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Promoting Positive White Racial Identity Development in K-12 Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study

Johnny Cole
johnnyjcole@gmail.com

Promoting Positive White Racial Identity Development in K-12 Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study

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Johnny Cole

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Approvals

In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Dr. Jeffrey Perrin _____ _____
Doctoral Committee Chair Date

Dr. Maureen Kavanaugh _____ _____
Doctoral Committee Member Date

Dr. Kelvin Ramirez _____ _____
Doctoral Committee Member Date

Dr. Valerie Shinas _____ _____
Director, Educational Studies Program Date
& Director, Individually Designed Specialization

Dr. Stephanie Spadorcia _____ _____
Vice-Provost for Education, Lesley University Date

Dedication

For the generations before and after me. For my mother, an immigrant to this country, who gave me more strength and resilience than I knew until she was gone. For Cassie and Amir, because being your father has taught me so much about who I am and who I want to be–all to give you the best possible future so you can become your ancestors' wildest dreams.

Acknowledgements

I could not have achieved this milestone without the unwavering support of my husband Todd. Sometimes he served as a solo parent so I could sequester myself in front of the computer, and other times he just quietly conveyed his belief in my ability. I also have appreciated my children who, as adolescents, likely are unaware of how much their own journeys toward adulthood have impacted my desire to complete this dissertation.

I am of course entirely grateful to my dissertation committee: Dr. Jeffrey Perrin, Dr. Maureen Kavanaugh, and Dr. Kelvin Ramirez (and special acknowledgement to Dr. Valerie Shinas for stepping in during another committee member's sabbatical). Your advice and guidance was infinitely helpful at both finishing this dissertation and reducing my imposter complex. I also would like to acknowledge my doctoral program professors, each of whom should see some element of their coursework in this dissertation: Dr. John Ciesluk, Dr. Kabba Colley, Dr. Lisa Fiore, Dr. Jo Ann Gammel, Dr. Victoria Gill, Dr. Caroline Heller, Dr. Kelvin Ramirez, Dr. Miya Miyazawa, and Dr. Sal Terrasi.

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge the participants in this study. Their willingness to be vulnerable and honest with me is a testament to the work required to dismantle systems of inequity. I hope that I have represented you authentically in these pages.

Abstract

The process of racial identity development (RID) is widely agreed to be the process by which an individual comes to understand the role race plays in their sense of self, how it influences their ability to acquire information and reach goals, how it affects their interpersonal interactions with others, and the manner in which it assigns group membership in the larger society. The formative years students spend in K-12 educational environments can play an important role in their RID; thus educators' awareness of these developmental processes can potentially help dismantle the systems of inequity within a critical race theory framework that uplift whiteness in public schools in the United States. This study explored how white educators' assessment of their own racial identity was influenced by participation in professional development focused on antiracism. Using the framework of Janet Helms's (2020) theory of white RID, this qualitative case study examined four white public school educators' experiences learning about and assessing their own RID as part of a 25-hour course focused on antiracism in education in an affluent suburb of the Northeastern United States. Through analysis of oral and written reflections, as well as a semi-structured interview after the course had ended, several themes emerged regarding how white educators assess their RID in these environments, including reflection on childhood and adolescence and exploration of parallel identities. The findings also yielded important indicators of the influence of antiracist professional development, including opportunities for reflection, explicit theoretical education, instructor vulnerability, and differentiation of learning experiences. Recommendations from this study include providing explicit instruction to educators in RID theories and prompting authentic reflection on the depth of relationships participants have with people of color, as well as on the intersection of their personal trauma and racial identity.

Keywords: Racial identity development, race, racism, whiteness, white educators, antiracism, professional development

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Tribal Land Acknowledgment

A tribal land acknowledgment is a practice where current occupants, whether permanent or temporary, of Indigenous lands take time to recognize the Native people who have cared for and served as custodians of the land and waterways for generations prior to colonization–and in many cases these are the people who are still caring for that land and those waterways. The goal is to show respect for these Indigenous identities, as well as to help to counter the biased, stereotypical, misguided, and missing representations of them in our social worlds.

My doctoral work has reflected my personal and professional passions for promoting social justice and equity, particularly for historically marginalized and silenced groups. For more than a decade, I have worked within the context of a predominantly white educator workforce in the United States (Schaeffer, 2021) to broaden the aperture of our collective consciousness so that we see the ways in which systemic racism oppresses all people of color, including Native Americans. With a dissertation topic grounded in a framework of critical race theory and the promotion of antiracism in white educators, I feel it is important to open my work with this acknowledgment, one that takes a step toward unerasing Indigenous peoples and their histories, for as Claudia Fox Tree (2021) said, “This land starts and ends with Indigenous people.”

Lesley University’s main campus sits upon land belonging to the Naumkeag, Massachuset, and Pawtucket nations (Lesley University, n.d.; Native Land Digital, 2023). It is important to note that historically Native American nations did not have carefully delineated boundaries as often represented in the colonized maps of New England we see today. Many Indigenous people moved in and out of the area and one group’s territory often overlapped with

another's. Further, within the Massachuset nation, there were multiple bands, one of which was the Pongapoag, a tribe that still exists today (Massachusett Tribe at Ponkapoag, 2019).

While simply noting my settler privilege, or the ways in which I benefit from the "genocide and land theft" that mark "the origins of the US [which] are rooted in foreign invasion" (Gilio-Whitaker, 2018), will do little to achieve the lofty goal of promoting greater equity for those most oppressed, it is but one sign of my commitment to the lifelong work of dismantling systems of oppression and a fitting way to open this culminating document of my doctoral work.

Use of Language

Throughout this work, I have attempted to utilize the language of inclusion and empowerment, a lexicon that is ever-changing. When using words to describe groups of people, I have researched what the most current inclusive language may be and have attempted to employ it here. In instances where I directly quote the language of others, there may be inconsistencies with my own use of language; however, in those cases I found it more important to share the original language from the source, whether that source is a noted published author or one of the participants in my study. Certainly, no group is monolithic, so identifying appropriate language to discuss identity can be rather challenging. I am sure that years after this dissertation has been submitted, many instances of the language I have used will have become obsolete, inappropriate, or even offensive. At this moment in time however, the language is as up-to-date as I know it to be.

Capitalization

I have chosen to capitalize all racial and ethnic groups with the exception of white, except when including direct quotations where the original author chose to follow different conventions;

I recognize this is in opposition to the American Psychological Association (2020) style guidelines, including those focused on bias-free language. While the organization has recently acknowledged its role in perpetuating systems of oppression, including racism (American Psychological Association, 2021), I have made this intentional choice, in line with the decisions of many major publications (Bauder, 2020; Coleman, 2020) in recent years, for I believe it encompasses my beliefs about equity, including those studied in this dissertation. I made this decision for the following reasons, each of which have been developed through the lens of my antiracist work with other local educators: (1) the collective shared histories and cultures of whiteness are those typically steeped in the oppression of others, which is quite different than the shared histories and cultures associated with other racial groups and some ethnicities; (2) the racial identities Black and Indigenous are not automatically capitalized like other racial constructs associated with proper nouns but should be because they represent centuries of shared culture, while the same is not true of whiteness, where shared culture is typically more tied to ethnicities like Irish or Italian (C. Fox Tree, personal communication, November 12, 2021); and (3) to capitalize white provides fodder to white supremacist thinking about white identity, even if it happens subconsciously. Researchers studying similar concepts have made this decision as well, such as Blaisdell (2020), Dumas (2016), Jupp et al. (2023), Okun (2022), Simmons (2020, 2021), and Smith et al. (2024).

Pluralization of Schema

While the traditional pluralization of the word schema is schemata, Helms (2020) used the word schemas. Since my work heavily relies on her theory of white racial identity development for its framework, I have chosen to follow her lead and use the word schemas.

Positive Racial Identity

For the purposes of this study, a "positive" sense of racial identity is defined as moving beyond the primary three schemas within Helms's (2020) model of white racial identity development (RID), schemas she described as "internalizing racism" (p. 17), into the latter three schemas, which she refers to as an "evolving non-racist identity" (p. 17). More discussion of these schemas is included in Chapter Two.

Non-Racist vs. Antiracist

Within her theory of white RID, Helms (2020) used the term "non-racist" (p. 17) to describe the three most advanced schemas that white individuals can use in the construction and understanding of their own whiteness. The word choice is interesting, particularly in light of recent rhetoric committing to the word antiracist as the only manner in which we can fight and dismantle the system of oppression known as racism. Tatum (2017) described racism as a system not unlike a moving walkway in the airport: people do not need to do anything other than passively stand there to allow the system to do what it was designed to do. Hammond (2019) remarked that inequity is not a "bug in the system; it is a feature of the system." With this thinking in mind, fighting racism requires action, not passivity. Kendi (2019) wrote that:

> ...there is no neutrality in the racism struggle. The opposite of 'racist' isn't 'not racist.' It is 'antiracist.' What's the difference? One endorses the idea of a racial hierarchy as a racist, or racial equality as an antiracist. One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an antiracist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of 'not racist.' The claim of 'not racist' neutrality is a mask for racism. (p. 9)

This commitment to actively dismantle racism is how I use the term antiracism in this dissertation. When applicable, I use Helms's (2020) term non-racist in describing the second half of her model for white RID. Non-racist in this context is used explicitly to describe the schemas from which white people can operate that do not perpetuate racism to the same extent as those that represent internalized racism. More discussion of this is included in Chapter Two; however Sue's (2015) description of the relationship between the two words may be helpful in clarifying how I use the terminology in this dissertation. He suggested that non-racist relates to the development of white identity, while antiracist refers to white people becoming active allies to people of color in the struggle for equal rights.

