the theories and philosophies because they did not resonate with my experiences and logic. I took in others through assimilation or accommodation. As I near the end of the curriculum studies program I can see how my personal journey and my theoretical journey have merged. This merger is fluid and inclusive, and of course, ever a process.

Personal Path

I have spent the majority of my life in a rural area in southern Georgia. I currently serve as the school counselor at the same high school from which I graduated. The only time I have spent living apart from this 2-redlight community consisted of a 12-year period following high school graduation. The majority of this 12-year period was spent in Atlanta, Georgia where I taught elementary school. I served as an elementary

school counselor during my final year in Atlanta. My time as an educator in the Atlanta area was a time of growth both personally and professionally.

I came to Atlanta one year before the “teacher transfer lottery” of the DeKalb County School System. DeKalb County is considered part of the metro-Atlanta area of Georgia. It is home to people of great diversity. At the time I began teaching in the county’s school system, there was a significant racial difference between those students in the southern end of the county and those in the northern end. The northern end was marked by large homes, high-end specialty stores and white residents. The southern end was marked by older abandoned buildings, liquor stores, pawn shops, and residents of color. The year I joined DeKalb’s teaching force, younger more inexperienced teachers were more likely to be placed in positions in the southern end of the county. This practice led to an extremely unbalanced level of teacher experience across the county. The following year DeKalb’s school system used a teacher lottery to even the level of teaching experience throughout the county. Teachers in the northern part of the county with more years of experience were placed in the lottery system and those chosen by lottery were relocated to the southern schools of DeKalb County.

Being a beginning teacher the year before the lottery, I was automatically placed in a school in the southern end of DeKalb County. The school I taught in served an almost exclusively black population (African Americans and Haitian refugees). The next year, DeKalb County Schools began to reshuffle their experienced teachers to the southern end of the county. This reshuffling caused an uproar among the experienced teachers of the north and this drama was played out on the television newscast nightly. There was little attention to what this coverage meant to the students and even the teachers of southern

DeKalb. There was often a quiet resentment from the southern teachers and students toward many of the teachers who were transferred into *our* schools. We were the underdogs and many of us took great pride in our students and our teaching. Over the following six years, I taught in schools which served an overwhelmingly black population in DeKalb. I felt bonded to the students and their families. My humanistic philosophy led me to have caring, fluid relationships with my students which permeated the walls between the schools and the communities. At that time, I would have viewed myself as, at least a non-racist teacher, if not an anti-racist teacher. The following year, my new position would lead me into a much deeper understanding of racism.

I finished my school counseling degree and took my first position as a school counselor. My assignment was an elementary school in a poverty stricken area of southern DeKalb. The school was known for being tough, but the African American principal had a reputation for being tougher. She barely managed to reach 5 feet in height with her heels. She was an impeccable dresser with a knack for dressing with power. She had high expectations for her teachers and her students. Her no-nonsense presence demanded that both teachers and students guard against misbehavior. As I began my first position as a school counselor, I was excited to be working with her. This excitement was quickly drained. I soon began to surmise that the respect shown to her by students and teachers was respect born of fear. I spent the first half of the school year attempting to set up a counseling program and prove myself to the students, teachers, and the principal. I soon found that winning over the students and teachers was much easier than gaining the principal's respect. When I offered new ideas, she was quick to explain why they would

not work. When a teacher complimented me on my program, she ignored the comments. I felt as though I had no chance of gaining the respect of this person.

Finally, after leaving one of our weekly administrative meetings feeling disappointed once again because my ideas were not taken seriously by our leader, I spoke with our part-time counselor about my disillusionment. Ms. Reddick was a black counselor a few years older than me. She and I had developed a fairly close professional relationship. Ms. Reddick asked me to describe how I felt I was being treated by our principal. I explained that my ideas were automatically not accepted by her. She absolutely disregarded me as a person and a professional without consideration for what I had to offer this school. I explained that even when I followed her directions directly, she would condescend. Then Ms. Reddick asked why I felt this was happening. I told her that I had no idea except that the principal had decided early on that she had no respect for me. Ms. Reddick shook her head and said, "Have you been white so long that you don't know racism when you see it?" This remark shook me to the core. I had not considered racism as a possibility. Having enjoyed a very positive relationship with two black principals in the past, I was not expecting anything less from this principal. Ms. Reddick said, "Let's put my theory to the test. I will become your mouthpiece at the administrative meetings. When you have an idea, give it to me before the meetings and I will present it." It worked. All of a sudden my ideas were getting rave reviews from our boss. After another co-worker confirmed Ms. Reddick's assertion, I began to believe that racism was in fact at the root of my problem. Putting a name to my oppressive experience gave some relief. Having a trusted partner with whom I could discuss the circumstances and ask for help was invaluable. As we neared the end of the year, I told her that I would be returning

to my hometown the following year. Ms. Reddick, who often looked at life from a Christian perspective, told me that she had expected that God would not put me through the trials of this year without expecting me to use the important lessons I had learned.

She was correct in saying I had learned important lessons that year. My two-hour daily commute had offered me a great deal of time to reflect on my situation. I contemplated the power of oppression. I could see and feel its effects on my emotional wellbeing, the way I viewed myself and the world, my professional actions, and the professional expectations I had for myself. I was amazed at the changes I felt even after I was able to name the issue. Even as I recognized that the racial oppression with which I dealt was restricted to one specific area of my life, I could still feel its weight. I had the opportunity to leave that world behind every day when I left work. Even when I felt the suffocating restrictions of oppression within the walls of our school, I knew that ultimately our society lifted those restrictions for me and actually added the privilege of white supremacy. These experiences and revelations helped me to understand, in a very limited way, the power and violence racism. This individual epiphany combined with other life experiences to promote an interest in antiracist work within my role as a school counselor.

Academic Path

When I walked into my first curriculum studies class, I was primed for the study of cultural issues and multicultural education. As a former classroom teacher and a current school counselor, my foundation has been rooted in a humanistic view of the process of education. William Ayers (2006) explains, “As researchers and humanists, we must struggle to approach others as the active knowledge-creators and meaning-makers that

they are, as agents and experts on their own lives; we approach ourselves as works-in-progress, too, both incomplete and provisional” (pp. 84-85). Respect for the creative process within individuals allows an educator to value and dignify students while pressing them toward new meanings. My teacher preparation courses at the University of Georgia had been filled with the idea that students were not blank slates, but instead brought innumerable life experiences into the classroom. We were told that it was our job to make connections with their life experiences and to use those connections to help them to learn. My experiences in the classroom taught me that making those connections between the students’ lives and the curriculum not only helped them to learn, but also help me to bond with them on a more personal level. It is truly difficult to get to know individual children well, and not have respect for them as problem-solvers and meaning-makers in their worlds.

As I began working toward a postgraduate degree in curriculum studies, I knew my passion would lie in the area of multicultural education. I especially found home in the works of critical theorists such as Paulo Freire (1996, 1998, 2005/1970), Cornel West (1999, 2001), and bell hooks (1989, 1994, 1995, 2001, 2003). These and other scholars gave depth and organization to my worldview. Specifically, I found home in reading the works of Paulo Freire in the beginning of my postgraduate work. His respect for people as subjects and his optimistic view of the power of education both comforted and empowered me as an educator. His critical understanding of the misuse of power resonated with my experiences and observations as an educator. John Elias’ (1994) apt description of Freire’s philosophy speaks to the power of his contributions:

It begins with a *theory* of persons in the world. It is *humanist*, directed toward enabling persons to achieve their true destiny through freedom. It is *scientific*, aimed at the precise understanding of the world. It stresses the importance of *dialogue* between teachers and learners. It involves *praxis* or action-reflection to bring about changes in the world. It is *utopian* in that it entails the denouncing of an oppressive reality while proclaiming a non-oppressive reality. (p. 50)

Freire (2005) explains, “to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects,” thus dehumanizing them (p. 85). His humanistic liberation view of education treasures the ability of people to create their understanding of the world versus passively receive *the* understanding as given to them by those in power. This ideology which discourages the teacher from viewing students as objects, connected with the experiences of my personal journey.

Reading the words of critical theorist, Cornel West (2001) further enriched my world view. West offers a logical argument of the importance of racial issues with his text, *Race Matters*. His double entendre speaks to the complexity of the issues of race and the importance of their exploration. West offers valuable insight through his logical and critical discussions of our raced society. Perhaps the critical theorist whose work interests me the most is the prolific black feminist, bell hooks. Her passionate and unrelenting commentaries on issues of social justice and cultural consciousness have proven informative, and at times, painful for me. She stays faithful to her feminist label as she fights against oppression with a message deeply rooted in love. Her writings have often produced the destabilization of thought that causes me to self-reflect and revisit and refocus my personal and professional cultural consciousness. Through reading her works,

I have been drawn to views of black feminists and ultimately to the use of their theoretical ideas as the framework for my research.

Theoretical Framework

This research will examine issues related to racism and education. The critical view of racial constructs will be a key component of the investigation. The work of Black Feminists will structure much of the theoretical framework of this research. The epistemology of knowledge is an important consideration for this research and needs to be addressed before a discussion of the theoretical framing of this endeavor.

Research Epistemology

The context of the origin of knowledge for a researcher is of major significance when understanding her research. The impact of this context is the purpose of the inclusion of my autobiographical roots, both personal and academic, in the preceding section. This importance was again considered when deciding upon the theoretical framework which would best inform my work. The epistemological impact of race on my work was a major consideration. Scheurich and Young (1997) contend that there are racial biases in educational research epistemologies. This contention is:

based on the seminal, ground-breaking work of scholars of color, that we educational researchers are unintentionally involved, at the epistemological heart of our research enterprises, in a racism – epistemological racism – that we generally do not see or understand. Once we see and understand it, though, we cannot continue in our old ways. To do so would be to betray our fundamental commitment as educators and as educational researchers. (Scheurich & Young, 1997, p. 12)

Scheurich and Young urge researchers to look beyond the individual, institutional, and societal levels of racism to find the source of epistemological racism. The authors conclude that the primary base for this type of racism is found at the civilization level. Citing that the European and territorial expansions of the modernist period “was typically undertaken under the rationale of the supremacy of White civilization” (p. 7), the authors explain that a dominant worldview was constructed from the perception of white supremacy without insight from other perspectives. Scheurich and Young use the analogy of ill-fitting clothes to describe how scholars of color have had to “put on” the clothes of dominant epistemologies in their writings.

For the purpose of this research, I have chosen to wear the “clothes” of the counter-hegemonic epistemology of black feminist thought. However, I use a different analogy to describe my use of black feminist thought. When thinking of what the use of this theoretical framework means in the context of my (a white woman) research of racial issues, I am reminded of a common situation I observed while dining-out with my in-laws. We would often sit down at a restaurant and begin to peruse the menu. Inevitably, my father-in-law would ask my mother-in-law for her glasses. These were the lenses she used to view the world every day. She never failed to have them with her. Certainly, he could see the menu without her lenses. He might even be able to see dinner specials written in larger print, but he could not focus on the important details of the menu without them. He may not have been equipped to see perfectly through her lens; however, her lens did enhance his view. Likewise, my life experiences have not afforded me the lens of black feminist thought, but I recognize that this lens will bring the issues, nuances, and details of race more in focus for me. The glasses do not fit perfectly, but I am thankful to black

feminists, whose writings are leading me to perceive the world with more awareness of the racist assumptions with which I consciously and unconsciously live. At the same time I recognize the incompleteness of my awareness as I realize “being conscious can never mean being fully conscious – we are more or less conscious, contingently aware, and at the same time entirely incomplete” (Ayers, 2006, p. 84). Increasing my awareness is a battle toward a more fully conscious, critical view of the world. Critical theorists are constantly battling against epistemological racism by interrogating structures that have been formed by white supremacist thought (Bell, 1992; hooks, 1989, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2003; West 2001). Hopefully, my use of the lens of black feminist thought will help me to more critically and thoroughly examine the racial issues that will be confronted in this research experiment.

Black Feminist Theory

Mary McLeod Bethune began her 1933 speech, *A Century of Progress of Negro Women*, with the following words: “To Frederick Douglass is credited the plea that, ‘the Negro be not judged by the heights to which he is risen, but by the depths from which he has climbed.’ Judged on this basis, the Negro woman embodies one of the modern miracles of the New World” (Bethune, 2008, p. 122). Bethune’s words foreshadow the feelings of many black feminists during the beginning of the contemporary feminist movement. Bell hooks (1994) describes the frustration,

Again and again black female activists, scholars, and writers found ourselves isolated within feminist movement and often targets of misguided white women who were threatened by all attempts to deconstruct the category ‘woman’ or to bring a discourse on race into feminist scholarship. (p. 121)

Likewise, the work of these black women intellectuals of the 1970s and 1980s was met with resistance (Collins, 1991, Hernton, 1985), and sometimes “blatant antifeminism...of many black male thinkers” (hooks, 1994, p. 127). Collins (1991) explains,

The exclusion of Black women’s ideas from mainstream academic discourse and the curious placement of African-American women in both feminist and Black social and political thought has meant that Black women intellectuals have remained outsiders within all three communities. (p. 12)

However, Collins (1991) recognizes the benefits of this exclusion, as she asserts, “Black women remain outsiders within, individuals whose marginality provides a distinctive angle of vision on the theories put forth by such intellectual communities” (p. 12)

Black feminists speak from places of intersection with “multi-layers of oppression [which are] vividly represented by women of color” (Romany, 1997, p.21). This locale does not allow for essentializing, but rather pleads for an inclusive context. When introducing the writings of Critical Race Feminists, Adrien Wing (1997) states, “Women of color are not simply white women plus some ineffable and secondary characteristic, such as skin tone added on” (p. 3). Instead, these writings represent thought based upon “the lives of those who face multiple discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and class, revealing how all these factors interact within a system of white male patriarchy and racist oppression” (Wing, 1997, p. 3). I mention critical race feminism here because, like black feminist thought, it does take into consideration the highly textured nature of oppression and discrimination, and supports much of the thought framing my work. Anh Hoa (2003) offers a distinctive difference between the two bodies of work, stating:

I believe that the idea of “critical race feminism” can permit us to move beyond the black-white discourse. Critical race feminism can provide a more open and contested epistemological space to include not only the researches of black feminists but also other colored feminists, mixed-race feminists, as well as “white” feminists who are engaging in critical race analyses. (pp. 1-2)

The sphere of my research does focus on a black-white dichotomy. The work of women, such as bell hooks (1989, 1994, 2001, 2003) and Patricia Hill Collins (1991), (who recognized themselves as black feminists) helps me to better understand the issues of racism, discrimination, white supremacy and privilege in the specific context of the black-white relationship. Because of the influence of these theorists and the emphasis on black-white relationships in my research, I have chosen to use the label of black feminist theory. More precisely, I view my work as situated within black feminist theory nested within critical race feminism.

Basing theoretical thinking upon concrete, lived experiences is one of the basic principles of black feminist thought (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Other tenets include the importance of the use of dialogue, an emphasis on caring, and personal accountability (Collins, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994). These basic principles frame the purpose of finding meaning, the emergence of meaning, and the use of this meaning. The theories of the dominant hegemony did not offer black feminists a pattern of thought that reflected the truth they found within their daily lives. Instead, these scholars had to look within themselves and their lives to reflect upon meaning. “Personal testimony, personal experience, is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because it usually forms the base of our theory making...we engage in a critical process of

theorizing that enables and empowers” (hooks, 1994, p. 70). Ladson-Billings (1994) explains the power of hearing from those who have *lived* what they *know* –lived experience adding wisdom to knowledge. This distinction between knowledge and wisdom reminds me of a saying that my white grandmother and my friend’s black grandmother both used with frequency–“A heap see, but a mighty few know.” Making the connection between theory and real life is often the transformation of knowledge into wisdom.

The use of dialogue is primary in much of the work of black feminists (Collins, 1991; Gray, 2003; hooks, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1994). “The give and take of dialogue makes struggling together for meaning a powerful experience in self-definition and self-discovery” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 155). During the focus group discussions, the participants were encouraged to be respectful of each member’s expression of lived experiences, as well as individual understandings of and reactions to the issues of racism and white supremacy. The group members were encouraged to dialogue with each other as each of them defines and refines their own meanings. Whites are generally less experienced in discussions of racial topics than are people of color (Tatum, 1997). Because the participants in this study are all white, some discomfort in discussing the issues of white supremacy and racism was expected. This discomfort stems from various sources including: inexperience, shame, guilt, and for some a belief that the concerns are invalid. Whatever the source, this discomfort was met with encouragement and understanding.

The documentary video offered the participants an opportunity to watch as others talk about their experience of being confronted with racism. The opportunity to observe

the video participants in the documentary as they filter through their own discomfort and understanding served as a model for discussing issues in a relatively nonjudgmental, yet truly challenging discussion. As part of my training and experience in counseling, I have found the ability to recognize the line between challenging people's perceptions in a manner that leads toward introspection and thoughtful change and challenging people in a manner that causes them to be resistant and perhaps even regress, to be essential. This skill was valuable throughout this research. Davis and Wildman (1997), Sleeter (1994), and Thompson (2004) all explain the importance of Whites moving beyond ignorance, discomfort, and resistance and toward a knowledgeable and confident articulation of their own place in fighting against racism. Hopefully, the focus group experience has opened the door for movement in this direction by the group members.

A third precept of black feminist thought centers on caring. According to Collins (1991), "The ethic of caring suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process" (p. 15). Ladson-Billings (1994) reported that participants explicitly and implicitly discussed the importance of caring when her research involved groups which were exclusively women. The powerful link between teacher caring, culturally responsive teaching practices and student achievement has been discussed by Ladson-Billings (1994) and Gay (2000). For teachers, caring is illustrated by their use of high expectations and empowerment of students, responsiveness to students, and advocacy on behalf of students (Gay, 2000). Teachers who believe in the abilities of their students and act in ways that demonstrate a commitment to the students' wellbeing and success build a milieu which generates that wellbeing and success. According to Gay (2000), "The students feel a need to have a personal connection with teachers. This

happens when teachers acknowledge their presence, honor their intellect, respect them as human beings, and make them feel like they are important” (p. 49) The group participants’ expressions and interpretations of caring were recorded and analyzed. Participant caring was scrutinized for the above characteristics as noted in their comments during group discussions and individual interviews. During the analysis, I looked for themes such as: how the participant related her expectations of students, the participant’s responsiveness to the students, the boundaries of that responsiveness, and the participant’s level of accountability to her students.

A final tenet of black feminist thought addressed within the realm of this research is the principle of personal accountability. Personal accountability is especially present when people are offered a safe place for discussion of ideas and reactions. The participants will be encouraged to respectfully question or challenge ideas mentioned by other participants. Such challenges within groups are important steps toward more clearly understanding the thoughts of others, as well as, our own. During the individual interview, teachers were asked about the connections between their lives and the ideas expressed in the focus group. They were also asked to explain if and how they expect the experience in the focus group will change their lives personally or professionally.

The *clothes* or *lens* of black feminist thought has hopefully led me toward a more insightful approach to understanding the issues of race that were addressed within this study. Black feminist thought has enriched my perception of how issues of race are viewed and reacted to by the participants of this group. Black feminist thought has caused me to approach this research with a strong desire for critical consciousness, recognizing

the questioning begins within me and then flows into the examination of the data gathered from group participants.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PRICE OF PRIVILEGE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is a review of information pertinent to the context of this study of the issues of white supremacy, racism and education. This review will be divided into six sections: 1) a general discussion of white supremacy and privilege, 2) a brief history of white supremacy and its influence on our educational system, 3) an examination of white peoples' reactions when confronted with their own white identity and issues of white supremacy, 4) a description of stages of white identity development, 5) a discussion of studies concerning critically reflective thought and the promising work in the area of culturally relevant pedagogy, and 6) a discussion concerning related antiracism studies and training.

White Supremacy and Privilege

According to Wink (2000), there is a common misconception that “there is a limited amount of power; power is fixed and subtractive. If one person gets more, the fear is that someone else must get less” (p.113). This fear is perhaps a fear that drives racism and the sociopolitical construct of White Supremacy. Wink may or may not be correct in her assumption that power is neither fixed nor subtractive, but that argument would take us far outside of the realm of this paper. However, privilege is limited and subtractive by nature. In order that one person or group is given privilege, someone must carry the burden of paying for that privilege. Bell hooks (1989) explains, “The word racism ceased to be the term which best expressed for me exploitation of black people and the other people of color in this society and...I began to understand that the most useful term was white supremacy” (p. 112). The ideology of white supremacy was developed (and has

been maintained) in an effort to privilege Whites while discriminating against and marginalizing people of color. Thus people of color defray the overwhelming majority of the cost of white privilege.

Georgia Pappas (1995) makes an important distinction in understanding racism as she explains, “White people are taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage but are not taught to see that it puts Whites in a privileged position of having certain advantages” (p. 1). She further states, “To grow up White is to be the focal point from which everyone else differs” (Pappas, 1995, p. 1). Peggy McIntosh’s (1990) discussion of white privilege is quite notable. She offers a long list of the ways the white race experiences preference or privilege in day-to-day living. Included among these are: the opportunity to walk around a store without being followed, the freedom to travel through a variety of neighborhoods without fear of racial profiling, the freedom to make mistakes without being seen as a representative of your race.

I have personally found that perhaps one of the greatest privileges of whiteness is being able to *act* and *be* without giving conscious thought of what my race brings to the table. The very assumption of supremacy within this idea leads me to prefer the term “privilege of white supremacy” to merely “white privilege.” Julie Landsman (2006) explains this concept as the privilege of a *single racial consciousness*. She expounds:

We [whites] can walk through American being who we are without an awareness of a second racial self: the self viewed by others. If we fail, we fail as who we are, unique and flawed individuals. If we succeed, we succeed because we have accomplished what we have through hard work, as individuals with our complicated histories and qualities. (Landsman, 2006, p. 17)

Landsman contrasts this sense of a single consciousness with W. E. B. DuBois' idea of double consciousness. DuBois (1903/1994) describes the double consciousness of people of color as the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 3). The contempt and pity DuBois mentions comes from a white world which views itself as superior. Supremacy is at the root of white privilege and this faulty idea of superiority needs to be critically deconstructed so that we may become more alert to the products of its power. The history of the privilege of white supremacy in education can serve as a powerful warning of the destructive powers of these faulty belief systems in action.

History of White Supremacy and Education

The educational system in the United States was created from a position of racial and cultural superiority. Over the years, people whose race, culture, and religion fell outside of that of the hegemony have experienced the domination of that dominant authority (Loewen, 2007; Spring, 2005, Takaki, 1993). Joel Spring (2005) notes, "The attempt to Anglicize the German population through charity schools was one of the first attempts in America to use education as a means of cultural imperialism" (p. 22). As the early German settlers began to establish homes in Pennsylvania, fears among the Anglican community spurred the introduction of charity schools. The answer to above mentioned fears appeared to be to assimilate the Germans into a culture that reflected the values and beliefs of the Anglican culture. This system not only strengthened the belief that the Anglican values and beliefs were absolutes, but also carried entrenched assumption of the superiority of the Anglican culture. The expected result being, "the more the oppressed

can be led to adapt to that situation [the changing of the consciousness of the oppressed], the more easily they can be dominated” (Freire, 2005, p. 74). Joel Spring (2005) asserts,

One reason for the nineteenth-century development of public schools was to ensure dominance of Anglo-American values that were being challenged by Irish immigration, Native Americans, and African Americans. Public schools became defenders of Anglo-American values with each new wave of immigrants. (p. 3)

A common thread in the declaration of this defense was the characterization of the people of these “other” cultures as *savages* who were ruled by their own passion and not the more *civilized* restraint of self-control (Spring, 2005). These descriptors are in agreement with Freire’s explanation of the view of the oppressed by the oppressors. Freire (2005), explains, “The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these ‘incompetent and lazy’ folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality” (p. 74).

Rituals, textbooks, and the curriculum of the common school were used by those in power in an attempt to “protect the ideology of an American Protestant culture” (Spring, 2005, p. 102). Native American children were, in some instances, placed in boarding schools in an effort to lessen the impact of their parents’ cultural influence and to attempt to more fully indoctrinate them with this foreign value system (Spring, 2005, Takaki, 1993). In many cases, people felt the necessity of forming their own private schools to ensure an education for their children that would teach them without having a detrimental or devastating effect on their cultures.

Because my research is more directly related to the influence of white supremacy on the education of African Americans, I will give a more detailed overview of the history

of white supremacy and the education of African Americans. In *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, James D. Anderson (1988) describes the struggle for universal education for the black population. The efforts toward universal education were under constant attack due to a lack of resources (both human and material) and a battle of ideology. His writings give a view inside black education before desegregation.

During the period of time discussed in Anderson's text, there was a politically charged battle for resources. Southern planters regained power in 1876 and used their political power to suppress the move toward universal schooling for Blacks by rerouting school funds for black children into funds for white children (Anderson, 1988). "In the late 1870s, black southerners began to turn inward and attempted to construct and maintain the semblance of a common school system from their own meager resources" (Anderson, 1988, p. 149). Anderson shares many accounts of how black southerners endured double taxation, as they paid taxes that were spent for white education and then worked to construct schools and gain resources with monies raised within their own communities. Vanessa Siddle Walker (1996) echoes these stories in her account of the segregated Caswell County Training School in North Carolina (1920s-1960s). Although Walker's report spans a later time than Anderson, many of the discussions of resources parallel those of Anderson. The local boards of education often expected the black community to prove their need for and support of education through monetary and labor donations. Walker (1996) explains, "Ironically, the expectation of self-help was so deeply embedded that Negro patrons themselves frequently made offers much like those of the school board" (p. 21). Throughout the years of segregation black students were faced with secondhand materials and less than adequate facilities.

In addition to the unequal provision of material resources, the black educational system was also fighting a battle of ideology. As Anderson (1988) explains, the “system of second-class education for blacks did not just happen. It was a logical outgrowth of social ideology designed to adjust black southerners to racially qualified forms of political and economic subordination” (p. 3). This battle of ideology was profoundly evident in the area of teacher training. The foundation of black education was weakened by a lack of teachers. “In 1900 in the sixteen former slave states there [was] ... one black teacher for every 93 black children of school age” (Anderson, 1988, p. 111). This shortage was of great interest to many northern philanthropists:

[Those] interested in shaping the beliefs and behavior of southern black children through formal schooling viewed the great teacher shortage as an opportunity to influence significantly the form and content of black teacher training and thereby contribute directly to the socialization of black children. (Anderson, 1988, p. 111)

In the rush to supply this demand, northern philanthropists began funding the training of black teachers.

Samuel Chapman Armstrong conceived the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute and his student, Booker T. Washington, founded Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Normal schools “became confused with trade training and economic development because Armstrong, and later Washington, employed a unique manual labor routine and an ideology of ‘self-help’ as the practical and moral foundation of their teacher training process” (Anderson, 1988, p. 34). Their ideology was in congruence with the curriculum ideas of Calvin M. Woodard. Woodard, dean of O’Fallon Polytechnic

Institute at Washington University in St. Louis, was an enthusiast of manual training.

Kleibard (2004) explains:

For Woodard, manual training was essential not only for proper intellectual and moral education, but as a way of restoring the dignity of hand labor, an avenue for youth to a respectable and rewarding occupation, and a way to make the country prosper (p. 112)

Armstrong and Washington saw manual training as the pathway to a respectable and rewarding occupation for African Americans and a way to the race's prosperity. The philanthropists were squarely behind the ideology of Armstrong, and worked to "Hamptonize" teacher training in the south (Anderson, 1988). This movement required teacher training programs to focus on industrial learning, or basically training black children for occupations demanding few skills and yielding low wages. When existing institutions did not generate an adequate supply of "Hamptonized" teachers, the philanthropists turned their attention toward the development of County Training Schools. These schools were opened throughout the southern states and were expected to "devote about one half of their time teaching the three R's and the other half to theory and practice of gardening, cooking, woodwork, laundering, and routine manual labor" (Anderson, 1988, p.144). This system reinforced the idea that black children would grow-up to work for and serve the needs of Whites. This type of oppressive institutionalized racism was the faulty infrastructure that served as the foundation for black education in the twentieth century.

By 1930, "only about 9 percent of the black elementary school teachers had at least a bachelor's degree... [leaving the masses] still more likely to receive training in a

private normal or county training school” (Anderson, 1988, p. 145). In the end, “state teacher certification requirements and student aspirations [for higher quality training in education] converged to shape long-run trends away from the industrial normal and county training school models” (Anderson, 1988, p. 145). The framework of black education carried with it an inherent slant toward suppression of the black race. The very structures of the schools and the education of the teachers was under attack by an ideology that generated training for manual labor and a systematic closing of the doors to other opportunities (Anderson, 1988).

Desegregation brought a consolidation of resources that would allow black students more up-to-date educational materials. Black students were given access to formerly “white-only” educational facilities which were generally newer and in better condition and working order. Desegregation theoretically offered black students access to the same educational system that served to open the white students’ lives to opportunities offered by the work force, the military, and postsecondary studies. This was a step away from the planned training for subordination that had such an effect on the structure of southern black education.

Although the fight for educational desegregation was seen as a fight to improve the educational system for Blacks, this is not to say that improvement came in all areas. Walker (1996) states, “to remember segregated schools largely by recalling only their poor resources presents a historically incomplete picture” (p. 3). The material resources were not the most important resources at stake. In fact, with regard to resources, Geneva Gay (2005) explains, “Even when students of color and European Americans receive similar educational resources, the effects are not identical. Sometimes resources that

benefit and facilitate the academic achievement of European Americans block or retard the educational development of students of color” (p. 227).

A major loss for black students came in the form of human resources. Viewing desegregation only as a positive experience for black students lacks a respect of the differences of cultures and is disrespectful of those teachers who worked passionately during the years of segregation to offer black students a meaningful and transformative education. Black students lost perhaps their greatest allies through desegregation, “as thousands of black teachers and educators ...lost their jobs, [were] demoted, or denied promotion” (Jones, 1979, p.25). Bell hooks (2003) explains the positive impact of segregation’s black teachers, “In our all black schools we were taught standards of excellence in relation to both our academic studies and our construction of self and identity” (p. 83). The children of segregation were often buttressed by their teachers. Foster’s (1990) study is based on the lives of several teachers who taught both during and after segregation. She explains how many of these educators perceive desegregation:

Desegregation has sharply curtailed African American teachers’ ability to talk with African-American students, in terms they understand, about personal value, the collective power, and the political consequences of choosing academic achievement. As a result, they contend not only that desegregation has weakened their solidarity with Black students, but...has also limited their ability to engage in critical dialogue with African-American students, dialogue necessary to engage students in their own learning. (Foster, 1990, p. 133)

With “no racial integration, black people were more vigilant about safeguarding the integrity of our lives in the midst of ongoing racist assault” (hooks, 2001, p. 77). These teachers perceived the importance of infusing a sense of racial pride in their students. Segregation offered separate spaces where “racist biases in educational systems could be countered by wise black teachers” (hooks, 2001, p. 77). The black children of desegregation often lost such safe spaces and access to the support of these caring and understanding teachers. This loss was difficult to overcome. Lisa Delpit (1995) describes life in the new desegregated school as coping:

not only with the overt racism that preceded our arrival, but with the subtle racism, infinitely more insidious, that developed when aspects of our culture—language, interactional styles, belief systems—became targets for remediation at best, and evidence of our inability to learn at worst. (p. 73)

This “coping” was a cause for fear and insecurity. Delpit (1995), hooks (2001), and Walker (1996) each compare the trust and high expectations of many teacher-student relationships in segregated black schools with the fear and low expectations that mark(ed) many cross-cultural teacher-student relationships of desegregation.

Communication was another area that led (and still leads) to a disconnection between the races of desegregated schools. The “culture of power” (Delpit, 1995) that is set by the hegemony does not allow equal access to our educational system. A specific example of how language can manifest into unequal power is in communication and instructional styles. Delpit (1995) explains that black children are more accustomed to direct and explicit instruction, while white teachers are more likely to engage in indirect and more ambiguous instruction. This difference in communication style places black

students at the disadvantage of being seen as less intelligent or as a behavior problem. Either of these perceptions reduces the teacher's expectation that the student will be an active and productive member of the classroom. The change in expectations has been a major loss for black students (and their teachers and classmates) in the desegregated classroom.

Another example of how black students can be ill-served by communication is found in Joan Wynne's (2002) essay, "*We Don't Talk Right. You Ask Him.*" Wynne and her all-black group of students attended a journalism workshop with a predominantly white crowd. When her students wanted to ask the speaker some questions, they asked her to be the messenger. Wynne encouraged them to ask their own questions but they responded, "We don't talk right. You ask him." Wynne (2002) admitted, "I did not know how psychologically damaging language biases are" (p. 205). This moment was an epiphany for Wynne. Wynne (2002) adds that "myths [about language superiority] are destructive. They lie about people's ability to think" (p. 207). When white teachers subscribe (either consciously or unconsciously) to the myths of language superiority, they discount the wealth of knowledge that their students of color have to offer.

In short, black individuals and communities lost power through desegregation. They lost the power of having a stronger voice in the educational decisions of their race. They lost the power to educate their children in the "liberatory paradigms" (hooks, 1994) that black teachers were able to share and stress in segregated classrooms. They lost power to boldly teach for racial pride and self-love and to fight against the systematic colonization of the minds of their children (hooks, 2003).

Conversely, the white population of the newly desegregated classrooms fared well in competition against black students because Whites were more familiar with the expectations and communicative codes of the white teachers. According to Heath (1978), “Communication depends on shared knowledge between teacher and students not only about the structure of these utterances, but also about the norms and behaviors to which they refer” (p.17). Most white students had (and continue to have) the advantage of understanding both the structure of utterances and the norms and behaviors of white teachers. Cultural codes such as time scheduling, sentence structure and intentions of teacher talk are examples of norms that have held black students at a disadvantage (Heath, 1978, 1983). These more subtle forms of repression continue to privilege the white students, reinforcing the idea of white supremacy.

Desegregation offered an opportunity for Blacks and Whites to learn from one another. However, the hegemonic power that systematically upheld privilege for Whites and oppression for Blacks did not change with desegregation. The shift in power was only slight, with the dominant white forces continuing to maintain an overwhelming control of the education of both races. Sadly, instead of the oppression being lifted, it was sent further underground (where it is more difficult to fight). Instead of inequality being written openly in laws and policies, the language has been changed to mask the discrimination. White teachers in today’s classrooms have a responsibility to learn from the black teachers of segregated classrooms of Caswell County Training School and realize that “good teaching, then, require[s] them to see each child as an individual and to count the successful engagement of each child in learning as part of the larger ongoing task of contributing to their race and to the human race” (Walker, 1996, p. 150). In

preparation for learning these lessons, white teachers will need to take a critical view of racial identity—their own and that of others.

Confrontations of White Identity and White Supremacy

As I stated earlier, one of the privileges of white supremacy is being able to *act* and *be* without thought of how my own race influences life. When white people are confronted with the influence of white supremacy in the daily lives of all people of our society, the possibility of revelation can be uncomfortable at best. Author and educator Beverly Tatum (2007) explains, “recognition of the meaning of Whiteness in our society is recognition of the meaning of privilege in the context of a society that advantages being White” (p. 36). Whites often respond to the presentation of white supremacy and discrimination with silencing, deflection, validity questioning, guilt and shame, and resentment (hooks, 2003; Howard, 1999; Irvine, 2003; Sleeter, 1993; Tatum, 2007; Thompson, 2004). Tatum (2007) reports white students in her psychology of race class “would often express anger and a sense of betrayal” (p. 34). Educator and researcher Gail Thompson (2004) describes the “white silencing” that occurs as in-service and pre-service teachers actively work to silence the talk of racism in a classroom.

White teachers often ascribe to the idea of colorblindness as a non-racist approach to teaching (Howard, 2006; Irvine, 2003; Tatum, 1997). However, as Jacqueline Irvine (2003) states:

Far too many pre- and inservice teachers appear to be not only color-blind but also “color-deaf” and “color-mute” when it comes to issues of race – that is, unable or unwilling to see, hear, or speak about instances of individual or institutional racism in their personal lives. (p. 78)

Thompson (2004) studied the correlation between teacher attitudes and beliefs about having to attend an in-service she conducted and their attitudes and beliefs about African American students. Among her findings, Thompson (2004) discovered teachers who perceived themselves to be colorblind were likely to blame parents and guardians, have low expectations of African American students, and resent attending race-related inservices (Thompson, 2004, p. 307). Clinging to the idea of colorblindness and the resistance to engage in conversations about race is not a passive choice; instead, it actively upholds the status quo. Davis and Wildman (1997) explain, “the avoidance of race, the failure to talk about it or acknowledge its role in history, maintains and perpetuates racism/white supremacy” (p. 177).

Christine Sleeter is a white antiracism researcher. In an effort to move toward social justice, Sleeter (1994) challenges Whites “to articulate, examine, question, and critique what we know about racism” (p. 5). Rather than deflecting and silencing discussions of race, whites need to recognize that “by examining our own experiences critically, we are uniquely positioned to contribute insights into racism” (Sleeter, 1994, p. 7). For many whites this would signify a movement from the guilt and shame of white supremacy into an active and critical stance against white supremacy.

Ricky Lee Allen (2004) explains that a white person’s move away from complicity with white supremacy includes the unlearning of “a lifetime of problematic white subjectivity, ideology, and behavior” (p. 130). Allen (2004) further explains, this person “needs to learn how to see the world through new eyes that reveal the complexities and problematics of whiteness” (p. 130). Allen describes this change in white thought, belief, and being as a “rebirth into solidarity” with people of color which includes a change in

our epistemology that must be informed by the epistemologies of people of color. This change in thought is akin to the decolonization described in *Salvation: Black People and Love*, (hooks, 2001),

[Decolonization] offers us the tools to resist white supremacist thinking. The heart of decolonization is the recognition of equality among humans, coupled with the understanding that racial categories which negatively stigmatize blackness were created as a political tool of imperialist white domination. (p. 73)

When whites can receive the epistemological messages offered through the critical thought of people of color, we are given the opportunity to unlearn the misinformation and stereotypes used by hegemonic, white supremacist powers to colonize our minds.

Beverly Tatum (2007) discusses the importance of understanding our own identities as part of a lifelong commitment to antiracism and social justice. Tatum (2007) explains,

those who have engaged in a process of examining their own racial or ethnic identity, and who feel affirmed in it, are more likely to be respectful of the self-definition that others claim, and are much more effective working in multiracial settings. (p. 38)

For Whites who are interested in working against racism but who are stuck in a cycle of guilt and shame, it is imperative to engage in consciousness-raising activities that lead them toward a critical understanding of their own identities and how they view others. Michael O'Loughlin (2001) explains why this is especially important for white teachers:

Before white teachers can undertake the task of bringing an antiracist stance to white students and before they can engage students of diverse ethnic backgrounds, they must become conscious of their own ethnic formation and the manner by which, by virtue of their insertion in white supremacist discourses, they benefit from being white. (p. 63)

This breaking away from the normative patterns and expectations of the hegemony requires that all teachers, but especially those who have benefited from this supremacy paradigm, work to understand their own identity. Teacher education programs need to impress upon teacher candidates the responsibility of challenging their personal understandings of their own racial identities. Using the terminology found in *The Racial Contract* (Mills, 1997), white educators must understand that while they are automatically beneficiaries of the racial contract, they have a moral responsibility to abstain from being signatories (or enforcement agents) of the contract. The following sections discuss some of the promising research that addresses this need.

Stages of White Racial Identity Development

Various models have been developed to identify and describe the stages of the development of a healthy, nonracist white identity (Carney and Kahn, 1984; Ganter, 1977; Helms, 1984, Howard, 2006). Two typologies of these developmental stages were especially useful during my research. Janet E. Helms' (1990) study which proposes "a linear process of attitudinal development in which the White person potentially progresses through a series of stages differing in the extent to which they involve acknowledgement of racism and consciousness of Whiteness" (p. 53). Gary R. Howard (2006) focused on how White educators think, feel, and act in the construction of his white racial identity

model. Howard's (2006) model "provides a means of tracking how white educators can progress in our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors relative to whiteness and issues of dominance" (p. 103). In the following paragraphs I describe these models which will be applied to the participants in this research as I strive to understand their responses and reactions to issues of racism as discussed during our focus group experience.

Helms' (1990) model consists of six developmental stages which are divided into two phases. According to Helms (1990), phase one of the process is concerned with the abandonment of racism, while phase two involves defining a nonracist white identity. The abandonment of racism phase begins with entrance into the Contact stage. During the contact stage, Whites enjoy the benefits of white privilege without feelings of guilt because they are naïve to racial issues. Beverly Tatum (1997), who uses Helms' model as she analyzes the stages of development of Whites in her classes and workshops, explains "for many Whites this early stage of racial development represents the passive absorption of subtly communicated messages" (p. 95). At this first stage, Whites have not engaged in interactions which cause them to question their acceptance of a white worldview. The second of Helms' (1990) stages, the Disintegration stage, is marked by an increase in racial awareness. According to Helms (1990), during this stage a white person experiences conflict as he or she begins to question the "racial realities the person has been taught to believe" (p. 58). As this person attempts to alleviate the tension of this conflict, he or she will likely enter the Reintegration stage. Helms (1990) explains this stage as being shaped by the "desire to be accepted by one's own racial group and the prevalence in the White group of the covert and overt belief in White superiority and black inferiority" (p. 60). The Reintegration stage is marked by emotions such as anger

and fear toward African Americans which can be acted out either passively or actively (Helms, 1990; Tatum, 1997). Due to the White supremacist structure of our society, a white person can remain in this last stage of the abandonment of racism phase relatively easily; in fact, “a personally jarring event is probably necessary for the person to begin to abandon this essentially racist identity” (Helms, 1990, p. 60).

As Whites move from abandoning racism to redefining a positive white identity, they enter into the Pseudo-Independent stage. During this stage, Whites begin to refuse a belief of White superiority and Black inferiority and acknowledge White responsibility for racism (Helms, 1990). Whites at this stage are at a precipice of change as they are no longer comfortable with an acceptance of their past racial definitions, so they often seek out a better understanding of racial issues. During the Pseudo-Independent stage Whites may seek more interaction with Blacks as they attempt to intellectualize their experiences and issues related to racism (Helms, 1990). However, these attempts are often met by suspicion by African Americans because Whites at this stage continue to be subject to behave in ways which propagate a system of white supremacy (Helms, 1990). According to Helms (1990) and Tatum (1997) this stage can include blaming the victim and attempts to help African Americans become more like Whites. Whites are in a moment of recognizing, but not fully understanding their identity or the fullness of the power of a system which privileges their race; hopefully, this discomfort will lead them into a process of redefining their own racial identity, which begins the Immersion/Emersion stage. The goal of Whites in the Immersion/Emersion stage is no longer changing Blacks, but is now helping Whites to change (Helms, 1990). “Emotional as well as cognitive restructuring can happen in this stage,” as Whites work through feelings of guilt and shame toward

healthier racial identification (Helms, 1990, p. 62). Autonomy, the final stage of white racial identification, “might be thought of as racial self-actualization or transcendence” (Helms, 1990, p. 66). Both Helms (1990) and Tatum (1997) agree this stage is not an end of development, but instead a point at which a White person’s growth is no longer structured by a rigid worldview of the cultures of others, but rather by a healthy, antiracist White identity.

Howard’s (2006) model of white racial identity was designed with attention to educators. His model involves three orientations of identity: fundamentalist, integrationist, and transformationist. “Each orientation is described by nine indicators, which are, in turn, clustered into three modalities of growth, including thinking, feeling, and acting” (Howard, 2006, p. 103). I will briefly summarize each orientation with attention to these three modalities in the following three paragraphs.

According to Howard (2006), the fundamentalist orientation involves thinking which is “literal and linear” and is characterized by “denial and/or ignorance of Whiteness and White supremacy” (p. 103). The structure of a white superiority within our society allows Whites within this orientation to feel comfortable with their own perspectives. Howard (2006) explains, “Fundamentalist Whites in positions of leadership are autocratic, directive, and committed to the preservation of White hegemony. They are ardent defenders of ‘business as usual’ in those organizations that have traditionally been White-dominated” (p. 105).

Whites with an Integrationist orientation are open to the realities and truths of others, but they continue to maintain a belief in the *rightness* of a white authority. “Integrationist Whites are aware of the personal pain others have experienced because of

White dominance, but they have not yet grasped the systemic and institutional nature of social inequality” (Howard, 2006, p.107). Howard compares this orientation to Helms’ denigration stage due to the emotional confusion, guilt, and shame associated with the recognition of the cost others have paid for the white privilege. The beliefs of the Integrationist Whites lead to behaviors which focus on assimilation of the other as they learn to play by the existing rules.

Transformationist Whites work toward change. These Whites accept their own view as simply one of many and make an effort to learn of and from the perspectives of others (Howard, 2006). Howard explains:

Transformationist Whites have abandoned the tacit assertion of White supremacy that lingers in the emotional backwaters of the integrationist orientation. Their personal pride and sense of self are no longer tied to the assumptions of superiority but are grounded in the self-generated process of growth and learning. (Howard, 2006, p.110).

Similar to the final two stages in Helms’ model, Transformationist Whites, now free from the rigidity of white supremacist thought, are interested in the healthy growth of other Whites and are now actuated to dismantle oppressive structures. Both Helms’ (1990) and Howard’s (1997) models of white identity development address the cognitive and emotional changes involved in the development of a healthy and positive white identity which rejects a world view based on an assumption of white superiority. These models were beneficial to my research as I examine the responses of the white females in our focus group to issues of race. Inherent in a person’s progression through the stages of either model is an increased awareness of self and others. The following section discusses

the importance of critical self-reflection for healthy emotional and cognitive growth, as well as, the importance of teachers using such growth in meeting the needs of a diverse student population.

Critical Reflection and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Critical Self-Reflection

Gay and Kirkland (2003) stress, “Teachers knowing who they are as people, understanding the contexts in which they teach, and questioning their knowledge and assumptions are as important as the mastery of techniques of instructional effectiveness” (p. 181). Richard Milner has written extensively on the topic of teacher reflection and cultural issues. Milner (2003) comments, “I have come to believe that there is often a void in teachers’ reflective thinking where diversity is concerned” (p. 173).

There are numerous obstacles to self-reflection in the area of cultural differences. Gay and Kirkland (2003) describe general obstacles, including the resistant teacher’s propensity to describe issues and ideas related to diversity rather than engaging in deeper analysis and introspection of their own beliefs. Their list of obstacles also includes a lack of the teacher experiences with and guidance through meaningful self-reflection (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). More specific obstacles include the teacher or pre-service teacher’s own efforts to block self-reflection. These efforts of resistance can take many forms including: silence, shifting of focus, claims of benevolent liberalism, and the questioning of the significance and validity of the issues (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

When leading teachers toward critical self-reflection of cultural issues, it is important to prepare for the possible roadblocks to reflection. Building an atmosphere

that is conducive to enhancing cultural consciousness and critical self-reflection is beneficial. According to Howard (2003),

Facilitation of this process must be sensitive and considerate to the lived experiences that people bring to their current time and space. The purpose of critical reflection should not be to indict teachers for what they believe and why it does not work for students. It is a process of improving practice, rethinking philosophies, and becoming effective teachers for today's ever-changing student population. (p. 201)

Establishing an atmosphere that encourages the analysis and critique of ideas is of great importance when leading teachers toward critical self-reflection (Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, & López-Torrez, 2003). Activities that provide opportunities for the presentation of numerous perspectives and dialogue concerning those perspectives will open the door for practice with critical thought and reflection. Gay and Kirkland (2003) suggest using ideas such as the jigsaw method, role-playing and simulation. The authors explain, "the process of converting knowledge from one form to another, then sharing it with others, and receiving constructive feedback on the quality of delivery, offer valuable practice in self-reflection and critical consciousness" (Gay & Kirkland, 2003, p. 185).

Teacher engagement in critical self-reflection regarding ideas and beliefs about cultural issues is an important first step toward transformative actions within the classroom. Howard (2003) gives five suggestions for translating "critical reflection into culturally responsive teaching:"

1. *Ensure that teacher education faculty members are able to sufficiently address the complex nature of race, ethnicity, and culture.*

2. *Be aware that reflection is a never-ending process.*
3. *Be explicit about what to reflect about.*
4. *Recognize that teaching is not a neutral act.*
5. *Avoid reductive notions of culture.*

(p. 200-201)

Culturally responsive teaching demands a knowledge of and respect for differing cultural perspectives. Critical self-reflection allows teachers (most of whom are white, middleclass women) to look beyond the expectations and procedures that serve the hegemony as they work to better meet the needs of all students. For many of these (highly educated) teachers, questioning the accepted norms presented by the hegemony may be a foreign idea, even when they, as women, are also among those being oppressed. Nelly P. Stromquist (1995) writes:

It is possible for women to attain high levels of education without increasing their gender consciousness...From the state's perspective, if women get an education that does not address the nature of gender (nor that of class or race) in society, the women become capable of making more money and better contributions to the economy and to family as presently constituted, while their increased schooling does not threaten the status quo, and so the basic structures of ideological and material domination are retained and sustained. (p. 445)

An important part of the self-reflection of teachers who attempt to cross a cultural boundary is the development of an awareness of themselves as raced and gendered beings shaped by historical, social, and political constructions.