Contradictions Abound: My Sociocultural Perspective

Growing up, school was a contradictory space for me, a space where I felt successful due to my test scores, transcript, and extracurricular resume, while simultaneously feeling invisible as I struggled with aspects of identity that no one else seemed to notice as salient. While I was deemed an academically gifted student by traditional metrics, my adolescence was also marked by the challenges of coming of age as a biracial and gay Asian man. Similar to experiences articulated by Dr. Sawsan Jaber (Eakins & Jaber, 2020), it was only in hindsight that I could see the ways in which my K-12 educators failed to recognize the negative impact of colorblind teaching on my own ethnic and racial identity development. I did not even fully recognize the role racial identity played in my own experiences until I became a transracial adoptive parent well into my adulthood, an experience that then brought other aspects of my racialized life into greater focus, including my own interracial marriage to a white man. Exploring the influence of educators incorporating an understanding of racial identity development (RID) into their antiracist teaching practices quickly became a professional focus of mine as I transitioned out of

the classroom and into administrative leadership roles in schools. I have worked with hundreds of K-12 educators over the years in both formal and informal professional learning capacities, and I have been eager to uncover how best to facilitate educators' own racial identity development in pursuit of bringing greater equity to the systems in which they work.

The contradictions in my personal experiences mirror that of academia in general: the history of imperialism and colonialism that contributed to my own identity development are the same elements that have been used as tools of oppression to silence and erase Indigenous people for generations (Smith, 2021). The impact of oppression is incorporated within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) developmental concepts of the chronosphere and the macrosystem, and I have appreciated the ways in which contemporary theorists like Fish and Syed (2018) have decolonized these ideas to argue that the impact of both the history within the chronosystem, in particular long-term history, and the dominant culture within the macrosystem are each inextricably linked to the development of the individual. These ideas have helped me to articulate the ways in which my own experience and identities have developed and the ways in which they inform my work.

My mother was born in the capital city of Jakarta, Indonesia. At the time of her birth, Indonesia had ended its fight for independence from the Netherlands only a few weeks prior; Jakarta was known by the imperial powers as Batavia in the Dutch East Indies. My mother and her family were Dutch citizens, although her family had been in Asia for several generations. Following the revolution and the Indonesians' political independence from the Netherlands, my mother's parents refused to relinquish their European citizenship and moved the family to Holland where they remained for several years before immigrating to the United States when my mother was a teenager. With a new American identity, one dictated by oppressive concepts of assimilation within the dominant culture, my mother raised me alone during my early childhood

in a family that had mostly lost its ability to speak Dutch and Indonesian. I was explicitly told we were American, but my young self wondered why I was expected to use Dutch words for my family members–Oma, Opa, Tante, Om. At the time, my experiences reiterated Kiang and Witkow's (2018) findings that ethnic identity for adolescents from Asian backgrounds was often eclipsed by a more generic American identity, one that could hinder individuals' ethnic-racial identity (ERI) development. I saw myself as just a regular American, although I learned quickly on the playground once I started school that my physical features were those that white Americans typically associate with people of color from anywhere but Europe. I was experiencing firsthand that, while race certainly operates in isolation from culture in some regards, the two work in conjunction for people of color when viewed through the dominant white cultural lens. While coming to understand this as an adolescent, my grandparents' colonial mindset was at odds with the ways in which others were interpreting and confusing my racial and cultural identities; however, it was dishes like bami, satay, and lumpia, dinner table staples at our weekly gatherings as a family when I was young, that helped me reconcile what I was being told–"We are Dutch citizens; you are American"--with what I was hearing on the playground–"What are you? Where are you from?"

As an adult when I entered into what Cross (1995) terms the *Immersion/Emersion* phase of racial identity development, I engaged in self-research in an attempt to develop a positive self-image following my realization that, for people of color, race alone can lead to negative treatment. My mother and her father had both passed away, so I turned to my octanagerian grandmother, my oma, and asked how much of our lineage was Dutch and how much was Indonesian. Without hesitation, she answered, "We are 100% Dutch. There is no Indonesian in our blood." I was dumbfounded at the time, for my oma certainly does not look 100% Dutch, nor

do her seven children and dozens of grandchildren. I have since discovered that her own grandmother–my great-great-grandmother–was Chinese, marrying her Dutch grandfather and moving to Indonesia where she raised her family. The internalization of superiority my oma had achieved through more closely identifying with the colonial components of her history was exactly the type of thing that perpetuates the cycle of oppression (Harro, 2000), and as I learned more through my own studies, I became determined to break that cycle. However, I have admittedly decided to let my now 98-year-old oma live out her final years without the knowledge that my DNA tests show more than one-third of my genetics comes from Asia.

My biological father is a white man who has had virtually no direct impact on my development as he has been absent my entire life; however, I am keenly aware of the ways in which his genes have provided me certain conditional access points to privilege and power as they produced in my racialized features someone who is sometimes viewed as only vaguely ethnic and not necessarily a person of color in America. Similarly, my mother's marriage when I was young to a second white man, one who has been my father for the past several decades, has played a significant role in my ability to function within predominantly white institutions of power, like the several schools I have attended throughout my life. Due to this socialization, I have had a harder time code switching out of white middle class cultural modes, an experience again that is mirrored in the literature for Asian students (Chan, 2017).

Of course my ERI is but one component–albeit a powerful one–of my identity. In considering the ways in which identity informs my research and work, I must also consider the intersectional components of who I am, especially since failing to do so can prevent me from seeing how the very issues I researched in this study impact various demographic groups differently (Crenshaw, 1991, 2016). In addition to the ways in which my family's history with

colonization and my father's whiteness provided me some limited access to power and privilege, my identity as a gay man has been filled with contradictions that must be examined from an intersectional lens. Growing up in the 1980s and early 1990s when homosexuality was regularly disparaged in popular films and television and discussed in negative tones on the nightly news, my sexual identity eclipsed my ERI. These experiences with marginalization carried the typical myopic tendency to focus solely on my own oppression rather than the ways in which the dominance of heteronormativity impacted all members of what we now term the LGBTQIA+ community. In fact, that tunnel vision prevented me from seeing the relative privilege of my identity as a cisgendered gay man within the queer community for many years. During my own research on racial identity development in pursuit of this degree, I was consistently interrogating my positionality within the work, asking myself where my various identity components reside on the axes of power to oppression and privilege to disadvantage. This is an endeavor that will continue long after my degree is conferred.

Another component of locating myself in this work is considering the ways in which I initially came to my own understandings of my racial identity development (RID) in a graduate course focused on antiracist teaching practices (see Appendix A), a course I now teach several times a year as I attempt to help other educators recognize their own RID, its impact on teaching and learning, and the role it plays within larger systems of inequity. The course leans heavily on Beverly Daniel Tatum's (2017) *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, which includes several chapters delving into RID for different demographic groups. At the time I completed the work, I was one of only two people of color in the course, the other being a woman of African American and Asian heritage, although her lived experiences based on how others interacted with her were more closely tied to her identity as a Black woman. The two of us

became friendly during the course, as our shared experiences were certainly different from the other two dozen white educators in the room.

Our class met consistently over the course of several months, thirty-six hours in total, and late in our time together we engaged in an activity called “Crossing the Room.” During the exercise, the instructors called out various identity groups and asked them to literally cross the room and face the rest of the class. They then asked a series of questions: (1) What is something you never want to hear about your group again? (2) What is something you want us to know about your group? (3) What is something you need from your allies? I had no problem crossing the room for “man” or “member of the LGBT community,” but when the instructors asked, “Please cross to the other side of the room if you identify as a person of color,” I froze. My new friend crossed the room, and my internal monologue centered on whether I would betray her experiences as a Black woman if I crossed; I was mired in the mindset of race being simply a Black and white binary, and although I absolutely did not feel white, I had not fully accepted my identity as a person of color outside that binary thinking. I stayed where I was and left my friend to respond to the questions alone. After class, she approached me and chided me for abandoning her: “Why didn’t you cross with me?” I explained my thinking and she laughed, suggesting I had a lot of growing to do. She reminded me that my internal sense of self had to be reconciled with how others viewed me, and she questioned whether the other white participants saw me as one of them or not. “If the answer is no,” she told me, “you need to deal with your identity as a person of color in America.”

That profound experience shifted me, and I started to consider the ways in which race and ethnicity were both simultaneously sources of internal pride and tools of oppression within our larger cultural context. I came to recognize the ways in which my socialization as a child by my

father's white family gave me a warped sense of self, one that was perpetuated when I married a white man myself. As I came to learn more and began teaching these courses, I was able to develop a more positive intersectional identity that balanced the components of oppression and colonization that are so deeply ingrained in my personal history with the power those aspects carry to disrupt systems of oppression within my spheres of influence and control. I have helped shift my husband's own understanding of his whiteness, and we have collectively considered the ways in which we can now help promote a positive RID in our own adopted children, both of whom identify as Black. These powerful personal experiences have helped me consider the ways in which explicitly incorporating an understanding of RID into the way we educate students during childhood and adolescence can be a powerful disrupter to the systems of inequity within our schools and beyond.

Conclusion

Now as I take on this new role in my educational journey as a researcher, I continue to consider the ways in which my identities–past, present, and future–all play a role in what I learn. I am committed to considering the ways in which my positionality informs–and likely biases–my epistemology (Takacs, 2003). I am a salaried professional living with my multiracial family in a nearly all-white town that my husband and I chose because of the way we had been socialized to think of schools as being good based on their access to financial resources. My two children of color are nearing the end of their K-12 careers in these predominantly white institutions, and my work has certainly been and will continue to be informed by the challenges they have faced learning from educators who have failed to actively engage in the internal work necessary to disrupt the systems that privilege white children and oppress children of color.

CHAPTER TWO: OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

In my work engaging with educators over the last decade on issues of racial equity, I have noticed a wide range of responses to this important topic. Some have struggled with the realization of how systemic racism operates in our world, while others have quickly moved to a more pragmatic position of taking actionable antiracist steps. Some have made the transition from one level of understanding to another through their work with facilitators like me. Some have remained stagnant and immobilized, while others have reflected deeply on the past experiences that propelled them to new perceptions. In my doctoral journey, I endeavored to better understand how white educators can develop a clear sense of their racialized self and commit to their role in dismantling systems of oppression. My research focused on strategies to promote positive racial identity in white educators, and my primary research question was "How is white educators' assessment of their own racial identity influenced by participation in professional development focused on antiracism?" My research included two sub-questions: "How do white educators assess their own racial identity?" and "What lived experiences do white educators cite as having shifted their identity development?"