Howard (2003) links a teacher's critical reflection with their commitment to teaching all students. He states:

Critical teacher reflection is essential to culturally relevant pedagogy because it can ultimately measure teachers' levels of concern and care for their students. A teacher's willingness to ask tough questions about his or her own attitudes toward diverse students can reflect a true commitment that the individual has toward students' academic success and emotional well-being. (Howard, 2003, p. 199)

Ultimately, a teacher's effort toward reflection is both a link to and a foreshadowing of the teacher's ultimate inclusion of culturally responsive teaching within their classrooms.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The study of culturally relevant pedagogy can work to expand the perspectives that teachers bring into their educational practice. Recognizing the destructive powers of teaching from a middle class, Eurocentric framework, can be a foundational and profound paradigm shift for many teachers. Geneva Gay (2000) discusses the importance of moving toward a teaching perspective that is more inclusive and empowering. An understanding of the influence of hegemonic powers through the educational system must be ameliorated. Gay (2000) explains that the prevalent attitude of "cultural blindness" in our educational system is built upon the following: a blindness to the interconnectedness of education and culture, an inadequate understanding of diverse cultures, a lack of recognition of the influence of middle-class white values on teaching practices, a belief that treating students differently equates to discrimination, the belief that all students should be responded to in the same way, the idea that "good teaching is transcendent," and

a focus on assimilation (p. 21). Teaching from these foundational beliefs is inequitable and destructive.

Culturally relevant pedagogy offers teachers a new perspective of the classroom and its structure. Because the communication and management styles of most classrooms are in line with white middle-class norms, as preferred by the hegemonic powers, students from ethnically diverse backgrounds often find themselves at a disadvantage. These issues have an “effect on the kind of opportunities offered students from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds to participate in instructional interactions in the classroom” (Gay, 1994, p. 129). Basically, the rules of the game are preset by those in power and if these rules are foreign to you, then you are likely to lose. You are also less likely to be picked for the “winning team.” When being on the “winning team” means earning an academically sound education, the loss is exponential. Howard (2006) explains, “Because school success is so highly correlated with success in life...race-based disequilibrium in academic achievement has become one of the core social justice issues of our time” (p. 2). When these ideas take root in the mind of a teacher, she will be faced with the decision to bury her head in the sand or to take a more critical view of the cultural climate of her classroom and school. The establishment of a more inclusive cultural climate is fundamental to the work of culturally sensitive educators. These educators realize the importance of helping students feel that they belong in and have the power to shape their educational environments.

A connection between the curriculum and the student’s real life assures the student that the curriculum matters for him/her, not just for the dominant culture. In order for a teacher to use the life experiences of the student as a foundation for new learning, the

teacher must be aware of and value those experiences. Geneva Gay (2000) expounds, “Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 29). Connections made between home and school can be practiced across grade levels and subject areas. Benson (2003) offers an example of this type of connection in her description of how elementary teachers use information gained during classroom discussions to make connections with student experiences. Another elementary example includes the use of a gardening theme (which was a common pastime of students and families) to teach mathematics concepts (Civil & Khan, 2001). Morrison (2002) connected with students using the theme of prejudice to study Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Each of these studies demonstrates how the connections between personal lives of students and the curriculum can be used to enhance student engagement. Gay (2000) explains that when African American students see the relationship between their worlds and academia, they will begin to view academic success as something they can attain without losing their membership in their own culture.

The student-teacher relationship is an important pillar in the structure of culturally relevant pedagogy. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) explains that teachers using culturally relevant methods can

be identified by the ways in which they structure their social interactions: Their relationships with students are fluid and equitable and extend beyond the classroom. They demonstrate a connectedness with all of their students and encourage the same connectedness between students. (p. 25)

A personal, caring connection between a student and teacher indicates that the teacher is invested in the success of that student. This gives the student a sense of safety that helps to fight against mistrust. High expectations also signal that the teacher is invested in the student's success. When asked about the characteristics of great teachers, the students in Gail Thompson's (2002) study repeatedly mentioned teachers who challenged them. This characteristic was seen at the elementary, middle, and high school levels found in her study. Students who are challenged by teachers, whom they know and trust, view the challenge as recognition of their value and ability. Ladson-Billings (1994) explains, "When children are treated as competent they are likely to demonstrate competence" (p. 123). High expectations, combined with thoughtful scaffolding, leads to exponential success. Gay (2000) clarifies, "[When] their performance expectations are complemented with uncompromising faith in their students and relentless efforts in helping them meet high academic demands. The results are often phenomenal" (p. 76). In contrast, the student finds it difficult to flourish with "teachers who question their intelligence or with a curriculum that ignores their existence" (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p. 41).

High expectations and faith in the student's ability are not only possible for same-race teachers, but are responsibilities of all teachers of all students. Gay (2000) explains:

The need for more Latino, Asian, Native, and African American teachers in U. S. schools is unquestionable. But to make improving the achievement of students of color contingent upon fulfilling this need is based on a very fallacious and dangerous assumption. It presumes that membership in an ethnic group is necessary or sufficient to enable teachers to do effective culturally competent pedagogy. (p. 205)

Instead, we need teachers of all races and ethnicities who have been trained in the *ways of knowing* that minority students are equipped with when they enter school. Educators who have begun this process will likely find teaching with an appreciation of cultural differences to be both effective and satisfying. When this revelation is paired with the opportunity to engage in shared inquiry and collaboration with their peers, these teachers will be better able to establish plans to create a school culture that is more conducive for learning by all students. The process and content used for encouraging this type of revelation and planning among teachers needs to be thoughtfully considered.

Through studying the response of the participants to the antiracism video and the focus group experience, I worked to better understand the process and perceptions of white middleclass teachers as they take this small, first step toward self-reflection and understanding that there are diverse perceptions of how racism impacts our world. A better understanding of how participants assimilate and accommodate this new information will help add insight into the overall body of research of educational relationships that cross cultural boundaries. Whereas the above noted studies have investigated the use of critical self-reflection and culturally relevant approaches to teaching, my study offers an investigation into how the white teachers understand their responses and reactions to antiracist materials – a small step toward self-reflection and for some, a possible catalyst for culturally reflective teaching.

Through my research, I worked to better understand how the white educators in the focus group respond to the issues of white supremacy and discrimination addressed through group discussions and as shown through Jane Elliott's experiment. I examined their experience within the focus group looking for patterns of denial, resentment, guilt,

shame...or...perhaps signs of self-reflection and critical consciousness. There were other questions that came to mind as I approached the group experience, such as: Will this experience serve as an impetus for some participants to engage in antiracist thought and action? Will the experience foster only “good intentions” that lack the depth and commitment to nurture true antiracist thoughts, beliefs, and actions?

Related Antiracism Studies and Training

Meredith J. Green and Christopher C. Sonn (2005; 2006) have done some powerful research concerning discourse analysis and antiracism related to the Reconciliation movement in Australia. The Reconciliation movement was a 10 year effort to provide “Australians with the opportunity, information and support to reject explanations of disadvantage that relied on negative stereotypes of Indigenous Australians and to understand disadvantages as a product of colonialism as well as institutional and cultural racism” (Green & Sonn, 2005, p. 482). (For more information concerning an overview of Australia’s Reconciliation, please see Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2000.) Green and Sonn (2005; 2006) used interviews and focus groups to study the discourse patterns of 31 white Australians who were participating in the movement. These researchers identified ‘reasoning discourses’ and ‘actioning discourses’ as two major categories of discourses among participants. The reasoning discourse category was divided into three types: cultural connection, expert analysis, and righting wrongs. The researchers found the reproduction of “whiteness” (and the power issues noted within this concept) to be especially evident in the first two types. Discourses that were categorized within the area of cultural connection and expert analysis both tended to reproduce whiteness by “returning attention to the white self and focusing on the Indigenous [as]

other” (Green & Sonn, 2005, p. 487). This led Green and Sonn (2005) to cite a “concern about antiracism simply becoming a series of benign and worthy individual sentiments from the dominant group” (p. 487). These sentiments, lacking the key ingredient of critical self-reflection, are not helpful in addressing the need to question social and political structures with different epistemological frameworks. Green and Sonn (2005) concluded that an important component of the work of white antiracists was an interrogation of their own whiteness and summarized that discourse analysis was a useful tool in understanding and negotiating their own position within this whiteness.

The second category, actioning discourses, was the topic of Green and Sonn’s 2006 article, *Problematizing the Discourses of the Dominant: Whiteness and Reconciliation*. Actioning discourses included conversations and comments that focused on how the participants felt racism should be addressed. The researchers found four types of actioning discourses which they labeled: Indigenous project, institutional change, challenging racism, and bringing them together (Green & Sonn, 2006). In the Indigenous project discourse “the disadvantage Indigenous people face was understood in terms of how indigenous people approach things...and echo the protectionist and assimilationist policies which attempt to remove or control the ‘bad’ characteristics of Indigenous people” (Green & Sonn, 2006, p. 385). Comments labeled ‘institutional change’ focused primarily on the long history of oppression and the systematic, institutional discrimination and racism which Indigenous people have encountered and continue to face. Institutional change and challenging racism (in other non-Indigenous people) are both labels which included discourses allowing the dominant group to recognize racism, while not focusing on their own personal responsibility. Institutional change allowed the participants “to

distance themselves from their complicity with racism by focusing on institutional racism and leaving their own whiteness unchallenged” (Green & Sonn, 2006, p. 389). In challenging the racism in other non-Indigenous people, “interrogation of one’s own subjectivity was avoided by focusing on the racism of other white people and presenting themselves as a ‘good’ white person” (Green & Sonn, 2006, p. 389). Finally, the ‘bringing them together’ discourse focused on the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people which continued to place the former in the position of object and failed to generate discussions which interrogated problematic issues related to the power of and domination by the latter (Green & Sonn, 2006).

Green and Sonn (2006) “suggest that getting people to problematise their whiteness through discourse analysis may be a useful form of engagement with whiteness that allows awareness-raising of dominance and privilege” (p. 390). Discourse analysis can be used as a tool to challenge Whites to move beyond ‘good intentions’ and out of familiar spaces of personal perceptions, toward a multi-dimensional worldview (Apfelbaum, 2001; Green & Sonn, 2005, 2006).

Another approach to antiracist work with Whites involves using white affinity groups to help participants make a connection between racism and themselves. Denevi and Pastan (2006) explain the importance of Whites understanding what their whiteness means, as well as understanding that racism negatively affects them (in addition to people of color). Denevi and Pastan created “a white affinity group modeled after Tim Wise’s group called AWARE (Association for White Anti-Racist Education) for White students interested in becoming actively anti-racist” (2006, p. 72). The various components of their group activities include: journal reading, dinner discussions, events of cross-cultural

dialogues, and exploration of the white identity and white privilege (Denevi & Pastan, 2006). Although the authors mention the importance long-term commitment by the participants and the significance of moving beyond the intellectualization of the problem of racism to a truer personal connection, there is little recognition of methods that might help participants move beyond good intentions and mere lip service to antiracist beliefs.

Another version of an all-white antiracism affinity group is called White Students Confronting Racism (WSCR). A major goal of this group is to help “white students understand their racial identities and work to become effective anti-racist allies” (Michael & Conger, 2009, p. 56). This group meets biweekly and has over 40 members from the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education. The group discusses topics including: “giving up privilege; avoiding collaboration with institutional racism; talking to family members about race; and mentoring for anti-racism” (Michael & Conger, 2009, p. 56). Michael and Conger (2009) explain the importance of the ‘safe space’ of the WSCR in helping Whites to critically reflect on their own identities. This all-white group is depicted as a place that allows white students to question themselves and honestly reflect on issues of race, thus preparing them to take positive antiracist steps as individuals and as a group. “Facilitating candid, constructive reflection on our position and privilege as white people is WSCR’s primary responsibility and goal” (Michael & Conger, 2009, p. 58). The group endeavors to prepare the participants to work as white allies (with other whites and people of color) in the fight against racism. In summation, the authors explain, “we need to know our racial selves better before we can fully participate in antiracist work, as understanding how race works enhances our ability to counter racism in ourselves and our environment” (Michael & Conger, 2009, p. 58). The group’s power for

positive change rests in its focus on the critical self-reflection of Whites, the need to “remediate” the understanding of race and racial issues by many Whites, and the need to recognize people of color as the leaders of antiracist work.

The studies mentioned above discussed the importance of Whites recognizing their own racial identity as a step toward antiracist actions. Lee Woodham Digiovanni (2005) hypothesized that the recognition of one’s racial identity might be precipitated by what she terms a “moment of rupture.” Digiovanni (2005) interviewed three white, female elementary teachers, noted for their success as multicultural educators, in an effort to determine if these teachers had experienced a “moment of rupture.” According to Digiovanni, this moment occurs when “a White woman recognizes that she has an identity, which allows her to take steps towards being more of a multicultural educator” (p. 22). Digiovanni (2005) used a combination of the theoretical frameworks: standpoint theory, critical race theory, and postpositivist realist theory of identity to examine the intersection of the life experiences, racial awareness and pedagogical approach of these women. She found that two of the three women in her study had moments of rupture which did have a revelatory impact on their multicultural approach to education.

Although the information garnered from the above mentioned antiracism research has been useful in my research, Jane Elliott’s antiracism work was used directly with my participants. Elliott is a former Iowa public school teacher. She currently offers diversity training workshops. The video documentary of one of her workshops, *The Essential Blue Eyed* (2004) was viewed by the participants of my focus group. The theme of Elliott’s workshops stems from a controversial activity she led with her third grade students the morning after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. In an effort to help her students

understand discrimination; she led them through an activity that discriminated against students according to eye color. In *The Essential Blue Eyed* (2004), Elliott explains how she continued to repeat the controversial activity with each new class she taught, often under fire by neighbors and peers.

Elliott has now adapted her original activity into a one-day workshop in which adult participants are discriminated against based on eye color (Elliott, 2006a). The first phase of the workshop includes:

separating the group according to eye color, collaring [placing a green collar around their neck for easy identification] Blues and detaining them in a holding room, conditioning the Browns as to what the exercise is about and what is expected of them, bringing the Blues into the meeting room and exposing them to discriminatory treatment, teaching them the listening skills in an atmosphere in which they will be expected to fail, introducing them to a brief American History lesson as biased as minorities have heard history throughout their educational experience in this country, giving them a culturally biased test which the Blues will not be expected to pass and won't, and continually [accuse] the Blues of incompetence resulting from their eye color. (Elliott, 2006b, ¶ 2)

This first phase is an emotionally charged encounter with racism. The documentary presents the interactions between Elliott and the participants during the phase, included interspersed commentary clips by Elliott, and segments from the final debriefing phases of the experiment. The debriefing phases include an opportunity for the participants to share, in writing and verbally, their thoughts and feelings about the exercise. Elliott ends the meeting by offering the participants “a bibliography, list of racist statements and their

clarifications, and a list of activities that individuals can do to eliminate racism, sexism, and ageism in themselves and their environments” (Elliott, 2006b, ¶ 4). Participation in Elliott’s exercise is totally voluntary and participants are made aware of the theme of the workshop before the day begins. The fact that the participants know that it is merely an exercise does not seem to detract from the pain of her tough, confrontational approach to antiracism. In the end, many of the participants in Elliott’s documentary video report having a profound change in their view of themselves as raced individuals and their sensitivity to racism.

Most of the antiracism studies mentioned here share an interest in or commentary concerning the need for Whites to move beyond good intentions and benign sentiments toward operationalizing antiracist actions. The studies also note the importance of Whites accepting the challenge of critical self-reflection, including an interrogation of our own racial identity, as imperative to the development of a more complete racial consciousness. Again, the importance of decolonizing our minds is indicated as a valuable tool in the battle against racism.

Totaling the Cost of Privilege

There is a price of privilege and it is always paid. White supremacy expects the privilege afforded those with white skin to be paid for by those of color. Our educational system stands as a glaring example of how privilege has exponential power. The privileged use the educational system to multiply their own power via the message sent through education, as well as the vehicle through which it is sent. The inequity and insensitivity in educational settings are hallmarks of the destructive powers of white supremacy and privilege in our society. The work of antiracists and culturally relevant

pedagogists offer some hope in bringing attention to the problems related to a system built upon (and for) inequity. Antiracism training, critical reflection, racial identity study, and culturally relevant pedagogy all offer constructive ideas to be used in working toward providing all students with more equitable opportunities through education.

This study examines how a group of white teachers respond to questions about and challenges to their belief systems concerning racial issues and the racial climate of their school. The recognition of the need to question racist structures built by a white patriarchal hegemony which is so basic to black feminists, is not as apparent for Whites. The passion and rationale for this battle is based in life experiences which illustrate the inequity of a system built by and for white patriarchal dominion. From the position of having experienced multi-dimensional discrimination, black feminists offer a perspective with a rich basis for understanding the cost of the privilege of white supremacy (Collins, 1991; hooks, 1995). Engaging in critical self-reflection, and working toward a more inclusive cultural consciousness can assist Whites in understanding and appreciating perspectives that are epistemologically different from their own (Ladson-Billings 1994; Tatum, 1997). This increased awareness is especially important for educators because they hold a powerful position which can either reinforce or battle against this inequitable system (Freire, 2005; hooks, 1994). As mentioned above, there is an extensive history of white supremacy in our educational system. African Americans have paid the overwhelming cost of this inequity and discrimination, while Whites have had the privilege of benefitting from, and often simultaneously overlooking, this systematic injustice. As we recognize the harm done to us and others through the hegemonic

colonization of our minds, we have an ethical obligation to critically examine and battle against racism at epistemological and other levels.

CHAPTER THREE: A METHOD FOCUSED ON MEANING

Focusing on Raising Consciousness

When deciding upon the methodology to use in my research, it was imperative that I analyze what I truly wanted to accomplish with my research. After much reflection, I discovered that I wished to listen to and learn from the participants; working to understand the *hows* and *whys* that the participants attached to the formulation of their meanings. I needed my research to be both cognizant and inclusive of the participants' thoughts, emotions, and life experiences. In Morgan's (1998) *The Focus Group Guidebook*, he provides the researcher with a checklist to use when deciding if a focus group is appropriate for a specific study. I found that my aims, as stated above, and the reasons Morgan lists for using a focus group were congruent. Morgan (1998) stresses the usefulness of focus groups in exploring how lived experiences, thoughts and emotions interact with groups and group members as they form meaning.

Morgan (1998) traces the history of the use of focus groups back to the 1920s and divides this history into three time periods. During the 1920s the groups were most often used in the formation of survey questions. Several decades later (1950 to 1980), focus groups began to be used as a tool for marketing research. In the most recent decades, focus groups have been effective qualitative research tools for social scientists (Morgan, 1998). Consciousness-raising focus groups were used by feminists in the 1970s in an effort to help women view their personal experiences with more of a political perspective (Marecek, 2001). Tina Wilkins (2008), a fellow Georgia Southern University cohort member, used this technique to study the reactions of a group of female science teachers to the idea that the nature of science is a masculine, social construct. Focus groups can

serve as a safe and fertile location for the development of a more informed, critical understanding of social and political constructs with the use of our personal experiences as a relevant factor in the acceptance, modification or rejection of those constructs. Jo Freeman (1975) explains, "From public sharing of experiences comes the realization that what was thought to be individual is in fact common; that what was considered a personal problem has a social cause and probably a political solution" (pp. 451-452). Feminists found that these groups often led to social and political activism by the participants (Freeman, 1975).

The focus group is reflective of the tenets of feminist theory and is thus an appropriate tool for the feminist researcher. "Feminist research attempts to lessen the dichotomy that traditional research imposes between thought and feeling, between political and personal, between the observed and the observer, between 'dispassionate' or 'objective' research and 'passionate' or 'subjective' knowledge" (Madriz, 2003, p. 368). Focus groups allow and encourage participants to discuss their viewpoints, feelings, and beliefs. Because a consensus is not the goal of group participation, individual thoughts are given room for expression and possible growth. Focus groups allow for the exploration and examination of contradictions between group members and/or the groups ideas and those of hegemonic forces (Madriz, 2003). This dialogical exchange is a rich source of information for both the participant and the researcher (Padilla, 1993). According to Madriz (2003), "The interaction occurring within the group accentuates empathy and commonality of experiences and fosters self-disclosure and self-validation. Communication among women can be an awakening experience and an important element in the consciousness-raising experience" (p. 375). In keeping with the ideas behind

critical feminist theory, focus groups can provide a space that encourages groups to “develop an analysis of their own psychological and social assumptions and practice as these collude in maintaining oppression, and to experiment with alternative practices” (Bell, 1997, p. 8). The respect for personal experience and dialogue inherent within the use of the focus group provided for a harmonious merger between this method and the foundation of Black Feminist Theory in my research.

The methodology of this study allowed for the multi-voiced response and reaction of white, female teachers within a focus group setting. This consciousness-raising focus group offered the teachers an opportunity to engage in a discussion of white supremacy and other issues related to racism in a homogeneous group setting. The experience involved a total of four meetings for each participant. The participant group met for discussions concerning race and watched *The Essential Blue Eyed* (2004), the 60-minute video version of Jane Elliott’s antiracism exercise and the subsequent debriefing session. The video was shown during the second meeting. I scheduled the individual interviews between the second and final group meetings. The final meeting included all group members and was used for clarification of conflicting ideas, exploration of new ideas, and dialogues concerning the effects of the focus group activities and discussions on group members.

The purpose of the individual interviews was to gain a more comprehensive view of the connections made between the individual participant’s life and the experiences within the focus group. During these interviews, participants were asked specifically about their life histories and how these histories connect to the subject of white supremacy and racism. Participants were also asked to make connections between the focus group

experience and their professional lives as teachers. Also, participants were given the opportunity to express any thoughts, questions, or concerns related to the experience which may have risen since the focus group experience began. I expected I would learn more from some participants during the group meetings, while learning more from others during the individual interviews. This expectation was met. I also anticipated that the combination of the two would allow for a more multi-layered, contextual approach to the inquiry of the participants' responses to the issues of white supremacy and racism. This expectation was also met. I scheduled two focus group meetings before the individual interview for two reasons. First, I expected the initial focus group meetings would increase most participants' comfort levels and allow for more empowerment of the individuals. Second, I expected the individual interview would be made richer by following the exchange of ideas and reflection during and after the focus group. Again, these expectations were met.

Participant Selection and the Focus Group Setting

I advertised my study by emailing an invitation to participate in the group to all white, female teachers in my high school. See Appendix A for a sample of the invitation. For the purpose of this focus group, a homogeneous group is more conducive to freedom of discussion. The fact that the "group is homogeneous increases the participants' comfort in talking with similar others" (Morgan, 1998, p. 59). More specifically, Tatum (1997) explains that all-white groups allow participants a comfortable setting for honestly working through issues of guilt and shame and the process of understanding their own white identity. Michael and Conger (2009) explain the difference in discussions of race

by white people in comparison to people of color and reason that some conversations need to be separate:

...many white people are frequently hindered in such [interracial] conversations by our inexperience discussing race, ignorance about the racial injustice in the US, and underdeveloped racial identities. Many people of color, on the other hand, arrive at interracial dialogues with an intimate understanding of racial dynamics and experience talking about race with friends or family...Bringing white people and people of color together to discuss race can be like placing pre-algebra students in a calculus class. The people of color are so far ahead of the white people that they would have to slow down in order to let us catch up. And since “catching up” involves extensive emotional processing, it does not happen quickly. This can be endlessly frustrating to everyone involved. People of color may feel cheated out of their own growth around race while white people may shut down or feel inadequate, scared, and intimidated. (p. 57)

Twelve white, female teachers attended the informational meeting. I explained the expectations of the participants concerning the number of meetings, types of interaction, and topic and purpose of the study. I explained to the group that information gathered from the participants would be shared in a narrative format in my research findings. I further explained that although pseudonyms would be used in the reporting of these findings, the fact that participants would be drawn from our relatively small faculty, and characteristics such as teaching experience and age would be noted, all combine to make the identification of group members a relatively easy task for a reader familiar with our community. The group was also told about the process and opportunity for earning

Professional Learning Units through their involvement in the research. The teachers were allowed to ask questions, but no questions were asked. Interested teachers in attendance were asked to complete and return to me a brief information sheet within one week. See Appendix B for this information sheet. Eleven teachers returned the information sheets. Of these eleven, seven teachers reported no knowledge of Jane Elliott's work. One of these seven expressed a low level of interest in the study. I chose the six participants who were not familiar with Jane Elliott's work and expressed a high level of interest in the topic.