Because race is a social construct that has no significant basis in biological fact, individuals can have a challenging time recognizing how this construct has a real impact on the ways in which they identify and develop. Whereas many other socially constructed elements, including gender, are certainly intricately intertwined in systems of oppression, they were not constructed for the purpose of oppression in the same way that race was (Anderson, 2016; DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2019; Oluo, 2020; Pollock, 2017). The invisibility of this history maintains the cycle of oppression, especially for the white people who benefit from that system,

but also for the ways in which the oppression is internalized by people of color who are then complicit with the system (Batts, 2017; Harro, 2000).

This chapter begins with the larger theoretical framework in which theories of racial identity development (RID) sit, specifically critical race theory (CRT). As a foundational framework, CRT posits the ways in which the social construct of race plays out in our daily interactions, including the influence of our larger social systems and institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Beneath that umbrella framework is the more specific framework of Janet Helms' (2020) theory of white racial identity development. Following that theoretical framework, I provide an overview of how RID concepts have been studied in student and teacher experiences in formal schooling, as well as how white educational professionals in adult learning environments best move through the very personal work of internalizing concepts of antiracism before moving from theory to praxis.

Critical Race Theory & White RID

To truly understand the ways in which concepts of whiteness can shift and develop over time, one must have a working understanding of critical race theory (CRT). As defined by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), critical race theory examines "the relationship among race, racism, and power" within "a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious" (pp. 2-3). They have specified the basic tenets of CRT as (1) racism is an inextricable component of all aspects of our lives, from daily interpersonal interactions to the functions of institutions and large socially constructed systems, (2) those who benefit from racism have little incentive to dismantle it, and (3) race is a social construct with little to no basis in genetics or biology. It is important to note that while social constructs are merely ideas that are widely accepted by people in a society, they hold real

meaning as well. As Franchesca Ramsey (MTV Impact, 2015) pointed out, “Money is a social construct; fundamentally it’s just a piece of paper, but it still keeps people up at night and has a huge effect on our day-to-day lives.” Such understandings are foundational to the modern conceptualizations of ethnic and racial identities, as the latter stages and statuses of development models typically are marked by an individual’s understanding of how race affects nearly all aspects of that individual’s experiences and perspectives.

Many CRT theorists have identified within the category of realists or economic determinists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), believing that racism is not merely about having negative thoughts about members of other racial groups; it is instead a powerful system of oppression that operates not just at the personal level but also the institutional, including economic, legal, and education systems that dictate all of our daily experiences and outcomes. Within the United States, these systems exist solely to uplift whiteness through the oppression, exploitation, victimization, and dehumanization of people of color. Maintaining the subjugation of people of color is actually a key feature of the system, which is a particular theoretical framework through which one can analyze gains within those systems. Derrick Bell (1980) suggested the concept of interest-convergence was the driving factor behind any societal gains for people of color, such as the interest-convergence of civil rights for people of color and the declining perspective of Americans within the global arena that resulted from widespread knowledge of the Jim Crow South after World War II. Bell suggested that such gains for people of color would not have been possible if there were not corresponding gains for white people, and in so doing, the power differential is maintained. Such progress maintains a delicate balance, one that pacifies oppressed people to prevent them from disrupting the system from within while maintaining the superiority of dominant groups.

Many CRT scholars have identified that the maintenance of this system resides in the invisibility of whiteness as a racial identity. British author Reni Eddo-Lodge (2017) argued that "positive affirmations of whiteness are so widespread that the average white person doesn't even notice them. Instead, these affirmations are placidly consumed. To be white is to be human; to be white is universal. I only know this because I am not" (p. xxi), and she further suggested that "whiteness positions itself as the norm" and "refuses to recognise itself for what it is" (p. 169). Eddo-Lodge's comments illustrated that the power of whiteness, even beyond the borders of the United States, resides within ignorance. Historian Robin Bernstein (2011) suggested that the term "innocence" itself is synonymous with the normalcy of whiteness, and Hagerman's (2020) work found that white parents often preserve ignorance of white superiority in their own white children through a parallel preservation of innocence by avoiding topics of race to just "let them be kids" (p. 151), a practice Debby Irving (2014) identified as a privilege of the dominant class. In fact, Heberle et al.'s (2023) mixed methods pilot study of white parents' facility with engaging their preschool-aged children in conversations about race and racism found that even though a majority of participants self-identified as "knowledgeable about race and racism, committed to anti-racism, and active in anti-racist action" (p. 8), few recognized the necessity of a focus on whiteness in order to actively live by those ideas and values. This echoed Hazelbaker and Mistry's (2022) findings that white children often reinforced problematic colorblind thinking that race does not matter, the view of white identity traits as normative, and a hesitancy to even self-identify as white. Derald Wing Sue (2015) further linked the invisibility of whiteness within concepts of innocence to the ways in which it promotes the opportunity to enact harm against people of color without the perpetrators' explicit awareness.

This positing of whiteness as a racialized identity that thrives on its covert existence has been a cornerstone of Helms's (2020) theory of white racial identity development. Helms positioned her theories squarely upon scientific advancements that affirm race exists solely as a social construct with no basis in genetics or biology. While the concept of race is believed by many to be a categorization based primarily on skin pigmentation, facial features, and/or hair texture, breakthroughs in DNA analysis have led the scientific community to accept that individuals' physical appearance provides no accurate information about where their ancestors may have resided (Gannon, 2016). Of course one's racial identity and ethnic origins are often intricately linked; however it is merely our shared collective agreements that lead us to identify certain individuals as members of specific racial categories. Take, for example, someone whose ancestors came from Africa may have lighter skin than someone whose ancestors came from India; although many would articulate that the hue of skin tone is a primary determinant of racial categorization, it is our collective mindset that identifies the lighter-skinned person with African heritage as Black and the darker-skinned person with Indian heritage as Asian. While Helms suggested race is an immutable trait assigned at birth, she did elaborate on the concept stating that RID theories deal with how individuals perceive themselves as racial beings as well as how those same individuals perceive others. Historian Robin Kelley (2003) added that race is not necessarily "about how you look" but rather "about how people assign meaning to how you look," which is in fact a "learned behavior." With respect to whiteness specifically, Helms's (2020) theory paralleled this thinking to the ignorance of white racial identity: "...in this society, one learns to act White, but not be White. White people teach each other to lie about being White" (p. 14).

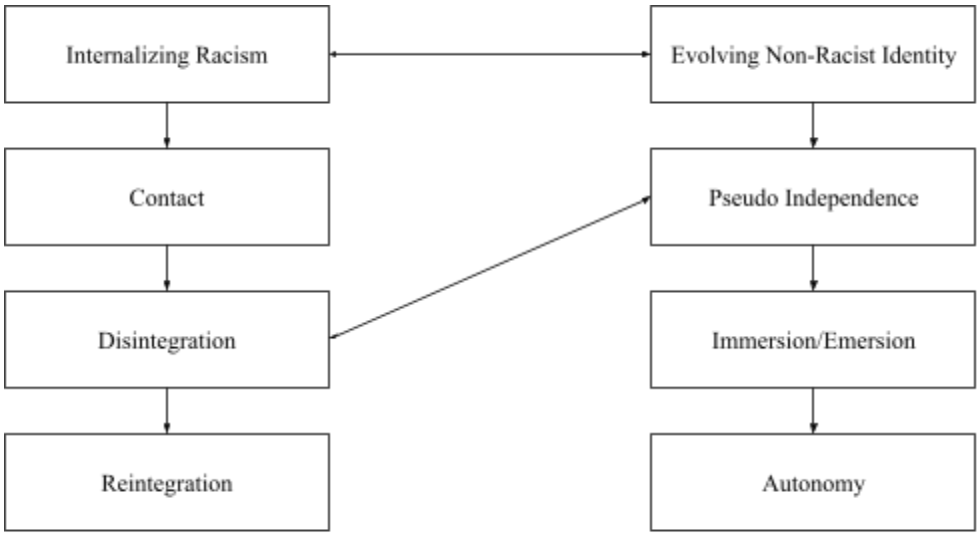
Whiteness, whether recognized or not, sits at the apex of the hierarchy articulated within a critical race theory framework, and this concept was foundational to Helms's racial identity development theory. Reminiscent of major CRT thinker Derrick Bell (1992), Helms (2020) affirmed that all white people in the United States, whether born here or not, learn immediately that being perceived as white is better than not, which is in fact a "racist orientation" (p. 26) whether the individual recognizes it or not.

Upon these CRT-themed underpinnings, Helms (2020) built a model of white RID that detailed six schemas individuals can develop and use. Figure 1 shows the progression of these six schemas, the first three of which comprise an individual who is internalizing racism and the last three of which make up an individual with an evolving non-racist identity, "internalizing racism" and "evolving non-racist identity" being labels Helms (2020) used to categorize the three schemas beneath (p. 29). Helms identified the final schema as representative of a positive white racial identity development; achieving this final status, even temporarily, requires four steps: "(1) making a decision to abandon racism, (2) observing the ways in which racism is maintained in your environments, (3) learning the differences between expression of racism and expression of White culture, and (4) discovering what is positive about being White" (p. 17). The depiction in Figure 1 shows the relationships between various aspects of the model. The arrow linking the internalizing racism schemas to the evolving non-racist identity schemas shows they are not unidirectional; one can move back and forth between the two based on context. The arrow between *Disintegration* and *Pseudo-Independence* shows how "often feelings associated with *Disintegration* serve as catalysts for this evolution" (p. 26) from internalizing racism and evolving non-racist identity schemas, including elements that individuals may encounter while

operating from a *Pseudo-Independence* schema that promote further growth through new use of the *Disintegration* schema.

Figure 1

Janet Helms's Model of White Identity Development



Note: From *A Race Is a Nice Thing to Have: A Guide to Being a White Person or Understanding the White Persons in Your Life* (p. 26), by Janet Helms, 2020, Cognella. Copyright 2020.