The first meeting of group members was held after school in the conference room of the counseling center of our high school. This meeting was expected to be approximately 45-60 minutes in duration. (At the end of the first hour, I told participants the time was up and anyone needing to could leave, but the entire group continued to talk for another twenty minutes.) A digital recorder and an audio tape recorder were employed to make a record of all comments made during this and all meetings. Because of the sensitivity of the issues being discussed, I began the group with a discussion of confidentiality and boundary setting. Morgan (1998) explains, "The goal of setting a boundary on self-disclosure should be to ensure that no one wakes up the next day feeling bad about what he or she said in your focus group" (p. 93). As a counselor, trained in and experienced with facilitating small groups, I feel comfortable in my ability to recognize and intervene when the group conversation is turning toward an emotionally "risky" discussion. I planned to offer small breaks and deescalate the discussion if needed; however, there was never a time when a break seemed necessary.

The meeting continued with a general discussion of the expectations of group members and a conversation about racial issues in general and more specifically, the racial climate of our high school. Possible group prompts and questions can be found on Appendix C. Due the generous flow of conversation which was offered by the group members, I only sporadically referred to these prompts and questions. Toward the end of the meeting, participants were given a list of 10 examples of white privileges (see Appendix D). We read and briefly discussed these examples, which originated from the work of Peggy McIntosh (1990). At the end of the first group meeting, one of the participants, Sarah, offered her home as the site for our next meeting which was expected to be three hours long and would include the viewing of Jane Elliott's (2004) video.

The second meeting was held after school, opening at approximately 4 pm and including dinner furnished by me and brought to us from Subway. The group chose the meeting date, time and choice of meal. It seemed obvious to me that the participants had been spurred to think about racial issues by our last meeting. The only break in conversation came shortly after 5 pm, when dinner arrived and we ate sandwiches and chips while watching *The Essential Blue Eyed* (2004) including the debriefing session, and a post-video group discussion. The conversations of the night were lively and included a wide variety of subtopics, as well as, a varied range of perspectives and thoughts concerning racial issues. The discussions included topics such as: racially segregated institutions from our community's past, the influence of this history on our community in general and us as individuals, equity of opportunities between the races, and the possibility of an African American assumption of racism and a white blindness to racism. Dinner arrived around 5:30 pm and we ate sandwiches and chips as we watched

The Essential Blue Eyed (2004) including the debriefing session, and a post-video group discussion. The group response to the video was mixed with some participants noting some anger or disagreement with what they saw as Elliott's misrepresentation, stereotyping, and blaming of white people.

A list of possible group prompts and questions can be found on Appendix E. The questions and prompts were only used intermittently. As with much qualitative research the analysis of data was an ongoing task and affected the collection process (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Thus, a change in direction of the discussion was determined by the group and the list of research prompts was merely a guide and was not strictly adhered to. During the last hour of the group meeting I began a discussion of the list of white privileges previously given to participants. Group members were asked to generate other examples that could be added to the list. After this discussion, the participants were provided with Appendix F, a "white privilege log." Members were asked to keep a log of experiences in which they become aware of white privilege over the next few weeks. The members were also asked to bring this log with them to the next meeting for discussion. Although the group members failed to return with the logs, they expressed that the logs had made them more sensitive concerning white privilege. During the final interview, some conversation was generated regarding their awareness of white privilege during the final past few weeks.

Within two weeks of viewing the video, I conducted an individual interview with each of the participants. One purpose of the individual interviews was to gain additional information concerning each participant's life history. I also utilized this interview to ask for clarification or interpretation of ideas expressed within the group. The participants

were also given an opportunity to expound on any ideas which have been reflected upon since the focus group meetings. The interviews were conducted after school or during the teacher's 90-minute planning block as preferred by the teacher. Each teacher was given a choice of sites for the interviews and all chose my office as the location for their interviews. Appendix G offers the list of possible interview prompts to be used as needed. In general, I found the participants eager to share their ideas about racial issues as they related to them personally and as they influenced our students, school, and society.

For the final group meeting we returned to the conference room of our school's counseling center. The meeting lasted a little beyond the scheduled one hour. The meeting offered members the opportunity to share their "white privilege logs" with each other. Although group members did not bring their logs with them, the group was able to engage in discussion of instances of white privilege.

We concluded our focus group experience with a discussion of ways we could improve our school, especially in the area of crossing racial boundaries to form stronger more productive relationships with students of color. This discussion included many practical ideas such as: attend sporting events and other activities to support the students, make connections in the classroom with their lives outside of the classroom, assign activities which allow them to draw on their talents and interests, and make the classroom a place where they feel safe and comfortable. As a final step of the meeting, I offered the teachers Appendix I, a suggested reading list. Tatum (2007) cautions, "Effective consciousness-raising about racism must also point the way toward constructive action. When people don't have the tools for moving forward, they tend to return to what is familiar, often becoming more vigorous in their defense of the racial status quo than they

were initially” (p. 105). I also offer interested participants the opportunity to work together to initiate a race relations advisement team for our school. (The race relations team would be a multicultural team that will work under my leadership and that of our African American assistant principal to investigate how our school can actively work against white supremacy and racism.) The group members responded positively to the idea; in fact, group members expressed a desire to repeat the focus group experience to discuss the improvement of our school in areas that include, but are not limited racial issues.

Context of Research

Setting of Research

The majority of my data collection was done in the high school of small, rural community in south central Georgia. This high school graduates approximately 90 students per year. The population of the entire school averages around 465 students. The student population currently includes 285 white students, 166 African American students, and 14 Hispanic students. The faculty consists of 39 white teachers and 1 African American teacher. There are two counselors and three administrators and one person in each of these positions is African American. As mentioned in the introduction, this rural, two-red-light community continues to be the home to the sad phenomena of segregated high school proms. Although the organizers of the “private prom” maintain that anyone is invited to attend, there have been few, if any, African Americans in attendance over the years. The school sponsored dances (which began approximately eleven years ago) have very few white students in attendance each year.

Political Moment of Research

This research is nestled within the time of the inaugural term of Barack Obama's presidency; a time when many across the nation might proclaim the election of our nation's first African American president as evidence of the end of racism. White antiracist, Tim Wise (2009) argues:

Contrary to the beliefs of many, the evidence is clear: systemic racial discrimination and profound inequity of opportunity continue to mark the lives of people of color, Obama's own success notwithstanding. Furthermore, not only does the success of Barack Obama not signify the death of white racism as a personal or institutional phenomenon, if anything it may well signal the emergence of an altogether new kind of racism...enlightened exceptionalism, a form that allows for and even celebrates the achievements of individual persons of color, but only because those individuals generally are seen as different from a less appealing, even pathological black or brown rule. (pp. 8-9)

This reasoning affords Whites in the disintegration stage (Helms, 1990) of white identity development an assurance of the appropriateness of African American assimilation into a society structured by white standards and expectations. This "new form" of racism conferred by Wise would then alleviate the tension for these Whites, thus slowing or ending growth toward the next stage or orientation. This reasoning allows Whites to admire African Americans who transcend race without recognizing their own responsibility to transcend racism.

Data Analysis

As I planned the analysis of my data, I returned to my original research question: “How do white teachers respond to discussions about and challenges to their belief system concerning racial issues and the racial climate of their school?” My research has been designed to draw themes and categories from the meanings made by the participants. Although these categories are certainly informed by established theory, the themes themselves emanated from the research data. Goetz and LeCompte (1981) studied the data analysis of human behavior in naturalistic settings and noted four sets of continuums on which “the majority of studies may be placed in locations between the extremes” (p. 54). The four dimensions noted are: inductive-deductive, generative-verify, constructive-enumerative, and subjective-objective (Goetz and LeCompte, 1981). These continuums can be used to decide the appropriateness of their data collection and analysis strategies within the overall purpose and design of their research (Goetz and LeCompte, 1981). My location on the continuums took root as I considered working within a focus group setting, garnering details from my participants regarding their personal backgrounds, past experiences, beliefs, attitudes, actions, and reactions as they relate to my research question. The above mentioned features of my research purpose and design locate this research closer to the inductive, generative, constructive and subjective ends of the continuums. Considering these features of my research purpose, qualitative research is an appropriate vehicle for research done within this location.

Some researchers question the lack of objective standards and relevance of findings produced through qualitative forms of inquiry (Behar-Horenstein & Morgan, 1995; Phillips, 1994). Other researchers applaud inquiry which offers innovative,

interpretive, multi-layered approach (Fenstermacher, 2002). Fenstermacher (2002) claims the lack of “sensitivity to context...[and] wrenching reconstructions of natural settings...are among the reasons that some researchers prefer to do research that is dialogical, intertextual, interpretive, multi-voiced, or narrative in form” (Compatibility section, ¶ 1). Jardine (1998) exalts the use of interpretive methods and its connection to pedagogy. He explains,

Understood interpretively, such incidents can have a generative and re-enlivening effect on the interweaving texts and textures of human life in which we are all embedded...It is not simply that pedagogy can be one of the themes of interpretive inquiry. Rather, interpretation is pedagogic at its heart. (Jardine, 1998, p. 34)

It is the interweaving of the textures of the stories and meaning-making of the participants which bind together the theory of black feminists with the experience of the consciousness raising group to better understand the experiences of these white women as they confronted racial issues. It is through the interweaving of multiple textures that respect can be given to the multiplicity of influences on and meanings of our thoughts, beliefs, and actions. The focus upon intersectionality of black feminist theory is more congruent with this research than other critical theories such as critical white studies. Discussing the experiences of the participants within a narrative form offers a platform for attention to life as an experience, complete with its multitude of influences. The following is a brief description of the steps I followed in analyzing the data gathered from the participants.

After reading and rereading the words of the participants of this focus group experience, multiple ideas surfaced. I first categorized these ideas according to topics discussed during the focus groups and individual interviews. These categories included:

personal background information, prom, school climate, race in the classroom, sensitivity to difference, extra-curricular activities, best teaching practices, the meaning of being successful, and blurred boundaries. Next, I categorized comments by the name of the participant who voiced them. Finally, I categorized the data by topics related to previous research, such as: critical self-reflection, reaction to confrontation, cultural knowledge, culturally relevant teaching. These three activities allowed me to immerse myself in the experiences of the participants, as I attempted to bring their process to print in a narrative form. According to Polkinghorne (1995), “The researcher’s task is to configure the data elements into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data” (p. 15). I have employed the use of biographical sketches and thematic discussions to present the meaning made during our consciousness raising experience.

These findings are not meant to be generalized to all teachers, but instead, the findings from this research will be used to better understand the lived experiences and meaning-making process of the participants as they work through race issues within their personal and professional realms. This is in keeping with Denzin and Lincoln’s (2003) statement, “The search for grand narratives is being replaced by more local, small-scale theories fitted to specific problems and particular situations” (p. 29).

CHAPTER FOUR: MEETING THE MEANING MAKERS

The presentation of the lived experiences of the participants of this study is a daunting task. In an effort to present the fullness of the participants' stories, I began this chapter with a table including a brief description of the participants and then provided a biographical sketch of each participant. Within the biographical sketches are connections to past literature and the thoughts of black feminists in an effort to understand the social and cultural influences on the participants' words, beliefs, and actions. I pulled from dialogue of both the group meetings and the individual interviews as I worked to depict the past and present life experiences and thoughts concerning race related issues shared by the individual participants.

Meaning Makers

Table 1

Meaning Makers

Name	Age	Years of Teaching Experience	Years Living in County	Comments
Hannah	50	27	45	Has only attended and taught school in our system. Individual relationships and multi-generational relationships are important.
Natalee	41	15	15	Worked as a registered nurse, also. Has been involved in critical self-reflection. Action-oriented approach to caring with focus on worth of all human beings.
Sarah	30	7	26	Has only attended and taught school in our system. More cross-cultural relationships than other group members.
Wendy	46	10.5	20	Grew-up in similar neighboring community. High standards and fairness in classroom is important. Expressed some fear and discomfort with cross-cultural relationships.
Carla	53	23	0	Grew-up in small community in Alabama. Focus on high standards and importance of being self-motivated.
Karen	47	4	15	Has worked in social services and higher education in past. Has been involved in critical self-reflection and multicultural sensitivity training.

Hannah-“That’s how I get along with many of the kids. I’ve taught their mama’s.”

I have worked with Hannah for the past 11 years. She teaches in the Family and Consumer Science Department of our high school. She is 50 years old and this has been her only teaching position. Hannah’s soothing, nurturing approach to teaching has served her well. She tends to set a cooperative, peaceful tone in her classroom and has very few discipline problems in comparison to other teachers at our school. Hannah has been voted Teacher of the Year by her peers and has been selected as STAR Teacher during her career. She has lived in this community her entire life. She is married and has two grown sons, both of whom graduated from our high school. She is a soft spoken person and is a well-respected member of our staff.

Like many of the Whites in our community, Hannah spends most of her private and social time in all-white settings. She explains that she grew up in a home where there were racist overtones, but respect was shown to African Americans who had “earned that respect.” Hannah explains that her father was quick to use racist language. This is a tradition that she and her husband have not allowed to be continued in their home. She explains that they have raised their sons not to use such language or to treat people unfairly. Hannah says a Christian upbringing is the basis for her belief that all people should be treated well. She admits that she is uncomfortable with interracial marriages. Hannah ponders these two concepts and then comments,

There have been several black children that I have loved and wanted to take home with me, and I think I would be good with them living with me, but not as my daughter-in-law. Sometimes I feel guilty because I feel this way. I guess that it is the biblical background of not mixing race.

The final comment refers to Deuteronomy 7:3-4, the biblical warning that the Israelites should not marry Canaanites. This verse has been traditionally used in some churches to warn against interracial marriage.

Hannah's earliest race related memories center around one man, Busey. Busey was an African American man who helped with her family's farm. Hannah's memories of Busey are overwhelmingly positive. She describes him as an extra grandparent and says, "It was a privilege to sit next to Busey at lunch." During our group conversation Hannah recognized the limitations of her interactions with Busey. "We did not know where he lived until he died. But he had been in our family since before I was born." When this comment was made, Hannah tilted her head slightly and gave a small smile as if this was the first time she had noticed the incongruence of her stated feelings for this man and her knowledge of his life. Hannah does feel that there is a connection between her feelings toward Busey and her feelings toward people of his race. She states, "Loving him made it easier to love others who were like him." I sense that the similarity between her feelings for Busey and "others like him," includes both the level of affection and the distance of objectification of the *other*. Emily Bernard (2004) is an African American author who writes about her own experiences with interracial relationships. She poignantly sums up the relationship between feelings of love and the objectification she felt in her own life experiences when she states, "In my experience, being loved isn't the same thing as being seen" (Bernard, 2004, p. 6). It is precisely oppressive dynamics such as Busey's not being "seen" which stymies Hannah's personal understanding of racism.

As a child, Hannah does not remember any African American students in her classes until around 8th or 9th grade. Hannah's first real relationships with African

American children were during her time in the high school band. She notes that the relationships between band members and band parents of all races seemed very amicable. Being in the band demanded a great deal of work from both the students and their; that work was shared among both races. Many parents found themselves working side-by-side with people of another race for the first time. Hannah notes that although her father has always been somewhat tightfisted with his respect for African Americans, “He loved Miss Irishtine and they worked together with the band.” Hannah adds, “If a person is black, they have to earn his respect.” Later, in our individual interview, Hannah mentioned a close friend, a dark-skinned woman, who is originally from Aruba. According to Hannah, this friend “has almost a defeatist attitude as far as her race goes...she doesn’t see how much respect people have for her...she makes comments about how people would treat her differently if she were white.” I reminded Hannah of her father’s style, most white people were given respect automatically, while people of color had to earn that respect. I asked her if she felt attitudes like this were the cause of her friend’s frustration. She raised her eyebrow and said, “Yeah, you may be right.”

Hannah states that she feels very comfortable teaching across racial lines. She says, “I teach more black girls than probably anyone else in the school.” She further explains, “I’m more like them than maybe some of the other teachers.” An example of this contrast can be seen between Hannah and her co-worker and fellow Family and Consumer Science teacher, Carla. Carla has done extensive traveling while Hannah is more of a homebody. In fact, like many of her students, most of the traveling Hannah has enjoyed has been done through the student organization Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America.

Hannah attributes part of her successful student-teacher relationships to the fact that she has taught many of her students' mothers and aunts. Hannah believes "the relationships are the most important thing!" It has been my experience in dealing with students Hannah and I share, that Hannah does get to know students well. When I need to know more about a student, Hannah can usually tell me who the child is related to and can offer insight into their home life. I have been witness to the effectiveness of Hannah's relationships with her current and former students during teacher/student/parent meetings. During these meetings the warmth between Hannah and her students seems obvious and I have often noted the relief in the eyes of an African American mother when she enters one of these meetings and finds that her former teacher at the table.

Although Hannah freely discussed specific incidents and relationships that involved crossing racial lines, she was slow to join in on the discussions of racism in general. She did not offer an opinion concerning the private or school prom, but instead her additions to these conversations were more informational. It seems that Hannah has not spent much time in critical reflection about racial issues. This focus group may have been Hannah's first time of being challenged about her thoughts and beliefs concerning race. There were times throughout the focus group experience when it was evident that Hannah's belief system was being challenged. The video offered such a challenge. During our individual interview, Hannah expressed a concern that during the video Ms. Elliott seemed to "put down the white man and promote the black man." Hannah added, "I have a hard time when people do that in either direction. I think everybody ought to earn whatever respect they get." When I asked Hannah if she believed white privilege existed, she answered, "Yeah, I do. Do I think it is right? No." Hannah added that she

had often thought about a “very intelligent African American middle school student from years ago.” This child was moved from a lower academic class which had many African American students on roster to a top class which had only white students. “She, I believe, has a six-year [degree] and is working on her doctorate. I’ve often wondered if that move caused her to be successful or if she was going to be ok anyway.”

When reviewing the focus group transcripts to gain more insight into the meaning made by Hannah, I continue to be unsure of any change in her beliefs and attitudes concerning racial issues and white supremacy. Hannah was more frugal with her comments than the other group members, giving me less opportunity for discernment. Some of Hannah’s comments show evidence of defensiveness and a lack of confrontation, while others offer a glimpse of recognition that racism involves more than overt segregation and racist language. Hannah does not profess a belief in a colorblind approach to teaching; instead she tends to allow her interest in the student, as an individual, to guide her interactions with them. Hannah, as all of us, would benefit from a better understanding of the power of dominant forces to colonize our minds with a value system which benefits those in power. There seems to be a passive acceptance of the privilege related to white supremacy within Hannah’s words and actions. Her strong Christian beliefs which uphold kind treatment of others has impacted her treatment of individuals, however it has not led her to investigate the social and political constructs of race which may impact her thoughts, words, and actions in more subtle ways. It will be interesting to talk with Hannah during the upcoming year as I watch for signs of how the focus group experience might have impacted her understanding of racial issues in general and at our school specifically.

Natalee-“People desire to be loved.”

Natalee is perhaps the group member I knew the least about when I began my research. Natalee worked as a registered nurse before becoming a teacher. She has worked in the neighboring school system and has held various positions in our system. She has taught at both our elementary and alternative school sites. At age 41, she has spent this, her first year, in our high school setting. Natalee explains she was surprised that she “did not hear more of the racial stuff in the classrooms” during this past year. Her current assignment includes one block of remedial reading with an almost exclusively African American male class, and two blocks of co-teaching in our English department.

Natalee explains that her Christian beliefs are fundamental to how she approaches life and teaching. She adds, “My parents never pushed religion, but instead they talked about doing good.” Over six years ago Natalee’s husband died unexpectedly, leaving her to be the single parent of two young girls. She feels that the loss of her husband has actually helped her to “focus more on faith, peace, love, and freedom...I would hate to know that I carried any form of hatred around with me, and [that feeling] comes from praying and being close to God.” After studying the transcript of my interview with Natalee, I was struck by the congruence of Natalee’s words, her work with students, and her demeanor in the group and individual meetings. She exudes a confident peacefulness that effectively puts you at ease. Natalee expresses a concern about the stress level of many educators. “You stumble over the small stuff, but if you keep stumbling you won’t make it to the big picture...and seeing the big picture brings peace...So many people around here just need to exhale.”

Many of Natalee's early race-related memories involve an African American woman named Annie Laura. This person and her husband worked in Natalee's family's business. Natalee said one of the most troubling memories of childhood involved Annie Laura, who Natalee mistakenly thought was "Aunt Laura." Around the age of five, Natalee's father told her that Annie Laura was not really her aunt. When Natalee asked why, he simply explained that it was because she was black. Natalee describes this news as "a shocker, it broke my heart." Natalee expounds, "I can remember exactly where I was when he told me. I can remember that moment inside of me, and the hurt." Even at such an early age, Natalee recognized that an assumed inferiority accompanied the racial difference. As a parent, Natalee can now see other ways of explaining this to children. "He could have focused on the fact that we were not related, but instead the focus was that she was black." Although Natalee had never heard either parent use the "N-word" during her childhood, she recognizes the racism embedded in his explanation and has worked to remove such entrenched (and often passively and thoughtlessly accepted) racist beliefs from explanations she shares with her children.

Natalee compares her father's explanation with an experience she recently had with her second grade daughter, Sarah. A person who worked at the elementary school called Natalee to *warn* her that Sarah had a black boyfriend. Natalee explained to the caller that she was not concerned about the issue. Sarah came in that afternoon and explained to her mom that she had a boyfriend, never mentioning his race. A few days later, Sarah came in with the news that she had ended the relationship. Natalee asked her for more details and Sarah explained that he was trying to tell her what to do, so she broke-up with him. Natalee told her that she thought it was a little early for her to have a

boyfriend and that she had made the right decision because she should never let a boy tell her what to do. Natalee's focus was on helping Sarah become a confident and powerful person, not race. There have been other times that Natalee has been *warned* concerning racial issues.

Several months ago Natalee invited an African American male student to her home to do some work for her and make some money. This young man has a reputation for having some behavior problems, but Natalee has a good relationship with him. Natalee explained that she has known this young man and his mother for years. "But somebody had something to say about it. It was about more than making money, it was about showing him how to work. It was about talking while we made a peanut butter and jelly sandwich." Natalee is convinced of the power inherent in getting to know your students and establishing strong bonds that go beyond the classroom walls. Her blurred boundaries lead to strong and relationships with her students. During our individual interview, she shared another story of a committed relationship with an African American student. She taught Dre during his third grade year and spent extra time after school helping him to become a better reader. She knew his mom and they worked together to make sure Dre progressed as much as possible. Dre eventually earned a scholarship and went out of state to college. A couple of years ago she received an invitation to his college graduation. She sent him a gift and within days she received a thank you note. She said in the note he wrote, "I don't remember anything about elementary school, but I remember everything about your class!" Natalee attributes his memory of her class to the emotional attachment he had with her because he knew that she valued him and he knew her feelings were authentic. Gay (2000) explains, "Long after leaving school, they [students] remember

fondly, and in graphic detail, those teachers who cared” (p. 49). Dre’s thank you note is illustrative of memories of a teacher who’s caring was action oriented and rooted in a knowledge and respect for him as a valuable human being.

Natalee’s authentic concern and interest for her students also seem to be effective in her remedial reading class. This class is composed of a small group of young men. There is one white student and the rest are African American. Some of these students are also being served by our special education services, and all came into the class reading at approximately a first grade level. During a focus group meeting the discussion turned to how to reach across racial lines to connect with students. Ideas included showing interest in their personal lives, learning from them, and talking overtly about racial issues. Natalee added, “They just want to be talked to...like you would your own children.” She believes that it is important to spend time learning from the students about how they view the world. She shared with the group her happiness concerning the progress of her students, “Yesterday my first block class came in asking to read...and I just started crying.” Another group member, Sarah, added that one of her friends had served as a substitute teacher in this class during the beginning of the year and had returned later in the semester. “He was so excited, he said at first they couldn’t [read] and now they are asking him to let them read and they are hollering, ‘I can read.’” The group discussed the phenomenal change in the students in the areas of both reading and confidence. This led to the group’s discussion concerning the importance of students feeling connected to the subject, the classroom, and the teacher.