In Helms's (1995, 2020) latest iterations of her theory, she clarified that the concepts were neither linear nor mutually exclusive, which was widely interpreted as an element of her earlier theories (Helms, 1984, 1990). Her initial update (Helms, 1995) shifted language from "stages" to "statuses" to promote her original intention that each was permeable or fluid. That update included clarification that the linear components of the model "describe the developmental processes by which the statuses come into being" (p. 188), so for example one cannot develop a *Pseudo-Independence* status without first developing the three internalizing racism status. To further clarify the nonlinear aspects of her theory, she more fully shifted the language to "schemas" (Helms, 2020).

To explain how an individual does not progress from one stage to the next, leaving behind the attributes of earlier statuses, as with other developmental theories, Helms (2020) used two analogies to articulate her meaning. The first is that of eye wear, in which one schema may operate in the same way that prescription contact lenses do, providing a clearer perspective, while another schema could simultaneously behave like sunglasses, shielding the individual from the harsh effects of some external light source. An individual may view an experience through a non-racist identity schema like *Immersion/Emersion*, but it may be a perverted viewpoint because it is clouded by elements of the *Reintegration* schema. The second metaphor she used is liquids in a container, each with different weights; one individual's cylinder may have differing amounts of liquid representing each of the six schemas, while another's cylinder may be filled completely with liquid representing *Reintegration*.

The Contact Schema

A childlike emotional fragility about racial dynamics is a hallmark of the *Contact* schema, in which individuals do not identify themselves as white even though they acknowledge the racialized identities of persons of color, although they may hold the naive assumption that belonging to a particular racial group involves superficial shifts in elements like vernacular or dress (Helms, 2020). This is bolstered by a colorblind mentality; individuals may claim not to notice race or that race is irrelevant. Paradoxically, while individuals operating in this schema may fail to recognize the existence of an oppressive white culture, they can simultaneously assume that all people of color aspire to assimilate within that dominant culture. This can be affirmed by existing solely in white spaces in which there are little to no interactions with people of color, or cultivating superficial relationships with occasional people of color, relationships masquerading as friendships without making space to truly learn of the person of color's

experiences, especially racialized experiences. Existing in solely white spaces can result in a lifelong use of the *Contact* schema, while superficial relationships with people of color often results in a progression to the *Disintegration* schema.

The *Contact* schema is fostered within larger institutional racist systems through misinformation and deliberate obfuscation, such as those characterized by critical race theory. For example, systems within the United States "are almost always procedural…rather than substantive" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 29), focusing on process rather than outcome: whether a person of color has an opportunity to have a fair trial in the criminal justice system or receive a quality schooling experience within our public education system is far more important than that the data show how rarely that actually happens. While people of color are often fully aware of the perpetuation of dominant white culture as the norm (Eddo-Lodge, 2017; Oluo, 2018, 2020; Sue, 2015; Tatum, 2017), it is the ignorance of white people operating from a *Contact* schema that maintains that oppression. In keeping with CRT beliefs that dominant groups will often violently oppose threats to dismantle the system maintaining its superiority, this is one way to view the backlash against providing K-12 students counternarratives through legislative action (Gross, 2022), such as recent state laws banning the *New York Times'* 1619 Project (Schwartz, 2021) and the refusal to incorporate a new Advanced Placement African American Studies course into Florida's public schools (Mazzei & Hartocollis, 2023); blocking this learning maintains the normalcy of white superiority, promoting the maintenance of white individuals operating from a *Contact* schema and avoiding potential disruption to the accumulation of racialized benefits in the United States for white people.

The Disintegration Schema

Within the *Disintegration* schema, denial of the effects of racism, including the benefits accrued by white people as a result, is no longer an option. The individual begins to acknowledge white privilege, which often corresponds with feelings of guilt, shame, and confusion. Individuals may engage in a series of self-reflective activities, such as articulating a list of privileges like Peggy McIntosh's (1998) enumeration of more than two dozen unearned advantages afforded her by her whiteness. However, as Robin DiAngelo (2018) noted, acknowledging privilege without similarly recognizing the "systematic dimensions of racism" (p. 64) can deliberately obscure the realities of oppression by race. While individuals may be mired in only a partial understanding of the role white privilege plays in the larger system of racism, a characteristic of the *Disintegration* schema is recognition that white people are entitled to better treatment and failure to conform to social norms around race, including the norm of remaining blind to white racial identity, will result in a loss of that entitlement.

While engaging in this personal interrogation, the beliefs of the *Contact* schema begin to disintegrate, so much so that returning to use of that schema is often impossible. This produces a type of moral dilemma, often requiring an abandonment of the moral conscience that supported the colorblind mentality of the *Contact* schema. Helms (2020) suggested this may cause disorientation in individuals, essentially requiring cognitive dissonance to make sense of the senseless. Individuals may engage in what Batts (2017) referred to as modern forms of racism in which individuals may attempt to rescue people of color out of an assumption of their inferiority, blame them for their own oppression rather than acknowledge the systems producing those outcomes, and avoid or deny the topic of race and racism altogether. Essentially, white people

operating in a *Disintegration* schema eschew the responsibility for racism and will typically focus on racist explanations that reduce negative feelings like shame and guilt.

Still affixed within the internalization of racism, this schema lacks an appreciation of the oppressive nuances of intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991, 2016) that highlights the ways social identities may be disadvantaged by multiple systems of oppression at once. In fact, when it comes to significantly dominant groups like white people in the United States, individuals may be simultaneously advantaged by some systems while disadvantaged by others, and those operating in the *Disintegration* schema are not yet ready to acknowledge this. For example, Cooley et al. (2019) found that teaching about white privilege in isolation from other intersectional forms of systemic oppression may actually increase problematic thinking about white people impacted by poverty. While this may be a necessary component of white racial identity development, it is still a problematic schema.

The Reintegration Schema

Through the somewhat flawed personal reflection individuals engage in during the *Disintegration* schema, they may become aware of their own whiteness, yet they still believe it to be superior. They may continue to blame the victim, believing that many aspects of people of color's identities are inferior. These traits may be engendered by the fact that disrupting racism comes at a cost to white people since that disruption results in a loss of power. White author Robin DiAngelo (2018) believed that coming to terms with whiteness is to understand the ways in which the identity benefits from all forms of racism. Further, she named how when she "kept quiet about racism, [she] was rewarded with social capital as being seen as fun, cooperative, and a team player" (p. 58).

Possibly the most prevalent schema from which white Americans operate, this final schema of the internalizing racism phase is distinguished by an idealization of white culture and identity; white privilege is viewed as the natural result of living in a meritocratic society. The anti-CRT movement noted in the *Contact* schema above also perpetuates the use of the *Reintegration* schema, as white people operating from the evolving non-racist identity schemas are viewed as "politically correct," "white liberals," or "playing the race card" (Helms, 2020, p. 49).

The Pseudo-Independence Schema

As white individuals progress into an evolving non-racist identity, they develop the *Pseudo-Independence* schema, one that is typically only achieved through a moral awakening resulting from a series of events in which the realities of race and racism can no longer be ignored. The sense of white superiority begins to fade, but only fledgling aspects of a positive sense of whiteness are evident. Individuals operating in this schema may see the possibility of equality for people of color to what whites currently have without recognizing the mentality as a racist view of assimilation that still posits whiteness as superior. To mentally safeguard against these continued cognitive dissonances, individuals may over-intellectualize the personal aspects of race and racism or simply deny some aspects of the concepts (Helms, 2020).

Persons operating in the *Pseudo-Independence* schema will often have a simplistic understanding of white racial identity, bifurcating it into bad white people–those who are overtly racist–and good white people–those who have good intentions. Self-worth for these individuals is tied up in being viewed as good, ignoring the reality that racist outcomes occur regardless of intentionality (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). They may promote liberal agendas and ideology but avoid the emotional weight of the ways in which their own whiteness contributes to systemic racism.

Still centering whiteness in interracial interactions, this schema allows individuals to send explicit or implicit messages to people of color that they should merely adhere to dominant white norms in order to succeed and avoid the negative impacts of racism (Helms, 2020).

This schema is reflected by the reinforcement from other whites who are similarly looking for positive acknowledgement of their development thus far, and that reinforcement may even come from some people of color; however, individuals operating in this schema still lack an intricate understanding of the personal and collective responsibility of whiteness within the system of oppression knows as racism. Other problematic aspects of this schema are the strategies that individuals typically employ to maintain their sense of good whiteness. They may ignore or minimize the experiences of historically marginalized racialized groups by pointing out how much better things are now than they once were, or they may highlight the existence of a singular role model, such as the election of the first Black president, to disprove the existence of ongoing systemic racism. They may sometimes even espouse that systemic racism exists but fail to apply its impacts to people of color with whom they personally interact. In fact, they may even recognize individual acts of racism such as telling racist jokes or using racist epithets, but rather than disrupt their use they may simply proclaim how unfortunate it is that such things still occur. Claims of reverse racism and a hyperfocus on ethnic identity status can also mark this schema, as well as blanket statements that all white people are racist in an effort to avoid personal responsibility. These strategies were deemed as protective by Helms (2020), and she suggested that until individuals can identify the ways in which they personally contribute to racism, they will continue to operate within this schema rather than developing an *Immersion/Emersion* schema.

The Immersion/Emersion Schema

Marked by an "active exploration of racism" (Helms, 2020, p. 29), the *Immersion-Emersion* schema requires an explicit reconciliation of the history of whiteness in the United States. In an attempt to literally redefine what it means to be white, individuals may engage in revisionist history, a component of a critical race theory framework in which one reexamines the historical events that created and maintain American society by replacing the dominant narrative of whiteness with the stories and experiences of minoritized people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This re-education can inspire anger and embarrassment, as individuals recognize the misinformation and biased information they have been provided by other white people they have trusted who are likely operating from a less developed schema.

While the *Pseudo-Independence* and *Immersion/Emersion* schemas share many traits with one another, the major difference is that the former still primarily locates the issues of race and racism in people of color while the latter incorporates an understanding of the significant contributions of white people to the issue, including one's own personal contributions. Helms (2020) provided several examples of this distinction, including promoting equity in hiring through quotas as an illustration of a *Pseudo-Independence* schema versus addressing white privilege to promote equity in hiring within an *Immersion/Emersion* schema.

During the self-exploration, individuals take on the "moral re-education" of other white people (Helms 2020, p. 29). Given that residing within this schema incorporates a feeling of responsibility for vigilantly identifying to other white people that of which they are ignorant or refuse to see, individuals can experience feelings of isolation and loneliness; they may seek the soothing company of white people engaged in the same level of learning, including reading the stories of other white people's journey of racial identity development who have achieved the use

of this schema, like Tim Wise's (2011) *White Like Me* or Debby Irving's (2014) *Waking Up White*. All of these traits typically result in abandonment, especially in the *Emersion* phase where individuals literally emerge from the process with new interpretations of self that may be anathema to whites in the internalizing racism schemas. This abandonment, including from those closest to the individuals in this schema, can be self-imposed as individuals in *Immersion/Emersion* often find it challenging to constantly be confronted with other white people who fail to see their own complicity with and perpetuation of racism (Helms, 2020). At the same time though, the isolation can also be instigated by others because those same people will find it too difficult to constantly be reminded of these interpretations of whiteness.

Ultimately, use of this schema is self-liberating, as individuals can finally begin to define their whiteness internally without feeling the powerlessness within the larger system of racism marked by other schemas, particularly those in the internalizing racism phase (Helms, 2020). It is important to note that early versions of Helms's (1984, 1990) RID theory did not include this schema.

The Autonomy Schema

Within the *Autonomy* schema, white individuals will attempt to deal with the negative feelings associated with *the Immersion-Emersion* schema by seeking out others who actively oppose oppression, especially relationships and interactions that are cross-racial (Helms, 2020). Individuals here are safe and secure in their whiteness, seeing within that identity the opportunity for freedom from oppression for all people, strategizing that end result by confronting all systems of oppression, moving those from the margins to the center, and promoting collectivism, which is the antithesis to the dominant cultural norms of the United States (Hammond, 2015; Načinović Braje et al., 2019), as well as white supremacy culture (Okun, 2022).

Individuals operating in this schema truly see the value of diversity, actively seeking out new opportunities in multiple contexts of their lives to authentically integrate the stories and experiences of people of color without the need for validation of their white identity in such interactions. Helms (2020) was clear that achieving the use of this schema does not mean the individual is "a paragon of virtue" (p. 74); life, both externally impacted and internally driven, is still complicated in infinite ways. However, those operating from an *Autonomy* schema do find a better self in race relations. As an example, Sue (2015) found white people engaged in this type of schema to have "reduced feelings of guilt," develop "acceptance of their role in perpetuating racism," and "become increasingly knowledgeable about racial, ethnic, and cultural difference"; he further articulated that these individuals "value diversity, and are no longer fearful, intimidated, or uncomfortable with the experiential reality of race" (p. 199). As one such individual suggested to Helms (2020) herself, the reward of achieving a positive sense of whiteness in which one sees the value of relinquishing the power of whiteness is to regain one's humanity.

With regard to the *Autonomy* schema specifically, Malott et al. (2015) expanded upon Helms's (1990) early RID model in their qualitative study of white racial identity in ten participants operating in the *Autonomy* status. Malott et al. found that participants had difficulty reconciling concepts of evolving non-racist white identities as positive, since their sense of whiteness was viewed "as inherently negative because of its roots in a racially hierarchical…system" (p. 339). In the initially revised model of Helms's (1995) theory, and further clarified in the most recent model (2020), these concepts were not mutually exclusive, as they represented different components of schemas that can work in tandem with one another. In a phenomenological study of participants identified by researchers as operating from the *Autonomy*

schema, Malott et al. (2021) found that these individuals held certain common traits consistent with her theories, including personal strategies to mitigate negative feelings like guilt and shame.

ERI Development in Students and Teachers

In this section of my literature review, I explore the current ERI development models and how they have been studied in previous research. Concepts of ethnicity and race are social constructs that are distinct yet intricately intertwined. Ethnicity typically refers to an individual's identification with a group with shared ancestry, customs, traditions, and beliefs (Cokley, 2007). Race, on the other hand, is a social categorization primarily based on an individual's skin color, hair texture, and facial features. The most befuddling aspect of racial constructs, however, is the way that racial categories belie themselves, such as the conflicting racial issues of skin color and ancestral heritage outlined amidst my theoretical framework above. In these cases, the ancestral components of ethnic identity are very clearly tied to placement within racial categories. In fact, Rivas-Drake et al. (2014) found that "much research with Asian American and Latino samples has focused on ethnic identity, and research with African American samples has focused more on racial identity" (p. 78).

The development of these identities have been studied in isolation and in connection to one another. The process of racial identity development is widely agreed to be the process by which an individual comes to understand the role race plays in their sense of self, how it influences their ability to acquire information and reach goals, how it affects their interpersonal interactions with others, and the manner in which it assigns group membership in the larger society. William E. Cross's (1971, 1991) groundbreaking work on racial identity development in African Americans articulated five stages from *Pre-Encounter*, in which racial identity is largely unconscious, to *Internalization-Commitment*, in which the individual reconciles the external

identity pressures of others with the internal concepts of self. Cross's work opened the door for the exploration of racial identity as it applies to people of color in general, as well as to other ethnic and racial groups, including Asian (Alvarez, 2002; Kim, 2012), Latinx/Hispanic (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001), American Indian (Horse, 2005), biracial/multiracial (Poston, 1990; Root, 1990), and even white (Helms, 1984, 1995, 2020), with most models following a similar trajectory from ignorance to awareness and several articulating that the statuses are not necessarily linear as originally conceived.

In many instances historically, the process of racial identity development has been divorced from ethnic identity development; however, Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) encouraged combining ethnic with racial identity development to create a new model of ethnic-racial identity (ERI) for a variety of reasons, in particular the intermingling of the two concepts in previous literature, the ways in which each develop along a similar trajectory within individuals, and the manner in which each informs the other. The definition of ERI articulated by Umaña-Taylor et al. captured the widespread use of the concept across disciplines in recent years: "a multidimensional, psychological construct that reflects the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their ethnic-racial group memberships, as well as the processes by which these beliefs and attitudes develop over time" (p. 23). Recently, conceptual models of ERI have been expanded beyond the focus on childhood to encompass a lifelong model that identifies five dimensions of ERI that play different roles depending on the developmental age of an individual: awareness, affiliation, attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge (Williams et al., 2020). Still, Moffitt and Rogers (2022) found that separating ethnicity and race to be paramount for white youth in particular, an idea reinforced by Hazelbaker and Mistry's (2022) phenomenological study that

found white children rarely self-identify as white, opting instead for ethnic labels, including American.

The remaining portion of this section of my literature review is broken into three sections: (1) the Role of K-12 Education, (2) Critical Race Theory, and (3) Social Context and Intersectionality. The role of K-12 education in ethnic and racial identity development remains salient in current scholarship, as these are potentially formative and foundational years in the development of ERI. Most of the models of racial identity development are rooted in critical race theory understandings of the social construct of race and its role in an individual's daily interactions, so the connection between the two is a major component of much of the literature I have reviewed. Finally, most recent research on ethnic and racial identity development discusses how futile it is to examine it without considering the larger social context within which individuals exist, as well as the intersection of different socially constructed identities and their impact on an individual's sense of their racialized self.

Role of K-12 Education

Much of the current research I reviewed noted the importance of the formative years of childhood and adolescence to ethnic-racial identity development (Appling & Robinson, 2021; Hagerman, 2018, 2020; Hazelbaker et al., 2022; Karras et al., 2021; Loyd & Gaither, 2018; Moffitt et al., 2022; Moffitt & Rogers, 2022; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Safa et al., 2022; Tatum, 2017; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2020), suggesting the importance of K-12 educators learning and applying these concepts to their pedagogy. During this time period, educators play a significant role in either supporting or delaying the development of their students' ethnic-racial identity, especially as it affects academic engagement and achievement (Appling & Robsinon, 2021; DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Hagerman, 2018; Hammond, 2015; Helms,

2020; Tatum, 2017). Helms (2020) acknowledged that most adults remain mired in the internalizing racism schemas, while the few that operate in the evolving non-racist schemas primarily operate from *Pseudo-Independence*. This remained true for adolescents in Moffitt et al.'s (2022) study applying Helms's model to white youth in the United States, suggesting a need to move away from age-related developmental models.

Sue (2015) pointed out that helping K-12 students move out of the ignorant and naive stages of racial identity development may "prevent the formation of biases and bigotry" (p. 202). For white students in particular, he suggested that advanced stages of racial identity development reduce negative feelings like guilt and shame and promote a more positive acceptance of their individual role in unintentionally perpetuating systems of oppression. He suggested this allows them to enter an increasingly diverse workforce or higher education institution upon graduation with the knowledge and skills to collaborate across cultural, racial, and ethnic differences without the fears and discomfort many white adults express about interracial communication and collaboration. Because many white students are socialized by their peers far more readily than they inherit the ideologies of their parents (Hagerman, 2018, 2020), educators must recognize how valuable guiding that learning in the school environment is. The same is true for multiracial students in middle school: their understanding of their own identity is more closely associated with the influence of diverse friend groups than it is with diverse schools (Echols et al., 2018), although school diversity still matters (Santos et al., 2017). While peer influence in schools appears to be important for all children in the development of ERI (Santos et al., 2017), parental attention to pride in cultural and ethnic heritage has also been tied to a strong ethnic-racial identity in children of color (Huguley et al., 2019), which implies the need for educator differentiation when incorporating concepts of ERI into the classroom and school culture.