Relationships with her students are very important to Natalee. She explains “Teachers are so pressured to get everything done, but you need to take time out to build

relationships...then they will want to perform for you.” Natalee believes that “People desire to be loved” and “Discipline is love, too.” She has quickly developed a reputation as a teacher who can effectively deal with students known for having behavior problems. Although she is very small in stature, she tends to build relationships with students that allow her to directly and effectively confront them with strength and compassion. She sees her job as much more than an administrator of academic knowledge, her focus is on the whole being of the child. Natalee has a firm belief in the innate value and goodness of human beings, she explains:

Like some people can look at a kid and say, “Boy, he is a bad one!” But no, there’s some goodness down in there somewhere and if I can be a tool to help him find it, then good! If I can teach you that – even before academics then that is what I need to do.

Natalee advocates spending quality time with students, “Just 15 minutes after school or in class, just to make that child feel important. They will give it back to you.” She attributes the success of her remedial reading class to strong student-teacher relationships. These relationships are made evident by the text messages she received from students during our meetings and interviews. The messages asked for a range of things including advice, general information, and even a ride home. It is obvious that Natalee’s students view her as a person to turn to for help or guidance. She explains that she has boundaries about what she can afford to offer students; however, she does not end the student-teacher relationship at the classroom door or even at the end of the school year.

Natalee acknowledges that she has engaged in much critical self-reflection over the years and says that she feels that critical self-reflection is very important for teachers

and even students. She was more hesitant to speak in the group setting than many of the group members. However, her comments were timely and well-received by others in the group. Natalee explained that she believes in the importance of critical self-reflection in helping her to develop into a more aware human being. Natalee's commitment to keep the "big picture" in focus enables her to continue her own self-reflection and even encourage this in others. Her persistent focus on the student's value and the importance of truly knowing students was invaluable to the group. The foundation of love in Natalee's approach to teaching reminds me of bell hooks. When I listen as Natalee talk about her relationships with the young African American men in her class and of the progress they are making, I am reminded of *Salvation: Black People and Love* (hooks, 2001). The author describes her concern regarding the debate of separate schools for African American young men:

Everywhere I turned, I kept hearing that black boys needed discipline, that they needed to learn the meaning of hard work, that they needed to have strong role models who would set boundaries for them and teach obedience. Again and again a militaristic model of boot camp and basic training was presented as a solution to the behavior problems of young black men. Not once did I hear anybody speak about black boys needing love as a foundation that would ensure the development of sound self-esteem, self-love, and love of others. Even though black male leaders were among the voices defining lovelessness as a key cause of hopelessness and despair among black youth, none of them talked about the role of love in the education of young black boys. (hooks, 2001, p.6)

Although Natalee has never read the words of bell hooks, her words and actions demonstrate an agreement with the author.

Sarah-“I was holding his head up while he threw-up. The nurses were looking at me funny.”

Sarah is the youngest member of our focus group. At just 30 years old, Sarah is a bubbly, excited English teacher in our high school. She also taught middle school language arts for several years before moving to the upper grades. She is a graduate of our school system and has lived in this community all of her life. She is from a prominent farming family and admits that her life has brought with it many privileges. However, she has also spent many summers working in the fields... most often with people of other races. Sarah recognizes that people who do not know her well would not expect to find her in the fields. She explains that her father expected her to do fieldwork when she was in school and expects the same now, if he needs her help or if she needs extra money. In fact, Sarah explained that just last summer she was working in the fields alongside Haitian immigrants. Sarah describes her experiences in the fields with African Americans from our community, was very different than her experiences with Haitians. She notes that the Haitians may be similar in skin color to the African Americans she knows, “but their culture is very different.”

Sarah’s most memorable race-related memory happened when she was just seven years old. Ida Mae, who Sarah describes as her family’s salvation, was the person who came to their house to care for Sarah and her three brothers while her parents worked. Sarah explains that it was also a common practice for her mom to take her to play with Ida Mae’s children at their house. Sarah remembers a life changing day at the age of seven.

Her nine year old brother was killed suddenly in a four wheeler accident. “The day my brother died. Ida Mae was the one who told us.” Sarah describes how she remembers everything about that day... “how everything looked, how I felt, where I sat when she told us.” Sarah describes how she felt sorry for Ida Mae because of the pain she knew Ida Mae was feeling. Ida Mae had continued to care for the family throughout this time and had served as a great source of comfort to Sarah, her remaining brothers, and her parents. The description of this event led group members to ponder how such a powerful early memory can shape how you view the world.

Sarah has a reputation for being well-received by African American students. “They call my homeroom the ghetto homeroom. We listen to rap music and just talk about everything.” Sarah feels that African American students are more open with her about their lives than the white students she has taught. She says that when she teaches African American students, they are often shocked that she knows their parents. When she tells the class that she will call or visit their homes if she needs to talk to their parents, her African American students will often laugh. Sarah describes her response,

They say you won’t come to my house. I say ‘in a minute.’ I went to school with a lot of their parents. They say, ‘You won’t call my daddy’...and then I call him by his nickname, I’ll say I know your daddy, your uncle, all of them—not just their names, but their nicknames.

This level of familiarity shocks the students, but instantly earns her a higher level of respect. Although this familiarity serves her well at this point in her career, she will need to build on her life experiences with the development of a stronger awareness racial

identity and a higher level of critical cultural consciousness in order to maintain open and productive relationships with students and their families for her entire career.

The discussions in her classroom are open and she feels comfortable asking the students about their views on race related issues. For example, earlier this year the students in her class were making comments about the fact that one of the class members, an African American female, is dating a white male student. The two had kept the relationship quiet for several months, but have since decided to openly date each other. Although there is an occasional occurrence of white females openly dating African American males at our school, African American females openly dating white boys is quite a novelty. When the students were asking the female student about her relationship, Sarah asked her why she had been hesitant to disclose the relationship earlier. The question was asked as an opportunity for the young woman to share her experience and her feelings and not as a way of asking her to defend the relationship. The group was then able to discuss the equity of the label of taboo placed on this relationship versus other relationships. Sarah's interest in the students and her eagerness to learn about people with life experiences that differ from her own (without judgment) allows her to model acceptance and appreciation for difference.

Sarah is comfortable with her relationships with her students and feels that they (and especially African American students) will come to her if they want to talk or need something. As an example, she explains that Quinton and Curtis called and asked for her help one Saturday. She told them to come by her house. She sat on the patio with them and helped them to fill-out job applications for over an hour. When the applications were

complete, she mentioned some recent trouble Quinton had gotten into. He was caught stealing from the school. She explained:

I told Quinton, “I’m not going to ask you what happened. I know you weren’t thinking.” I would never have thought Quinton would have done something like that. But I told him, “I’m just surprised. If I needed something out of my room, I would have sent you because I trusted you.” I wanted him to know that.

After hearing Sarah’s comments I had to wonder what his internal reaction to her words were. I was reminded of a comment Natalee made in our group discussion about how we should communicate with students when they do something wrong. She offered, “They want to be talked to, not in a degrading way, but like you would your own child.” Sarah’s words to Quinton were compassionate, but at the same time firm and to the point.

Sarah’s openness to cross-racial relationships has not come without a cost. Several years ago she developed a relationship with an African American young man from a single parent, poverty-stricken home. She first taught this young man in middle school. “I don’t know if I just wanted to make a difference in someone’s life or what.” When this young man came to high school, Sarah and her husband supported him in athletics and academics. They were often at his sporting events, helped him with school work and even helped him financially when it was needed. “We would let him come in and out of our house like he was ours.” When he had surgery, Sarah went for a short visit, but was left to take care of him after surgery. “His mom left, so...I was with him...holding up his head while he threw-up. The nurses looked at me funny.” Her relationship with this young man caused much talk in the community because of the level of her commitment to him.

She says she understands the viewpoints of people in the community; but her desire that he find an escape from extreme poverty overcame her concern of what others thought and said. “I remember sitting with [his mother and aunt] and they live such a different life. I kept thinking he’s got to get out of here.” Sarah’s mother has asked her if her relationship with him was worth all of the “bad press.” Her response is “When he came by to tell me that he passed the graduation test, yes....when he’s in the newspaper [for criminal activity], no!”

Sarah’s belief that the young man needed to “get out of here,” is a theme I often hear repeated in our community by Whites and African Americans, alike. Although, Sarah did not mention the idea that he needed to “get into a more privileged, white home,” however the idea of “rescuing” him from his African American home of poverty is apparent. Recently, the award winning movie, *The Blind Side*, portrayed the “successful” rescue of a young black male by an upper-class white family. While watching the previews for this movie (I could not bring myself to watch the movie), I admit, the relationship between this young man and Sarah came to mind. I agree with Patricia Williams’ (1997) as she states:

I am particularly troubled by the notion that black children in white families are better off simply because they may have access to a broader range of material advantages by having white parents and living in a largely white and relatively privileged world. Such an argument, should not, I think, be used to justify the redistribution of children in our society, but rather to bolster a redistribution of resources such that blacks can afford to raise children, too. (p. 153)

Law professor, Dorothy E. Roberts, adds a more historical critique of the issue. Roberts, (2005) explains as child welfare services in our country began (over the last few decades) to serve more African American children and families, the services became more punitive with more money spent on "out-of-home care and less on in-home services" (p. 971). This change in funding is reflective of an ideology that lacks respect for African American homes and families. "Policymakers have accepted a medical and individualistic model of child abuse that erases the social reasons for poor families' hardships by attributing them to parental deficits and pathologies that require therapeutic remedies rather than social change" (Roberts, 2005, pp. 971-972). The interrogation of such issues on a societal level, with an understanding of cause and effect which questions established policies, will help Sarah to develop a more thoughtful and critical approach to antiracist work. Her experiences have given her insight into the issues of inequity and discrimination faced by individuals. She has demonstrated a commitment to actively work to assist these individuals. Hopefully, as her consciousness is raised in the area of cultural issues and racial identity, she will continue this commitment at a higher level.

In comparison to the other participants, I feel that I knew little about Sarah when we started the focus group. Throughout the discussions and interview I found a young woman with a very open, fluid, and generous approach to people. She seems to genuinely appreciate people and their differences. She shies away from judging people, including those people who may have unfairly judged her. Sarah tends to take purposeful steps to reach across cultural boundaries and get to know the students she teaches. This reach is made more comfortable for Sarah because of her family's support of the cross-cultural relationships she has enjoyed as a child and adult.

Being over ten years younger than the next youngest person in our group, Sarah's life experiences had a different flavor than many of ours. The fact that Sarah's age places her further away from our system's moment of integration is just one influence. Her family's support, her open personality, and other factors have combined to flavor Sarah's open and engaging approach to racial issues. Often during discussions Sarah would vacillate between descriptions of her time as a student and as a teacher. She built important cross-cultural relationships as a student that she still maintains today. Sarah believes that one specific childhood friend had a profound effect on her view of racial identity. During middle school Sarah would spend many weekends in another town with a good friend. Sarah and her friend developed a friendship with a young girl from that town who was born to a black father and a white mother. Sarah described how she witnessed racial slurs being made to the biracial girl by people of both races. She explained that she spent time thinking about how painful it must be for her to not feel "really white or black." Sarah feels that extra-curricular activities helped her to cross cultural lines at her school. "We always had groups that mixed in high school, but it was usually like the cheerleaders...if we played sports, that group hung out." Sarah's conversations were peppered with examples of how the cross cultural relationships she formed during high school are still intact today. Her discussions of weddings, parties, weekend activities often included names of people I recognize as her African American schoolmates and former teammates. Sarah also liberally quoted from discussions that she had enjoyed with African American friends, coworkers and students to offer a point of view counter to the hegemony. The details of these conversations reflect the authenticity and comfort of her travels across racial boundaries.

As a teacher, Sarah also recognizes the power of extra-curricular activities. She explains that she began attending as many student activities as possible several years ago and “I saw their behavior get better. Because they saw, ‘Hey she cares. She’s spending her time to come see me.’ A lot of times their parents aren’t there...they can’t come.” Sarah went on to note that many of their parents work more than one job or may have smaller children at home and cannot regularly attend the activities. Sarah’s explanation of why some parents might not attend their child’s activities speaks to Sarah’s understanding of the lives of her students, her respect for their families, and her recognition that others in the group may have thought a lack of attendance represented a lack of interest and support by the parents.

Throughout our focus group discussions, Sarah seemed to add quick comments that offered insight into the experiences of students of color and their families that countered the cultural blindness of others. When asked why she believes some teachers have a more difficult time getting along with African American students, Sarah answered with an unintentional pun. “They see things as black and white in all areas...but nothing gray.” During our individual interview, I discovered that Sarah’s comments and actions concerning racial issues were often intentional. Although she has not been exposed to the writings of critical theorists, her life experiences have naturally opened her mind to critical thought. She seeks experiences that allow her to understand the lives of others and uses those experiences shape her view of the world. In comparison to the other teacher-participants, it is as if Sarah has a jump start in the formation of meaningful cross-cultural relationships. She is like a runner coming to the race with a certain amount of natural speed; however, without proper training, this runner will begin to fade in a race of

endurance. It is important that Sarah capitalize on her life experiences and build for the race of endurance through exercises in critical self-reflection and cultural consciousness. I plan to offer Sarah resources concerning critical self-reflection and culturally relevant pedagogy. She has a foundation of openness and curiosity which will likely mature with insight from critical thinkers.

Wendy- “I’m real careful because I don’t know what would offend them.”

Wendy began her teaching career in her thirties. Before teaching she worked as an office manager of a doctor’s office. When Wendy first began teaching at our school, she worked with special education students. She now teaches social studies mostly to 10th and 11th graders. She holds a gifted certificate and has the reputation as a tough, but fair teacher. Wendy has been teaching for a total of 11 years.

Like many in the group, Wendy’s personal educational story began during the first years of integration. She explains that during first grade she moved to a neighboring elementary school which was predominately African American. “I was scared to death of them [African American girls] and with good reason. They could be quite mean.” Wendy explains that much of her early grade memories include being made fun of and picked on by African American girls. During her seventh grade year a good friend encouraged her to stand-up for herself. That year while playing basketball with a racially mixed group, Wendy made the effort to stand-up to what she saw as cheating by the other team. A black girl on the other team began fussing at her, but Wendy stood her ground. She sees this a pivotal moment in her relationship with the African American girls at her school. “I never remember them messing with me again. In fact, I became friends with several black girls in high school.”

Wendy does see herself as cautious when dealing with people of other races. “I don’t know what would offend them.” She is also cautious when the topic of race comes up in the classroom. “I feel comfortable, but I’m very careful. I don’t want anything to be taken out of context.” When asked about her views on racism, Wendy questioned the validity of claims of racism, “There is a lot more opportunity out there than before. I get irritated when the black community doesn’t rally around that more. Instead, they hang on racism and use it every chance they get.” When asked about the equity of life choices between the two races, Wendy stated “I think in the past maybe [not], but I think now...pretty even... the gap is closing.” Wendy mentioned her concern about the actions and words of some white people. “Maybe white people who want to nitpick everything are really the racists.” She goes on to explain, “White people feeling guilty... makes them go to the extreme and that can make things worse.” She equated this to the boy crying wolf. I probed further asking, “Can you think of something that has happened that you can say, ‘Yeah, that is racism?’” Wendy mentioned the “nappy-headed hoe” comment by radio and TV commentator, Don Imus. But she mitigated the racism of his comments by adding, “Some people can say things and get away with it because it is funny [while] someone else can say it and get in trouble.” When I asked her if she felt there were examples of racism related to Hurricane Katrina, she answered with a quick, “No.” Wendy went on to explain, “The governor was a woman. The mayor was a black man. They knew it was coming, they didn’t act pre-emptively.” When I asked if she felt the general response of people was different because the news coverage included so many of the poor African Americans as opposed to middle-class Whites. She stated that it was up to the individual viewer and added that with the floods of the mid-west the surrounding

communities pitched in and helped. “I think sometimes people want to see that you are willing to help yourself and they will jump in and help...and sometimes that gets confused with racism.”

During our discussions, Wendy was quick to defend the status quo. For example, when the topic turned to the all-white golf team [which practices at the traditionally all-white country club], or the segregated proms she would often redirect or question the validity of any reference to institutionalized racism. When Sarah questioned the impact of our traditionally all-white country club on our golf team being all-white, Wendy interrupted to explain that the two were not connected. She named two African American students who played golf at the country club as guests of her sons and other friends. However, Wendy explained the rules have since changed and a visitor is only admitted as a guest a total of three times. Then, according to Wendy

they can't go anymore whether you are white, black, or whatever...but as far as the golf team, it doesn't matter. You can go. You don't even have to be a member. They don't even have to pay. I think it is three days out of the week...and that is for the golf team, so they [the board of directors of the country club] are pretty good about that.

Likewise, when I brought up the topic of the two proms during our individual interview, Wendy seemed somewhat protective of the idea of a private dance.

“It's just a freer atmosphere. I don't think they want to have it associated with the school.” I probed further asking Wendy how she thought she would view the prom issue if she were a black girl. She did not answer the question, but instead brought up an event that many people in the community believe to be the impetus for the first school prom.

Approximately eleven years ago a young black student was refused entry into a private dance by one of the parent chaperones. Wendy said, “Man, I could not have done that. But the [private] dances I have helped with, I think there have been some Blacks.” It is true that no student has reported being refused entry to the private dances in the past eleven years. I asked Wendy to speculate on why there are fewer African Americans at the private dances since they are “allowed” to be there. She responded, “You’d have to ask them. I haven’t asked. That’s one of those things you hate to ask, because maybe they haven’t thought about it. Maybe they would rather mix with their own.” Again I asked how she would view the private dances if she were a young African America girl. She responded, “I would have to make a choice. I would know I would be accepted if I went.” I challenged, “Do you think they feel accepted?” Wendy answered, “Yes, the ones I saw had a good time. Mind you, they kept to themselves inside and mingled outside.” Wendy seems very committed to the idea that the reason for the private dances is only to allow students more freedom without school rules. Neither the history of the private dances being all-white nor the continued practice of the dances being organized and supported by only white children and their parents seems to sway Wendy’s view of this institution.

Ironically, Wendy’s sons often have African American visitors in their home to swim, hangout, or sleepover. Wendy explains that when her oldest daughter was in school, the child’s stepfather would not allow her to bring home a black friend to spend the night. Now, several years later, Wendy’s husband has become very active in their sons’ sports teams and in the process has gotten to know many of their African American friends. “Now he’s different. When you get to know kids you see it differently...and like

Donte [son's African American friend] has practically stayed at our house for the past two weeks." When one son graduated this year, she sponsored one of the only two graduation dinners that invited all students without regard to race.

I was excited to have Wendy as a participant in our group. I knew that she would not hesitate to offer her opinion in a homogenously grouped setting. I also knew that Wendy enjoys debating issues and is one who is eager for personal growth. Throughout the discussions, I watched as Wendy intently listened to the ideas of others and thoughtfully added her own comments. Wendy was not afraid to share her thoughts even when contradicting the contributions of others. Her comments illustrating her commitment to upholding status quo, even when the equity of institutions is brought into question, offered moments which allowed the group to pause and reflect upon their own beliefs and attitudes. Wendy has a passion for studying and teaching world history. She often discusses current events and situations with consideration of historical parallels. I have challenged Wendy to read accounts of history from alternative points of view, such as works by Ronald Takaki (1993) and Joel Spring (2005). I will be interested to find how Wendy will respond to these texts.

Carla—"I grew up poor. [I decided] if I wanted to make it in that setting, I'd have to see what it takes to become successful in that setting."

Carla is the only participant who did not grow up this state, but rather in southern Alabama. She is 53 years old has been spent her entire teaching career in the Family and Consumer Science department of our high school. She and Hannah share a lab/classroom and work very closely. Carla has earned her doctorate and is nationally board certified. She is very confident and outspoken person. When the first group discussion began with

the topic of our school's racial climate, she was the first to comment. "The most racist group in our school is the black population...they think the white teacher is only going to be fair to the white student."

Carla's childhood school was integrated when she began fifth grade. She remembers having very little interaction with African Americans before that time. She had African American teachers for fifth grade math and seventh grade science. She remembers both of them as "very good teachers" and "good role models." She attributes her learning to study to the African American man who taught her science. She describes him as being "terribly difficult." Carla explains that the African Americans that she was "exposed to were very professional. They fit in and were successful." Carla does not include any descriptions of interaction with African American students in her memories of school.

Carla's perspective is primarily focused upon assimilation, merit, and choice as the road to success. "I didn't have perfect grammar. I could have adopted a lifestyle and a circumstance that would have hindered me. It's not [as much] about the color of their skin, as about the choices they make." When given the opportunity to expound further, Carla states, "I'm blonde, female and southern. That does not make me stupid. If I change one of those and make it my skin color, does that give me less of a chance? I don't think so....maybe 100 years ago." I challenged Carla by asking, "Would an identical black female born in your place and time have had the same chances you had? She quickly retorted with a look of scorn, "She would have had a better chance. I grew up when all the quotas had to be met." Carla consistently responded to issues of inequity with comments about learning "how to make the system work for you" and "working hard

to overcome your circumstances;” citing the improvement of her own status via hard work and determination. However, Carla failed to recognize that even when focusing on class as the “issue,” there is a racial difference within similar classes. Delgado and Stefaniic (2001) explain:

The predicament of very poor minority families differs in degree from that of their white counterparts. White poverty usually only lasts for a generation or two (even for immigrant families); not so for the black or brown version. By the same token, middle-class or professional status for blacks, browns, or Indians is less secure than for others. (pp. 110-111)

Attempts to shift the focus from racism to classism and the view of Affirmative Action as an unfair advantage given to African Americans are common obstacle to the creation of cultural competence. I will discuss this type of deflection, as well as other obstacles, in further detail later in this chapter.

Throughout the focus group discussions and the individual interview, Carla struggled with what seemed to be a commitment to her original point of view and insights from group discussions which tore at that belief system. There were times during the discussions when Carla seemed to be thinking out loud as she juggled warring perspectives. One example of this tension involved a mixed race friend. Carla shares a close relationship with the same Aruban friend as Hannah. Carla explains that this friend is “half Chinese and half Dutch...but she really looks Latin.” Carla describes her experiences with this friend:

She is always talking about how people treat her, and I’m with her. I mean for ten years we have been best friends, the three of us together. And I

don't see things that she sees, in the same way. And so I've tried to really look hard to see what it is [she sees]. She says people talk down to her and I don't see that. And I mean I've been right there, I've heard the same words.

When challenged by myself and others with the idea that either perception could be correct and that the friend might have more insight into the cues that people give when they are devaluing others, Carla agreed (but only through the lens of her own perception) stating, "But my point is that I think she makes it harder on herself than it has to be...as my daddy used to put it to me, 'Carla you are wearing your feelings on your shoulders.'" I probed further, asking what would cause her to "wear her feelings on her shoulders." Carla responded, "Because I had gotten hurt before." She then quickly redirected the conversation to a discussion of being successful by becoming like those who are successful.

Carla is very committed to helping students see that they have control over their own destinies and their own successes. In her view great teaching involves, "empowering kids to feel like they are in control of where they are going to take their future...no matter what is thrown at me, I have control of my future." This idea was played out in Carla's most memorable racial experience, which involved a student I'll call Quanda. Carla explains,

Quanda represented the struggle we have as white teachers. She did not trust us because of the color of our skin. But when she let down her barrier to trust us, it changed her whole life. She became very successful in school

and left here with some very real career choices...I don't think *we* changed at all. I was the same teacher before as after.

Carla attributes her own success to hard work and intelligence. She describes herself as an intelligent child of a very poor family. Pull-up your bootstraps, face your issue and get the job done is her recipe for being successful. It was only near the end of the group sessions that I began to notice Carla's reference to an uneven playing field. Carla did begin to make comments equating experiences with racism to her own experiences with sexism. She also admitted to telling her students, "If you are black, female, and southern, you've got to work really hard to overcome that pre-thought that is out there." The use of the term pre-thought seemed to be a conscious effort to remove any critique of a flawed and prejudicial system which she seems to insist works for all. Carla's personal tenacity has helped her to overcome obstacles of class and gender to gain a relatively high level of academic and financial success. To her credit, Carla is passionate about inciting that same type of tenacity in her students. She has found this to be a sometimes rewarding, sometimes painful task.

As Carla strives to uphold high standards in her classroom, she reports that African American students in general are quick to rebel against her high expectations. "The reason that I have had so many write-ups for black children is because they fight me over that very thing [high expectations]. I'm not changing my standards and you will not be disrespectful." She also provided several anecdotes concerning students who have tested her commitment to high standards and have found that she has a powerful resolve. Most of these stories end with students who come to appreciate her expectations, however, some end with students who choose not to sign up for another class with her

Throughout our discussions Carla maintained a continuous focus on the importance of high standards and her understanding of the significance of the students' internal locus of control when being motivated for success. These two themes are certainly born of Carla's personal experiences. In her passion for teaching, she is consistent in her drive to help students to rise up using the same formula that has worked for her. The idea of being internally motivated and the importance of meeting high standards are worthy, but must be combined with an understanding of the life views and experiences of her students. Carla expressed her belief that the experience of the focus group has positively affected her understanding of how others view the world. She explained this new awareness "will make me a better person and a better communicator... [and] a better teacher. So I think all of this is valuable. Maybe there should be a sensitivity class in college, because I didn't get any of that." Carla admitted that she had never thought about white privilege until watching the video and she seemed frustrated by the discussions of inequity in our society. It is my observation that the focus group may have been more painful for Carla than the other participants. The very tenacity that has led her overcome obstacles in her journey toward success is the same tenacity which leaves her unable to disregard the insights of the perspectives of others which she gained from the focus group. Although this tension caused by her limited recognition of white privilege may lead her into the reintegration stage of her own White racial identity; it is my hope that her intellectual curiosity and tenacity will ultimately propel her beyond that stage and into the development of a healthy, antiracist white identity.

Karen-“I think I’ve been able to separate different from inferior.”

Karen has had many interesting life experiences that have shaped how she views the world. At the age of 45, she is relatively new to teaching with only four years of experience. She has had numerous past positions in social services. She holds a degree in family therapy and works as a therapist part-time through her church. Karen has had more African American bosses than any other participant and has been in several work environments in which African American employees outnumbered white employees. I have known Karen since we were both in 10th grade and I find her life story to be particularly interesting.

Karen grew-up in a Pentecostal family. Her father worked in retail and ultimately, he and her mother owned a small store in our hometown. Her upbringing could be described as very sheltered with her family’s faith being the guiding force of how they were expected to live. She does not remember racial slurs ever being allowed in her home and her parents were quite comfortable with their children having relationships that crossed racial lines. Karen’s brother actually quit playing baseball when he discovered that his friend, an African American, was not allowed to participate in the private league. She remembers going on an overnight school trip and sleeping the in the same bed with her close friend, an African American young woman named Connie. Karen laughingly states, “My parents saw no problem with it, but my grandparents were horrified. I guess I was one generation removed from the horror!”

Karen explains that several major things happened in her life between years of the impressionable age of 19-21. She feels these issues and events most likely had a huge impact on her view of the world. During this time,

I was with my best friend through the processing of deciding she was gay. I married Trevor. We had a stillborn child. Trevor decided he was gay. It was like everything fell apart at one time. Everything was so different from how I grew up...Any kind of minority you love affects you. I don't know how else to say it, it affects your lens when you see people [you care about] treated differently...a righteous indignation rises up!

Karen and Trevor did have another child together before they divorced and Karen still maintains contact with him. In fact, Karen laughed as she explained to me that Trevor's health is not good and she wondered how our small town would respond if he had to come to live with she and her current husband. She feels that her experiences have helped her to value people regardless of their differences. She explains, "I think I've been able to separate different from inferior."

Karen's personal life experiences are not the only source of her world view. She is also a person who has learned from the lives of those she has met professionally. When talking with her about her work experiences she has many stories of how her co-workers have shared their view of the world. For example, one African American male described how his grandfather had been killed by a white man, for simply not saying "sir" to him. Another co-worker confided in Karen that she (a white woman) was secretly married to an African American man for years before her family found out. Still another co-worker, an African American woman, explained her contradictory feelings when a school official told her to warn her son that he could be killed for dating a white girl. The fact that her coworkers feel comfortable sharing these personal stories gives some insight into the warmth, openness, and respect with which Karen approaches people. Karen laughingly

states, “I have this white, conservative, maternal look, but somehow I can make it work for me.”

Karen is very analytical and was the group member who often summarized the points made in a discussion and brought out the crux of the message. For example, when some group members were discussing how minorities see racism in situations when they do not...Karen offered, “*We* see things as it has to be proven to us that it is racism. *We* don’t automatically assume racism. But with some of African Americans, I’ve seen that it is assumed that it is [racism] and has to be proven that it is not.” Later, I introduced W.E.B. Dubois’ term, double-consciousness. I asked the group what difference they felt this feeling of a double-consciousness would have on a person. Karen stated,

It would have to be exhausting. We work in a majority female profession, but sometimes being female slaps you in the face. What if you were slapped in the face [due to your race] on a regular basis? Because I get so angry sometimes, I can’t speak.

Karen has a gift of drawing parallels and illustrating the overall point of a discussion. During the individual interview with Karen, I found out that she had participated in a three-year long multicultural awareness program while working at the local college. This critically reflective learning experience, along with Karen’s life experiences and her analytical nature combine to allow Karen a high level of awareness of the importance of her own racial identity and the racial identity of others.

During our individual interview, Karen explained that she truly wondered how some people are open to and interested in the perspectives of those different from themselves while other people seem uninterested or maybe even unaware. She questioned

“How much of it is that there are people who view the world very linearly? How much is there a connection between linear thinking and a lack of that kind of perception [understanding how others view the world]?” She went further explaining that she is sometimes envious of people who think in a more dualist, linear manner. “Everything for them is yes/no, right/wrong, good/bad. That would make my life so much easier!” A critical look at our own racial identity and how this identity and the racial identity of others have been influenced by a society of unequal power structures seems to foster the rejection of such a dichotomous view of the world.

Like other participants, Karen believes there is power in the student-teacher relationship. She used two students to illustrate this point. One young woman seemed to be a solid student with no visible issues to work through; however Karen found a deeper story when she helped the student with college applications. Karen explained how much more respect she had for this student when she discovered that the young woman had overcome numerous obstacles while excelling academically. The student responded to the respect Karen showed toward her. Karen was then able to help this young woman deal with some tough life lessons in a very positive way. In another situation, Karen described how working closely with a young man as he learned to write a term paper was an extremely involved process. She explained that if she had not sat one-on-one with him getting to know him as a person and a learner, she would not have known him well enough to teach him the writing process. His needs were more intense than most students and only through spending time with him was she able to match his ability with the proper amount of scaffolding. Karen’s efforts to make connections between this young man as a whole person and this specific task of learning are indicative of a transformative teacher’s

“responsiveness” as described by Gary R. Howard (2006). Howard (2006) explains, “Responsiveness has to do with our capacity as teachers to know and connect with the actual lived experience, personhood, and learning modalities of the students in our classrooms” (p. 131). Karen sums up her belief in the power of relationships by stating, “I think relationships are hugely significant. Relationships help students to see their own potential. But, I think relationship slash responsibility is the thing.”

Conclusion

These sketches are offered as a background of data from which further analysis and interpretation can be garnered; helping the researcher and reader to understand the context of meanings produced by the participants. Themes which arose during our focus group and interviews included: a discussion of lived experiences shared by group members, relationships, cultural blindness and cultural competence, and the reinforcement of and resistance to the status quo. These themes will be discussed in the following chapter. The biographical sketches and the description of themes within our discussions are shared in an effort to describe this experience from multiple directions of inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe their focus on four directions (inward and outward, backward and forward) of inquiry:

By inward we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward we mean, the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality—past, present, and future. (p. 50)

In the following chapter, I will keep these directions of inquiry in mind, as I worked to present a meaningful portrait of the process of the participants’ experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE: MEANINGS MADE

Meanings Made as Issues are Discussed

This consciousness-raising focus group experience allowed the participants a safe environment for the discussion of racial issues and the racial climate of our school. These discussions allowed the participants to examine and communicate the structure of their own belief systems concerning race. Participants shared insights into the lived experiences that have helped to shape their belief systems. Through the conversations in both the group discussions and individual interviews, the participants demonstrated their personal views of many issues concerning race. This chapter will begin with the exploration of themes of discussions among group members. As participants discussed their lived experiences and early cross-cultural relationships, the influence of these experiences on participants' reactions to and understandings of other cultures became evident. As participants talked of other cultures, their levels of cultural competence and the impact of this competence on their views of racial issues became obvious. In turn, these experiences and relationships and the cultural competence garnered therein influenced the group members' belief in and support of the status quo of our society's racial structures. The importance of critical self-reflection in the lives of teachers, as agents which reinforce social inequity or work to deconstruct structures of inequity, was reinforced in the findings of this study. Common reactions and responses by Whites to the discussions concerning racial injustices were noted in the conversations of group members. Also, a discussion of each participant's stage of White identity development is included as I worked to analyze and interpret the lived experiences of the participants as they responded to discussions of racial issues which include challenges to their individual

belief systems concerning race. This chapter concludes with a summary of the research findings, along with the limitations and significance of the study.

Lived Experiences and Early Relationships

The participants of my study demonstrated how lived experiences and early relationships shaped their understanding of and responses to people of other cultures. Hannah, Carla and Wendy in general, have experienced fewer close personal relationships with African Americans. They also reported fewer life experiences in which their race made them a minority in a group. Hannah had a positive relationship with an older male African American farmhand as a child, but stated that this was her only real contact with that race until her high school experience. Hannah's father used racial slurs, but did have respect for those people of color who "earned his respect." Carla reported only truly being exposed to African Americans in later elementary school as integration took effect. Her memories from that time involved positive relationships with two teachers. Carla maintains that racial slurs were not used in her childhood home and that issues of race were not commonly discussed. Wendy, being seven to nine years younger than Carla and Hannah, experienced the racial integration of public schools during her early elementary years. Her early interactions with black girls in her school were not positive experiences. Wendy states that she did have a positive relationship with an African American woman who worked in her family's home. Wendy describes growing up with a father who used racial slurs and often talked about racial issues from a racist standpoint. She explains, "He will swear up and down that he is not a racist...but when he makes those comments...I'll say, 'You mean to tell me that's not racist?'"

When compared to the others in the group, Carla, Hannah, and Wendy reported fewer past and present personal relationships with African Americans. Neither of the three had participated in any form of multicultural sensitivity or critical self-reflection training. Instead, these three women have been left to make connections across racial boundaries without a deliberate attempt to come to terms with their own racial identity and the active colonization of their minds by a racist society structured by a white patriarchal hegemony. This void in cultural competence and critical self-reflection is common among white teachers (Gay, 2002; Milner, 2003). As a result of this deficit, the three women have attempted to serve their students using an ideology which they felt had, in general, worked for them. (And of course it has, in part, as they have benefitted from white privilege.) Their ideology seemed based in an acceptance of “how things are,” combined with a determination to overcome and possibly win at a game with rules which they accept as being unchangeable. Gay (2000) explains, “Some educators fail to realize that the assumptions, expectations, protocols, and practices considered normative in schools are not immutable. They are based on the standards of the cultural system of one ethnic group—European Americans—that have been imposed on all others” (p. 209). Such a belief system can perpetuate an approach to teaching which does not consider the following points: culture is an important component of education, teachers need to understand the culture of their students, good teaching does not transcend cultural difference, and education is not an effective method for assimilation into the mainstream of our society (Gay, 2000). These are points already known by many of our African American students at some level. When teachers are not aware, it creates mistrust of the teacher by the student and ultimately diminishes teacher effectiveness and student

achievement (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994). I am, however, optimistic about Hannah, Wendy, and Carla working toward a greater level of cultural consciousness. Hannah's interest in and compassion for her African American students will, hopefully, inspire her to engage in more professional development related to a better understanding of how African American experiences and opportunities in our society are greatly affected by a prejudiced society, which we, as white teachers should feel obligated to change. Also Wendy and Carla share a zeal for helping students to become overcomers and believe in their students enough to maintain notably high levels of standards. Both women also have high expectations for themselves as teachers and their own intellectual curiosity will hopefully mandate further exploration into the ideas of the focus group which have contrasted with their own belief systems. Again, with work toward critical self-reflection and an increased cultural consciousness, all three teachers should be able to add to their existing teaching talents the skills for more effective crossings of racial and cultural boundaries.

Karen, Natalee and Sarah each had a larger number of relationships with African Americans than the other three group members. Karen's close high school friendship with Connie included time spent together both in school and outside of school. Her careers have given her the opportunity to work in offices which were populated by a majority of African American coworkers and were supervised by African Americans. Much of her work, before coming to the school system, involved serving a minority population. During college, Karen's relationships with her husband and her best friend offered her a unique opportunity to better understand the pain of prejudice. Karen maintained close relationships with both, as they came to terms with their own homosexuality. Although

their experiences did not concern race, Karen feels the prejudice both of these individuals faced had a remarkable effect on her belief system concerning any type of prejudice.

Natalee described growing up in a home that did not use racist language. Her upbringing also included a focus on the fair and kind treatment of all people; however even in this environment, Natalee saw the effects of the subtle messages of a racist society. Natalee remembers the moment in time that she became conscious of the fact that African Americans were judged as inferior based on the color of their skin, as a life moment of revelation and trauma. Natalee describes the moment of recognition that a person she saw as having great value was labeled as inferior by society was an event which caused great distress. The fact that she so vividly remembers the event, along with the emotion the memory invokes in Natalee, is evidence of the power of the moment. Like Natalee, Sarah also described in vivid detail a traumatic, life changing moment which she feels shaped her view of race relations. Sarah's experience involved a moment that would not allow for objectification of *the other*. She explained her complex reaction to the news of her brother's death as a moment which stood still in time, with a crisp memory of the sights, sounds, and her own thoughts. As Sarah looked to Ida Mae for protection and provision, she was transfixed by the grief she saw in the woman. This recognition of Ida Mae's grief was the most powerful memory of the moment. For Sarah, this moment was situated in, and compounded by, a childhood and young adult life in which cross-cultural relationships seemed to her to be the norm.

In general, Natalee, Sarah and Karen are similar in their report of more relationships which cross racial boundaries. This similarity served all three in the promotion of their comfort with, and interest in, cross-cultural interactions; however their

individual life experiences influenced the framework of their interpretations of these relationships. Karen and Natalee held in common experiences with, and an appreciation for, critical self-reflection. Karen's experiences with critical self-reflection in her training as a therapist have been combined with her involvement in a multicultural sensitivity training. I was unaware of Karen's participation in this 3-year long multicultural sensitivity training before her individual interview. At the end of our focus group I asked Karen how she perceived our group experience, considering the fact that she had already undergone an intensive sensitivity training. She explained, "It has served as a reminder, sort of a tune-up. I was glad to have it because it reminded me not to get sloppy in my attention to these issues." Tatum (1997) supports the use of such tune-ups for Whites who have engaged in previous racial identity and cultural awareness work as an effort to promote further growth and fight against complacency.

Natalee's critical self-reflection was combined with her personal Christian beliefs. Natalee weaves meaning through her life experiences, her spiritual beliefs and acts of self-reflection construct her own moral obligation to our society. Natalee stresses the importance of the recognition of the worth of others and a need to help young people see themselves as worthy. I find this theme in her approach to cross-cultural relationships to be reminiscent of the memorable childhood experience she shared. It is as if the childhood trauma she felt in the lack of worth appointed to Annie Laura has now translated into a commitment to upholding the worth of the students (and other people) she engages with today. I found no research establishing a connection between themes of a teacher's early racial memories and that teacher's approach to cross-cultural relationships; however, future research concerning the existence of such connections

would be interesting. Natalee's racial identity development is a testament to the transforming power of self-reflection. An addition of the study of the works of critical cultural theorists has the power to solidify and thoughtfully inform Natalee's already thoughtful approach to education.

Natalee's experiences offer an endorsement of the need for Sarah to engage in self-reflection. As Sarah blends her life experiences (rich in personal acts which cross cultural boundaries and the insight earned via those acts), an early experience which Digiovanni (2005) might term a "moment of rupture", with critical self-reflection I am hopeful that she will ultimately develop a transformationist orientation. Howard (2006) reinforces my hope as he remembers, "In the process of growing beyond my integrationist orientation, it was necessary for me to become self-reflective regarding white dominance...[this] orientation can be transcended only when Whites begin to question the legitimacy of those institutional arrangements which perpetuate White dominance" (p.110). More attention will be given to each participant's racial identity formation later in this chapter.

The life experiences and early relationships of all six of the group participants have served as foundations for the meanings they have made of their worlds. Each participant forms a unique meaning from her experiences as these ideas are sifted through the participant's own interpretations. The participants' decisions to modify, dismiss, or accept ideas offered during our focus group were influenced by these life experiences and their interpretations. The importance of critical self-reflection and cultural competence for teachers which is well documented (Gay, 2000; Gay and Kirkland, 2003; Howard, 2003; Milner, 2003), is also apparent in the meanings made by the participants of this focus group. Karen (who has had experiences with multicultural sensitivity training and

critical self-reflection) and Natalee, (who employees critical self-reflection), both demonstrated a more critical approach to the processing of their life experiences and early cross-cultural relationships. Sarah (who had the most prevalent cross-cultural experiences) had the benefit of familiarity with an epistemological difference which opens the door for the possibility of such critical the critical processing. The following section is a discussion of how these three participants have continued to be influenced by cross-cultural relationships

Relationships

The quantity and depth of the participants' cross-cultural relationships were linked to their understanding of and respect for the epistemological differences of the perspectives of others. An authentic, positive teacher-student relationship is the foundation of effective teaching (Gay, 2000; Gay and Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Thompson, 2004). One of the reoccurring themes in our focus group discussions included the importance of strong student-teacher relationships. I noted several similarities between Karen, Natalee, and Sarah concerning relationships including: an interest in the personhood of their students, a recognition that the perceptions of their students often differ from their own views, an interest in and knowledge of the lives of their students beyond the classroom walls, and a commitment to their students which often required time and effort outside of school hours.

As mentioned in her biographical sketch, Karen was open to learning from the life stories of the people with whom she worked. In general, Karen's relationships with co-workers, superiors, clients, and students appear to be more fluid in nature than some participants. I have witnessed her willingness to work beyond the school walls and hours

as well as beyond the subject of English in order to help a student to grow and prosper. She offered numerous stories concerning the personal struggles of the people with whom she has worked. She also told stories of her experiences in social services which took her beyond her job description as she worked with a client. One story included Karen helping a client move and even having friend accompany them to help put beds together for her. In another story, Karen brought a client home from the hospital and proceeded to cook supper for her children. Karen did not mention these as benevolent acts of a liberal white woman, but instead used them as examples of her respect for the importance of the fluid aspect of authentic relationships. She explained that her approach to life does not allow for an abundance of compartmentalization.

Similarly, Natalee and Sarah do not end their relationships with students at the classroom door. During the majority of Natalee's teaching career, she has taught more African Americans than Whites. Although she did not overtly mention any close relationships with African Americans at this point in her life, there were several times when her discussions of African American students included a reference to a long established relationship with their mothers. Sarah was the participant with the most experience crossing racial boundaries. From the nanny who cared for her, to close high school friendships with African Americans, to the multiracial social gatherings she hosts in her home, to her admittedly closer relationships with African American students than white students...Sarah's experiences crossing the racial boundaries in this small southern town have taken place across her lifetime and have been countless. In the biographical sketches and throughout the focus group and interview discussions there were numerous descriptions of ways in which these three participants are assessable to their students.

Ladson-Billings (1994) suggests that fluid relationships that stretch beyond the walls of the classroom offer teachers the opportunity to better learn from and teach students.

Karen, Natalee, and Sarah all expressed a belief in the importance of spending time getting to know their students. Each of these three participants echoed the ideas of a culturally relevant approach to teaching in their commitment to learning how their students perceive the world, what the students' life experiences have been, and building connections between the lives of their students and the classroom. The importance of their relationships with students moving beyond the classroom walls offered depth to the learning relationship which included benefits to both individuals in the relationships. First, the teachers' actions and words offer the students hope that these teachers genuinely care about them as human beings, not just learners who need to turn in work. The message sent is, "I recognize you as Subject, not object." In return, the students offer these teachers insight into their world. This insight offers growth for the teacher in the area of cultural competence, as well as, knowledge specific to that student's life experiences and struggles. With this dynamic at work, both teachers and students are valuable as learners and teachers and both. The importance of understanding teaching as reciprocal process is a powerful component of teaching in a culturally relevant manner (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The fact that these white middle-class teachers have benefitted as learners was evident in our discussion about issues of race within our focus group as they offered insight acquired from their relationships from students. These three participants were quicker than the other group members to add knowledge about the African American culture and were slower to defend racist structures in group discussions.

Cultural Blindness or Cultural Competence

The level of cultural competence of each participant was an important factor and/or indicator of their acceptance of epistemologically different thought. During the first meeting Carla explained, “I don’t see a black kid, I see personality and what they bring...their eagerness to learn.” During her individual interview she added, “I’ve always seen things more in terms of ability level than color.” In fact, Carla was the only group member to boldly state her adherence to a colorblind approach to teaching. Carla’s strong adherence to a colorblind approach was only one sign of her much deeper issue of cultural blindness.

The destructive power of teaching from an uninformed position of cultural blindness is well-noted in literature (Delpit & Dowdy, 2000; Gay, 1994; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006). As discussed in the previous literature review, the attitude of “cultural blindness” in our educational system includes: a blindness to the interconnectedness of education and culture, an inadequate understanding of diverse cultures, a lack of recognition of the influence of middle-class white values on teaching practices, a belief that treating students differently equates to discrimination, the belief that all students should be responded to in the same way, the idea that “good teaching is transcendent,” and a focus on assimilation (Gay, 2000, p. 21).

Being one of the most outspoken members of the group, Carla offered many comments which demonstrated her adherence to not only colorblindness, but also cultural blindness. She made numerous remarks about there being no need to change the teaching styles of teachers, but rather a change in the empowerment of the students and parents.

This approach is in direct contrast with the thoughts of Tim Wise (2008) who explains, “To treat everyone the same, or like the white common denominator, is to miss the fact that children of color have all the challenges white kids do, and then that one extra thing to deal with: racism” (p. 21). Carla also spoke of how success could be found by African Americans who “fit-in” and “choose to follow the right path.” She often presented her own experiences of assimilation and hard work as vehicles which can and should be used by anyone to reach success. Carla in no way equates her comments with any form or degree of racism, but rather sees her insight as a key to success that anyone is welcomed to follow. She seems to take no notice of her whiteness or how it has contributed to her success. She also fails to recognize the price African Americans are paying for the privilege of white supremacy.

As counselor for the same students Carla teaches, I have on several occasions, found myself working to allay the frustration of African American students who have become offended by Carla’s belief in a system of meritocracy which they feel is unfair. Each time, these frustrations seemed to have stemmed from what the student (and I) perceived as Carla’s lack of understanding and appreciation of their situation and their perception of the world. During these counseling sessions with students, I became acutely aware of the negative impact of dysconscious racism. Any follow-up discussion I had with Carla after these sessions generally led to her restatement of a commitment to hard work and dedication as the “way out” for the students and a dismissal of their perception as merely an indication of their need to assimilate. Carla’s misunderstanding of the impact of her approach is evident in a comment she made during her individual interview. She explained, “The reason that I have had so many [discipline] write-ups for black

children over my career is because they fight me over that very thing [high expectations]. I am not changing my standard and you will not be disrespectful.” During this conversation, I began to see the breakdown in Carla’s relationship with the students. In Carla’s professed colorblind approach to teaching, she is ignorant of the fact that her students are not colorblind in their approach to learning. According to Gary R. Howard (2006), “When we fail to recognize the racialized nature of our identity as white people, we are ignoring the race-based barriers between ourselves and our students and thereby contributing to the reproduction of racial inequities in our nation’s schools” (pp. 122-123). Time and effort spent developing an understanding of herself as a raced individual and working to gain insight into the political and social impact of race on our educational system can help Carla to breakdown these racial barriers and the inequities they reproduce. Carla needs time spent deconstructing her true expectations of her students. Once again, this deconstruction will need to include time spent coming to terms with what her whiteness means to her and her students, as well as time spent understanding the race and culture of her students. However, this work will be difficult as white guilt will motivate a strong defense against any change in Carla’s awareness.