This distinction in interventions for promoting ERI development was further clarified by a handful of studies focused on the Identity Project, an 8-week curriculum developed for adolescents to explore aspects of self that are tied to historical and contemporary contexts (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2016). In an evaluation of the program, Umaña-Taylor et al. (2018) found that "minority status was a significant predictor" (p. 866) of exploration and resolution of ERI, for the program was less successful with white youth, perhaps as a result of the invisible nature of racial identity for white people in the United States (Casey, 2023; Helms, 2020; McIntosh, 1998). In a separate study seeking to assess ERI in Black and Latinx youth, Wantchekon et al. (2021) found similar results for their participants of color: the more developed their ERI, the better their levels of academic and psychological adjustment. Similar findings resulted from Sladek et al.'s (2021) study on the role of family ethnic socialization during the Identity Project, which identified different pathways to increased ERI development for white students. While students of color achieved positive results before and during implementation of the project based on family support, white students required additional follow-up for up to one year to achieve similar results.

The variance in processes is also an important component of recent literature. Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) differentiated between ethnic-racial identification and ethnic-racial identity (ERI). The former is the period of early childhood in which most individuals acknowledge, categorize, and label racial and ethnic differences, a process that begins as early as three months old (Kelly et al., 2005); the latter represents an internalization of the impact of such identification on a range of elements, including values, opportunities, and social experiences, that takes place typically during the period of middle childhood and adolescence. However, more recent literature rejects this bifurcation as it may place too much emphasis on the importance of

pre-adulthood experiences in the identity development process (Williams et al., 2020). Still, the importance of childhood and adolescence on the topic cannot be ignored. In their meta-analyses of 46 studies on minoritized youth, Rivas-Drake et al. (2014) found that positive ethnic-racial affect, or how good individuals feel about their ethnic and racial identities, were correlated to positive outcomes in academic achievement and health. Similar outcomes were reported for Black and Latinx students by Wantchekon and Umaña-Taylor (2021) in their study correlating ERI development with psychological adjustment and for U.S. Latino adolescents in Safa et al.'s (2022) assessment of the impacts of balancing ERI development with measurements of National American Identity. Marcelo and Yates (2018) found that promoting the development of ERI for children during elementary school can mitigate the behavioral problems associated with racial discrimination. Late adolescence in particular is also a period of time where even those youth who have not contemplated their racial and ethnic identities are typically forced to do so as they complete the forms and documents required of most adults that ask for this demographic information (Kiang & Witkow, 2018). The importance of these early stages of identity development is also exemplified in Guillaume and Christman's (2020) study that found students of mixed racial identities struggled in post-secondary university environments due in part to both their own, as well as others', lagging understandings of racial identity.

Many white educators, like many white adults, escape K-12 schooling remaining in the colorblind *Contact* schema of their racial identity development (Helms, 2020; Tatum, 2017). Hawkman's (2019) case study discussed the way in which white Social Studies educators who make pedagogical decisions through this racially ignorant perspective fail to provide sufficient opportunities for their students to progress through the necessary stages of racial identity development. Similarly, Chan's (2017) overview of theories and research in Asian American

Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) racial identity development considered the ways APIDA students may remain unaware of their racial identity due to a variety of factors, including limited exposure to such thinking during their elementary and secondary educations. While much attention has been given to ethnic and racial identity development during early childhood and adolescence, this sociological process clearly continues well into adulthood for many, especially since it is becoming increasingly common to recognize the ways in which these processes at the individual level are anything but linear (Williams et al., 2020).

The complexities of how and when individuals proceed through their ethnic-racial identity development have been further explored in recent literature. Syed, Juang, and Svensson (2018) proposed a theory of ERI research that considers the settings in which individuals interact with others and that promote self-reflection. They identify four dimensions of ethnic-racial settings as pertinent to the development of ERI: (1) perspective, or the manner in which objectivity and/or subjectivity impact a setting; (2) differentiation, or how an ethnic group is defined in a particular setting; (3) heterogeneity, or the measurement of diversity that exists in a setting; and (4) proximity, or the distance between the individual and the setting. This thinking is evident in the ways in which Asian American students may enter college with widely differing understandings of their racial identity based on their home and K-12 experiences (Chan, 2017).

The research is clear about the potential for the years that students spend in K-12 educational environments to influence children's development of their ethnic-racial identities. The research suggests this to be true regardless of educators' awareness of whether these processes are taking place or are in a state of ignorant arrested development (Hagerman, 2018, 2020; Hawkman, 2019; Hazelbaker, et al., 2022; Loyd & Gaither, 2018; Tatum, 2017). The potential positive impacts on ethnic-racial identity development in their students might certainly

be increased simply by raising those educators' awareness of these models and promoting their own self-reflection and identification in the processes.

Critical Race Theory

As outlined earlier in this chapter, critical race theory (CRT) examines "the relationship among race, racism, and power" within "a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious" (pp. 2-3), including the following three basic tenets: (1) racism is an inextricable component of all aspects of our lives, from daily interpersonal interactions to the functions of institutions and large socially constructed systems, (2) those who benefit from racism have little incentive to dismantle it, and (3) race is a social construct with little to no basis in genetics or biology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Also as previously noted, these understandings are foundational to the modern conceptualizations of ethnic and racial identity.

Recent studies explicitly identify conceptual frameworks such as CRT as important to helping students' racial identities progress appropriately, specifically linking educators' knowledge of critical race theory (Appling & Robinson, 2021) and antiracist practices (Utt & Tochluk, 2020) to supporting their students' RID. Since white individuals in particular can often remain in the *Contact* schema of their racial identity well into adulthood (Helms, 2020), white educators often need pre-service education and ongoing professional learning that connects what Ladson-Billings (2005) summarized as the manner in which CRT provides educators an opportunity to solve problems of disparate racial outcomes in schools. The literature suggests that without a proper intellectual grasp of the ways in which CRT provides a framework for approaching institutional racial disparities, educators' own racial identities may be stalled. This is especially true for white educators (Helms, 2020; Tatum, 2017), since early stages of white

racial identity are marked by a colorblind mentality that ignores the role the past and present play in how racism manifests in social systems. Recent scholarship on CRT in K-12 education focuses on the need to shift from theory to praxis in order to awaken all educators to the ways in which white supremacy dictates the structures, policies, and practices in schools (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). The same benefit of CRT helping educators gain a more clear understanding of systemic oppression in education can be applied to students, particularly as it is delivered in developmentally-appropriate ways with a focus on creating a sound racial identity for all students regardless of group membership.

Similar thinking has been applied to post-secondary educational programs. While many pre-service educator programs in higher education report to incorporate foundational concepts of racial equity into their curricula, these programs fail to accurately use CRT to move a largely white educator population toward a more positive sense of their own whiteness (Juárez, 2015). In one example, Parker and Neville's (2019) study of white students enrolled in courses led by African American faculty in a predominantly white college in the Northeast found that white university students who failed to internalize concepts of CRT were typically in early stages of their racial identity development, which negatively impacted their perceptions of their African American faculty. While Parker and Neville's study focused on students taking coursework in Human Development and Professional Studies, similar thinking has been applied to university students explicitly pursuing educational studies. The failure of teacher preparation programs to adequately incorporate a keen understanding of race and racial identity development can produce continued failures once these educators enter the workforce, including those that take on leadership roles: "While many White administrators with positional power certainly have the ability to positively affect the racial identity of Black students and the attitudes non-Black

students have toward Black students, most administrators fail to do so" (DeCuir-Gunby, 2009, pp. 114-115). Recent studies exploring higher education preparation programs for educators and clinicians cited the importance of grounding learning in CRT and ensuring that learning moves beyond pure theory (Turner et al., 2024; Wilcox et al., 2024).

The research I reviewed suggests the application of the CRT concept that race and racism are at play in virtually every facet of our daily lives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) helps all educators, regardless of racial identity, internalize the thinking that will propel their own ERI development. This may provide them a better understanding of how to best facilitate appropriate development in their students, for the processes are complicated and individual. Chan (2017) for example articulated the way in which some APIDA students need differentiated support, especially "for APIDA students for whom racial identity is either not their most salient identity or is interconnected with other social identities" (p. 16). Without a solid foundational understanding of CRT and the ways in which it articulates the role racialization plays in nearly all facets of our lives, including schooling, educators may find it difficult to progress in their own racial identity development, which certainly would make it challenging for them to to provide opportunities for their students to do so.

While the influence of CRT on K-12 schooling is a source of considerable current political unrest (UCLA School of Law, 2022), it is rarely taught explicitly as a theory to children and adolescents. More often, the tenets of CRT help guide curricular and pedagogical decisions that are aimed at reducing disproportionality in elementary and secondary schools and increasing outcomes associated with positive ERI development. Such is the case with Umaña-Taylor and Douglass's (2016) development of the Identity Project, noted above as an intervention to promote high school students' understanding and exploration of ERI. The two-month weekly

curriculum covered concepts such as the discrimination of historically marginalized groups through the true accounts of those experiencing such oppression, a core tenet of CRT, although that connection is not explicitly stated in the curricular materials. Studies of the efficacy of the program (Sladek et al., 2021; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018; Wantchekon et al., 2021) tie it to positive outcomes in ERI development for all students, including white students.

Social Context & Intersectionality

Many researchers have articulated the ways in which social context and intersectionality have and will continue to change the ways in which individuals experience racial identity development (Cole, 2018; DeCuir-Gunby, 2009; Derlan et al., 2017; Rogers et al., 2020; Safa et al., 2022; Tatum, 2017; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2020). For example, the recent prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States has been linked to a change in children's racial identity development (Rogers et al., 2021) and the national attention on racial events of the past several years may be tied to both the implicit and explicit ways parents of color "prioritize cultivating prosocial ethnic-racial identities in their children" (Huguley et al., 2019, p. 452), reinforcing Syed, Juang, and Svensson's (2018) ideas about the impacts of settings mentioned earlier. These social movements entering the national stage in recent years also have prompted scholars to ask about their impact on the racial identity of post-secondary students, including how such activism influences students of color, like Asian students, that exist outside the invisibilizing binary contemporary views of racism as solely an issue between Black and white people (Chan, 2017).