Karen, Natalee, and Sarah each demonstrated levels of cultural competence which seemed substantially higher than other group members. All three made comments about their freedom to discuss racial issues in the classroom. Each of these participants made comments concerning concepts they learned from students during these conversations. Karen’s experiences as a white minority in most African American working environments led to an insight and appreciation of aspects of the African American culture not readily held by many Whites. Sarah’s multiple experiences with cross-racial relationships also

provided her with “insider knowledge” of the African American culture. Natalee explained that her practical, everyday experiences and conversations with friends and students who are African American help her to better understand their culture. Examples of cultural knowledge these three participants have learned from African Americans range from topics as serious as distrust of the establishment and consciousness of racism to tape lines and foods for holiday meals. Discussions of these experiences remind me of one of my more humorous conversations with my friend and African American co-counselor, Debbie, about the differences of our cultures. Once Debbie was pulling at the hair at the base of her skull and said, “My kitchen is in bad shape.” I responded, “What are talking about?” She laughed and said, “The area at the base of the back of the head is referred to as *the kitchen* by black folks and it can get to be a problem between hair washings. That is just another of our secrets that I’ve let you in on. One day I’m going to have to kill you ‘cause I’ve told you too much.” Sometimes it is just the innocent exchange of everyday dialogue that helps us better understand the secrets of each other’s culture. More seriously, our appreciation of the culture of others and its impact on how the world is viewed by others helps us to become more sensitive to the often destructive powers within the dominant structures.

Status Quo: Reinforcement or Resistance

Life experiences and relationships of the participants were influential in the amount of cultural competence of the participants. The cultural competence of participants in turn influenced the participant’s reinforcement of or resistance to the status quo. Bell hooks (1994) warns of a lie that stems the tide of a revolution of values. She explains, “The lying takes the presumably innocent form of many Whites (and even some

black folks) suggesting that racism does not exist anymore, and that conditions of special equity are solidly in place that would enable any black person who works hard to achieve economic self-sufficiency” (hooks, 1994, p. 29). Both Carla and Wendy made numerous comments supporting the notion that there is currently equity of opportunity for African Americans and Whites. In fact, Carla mentioned that at times (due to quotas) African Americans have had more opportunities than she enjoyed as a white woman. Wendy says she feels “things are pretty even now...When I hear people making excuses like ‘I’m black’ or ‘I’m a girl’ I just automatically think, I’m not going to listen.” Discussion concerning segregated proms and private athletics included Wendy’s belief that racism was being or had been successfully removed from these institutions. Carla stated that she did not have a problem with integrated dances and further stated that dances were integrated at the same time as the schools in her home community. She also offered that one reason African American students may not be as welcome at the private dances might be because “black kids crash a party they did not help with.” (Carla’s point totally dismisses the fact that the private dance committees are formed by all-white groups and African Americans are not invited to join in the planning nor the production of the dances.) Both teachers expressed support of the system of merit which in theory, equally rewards people who work hard. Both Carla and Wendy made multiple comments about the use of racism as “an excuse.” Carla described her own employment of the colorblind approach during our first meeting. “I do not see a black kid or a white kid. I see their personality and what they bring, their eagerness to learn.” Wendy added, “The time I think of the race thing is when I am trying to understand who they are, why they are not

doing what I expect, but I do that with white kids when I look at their families.” Then Carla suggested, “It is more of a family thing for me than a race thing.”

Carla and Wendy certainly presented themselves as being committed to the maintenance of the traditional paradigms of power as created by the white patriarchal hegemony. Their life experiences have led them to trust in and comply with this authority. They are both extremely vocal in their support of students working hard and climbing the proverbial ladder of success. Interestingly, I have been in meetings with both of these teachers as they have passionately worked to motivate young African Americans to believe in and trust a system based on merit. I have had discussions with both teachers before and during our focus group in which they have expressed an intense desire that our students, and especially our African American students, grab hold of the American dream, get an education and improve their standard of living. Both Carla and Wendy are known by both peers and students as teachers with tremendously high levels of work ethic, who are always at school late and are always willing to go the extra mile for their students. I have little doubt of the sincerity with which both teachers believe in this system or the sincerity of their concern for our students. I do, however, believe their theory implies a misplaced agreement with the oppressor’s consciousness in which “*having more* is an inalienable right, a right they acquired through their own ‘effort’, with their ‘courage to take risks.’ If others do not have more, it is because they are incompetent and lazy” (Freire, 2005, p. 59). Basically, I see a profound difference in their understanding of the American dream, my understanding of the American dream, and our African American students’ understanding of the American dream. Their American dream offers the hope that people are not destined to continue in a generational cycle of

uneducated poverty, but that one person can decide for him/herself to work hard and break this cycle. Included in this belief is a necessary white denial of privilege that is at work within the dream. Tim Wise (2008) explains, “It is precisely the collision between the rhetoric of equality and the crushing evidence of inequality and injustice that has, in other words, necessitated white denial, (p. 64).” Actually, I can attest to their vision of the dream. My own father broke the curse of uneducated poverty and in doing so gave at least two generations the privilege of education and financial stability. However, I recognize that his effort was not the only factor working to overcome obstacles. He also carried with him the privilege of being an acceptable part of the white patriarchal hegemony, and now I have benefitted exponentially from this system of privilege. Our African American students, however, recognize that the landscape of the land of opportunity is filled with hills of privilege and discrimination. Again, the price of the privilege of white supremacy may go unnoticed by some, but it does not go unpaid.

Carla and Wendy are not uncaring. In fact they care very deeply for their students. As mentioned above, I have been witness to their hard work and passion for instilling hope and determination in African American students and I have listened as they have spoken about their despair over the *loss* of some of these students. However the issue of white denial has worked to shield both teachers from a more in-depth understanding of what these students face. Tim Wise (2008) comments on the phenomena of white denial:

White denial didn't just happen, and it manifests not because whites are stupid or insensitive, or uncaring as a group. Rather in a nation where racism was woven into the fabric of the culture, yet the nation ethos was

always one of equality and freedom, the contradiction required something that could paper over the hypocrisy.

If you've been told that everyone has equal opportunity, and yet, you see profound inequities between whites on one hand and folks of color on the other, how do you resolve the apparent gap? You can either conclude that the ethos is a myth, that things aren't as equal as you have been told—which requires a rare willingness to rethink everything you've been taught—or you can decide that there is something *wrong* with the people at the bottom. They must be inferior, they must not work as hard, or they must be less intelligent. Their genes or their culture must be defective. (p. 64)

Carla and Wendy are unfortunately caught within the struggle to make sense of a society which is built upon the ethos of equality, but is not living out this promise. However, more importantly, our African American students are unfortunately caught in a more intense and life-altering struggle to learn, live and thrive in a society which is built on the ethos of equality, but is not living out this promise...and which is being continuously reinforced by our current educational system. Until we, as educators, can begin to process our own understanding of the political and social meanings and influences of this contradiction of promise and reality through the lens of a reality which is epistemologically different than our own, our students will suffer from our lack of knowledge and wisdom.

Karen, Natalee, and Sarah seemed more comfortable challenging traditional constructs regarding possible racist components within the structures of our society than

the other participants. Karen offered analogies and antidotes as evidence of the importance of challenging the status quo in an effort to expose injustice. She often used examples of the influence of gender on our perceptions to illustrate the power of racism to affect African American perceptions. She also described an incident involving an African American coworker who perceived racism which was not readily apparent to Karen. She explained that after some contemplation, she recognized that her coworker's perception of racism was more informed than her own. Karen acquiescing to what she perceived as a more cognizant view speaks to her faith in epistemological viewpoints that differ from the hegemonic structure. For both Natalee and Karen, the discussions of racism involved issues at the individual level as well as a broader look at the social and political constructs of racism. Although Natalee admittedly does not enjoy conflict, in several instances she chose to gently challenge cultural insensitivity among group members. One example included her challenge of Carla's colorblind approach to teaching. Natalee took the opportunity to explain the importance of seeing their race as a way of knowing the student. Natalee shared her frustration with inequality in our society which she often notices. "Things like watching *Glory* the other day. I cried through the whole thing because we just haven't made enough progress." Sarah used her own cultural competence to inform others with thoughtful comments concerning cultural differences. These comments were well-placed and seemed intended to dispel racist assumptions inherent in beliefs and attitudes distorted by hegemonic influences. Karen and Sarah used mocking humor to display their own personal contempt for the private prom and senior walk. The two explained to focus group members that during their classroom discussions about the reinstatement of the private senior walk, they told their students that a great idea would be

for all of the students to attend the private walk, switching dates to make each couple interracial.

Compared to the other participants, Karen, Natalee, and Sarah more readily acknowledged the presence of racism and its destructive powers concerning our students in particular and our society in general. Their acknowledgement of racism was more easily translated into points of discussion by other group members than the discussion of these same issues on the video. Perhaps the fact that Karen, Natalee, and Sarah were able to cite details of racism specific to our surroundings gave their arguments more meaning. Whatever the reason, modeling the of acknowledgement of racism and, in some instances, the commitment to fight against racism by fellow white educators was an important contribution to the focus group by Karen, Natalee, and Sarah. Their ideas did offer group members a point of conflict and challenge. Signs of some of these challenges came in different modes of resistance as allegiance to the dominant power structure was tested. The need for and power of critical self-reflection emerged as a reoccurring theme throughout the experience and this subject will be discussed later in this chapter.

Validity Questioning, Deflecting, and Silence

As some participants fought to uphold the status quo of a white patriarchal hegemony, they employed common responses. Validity questioning, deflecting and silence are conventional responses by Whites when confronted with issues of racism (hooks, 2003; Howard, 1999; Sleeter, 1993; Thompson, 2004). Three members of our group used these techniques multiple times. Wendy aggressively countered the validity of references to racism in several conversations. Discussions of the historically white country club and golf teams were quickly countered with Wendy's explanation of how any racial inequities had been remedied. She also met the discussion of private dances

with an explanation of how African Americans should feel free to attend the dances. Even when asked about the role racism played in the fallout from Hurricane Katrina, Wendy stood firm in her belief that racism was not involved. However, the power of the fact that no previous generation of African Americans in our community has been allowed access to a golf course cannot be overcome by simply changing the policy to allow golf team members free access on certain days of the week. Also, the notion that African American students should feel welcome at dances which were in the past “white only” and continue to be “white only” in all planning and preparation seems somewhat absurd. Finally, questioning the validity of racism as a factor in the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina is a common argument among White Americans. However, Tim Wise (2008) a former resident of New Orleans notes several reasons why racism was a stronger force than the hurricane in the consequences of Katrina. Wise (2008) contrasts the continuous looping of video showing looting by African Americans with the absence of the reporting of public school buses being used to transport white people of St. Bernard Parish “even as blacks were left by the tens of thousands to fend for themselves downtown” (pp. 182-183). He further explains, “What happened was a man-made tragedy, the result of human decisions not to build adequate levees, not to reinforce those levees when the opportunity was there to do so, to divert money for that purpose to other causes...” (Wise, 2008, p. 183). Wise (2008) also explains, “race was more predictive of property damage in New Orleans than any other factor, including economic status” (p. 183). The idea that racism is at work in all three topics seems clear. The question then becomes, “Why is it not recognized by Wendy?” The answer to this question can, once again, be found in her use

of white denial as an acceptance of a truth which does not question the gap between the promise of equality and a reality of inequity.

Likewise, Carla's questioning of charges of racism is also built upon her refusal to question the fairness of society's status quo. She explained that African American students use the complaint of racism often in her classroom. "Sometimes in my teaching I don't realize when it's real because I've heard it so much." Her assumption is that the complaint of racism is an unjustified excuse given by students in an effort not to work. Carla's "assumption of rightness" (Howard, 2006) is evident as she seems to believe herself to be the appropriate entity to decide when racism has taken place in her classroom. She applied this assumption outside the classroom as she shared the feeling that her biracial friend makes claims of racism, when "I don't see that and I've been right there. I've heard the same words." When the group responded with a discussion of whose lens was best at determining racism, Carla's response was a monologue about doing what needs to be done to assimilate so that you can be successful.

In their research concerning teacher education students and the development of cultural conscious and critical self-reflection, Gay and Kirkland (2003) found "students also frequently try to shift the focus of analysis from race to class, gender, and individuality" (p. 183). This use of deflection was commonly employed by Carla during our discussions. Carla often spoke about seeing the student as an individual, giving attention to their ability, personality, and effort. She explained that she saw personal ability as the most important determining factor of success, "I've always seen things more in terms of ability level than color level. So, if things came easier [and] you were willing to follow the rules, then it [success] came easier." As in the preceding statement, Carla

was consistent in her reinforcement of assimilation (follow the rules) as being an important part of success. Her passion and consistency in discussing these ideas underlined her singular commitment to her own perspective.

Unlike Carla, Hannah was sparing with her words. Hannah remained almost completely silent during discussions of racist structures such as private proms and private sporting venues. Her only comments were factual in nature (“We have 65 couples signed up for the walk.”) She offered no opinion on these issues. Her comments concerning race relations tended to focus on her interaction with individuals. She explained that she has historically taught more African American female students than other teachers. She added that she felt very connected to those students. When the conversation went beyond the discussion of individual relationships, her body language and speech suggested a very guarded approach to the sensitive topic. During our individual interview, I bluntly asked Hannah if she felt there was such a thing as white privilege. She answered succinctly, “Yeah. Do I think it is right? No.” Overall, her guarded approach offered no outward sign of any critical self-reflection. There is little evidence of her internal process; however, Gay and Kirkland’s (2003) study of self-reflection among pre-service teachers suggests that when silent, “the students may listen intently to the reflection of the professors [or in Hannah’s case other group members], but their own self-reflection and critical consciousness about racism, ethnicity, and cultural diversity in education are not accomplished” (p. 183). Critical self-reflection and working toward a higher level of critical consciousness are both important in the development of a healthy, antiracist White identity (Helms, 1990; Howard, 2006). The following section will explore the importance of critical self-reflection. The developmental stage of Hannah’s white identity, as well as

the identity of the other five participants, will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Participants and Critical Self-Reflection

An important finding of this study is the connection between a lack of critical self-reflection and a lack of understanding of social and political injustices within our society, which some teacher (sometimes unwittingly) continue to reinforce. Milner (2003) has come to believe that there is a void in teachers' reflective thinking where diversity is concerned" (p. 173). Because of the power of teachers to facilitate the adherence to, or critique of, existing political and social structures; it is of great importance that they scrutinize their own understanding of themselves and these structures. Two focus group participants, Karen and Natalee, had been involved in some form of critical self-reflection prior to this experience. Karen's exposure also involved work toward a more critical cultural consciousness. Both participants offered the group insights which challenged the assumptions of hegemonic racial structures. Karen and Natalee both view themselves as growing changing human beings and seem invested in a commitment to the continuous interrogation of themselves and their worldviews. Sarah's life experiences and comparatively large number of cross-racial experience have implanted her with a critical view of the racial structures in our society. She added to the group experience a cultural capital born of and nurtured by personal experience with authentic, meaningful, long-term cross-cultural relationships. Her understanding of these experiences has the potential of great depth if combined with the tough investigation of critical reflection of the meaning of these experiences to her racial identity and her understanding and respect for cultures different from her own. Hannah's cautious sensitivity seemed to represent a reluctance to

engage in the challenge of critical reflection. Carla and Wendy were the most vocal in their support of the status quo. Both women, although very invested in that support, demonstrated some curiosity when they opened themselves up to a different epistemological view (as discussed in the following section). Carla, Wendy, Hannah, nor Sarah mentioned any experience with formal critical self-reflection.

Why is this critical reflection so important? Because of the ever-present and ever-increasing cultural differences between our nation's teachers and the student population they serve. Just as Howard (2003) states, "The racial and cultural incongruence between teachers and students merits ongoing discussion, reflection, and analysis of racial identities on behalf of teachers, and is critical in developing a culturally relevant pedagogy for diverse learners" (p. 196). It is essential that white teachers interrogate their own racial identities. This is not a natural process for Whites, as the privilege of our whiteness allows us to be the norm and therefore that by which all others are defined. Tim Wise (2008) declares, "For those of us called white, whiteness simply is. Whiteness becomes, for us, the unspoken, uninterrogated norm, taken for granted, much as water can be taken for granted by fish" (p. 2). However, Whites have the choice of making a conscious effort to move beyond this understanding of themselves as unracial beings. Taking the time to examine what it means to be white, to question how this whiteness affects you and others, and to hold ourselves accountable to move away from our complicity with white supremacy helps us to not perpetuate the destructiveness of white supremacy (Allen, 2004; Davis and Wildman, 1997; Sleeter, 1994).

Some participants of the focus group gave little indication that they viewed themselves as raced individuals. Conversations often focused on the blackness of the

students and not the whiteness of the teachers. Just as Green and Sonn (2006) found with the discourses of their participants, I found discussions concerning racism on an institutional level which did not require individual accountability from the participants. The participants of the focus group were able to discuss institutional racism as a sad fact of the past, without any attention to how the institution was a system built by and for the benefit of Whites. Another similarity with the study by Green and Sonn (2005) was the perpetuation of the power structures which points to the deficiencies of the oppressed. These are assumptions that go unchallenged when teachers leave their own cultural background and racial identities unexamined (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The following section is a discussion of one experience which seemed to challenge a couple of the group members to examine some of their own assumptions.

Accepting Another Perspective

One experience during the group which seemed to have a strong impact on two of the group members involved information I related to the group from Debbie, my co-counselor. During one session, I shared an example of what Debbie refers to as her constant awareness of her identity as an African American woman. Debbie shared this with me and gave me permission to share this with the group. Recently, Debbie and I have taken over the role of counselor for all middle school students in our county. (Our middle and high schools share a common building.) Debbie had noticed the middle school teachers turning to me more often for help with their students. She and I had just discussed this issue one morning, when a middle school teacher came in our office and immediately asked to speak with Debbie about a student. She and Debbie went behind closed doors and I felt some relief that Debbie had been called upon instead of me. When

the teacher left, Debbie came into my office, laughing. She said, “Guess what! It was about a black student. I guess I’m good enough to work with them.” I told the group that if Debbie were not African American, she might assume that the teachers liked or knew me better or even that they thought I was personally a better counselor...but because of her race, she was forced to filter the inequity of our middle school consults through race first. I explained to them that this race filter is painful not because it focuses on the color of her skin, but because of all of the negative connotations of the social constructs that accompany her skin tone. The burden of this race filter is one of the many costs of White privilege paid by African Americans.

Both Wendy and Carla have made several comments about the thoughtful effect of hearing about Debbie’s experience. During Carla’s individual interview she commented, “I think the awareness of [Debbie’s filter] will make me a better person, communicator and teacher. So, I think all of this has been valuable. Maybe there should be a sensitivity class in college, because I didn’t get any of that.” During the individual interview Wendy discussed the illumination of Debbie’s struggle, “The ideas from Debbie have been eye opening...My eyes have been opened, especially about what is going on internally.” It is apparent that both teachers have responded to a message that is epistemologically opposed to their previous thoughts concerning the legitimacy of racism’s impact on our society. The pain of Carla’s own disequilibrium was evident near the end of our individual interview as she worked to maintain her long held convictions, supporting the status quo against the insight offered by the focus group experience. She stated:

According to the video we saw...I guess we have a group in our society that feels like they’ve got to prove themselves and the most I can do to

relate to that is when I walk into a room of northern people ...like I tell my students, if you are a female in a man's world, you are already thought more stupid than the man, so you've got to overcome that...If you're southern in a business world, you've got to overcome that. And I've always told my black students, if you are black, southern, and female you've got to work really hard to overcome that pre-thought that is out there...But I don't think it is an impossible barrier, if you are determined within yourself, because I think I've done it...its more about empowerment within myself without regard to anything about me.

Carla's vision of maintaining faith in a flawed and oppressive system seems to overshadow the knowledge of her own oppression. Paulo Freire (2005) describes such a plight as, "Submerged in reality, the oppressed cannot perceive clearly the "order" which serves the interest of the oppressors whose image they have internalized" (p. 62). Carla has internalized the image of the oppressor, accepted his rules of reality and is certain she can win his game. Carla's commitment to this structure of white patriarchal dominance gives evidence to her stage of white identity development. The following section includes an analysis of each participant's stage of development and how their developmental stage and identity orientation relates to their response to racial issues discussed within this focus group.

White Identity: Stages and Orientations

As discussed in the review of literature, various models and typologies of white racial identity development have been constructed. I have chosen to use the work of Janet

Helms (1990) and Gary Howard (2006) as I analyze the discussions within this focus group to discern the identity stages and orientations of the group participants. For clarity, I have constructed a table for each participant. Each table will include the participant's name and stage/orientation of that participant's white racial identity. Any change of stage or orientation will be noted. Also, evidence of their belonging to this stage will be offered in the form of general descriptions of the participant as discerned from their interactions in the focus groups and individual interviews. Additionally, the table will include a section for other comments, such as, how the participant affected the group, how the group affected the participant, and any other interesting details connected to the participant's stage/orientation. The participant tables will be followed by a summary of the meaning of these findings.