There is also ample research to support the intersectionality of various social identities, or the idea that issues of social justice can only be appropriately addressed by considering the ways in which our social identities are intricately intertwined (Crenshaw, 1991, 2016). In "'He can't

be your dad!': The intersection of race, adoption, and gay marriage," I previously noted the ways in which my daughter's classmates' ignorance of social identities caused her emotional distress as an adopted Black girl with two fathers in a predominantly white school that failed to explicitly teach those identities to her classmates (Cole, 2018). Safa et al. (2022) identified a gap in research that considers the role of social position factors, such as gender and immigration generation, alongside ERI processes. Pugach et al.'s (2019) review of research on social justice in teacher education revealed the limitations of focusing on specific identity markers, such as race, without acknowledging the intersectionality of the larger demographic tapestry that makes up an individual's identity. Derlan et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study of 161 parental relationships that found ERI formation varied in the children of adolescent Mexican-origin mothers based on factors such as gender and skin tone. Kiang and Witkow (2018) found that ethnic identity for adolescents from Asian backgrounds was often eclipsed by a more generic American identity, one that could hinder individuals' ERI. The effects of personal American identity labels on these Asian students also differed by other intersectional social identities, including lower self-esteem in girls and academic motivation based on country of birth. For students who reside at the intersection of multiple racial identities as a result of biological parents who identify as different races, the diversity of their social context, including classrooms, neighborhoods, and peer groups, has a large impact on how likely those students are to explore all facets of their multiracial identity (Echols et al., 2018). The diversity of school context is not irrelevant of course; school environments with racially diverse student bodies are tied to more fully developed ethnic-racial identity in students, but even within those settings the larger social context of political rhetoric at the state and local levels can negatively impact those same developmental processes (Santos et al., 2017).

The intersectionality of educators also plays a role in the effectiveness of particular pedagogical decisions on student racial identity development. Hawkman's (2019) case study of an ethnically Hispanic and racially white Social Studies teacher found that the educator's disorienting treatment by other whites as a Spanish-speaking man with a Hispanic last name progressed his own white racial identity development, including how he viewed his own K-12 educational experiences in hindsight. This process shifted the educator's approach to discussing topics in an elective high school class focused on race, gender, and ethnicity, where "he cautiously designed a course in which students could explore identity development, reflect personally about their own racial knowledge, and consider how racial identities influence societal structures" (p. 226). The study of these intersections in adults who were not necessarily pursuing teaching was also a key component of Chan's (2017) discussion of different APIDA post-secondary students, some of whom more closely identify with an ethnic identity than a racial one, in part due to the strength and presence of ethnic communities in their home environment and/or the diversity in their K-12 educational spaces.

As the United States becomes increasingly diverse (Maxwell, 2014; Schneider, 2023), curricular topics and conversations on race will likely become far more commonplace. Several recent studies outlined in this section explored the impact of the focus on racism in the national collective consciousness in recent years (Chan, 2017; Huguley et al., 2019; Rogers et al., 2021), and this is likely to continue as people of color increase in population and prominence. Predictions suggest that in nearly two decades, our nation will be majority people of color (Frey, 2018), and students in our public schools have been the majority for almost a decade (Maxwell, 2014). As the diversity in schools and the general population increases, our educators and students must be better equipped to discuss the impact of race and ethnicity on their own

identities and their interactions with others. Likewise, as other socially constructed identities, such as gender and sexuality, become better understood by dominant and majority group members, the intersectionality of these identities with race and ethnicity will surely impact the ways in which individuals come to understand the various components of who they are, including race.

Whiteness in Adult Learning

In this section, I address how whiteness is reflected in current research on adult learning and how it maps against my theoretical framework of white racial identity development. The role of whiteness in the adult learning arena, especially in spaces devoted to addressing issues of equity or even more mild concepts like multiculturalism, is key to promoting non-racist identity schemas for white people. Helms (2017) found in her assessment of four articles by white researchers and teachers describing their experiences in multicultural settings, none of the authors articulated an understanding of the role whiteness plays in these spaces, suggesting in spite of their engagement with these topics in adult learning environments, they were likely still operating from a schema that internalized racism. Concepts of whiteness, however, are constantly evolving, as summarized by Torkelson and Hartmann (2021) who suggested that more white Americans are aware of their racial identities than ever before, although that awareness may not delve into the deeper understandings provided by Helms's (2020) framework.

This portion of my literature review is broken into four sections: (1) Centering and Decentering Whiteness, (2) Identifying and Disrupting Systems, (3) Emotions and Fragility, and (4) Interventions that Promote Safety. At nearly all levels in which racism plays out–personal, institutional, structural–whiteness is centered and uplifted; the same is true for adult learning spaces without explicit efforts to contradict those systems, which requires raising consciousness

about their invisibility in order to disrupt them. As outlined in Helms's (2020) theory of white RID, this can promote challenging emotions and fragilities that must be ameliorated for white participants, and in doing so, these learning environments must promote safety for all, both white learners and participants of color.

Centering & Decentering Whiteness

In my work providing professional development and graduate-level courses in antiracism to educators, I am constantly working to find the proper balance between safe and brave spaces. I must create a safe space for educators of color to counter the cycle of systemic oppression being enacted upon them. At the same time, I must create a brave space for white educators to progress through their racial identity development by recognizing, acknowledging, and ultimately disrupting their complicity with the system of racism from which they benefit. In these courses and workshops, the adult learners are almost always majority white with only a handful of educators of color–and in some cases there are no people of color at all. An idealized outcome of these courses is a decentering of whiteness, something some scholars are calling for at the higher education level, specifically in teacher preparation (Andrews et al., 2021); however, it is a clear irony that in order to reach that goal, the experiences of white participants must initially be centered in order to help them remove themselves from positions of power, just as Freire (2018) suggested that because oppressors are dehumanized alongside those they oppress, they must ultimately move themselves to the margins in order to create space for the social change called for by this transformative learning environment. This self-imposed marginalization can promote cultural humility while centering the voices, experiences, and needs of those who have been historically oppressed; Horsford (2014) referred to this process as the development of racial literacy, one that culminates in racial reconciliation in which individuals form new concepts of

race to heal and move forward. Since those who hold the power must ultimately relinquish it to promote equity for all, centering the needs of white participants in the early stages of these processes may be an integral component of change, as Eddo-Lodge (2017) stated that antiracist work must be led by "white people who recognise racism" and they cannot do so "while wallowing in guilt" (p. 215). DiAngelo (2018) identified this process as working from the inside to challenge racism, using a position of authority as a speaker to primarily white audiences as an actively antiracist maneuver.

These concepts of centering whiteness are not without variations of course. Wilcox et al. (2024) noted in particular the difference between centering whiteness and centering white supremacy, suggesting that the latter "is working to maintain racial domination" (p. 130); a keen understanding of this differentiation is certainly a key component of the final two schemas in Helms's (2020) RID theory. Further exploring who is historically centered, Casey (2023) argued in response to recent naming of his and others' scholarly work as the "re-centering" of whiteness (p. 1443) that since the invention of the white identity in the 17th century there has been no moment in time in the United States when whiteness has been marginalized, including during periods of significant civil rights gains like the 1960s. What has always been centered, he argued, cannot be re-centered. Instead, he suggested that we shift to an understanding of the ways whiteness has been invisibilized, something compatible with Helms's (2020) initial schemas of white RID.

Facilitators of these processes must also incorporate Friere's (2018) theories that the power of oppressors lies within their own violence towards those whom they oppress, which means that power cannot be used for liberation; only the oppressed have the opportunity to create the conditions for true emancipation for all. According to Firere, the oppressed can only view

themselves through the image of the oppressor, so they must ultimately attain a certain rebirth, claiming their full humanity separate from that as dictated by the oppressed, and in so doing, humanize the oppressors as well. These theories adequately match Helms's (2020) theory of white racial identity development where whiteness is initially centered in order to create new concepts of self beyond that of victimizer and oppressor, a self that allows for the centering of the experiences of people of color. This was captured in Abioye and Sasso's (2023) phenomenological qualitative study of white undergraduate students' racial consciousness amidst their university's efforts to promote diversity and inclusion on campus. Their findings suggested that without explicit opportunities to explore white identity, students confused their sense of self with concepts of privilege; white identity and privilege are linked, but they are not interchangeable. Similarly, participants had difficulty connecting their white identity to concepts of white supremacy, while they had no trouble paralleling their white privilege to issues of social class.

The focus on helping white individuals learn about their role in larger systems of racial inequality has long been a focus of antiracist work. Following a yearlong ethnographic study, Lewis (2001) concluded more than two decades ago that discussions of racial equity in all-white suburban educational spaces might be even more important than in multi-racial inner city environments, and variations on such thinking has surfaced in more recent scholars' work (DiAngelo, 2018, 2021; Fleming, 2018; Hagerman, 2018; Kendi, 2019; Saad, 2020).

Identifying & Disrupting Systems

The delicate balance of meeting the varied needs of racialized individuals within the adult learning space is well documented (Bohonos, 2019; Bohonos & Duff, 2021; Byrd, 2023; DiAngelo, 2018; Helms, 2020; Oluo, 2018; Sanchez et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2024; Sue, 2015;

Tatum, 2017). Conversations about race and racism inevitably pit the experiences of the dominant white group against those of people of color. These racialized learning spaces can create a host of challenging emotions in white participants, including fear, anxiety, anger, and shame, as these learners are often challenged to reconcile their own complicity with a system that almost always benefits them; on a parallel level, these same conversations can create a different but equally as taxing emotional burden for participants of color, who are shouldered with sharing their experiences in a way that is palatable for white counterparts while fighting the fear and distrust that naturally occurs as a response to the emotions noted above from white participants.