Table 2

Hannah's Racial Identification Stage

<p>Participant Name: Hannah</p> <p>Stage/Orientation: Disintegration Stage, Entrance into Integrationist Orientation</p> <p>Change: Little detectable change</p>
<p>Evidence of stage: Hannah seemed to have a limited awareness/acceptance of racial discrimination and white privilege. The intersection of this awareness with her moral belief that all people should be treated fairly was cause for some tension. Hannah tends to ease this tension with a refusal to be involved in individual racist acts (ie. racial slurs and comments) and a devotion to individual kindness toward all students. Hannah showed no signs of questioning the legitimacy of institutional racism, but is beginning to recognize that it exists. The majority of her cross-racial relationships were with students, to whom she stated she felt she “had something to offer”. Hannah may be beginning to acknowledge the perspective of others, but seems hesitant to explore those perspectives or consider their validity. Her allegiance to a Eurocentric truth is apparent in her own hesitancy to question its legitimacy.</p>
<p>Comments: Hannah's limited conversation made the interpretation of her stage and orientation more difficult than the other participants.</p>

Table 2

Natalee's Racial Identification Stage

<p>Participant Name: Natalee</p> <p>Stage/Orientation: Autonomy Stage, Transformationist Orientation</p> <p>Change: Perhaps toward a more solid placement into these later stages of development</p>
<p>Evidence of stage: Natalee expressed an understanding of her own privilege and the inequity of opportunity for others without the indulgence of guilt. She discussed a commitment to her own personal growth and the growth of others. She actively seeks both personal and professional relationships which cross racial boundaries. She describes excitement in learning from the lived experiences and perspectives of people different from herself. Natalee also actively, and with forethought, works to model antiracist behaviors for other Whites. She believes in the importance of interrogating the structures of power within our society.</p>
<p>Comments: Natalee's work with students might, at times, be seen by others as indicative of a missionary perspective. However, her disdain for a system which involves racist, sexist, and homophobic beliefs, policies, and power structures, along with her commitment to engage others in antiracist actions indicates a personal move beyond the missionary perspective.</p>

Table 3

Sarah's Racial Identification Stage

<p>Participant Name: Sarah</p> <p>Stage/Orientation: End of Pseudo-Independent Stage and beginning Immersion/Emersion Stage, Entering the Transformationist Orientation</p> <p>Change: Moved more deeply into Immersion/Emersion Stage and Transformationist Orientation during process. This movement was likely enhanced by interaction with those who model a positive white identity.</p>
<p>Evidence of stage: Sarah has been the target of the suspicion of both Whites and African Americans because of the time spent helping African American students. Sarah showed signs of turning her attention toward the education of Whites by using several timely comments (which demonstrated an insightful cultural consciousness) in an attempt to make others in the group more culturally aware. Sarah also made comments about actively seeking information from those of other races and seems unthreatened by difference. Sarah does appear to have begun to internalizing the issue of white racism as her focus in racial interactions and discussions.</p>
<p>Comments: Sarah seemed to have many of her thoughts and experiences validated by her participation in our focus group. She seemed to take comfort in the thoughts and ideas shared by Karen and Natalee.</p>

Table 4

Wendy's Racial Identification Stage

<p>Participant Name: Wendy</p> <p>Stage/Orientation: Still in the “abandoning racism” phase, but none of Helms’ specific stages resonated with Wendy. She seems curious about ideas related to an Integrationist orientation, but is strongly rooted in a Fundamentalist orientation.</p> <p>Change: Little movement toward integrationist orientation.</p>
<p>Evidence of stage: Wendy upheld the legitimacy of a white patriarchal structure of dominance. She often rejected the idea that white privilege and discrimination still exists. Wendy stressed commonalities when discussing other races and seemed anxious about attention draw to difference. She is hesitant to explore and understand her own racial identity. She demonstrated a cautious interest in the ideas of others, but is somewhat tentative in her approach to interactions with African Americans. Wendy does confront racist remarks in others, but does not recognize or confront racism on an institutional or systematic level.</p>
<p>Comments: Wendy’s discomfort with overt discussions of white privilege and discrimination was consistent. However, she has a reputation among African American (and white) students as a fair and caring teacher with high expectations.</p>

Table 6

Carla's Racial Identification Stage

<p>Participant Name: Carla</p> <p>Stage/Orientation: Signs of all stages within the “abandoning racism” phase , Fundamentalistic Orientation</p> <p>Change: Some signs of beginning to intellectualize the idea of White privilege.</p>
<p>Evidence of stage: Carla’s comments seemed to fluctuate across the abandoning racism phase. Ultimately her responses and reactions seemed based upon a need to uphold the structures within the white patriarchal hegemony and defend her own status within that structure. She identified her identity as the norm. She became very defensive when issues of white privilege or discrimination were discussed. Carla continually pointed to the individual’s responsibility to overcome obstacles, without considering her responsibility to recognize or fight against social injustice. Carla’s responses to issues of racism were prototypical of Howard’s Fundamentalistic orientation. Her thinking involved a literal, one-dimensional construction of truth with a legitimization of the white patriarchal hegemony. She projected feelings of denial of racism and a defensiveness which suggested that she is threatened by difference. Carla’s actions suggest a commitment to a colorblind approach to people with a profound belief in assimilation.</p>
<p>Comments: As I describe and analyze the responses and reactions of Carla, I am torn by the difference in the description of her white identity and what I see as her basic intentions. Although this description of her white identity paints a bleak picture, I would be remiss if I did not point out the fact that Carla is a passionate, caring teacher who, with all of the tools she has acquired, is struggling to teach her students (both African American and White) how to be successful. This picture of Carla is not an indictment of her as a teacher. I am often impressed by her passion and seemingly absolute refusal to give up on the promise within students. The indictment is of an educational system which did not provide Carla with diversity training.</p>

Table 7

Karen's Racial Identity Stage

<p>Participant Name: Karen</p> <p>Stage/Orientation: Autonomy stage and Transformationist Orientation</p> <p>Change: No noted change</p>
<p>Evidence of stage: Foundational to Karen's responses within the group was a tacit freedom from the confinement of rigid societal views of white superiority. She seemed to refuse the privilege, confusion, guilt, anger or fear which is associated with other stages of white identity development. Karen's responses within the group suggested a confidence in her freedom to relate to people of any color about racial issues. Her initiation of more controversial topics was reflective of her liberty in discussion, as well as her need to help other Whites to investigate their own racial assumptions. Karen demonstrated an enlightened understanding of dominance and an assumption of her own responsibility to challenging the legitimacy of the dominant hegemony.</p>
<p>Comments: After our meetings, Karen expressed the importance of being reminded of the importance of antiracist work and growth in our understanding of racism. Karen's experiences with sensitivity training and as a therapist were helpful in challenging the group to go beyond comfortable, self-congratulatory discussions of race.</p>

Helm's (1990) stages and Howard's (2006) orientations have proven very useful in analyzing the participants' responses to discussions of and challenges to their belief systems concerning those issues. As expected, each participant did not fit perfectly within a stage or orientation; however, the work of Helms (1990) and Howard (2006) offered two complimentary perspectives of the process of white racial identification which allowed for a more thoughtful conceptualization of the experiences of the participants in this research. Their work offers the stability of framework and the hope of progression. Inherent in

growth is the vulnerability and sometimes awkwardness of change. Howard (2006) relates his multicultural educational work with teachers and the understanding of racial identification development to Erik Erickson's (1950/1963) identity framework for children and adults. Howard (2006) explains:

Inspired by his approach, I have found it helpful to acknowledge that the development of a positive white racial identity, like the movement toward mature adulthood, is a continually unfolding journey of discovery and growth. Remembering the vulnerability and inadequacy I experienced in my own early adulthood, I know that many Whites educators are similarly subjected to insecurities and personal dislocations when confronted with issues of race. The affirmation I received from Erikson's nonjudgmental descriptive approach has served as a constant reminder for me to employ similar positive regard when working with my colleagues on issues of race and whiteness. (p.88)

I found these words true for myself as I filter the interactions and comments of my colleagues through white identification theory. I, too, found a nonjudgmental, positive regard for my coworkers to be an important component in my engagement as a participant/researcher in our focus group.

The participants of this study vary in their understandings of racism and their own racial identity. A void in the critical investigation of the racist structures of our white patriarchal hegemony is apparent in the identity development of Hannah, Carla, and Wendy. The three participants offer different pictures of what it means to have racial

identity orientations which are primarily Fundamentalist. Hannah's approach involves an expressed individual commitment to the fair treatment of others and silent response to the questioning of paradigms of dominance. Carla's attention is focused on the willingness of individuals to assimilate and live up to a white standard, which she sees as unquestionably appropriate. Wendy's development is characterized by an eager reinforcement of dominant structures, coupled by an individual commitment to fairness. She appears to see no incongruence with the two. These three participants offered no signs of interest in the critical questioning of the legitimacy of our society's foundational white supremacist structure. This void is harmful to their efficacy as teachers of a diverse student population. Prolific multicultural educator, James Banks (2006) explains:

Effective teachers in a diverse and flat world need an education that enables them to attain new knowledge, paradigms, and perspectives on the United States and the world. They should acquire knowledge and skills that will enable them to examine assumptions that undergird concepts such as "the Westward Movement" and "American Exceptionalism." Teachers should also be able to examine the gap between American ideals and realities, and to develop a commitment to act to help close it. (pp. xi-xii)

It is important that all three of these educators begin to question and challenge the colonization of their own minds, so that they might find the liberty to approach their own lives and the lives of their students in a manner free from the restraints of racist assumptions and the negative impact of an unhealthy white identity.

For Sarah, Karen, and Natalee, the critique of existing structures of dominance has already begun. The next stage in Sarah's growth will hopefully, involve a critical investigation into the meaning of her identity as a white woman. As she progresses through the Immersion/Emersion stage, hopefully, she will form relationships and engage in activities which will help her to shed residual white guilt as she gains the confidence of a racially aware person whose actions are not defined and restricted by racist structures. As Karen and Natalee continue the growth of their Transformationists' orientations, their struggle will be to remain focused and to continue to grow in their understanding of what it means to be a Transformationist White teacher. They will find it helpful to unite with other teachers who are also thoughtfully working to meet the needs of a diverse student population and develop teaching practices which are culturally responsive. Howard (2006) explains, "Transformationist pedagogy is the place where our passion for equity intersects with our cultural competence and leads to culturally responsive teaching in our classrooms and schools" (p. 133). Karen and Natalee have the foundational ingredients for the instigation of this Transformationist pedagogy in our school.

Summary of Meanings Missing and Found

"If they knew better, they would do better," is a quote I often hear from my counseling partner, Debbie. Sometimes, it is in response to my statements of general frustration with someone. Many times over the past decade I have heard Debbie use this quote to dismiss the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) racism she encounters in her daily life as an African American woman. When I began to consider what I have learned from the participants in this group, I was reminded of this quote. First, I was impressed by the consistency with which the participants' life experiences and the meaning they

have constructed from these experiences guide their attitudes and beliefs about race and teaching. Most participants viewed their life experiences and relationships as major considerations in understanding their views of racial issues. The participants with a larger number of cross-cultural relationships reported more comfort discussing racial issues within their classrooms, were also more likely to have processed through the “abandoning racism phase” of Helms’ (1997) white identity stages, were more likely to question the existing racist structures on a political and social level, and were less likely to question the validity of racism. These teachers within the “defining nonracist white identity” phase of Helms’ (1997) development stages were also more likely to demonstrate student-teacher relationships with more porous boundaries. Conversely, the participants with relatively few cross-cultural relationships were more likely to reinforce structures of the existing hegemony, had a lower level of cultural competence, and utilized more obstacles when questioned about racial issues. Also, those participants who had not yet left the “abandoning racism phase” were more rigid in their relationships with students. This consistency underlines the idea that these teachers truly *do what they know*.

Secondly, I was made hopeful by their interest and openness in our discussions. Although persistence of some group members to uphold the status quo of the white patriarchal hegemony of our society did seem disheartening at times, the fact that they were willing to discuss the issues and listen to the points of view of others was a small step. The fact that they eagerly discussed their views with people in the group who obviously had different opinions and that they gave Debbie’s experiences and her interpretation of those experiences thought and respect, gave hope that they are willing to

question some of their assumptions. Most participants seemed willing to explore what *they know and what they do*.

Finally, this focus group experience has opened the door to critical thought which offers an opportunity for all of us to *know better, so that we can do better*. Karen and Natalee, both in the later phase of redefining their own white identity, have begun conversations which can be used to reinvigorate each other. Sarah has found role models for positive antiracist white identities and has been exposed to ideas about the political and social impact of racism. Hannah, Carla, and Wendy have heard fellow white female teachers consider racism and give deference to the epistemology of the truth of *the other*. These experiences all offer a point of opportunity for growth. The question is, “Will the participants use the focus group as an impetus for further growth or will they return to what is familiar to them?” Growth may come more easily for Karen, Natalee, and Sarah. People who have a Transformationist orientation are encouraged by the liberty they experience as they are no longer restrained by the rigid world views of a faulty structure of superiority and dominance (Howard, 2006). Hannah, Carla, and Wendy will likely have more obstacles if they attempt further abandonment of racism on a journey toward the development of healthy, antiracist white identities. During the work of abandoning racism, Helms (1997) explains, “the desire to be accepted by one’s own racial group and the prevalence in the White group of the covert and overt belief in White superiority and Black inferiority virtually dictates that the content of the person’s belief system will change in a similar direction” (p. 60). If these teachers are interested in working through these issues, the support of multicultural professional development workshops would offer resources to help in this growth. There are workshops and college courses and books

which help teachers by offering tools and support for growth toward a healthy, antiracist White identity (Helms, 1997; hooks, 1994; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Lawrence and Tatum, 1998; Tatum, 1997).

Knowing better, so that we can do better involves a strong commitment to the interrogation of our own beliefs and actions that denote an understanding and respect for the beliefs of others. Critical self-reflection is a useful tool in understanding ourselves and our world. This self-reflection invites teachers to engage in use of more culturally relevant forms pedagogy. A culturally relevant approach to education teachers encourages teachers to explore the perspectives of others, engage in meaningful caring relationships with students, establish high expectations for all students, and encourage a feeling of academic ownership and belonging among all students (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This study serves as a reminder of the need for a systematic employment of critical self-reflection and culturally relevant pedagogical training in undergraduate and graduate programs, and for pre- and in-service teachers...so that we as educators can *do better*.

Limitations

My study is limited in the generalization of the findings due to the small size of the group. The themes generated through this qualitative research are meant to offer meaning within the context of this story. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) explain, “Qualitative researchers ... are committed to an emic idiographic, case-based position, which directs their attention to the specifics of particular cases” (p. 16). The test of validity for qualitative research cannot be measured with the same technical, statistical methods as quantitative research. “Validity in qualitative research has to do with description and

explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description...In addition, qualitative researchers do not claim that there is only one way of interpreting an event” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 69).

The richness of the data is both a blessing and a curse for the qualitative researcher. Using a qualitative approach to research is respectful of the fullness of the lives studied. As the events and ideas are retold by the participants and are discussed within the group, there is an interpretation and manipulation of meaning which is inevitable, and at times enriching. The rich contextual location of the data leaves the researcher with stories and meanings that are at times difficult to contain and relate. According to Wolcott (1994), the researcher must strive to make the level of detail both relevant and appropriate, while remaining as descriptive as possible. While analyzing the data from the focus group experience, my own personal filter and lens added its own dimension to the stories. Beyond the explication of the participants and the analysis of the researcher, is the illumination of the reader who brings yet another layer of interpretation. The substantial amount of data, from a small number of participants, in a homogeneous group, filtered through generous interpretation maximizes meaning articulated; yet limits the generalizability of the results.

Another limitation of this work is my involvement as a participant observer, who is very much a part of this ongoing story. Due to my past and present relationships with the participants, our level of intimacy is already deeper than that of researchers who come into an experience to gather data. This intimacy added both an additional level of insight into the participants and an additional level of hesitation in my analysis. Phillion, He, and Connelly (2005) argue the possibility of the establishment of vulnerability when

researchers enjoy a close, caring relationship with their participants. I felt some vulnerability due to my relationship with the participants as I began to analyze the data. As I noticed themes in some members approach to racial issues and protection of the status quo, I recognized the difference between their own interpretations of these issues and my thoughts. As I processed these differences, I attempted to give the participants the respect of their own musings, while maintaining a sense of fidelity to my own reflections and connections to the work of other scholars.

Significance

The significance of this study on the local level includes the awareness of the consciousness-raising group as a tool to focus teachers on the conversation of school improvement. One of the final conversations of our last meeting included the discussion of the usefulness of focus groups for our school's improvement. Another noteworthy result of this experience flows from the recognition of the importance of critical self-reflection as a step toward more cultural consciousness and the use of a culturally responsive teaching style. Even as the membership of this group was highly homogeneous, I found great differences among their reactions to racial issues. Five of the six teachers were within 10 years of each other's age. Five of the six teachers had lived within 25 miles of our school for the majority of their lives. Even with similar age, education, location, and socioeconomic demographics, these female teachers' life experiences offered different levels of cultural consciousness and racial identity awareness, which were accompanied by very different approaches to teaching in general and to the teaching of African American students in specific. This realization underscores the importance of a conscious and determined effort to work toward teacher self-reflection

and cultural competency as we prepare teachers to better meet challenges within the classrooms. Gay (2000) warns against the assumption “that constructive caring about and pedagogical responsiveness to, cultural diversity will emerge naturally from the professional ethics or personal altruism of teachers. Instead, it must be deliberately cultivated” (p. 70). The negative impact of lack of a systematic approach to multicultural education and sensitivity training for pre-and in-services teachers was glaringly apparent in the reactions and responses of teachers in our group.

Summary and Conclusion

In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) asserts, “Curiously, most white women writing feminist theory that looks at ‘difference’ and ‘diversity’ do not make white women’s lives, works, and experiences the subject of their analysis of ‘race,’ but rather focus on black women or women of color” (p. 103). In my study, I examined the responses of white women to the activities and discussions within a consciousness raising focus group in a small rural high school in southern Georgia. My research intent was to focus on the responses of these white women to issues related to race; therefore, their lives, works, and experiences were important factors in their interpretation of race related issues. Sadly, much of the conversation of these white women within the group focused on African Americans as learners and not themselves as teachers. However, again my research turned to the lives and beliefs of white women to find out how they produced meaning before and during these group discussions. My discussion of how the teachers lived experiences and their current stage of white identity development shape their responses to issues of race is a study of the work and lives of white women. The fact is they work in an educational environment where their racial identity matters, even when

they do not recognize that identity. Using a consciousness-raising focus group, the teachers in this research were able to dialogue about racial issues within a safe setting. Through their conversations within the group and the individual interviews I was able to examine how these white teachers responded to discussions about and challenges to their belief systems concerning racial issues and the racial climate of their school. I found connections between their life experiences and their white identity developmental stage and their acceptance, modification, and dismissal of these challenges. Ultimately, the meanings made during this research led me to strongly believe in the need of school systems and teacher preparation programs to provide both pre- and in-service teachers with opportunities, tools, and support for understanding their own racial identity and the political and social impact of race on our educational system and society.

During my studies at Georgia Southern University I have been asked why I, as white middleclass woman, am interested in studying the issues of racism in education. At times, those comments seem to come as accusations, as if I have neither a right to speak on this topic nor anything to add to the conversation. Throughout my studies I have been reminded of two truths: 1) most teachers are white, middleclass women, and 2) most classrooms advantage white students while disadvantaging students of color. Through this study, I have breached a better understanding the connection between the racial identity development and cultural consciousness of white teachers and their pedagogic work with students. This work either perpetuates inequity in our society or works toward its destruction. The group experience has underscored the need for a systematic and deliberate approach to helping teachers to recognize themselves as racial beings as they deconstruct what race means to them as human beings and what it means to their practice

as teachers. Personally, I have also developed a more powerful understanding of my own responsibility in working toward a more deliberate approach to the decolonization of the minds people, in general, and teachers, in specific.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in Focus Group

_____,

You are invited to participate in a focus group. This focus group will study issues related to racism. The actual focus group will involve three group meetings and one individual interview. Professional Learning Units can be earned through your participation. If you are interested in participating in this group, please attend a brief informational meeting in the conference room of the counseling center on _____ at _____pm. I am leading this focus group as part of my research through Georgia Southern University. More specific information will be given at that time and those people wishing to be a part of this research will be allowed to sign-up. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

In Appreciation,

Vickie King

vking@irwin.k12.ga.us
229-468-9421 (office)
229-468-7719 (home)

Appendix B
Participant Information Sheet

Name: _____

Age: _____ Race: _____ Gender: _____

Number of Years in the classroom: _____

Please describe any previous schools in which you have worked. Please include an estimation of the racial make-up of that school's student population:

If your career began in a field other than education, please briefly describe other positions held: _____

Appendix C

Prompts for Initial Focus Group Meeting

1. How would you describe the racial climate of our school? (attitudes, expectations, and beliefs regarding racial issues)
2. What is meant by the term “white supremacy”?
3. What are your biggest challenges with working with students of other races?
4. Is discrimination a big deal at this point in history?
5. How comfortable are you in discussing racial issues?
6. How often do you find yourself in discussions concerning racial issues?
7. How often are you involved in social situations that include people of other races?
8. Describe life experiences that you feel shaped your view of race-related issues?

Appendix D

List of Examples of White Privilege*

1. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
2. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
3. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
4. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systematic racism for their own daily protection.
5. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty or the illiteracy of my race.
6. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
7. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.
8. I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.
9. If I have low credibility as a leader I can be sure that my race is not the problem.
10. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in “flesh” color and have them more or less match my skin.

*This list was taken from a more extensive list by Peggy McIntosh, which can be found in the following article:

McIntosh, P. (1990, Winter). White privilege. Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Independent School*, 49 (2), 31-35.

Appendix E

Post-Video Prompts for Focus Group

1. Did you learn anything new from this video?
2. How comfortable were you in viewing the video?
3. What are/were your emotional responses to the video? Which segments made you uncomfortable? Which were more challenging?
4. Which segments of the video confirmed beliefs you already held?
5. What do you think about the video's statement: "Responsibility is the answer to racism?"
6. Do feel this video will have an impact on your teaching? If so, how?
7. What life experiences did this video remind you of?
8. How would this group be changed if some of the participants were from other races?
9. Do you feel that the video's description of white supremacy and discrimination were on target or overblown? How?

Appendix G

Prompts for Individual Interview

1. Please give me a brief description of your most memorable past experiences with people of other races.
2. How did your family of origin relate to people of other cultures? How is this different or the same as your current family?
3. Discuss one idea or belief that you already held that the video and focus group validated.
4. Discuss one idea or belief that you held before the video that conflicted with the video.
5. Were there times during the video that you felt uncomfortable? Please describe.
6. What do you think about the racial climate of our school?
7. Describe any connections between the video and the racial climate of our school.
8. Please explain what the terms white supremacy and white privilege mean to you.
9. Do you feel that this experience has had an impact on the way you perceive racism? If so, how?
10. Do you feel this experience will change your teaching in any way? If so, how?
11. Is there an idea or theme from the focus group that has been on your mind since our meeting? Tell me your thoughts concerning this.
12. Would you like more information about anti-racist teaching?

Appendix H

Professional Learning Unit Log

Name: _____

Activity Topic: Cultural DiversityActivity Leader: Vickie King

Date	Activity	Time Spent	Leader Initials

This sheet verifies that _____ spent a total of _____ hours and
 _____ minutes in a professional learning activity in the area of cultural diversity.

Signature of Participant: _____

Signature of Activity Leader: _____

Appendix I

Suggested Reading List

- Anderson, J. D. (1988). *The education of blacks in the south, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Apple, M. W. (2001). *Educating the right way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality*. New York: Falmer.
- Bell, D. (1992). *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. New York: BasicBooks.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- Delpit, L., & Dowdy, J. K. (Eds.). (2002). *The skin that we speak*. New York: The New Press.
- DuBois, W. E. B. (1994). *The souls of black folk*. New York: Dover. (Original work published 1903)
- Foster, M. (1990). The politics of race: Through the eyes of African-American teachers. *Journal of Education*, 172(3), 123-140.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th Anniversary ed.). New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1970)
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.

- Howard, G. R. (1999). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers and multiracial schools*. New York: Teacher College Press.
- Irvine, J. J. (2003). *Educating teachers for diversity: Seeing with a critical eye*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). Yes, but how do we do it? In J. Landsman & C. W. Lewis (Eds.), *White teachers/Diverse classrooms: A guide to building inclusive schools, promoting high expectations, and eliminating racism* (pp. 29-42). Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- McIntosh, P. (1990, Winter). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Independent School*, 49(2), 31-35. Retrieved July 9, 2005, from Academic Search Premier database.
- Takaki, R. (1993). *A different mirror: A history of multicultural America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Tatum, B. D. (2007). *Can we talk about race?* Boston: Beacon Press.
- Thompson, G. L. (2004). *Through ebony eyes: What teachers need to know but are afraid to ask about African American students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Walker, V. S. (1996). *Their highest potential: An African American school community in the segregated south*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.
- West, C. (2001). *Race matters* (2nd ed.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Wink, J. (2000). *Critical pedagogy: Notes from the real world* (2nd ed.). New York: Addison Wesley Longman.



Appendix J
Informed Consent Form

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS, & READING

1. My name is Vickie King and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am doing this research as partial fulfillment of the requirements for my degree.
2. The purpose of this research is to study the reactions and responses of white female teachers to their involvement in a focus group concerning issues of race.
3. Participation in this research will include 3 focus group meetings and one individual interview. Two group meetings will last approximately 1 hour, another group meeting will be approximately 3 hours in duration. The individual interview will last approximately 45 minutes. During the focus group meetings participants will be involved in activities such as: viewing a video concerning racial issues, discussions about the experiences of group members with racial issues, and discussions regarding participants' thoughts concerning race-related issues. The individual interview will allow participants an opportunity to further state their thoughts related to racial issues and their reactions to the video and other focus group activities.
4. This research could possibly include limited discomfort or risks. Due to the sensitivity surrounding the topic of racial issues, there is the possibility that some participants might incur some discomfort while discussing these issues. In signing this consent you are agreeing with the following statement: "I understand that medical care is available in the event of injury resulting from research but that neither financial compensation nor free medical treatment is provided. I also understand that I am not waiving any rights that I may have against the University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or investigators." Counseling referrals will be handled through the Georgia Southern University's Counseling Center at 912.478.5541.
5. Participants in this research could benefit by developing more awareness of self and racial issues. Our school (and the larger society) may benefit by improved racial relationships.
6. This research will take place over approximately 2 months. During this time, the participants should expect to spend approximately 6 hours in group or individual meetings and approximately 1-2 more hours of record keeping/journaling outside of the meeting time.
7. The raw data gathered during this research will be kept in a secure, locked file for 3 years. The audiotapes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet until the year 2014. The only people with access to this data will be the primary investigator, Vickie King and her supervising professor, Dr. Delores D. Liston.

8. Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact Vickie King or her faculty advisor, Dr. Delores Liston whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-0843 or email IRB@georgiasouthern.edu.
9. Participants will earn professional learning units at a rate of 1/10 unit per one seat/work hour.
10. Participation is totally voluntary. Participants may end participation at any time by telling Vickie King that they no longer wish to be involved. Participants do not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer during interviews or group activities.
11. There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study; participants may decide at any time to withdraw without penalty or retribution. In the event that you withdraw from the research before its completion, professional learning units earned will be based upon hours you have spent in the study.
12. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project: Focus Group Concerning Racial Issues

Principal Investigator:

Vickie King
27485 Hwy 129
Alapaha, GA 31622
229-468-9421
vking@irwin.k12.ga.us

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Delores D. Liston
P.O. Box: 08144
Georgia Southern University
Statesboro, GA 30460
912/478-1551
listond@georgiasouthern.edu

Participant Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

Investigator Signature

Date