Bohonos & Duff's (2021) study of racialized adult learning spaces in the American midwest prompted them to suggest facilitators of adult learning spaces must study and incorporate the contemporary and historical ways in which race has impacted adults within a specific geographical location in order to be effective. They further identify the importance of white facilitators and learners decentering themselves in these educational spaces in order to create safety for others. This sentiment is echoed by Black's (2021) call to white teachers to locate their racial positionality in order to better prepare pre-service teachers in higher education programs, as well as Tanner's (2019) shift of identity work on race and the dismantling of racism away from people of color to whites, actions reminiscent of an *Immersion/Emersion* schema (Helms, 2020). Sanchez et al. (2021) articulated similar findings in their study of training programs for adult mentors who serve adolescents who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), suggesting as well that increasing awareness in adult learners is not enough; they must also "learn specific skills and behaviors based on the content to help them engage in anti-racist interactions that promote the positive development of BIPOC adolescents" (p. 707). Several of the key points in the study hold clear parallel implications for educators who work

with K-12 students, and many scholars have suggested a movement from antiracist theory to praxis is paramount in all adult learning spaces (Bohonos, 2019; Fleming, 2018; Kendi, 2019; Wilcox et al., 2024). This was true in Ashby et al.'s (2018) study of one college's facilitation of an interracial undergraduate student group discussing issues of race and racism. They found that the program created a desire in participants to discuss race more readily, but they actually felt unprepared to take action and engage. Many of these collective findings were summarized in Smith et al.'s (2024) study of promoting strategies in middle grade teachers for critical consciousness in themselves and students. Among their findings was the implications for critical professional development that is "intentional in naming the role that racialized identity and positionality play in facilitating critical" professional development (PD) and where facilitators are "transparent about the ways in which these dynamics inform their planning and decision-making leads up to critical PD" (p. 12).

Several recent scholars have suggested this shift from theory to praxis cannot occur without adequately addressing the ways in which whiteness as it was originally conceived is in itself entirely oppressive (Anderson, 2016; Casey, 2023; Wilkerson, 2020), further evidence for the complete reinvention of the identity necessary to achieve a positive status according to Helms (2020). Some specifically identify anti-Black sentiment as an especially pernicious aspect of white supremacy culture (Dumas, 2016; Lopez et al., 2021; Wilcox et al., 2024), and others imply the same by exclusion of Asian, Hispanic, Indigenous and multiracial people from discussions of racism. While it may be true that anti-Black racism is a particularly dangerous component of the ways in which whiteness struggles to maintain its superiority at the personal, cultural, and institutional levels, I believe the invisibility and erasure of the experiences of all people of color that maintain the binary understanding of racism as purely an issue between

white people and Black people to be one of the major conditions in which inequity thrives. This is reinforced by Okun's (2022) definition of white supremacy culture as an ideology intertwined with all aspects of socialized life that both implicitly and explicitly holds whiteness as a paragon by oppressing, demonizing, and/or invisibilizing all people of color. Still, the literature provides ample evidence to the potential impacts of anti-Blackness in schools. Blaisdell's (2020) five-year ethnographic study of a public elementary school led him to suggest two important components may be necessary for this shift from theory to praxis: addressing race in schools must incorporate specific concepts of anti-Blackness while simultaneously creating "space for Black Joy" (p. 87).

Without acknowledging the ways in which participants in these settings may be operating from any of the internalizing racism schemas (Helms, 2020), facilitators run the risk of enforcing norms that promote dangerous microaggressions against people of color like tone policing and gaslighting (Byrd, 2023; DiAngelo, 2018, 2021; Oluo, 2018; Sue, 2015). The former is a diversionary tactic in which a privileged person shifts the focus of a conversation on oppression to the manner in which the oppression is being expressed as opposed to the oppression itself, prioritizing the comfort of the privileged person over the disadvantages of the other (Oluo, 2018). The latter is the failure to accept another's experiences as legitimate, dismissing those experiences as incomprehensible and causing the other to question their own sense of reality (Cull, 2019). To overcome these hurdles, Byrd (2023) proposed a cycle of development for students in learning about identity and systems of inequality, specifying the forms of resistance this can take, primarily based on the struggles of white learners in these arenas. Differentiation based on previous knowledge and experience, and not solely on identity, is key to Byrd's cycle, while Gorski (2020) suggests this type of learning may be better supported by critically

analyzing ground rules and norms to ensure that already-privileged groups are not being further privileged by these rules of engagement.

Emotions & Fragility

The existing literature I reviewed on the role emotions play in adult learning environments did occasionally explicitly identify the role of race (Abioye & Sasso, 2023; Black, 2021; Byrd, 2023; DiAngelo, 2018, 2020; Heberle et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2024; Sue, 2015; Tanner, 2019); such is the case in Manglitz et al.'s (2014) assertion that facilitators of cross-racial dialogues specifically need increased cognitive and emotional capacities to navigate these often challenging discussions. However, the literature at large is more likely to only implicitly address the way these feelings are tied to the sensitivities of white learners, and the implications are clear when assessed through the theoretical framework of Helms's (2020) white RID. The concept of shame for example surfaces in the literature, but not always tied to concepts of identity like race. Walker (2017) called for more research in the field, believing that helping usher adult learners through the challenging emotion "can help us decouple shame from our sense of self, helping us to shed our shame-based identity" (p. 370). Reminiscent of the promotion of more advanced schemas in Helms's (2020) theory of white RID, Walker (2017) specifically acknowledged that in her experiences and those of her colleagues, students can grapple with concepts of oppression based on identity like racism and sexism, but they get mired in shame. Brene Brown's (2012) work exploring shame specifically also identified the ways in which white people talking about race must incorporate the concept of privilege, which inevitably results in an incapacitating shame. Stevens and Abernethy (2018) found that shame could prevent personal exploration of racism in group therapy settings, especially when facilitators had not completed the personal work necessary addressing their own biases to help move participants through these feelings.

These examples of debilitation can create a type of arrested development within the *Contact* and *Disintegration* schemas (Helms, 2020).

One recent study did explore more deeply the challenging emotions that come up for educators when developing professional strategies for promoting critical consciousness in students. Smith et al.'s (2024) collaborative self-study of a predominantly white group of educators in the similarly predominantly white state of Vermont focused on, among other research questions, "what tensions arise as teacher educators attempt to develop the critical consciousness" of middle grade teachers "and what is the role of teacher educator identity and positionality in these tensions" (p. 5). Among their findings, they listed the pervasive presence of doubt and worry on the part of white educators when discussing racial equity and social justice. These types of challenging feelings in relation to discussions about race with children also surfaced in Heberle et al.'s (2023) study of white parents; they found providing explicit strategies for engaging in these conversations promoted tolerance for the difficult emotions that arose.

DiAngelo (2018) identified the collective negative emotional responses of white individuals to this development as "white fragility." She declared this to be "a form of bullying" that is "much more than mere defensiveness or whining," a tactic that whites are socialized to enact "to protect, maintain, and reproduce white supremacy" (pp. 112-113). Although often, but not always, operating on a subconscious level, this fragility plays out on multiple layers, from the personal to the systemic. White fragility has triggered a slew of legislation across the country in recent years that aims to significantly limit how educators discuss concepts like race and racism in the classroom, most notably in Florida's Stop Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees (W.O.K.E.) Act, which prohibits schools and other organizations from teaching anything that causes anyone to "feel guilt, anguish, or any form of psychological distress" (Florida Discrimination in the

Treatment of Persons; Minority Representation Act, 1977/2022). Florida's law includes a play on the word "woke," which prior to 2016 simply meant "socially aware" or "empathic," but has since been co-opted by the political right to demonize social platforms of the left; in fact, in reference to the law, Governor Ron DeSantis said, "Florida is where woke goes to die" (Remnick, 2023). By invoking negative connotations for "woke," these laws preserve the ignorance of Helms's (2020) internalized racist schemas, but only for whites, ignoring the difficult emotions in people of color. This mentality is not unique to the United States. Reni Eddo-Lodge (2017) described political movements in the United Kingdom to decry rhetoric focused on antiracism as a threat to freedom of speech, which shifts the focus from justice to sensitivity. These efforts center whiteness in learning spaces by continuing to marginalize the experiences and identities of people of color, saddling those identities with the emotional burden to placate white fragilities.

Along these lines, Neal and Espinoza (2022) analyzed the differences in concepts of emotional labor that exist between the world of sociology and more recent popular culture. They articulated the sociological idea from the early 1980s focusing on the demands of organizations on the emotional management of their employees as differing from the definition used in more recent popular periodical publications centering on unpaid labor taken on by minoritized identities like women and the emotional toll that results. They identified the shift in colloquial understanding as potentially leading to practitioners "creating learning environments where adults must disguise their true feelings and emotions in order to maintain alignment with the implicit emotional standards of the learning community" (p. 6). Applying their worries to learning spaces inhabited by mixed racial groups, they cited the work of Evans and Moore (2015) that explored the experiences of people of color in white institutional spaces, finding that

minoritized racial groups often must suppress difficult emotions in order to maintain the peace of dominant white groups.

The dangers of catering to these fragilities include stagnating in early schemas of white RID and continued perpetuation of racism against people of color. Batts (2017) described modern forms of exclusion by dominant groups that result from incomplete learning about concepts like racism; she identified five behaviors that maintain systemic oppression by often well-meaning members of dominant groups: (1) disabling help, in which white people assume that people of color cannot help themselves; (2) disowning responsibility, characterized by blaming the victims of oppression for their circumstances; (3) distant/no equitable contact, where whites avoid social and professional contact with people of color; (4) denial of difference, when whites embrace a colorblind mentality; and (5) denial of the significance of difference, where whites refuse to acknowledge the different impact of race on themselves and people of color. For educators, the marriage of the personal and professional impacts of racism is an imperative component of the learning; for whites in particular, they must reconcile the ways in which they have benefited from the systemic oppression of people of color prior to taking action, or they run the risk of falling victim to the behaviors outlined by Batts.

Interventions that Promote Safety

Coupling this recent scholarship with groundbreaking adult learning and development theory suggests some important and necessary interventions to promote the safety necessary to progress to an antiracist educational stance, especially when overlaid against racial identity development theory. While Erik Erikson (Erikson & Erikson, 1997) created his theories of human development through a flawed positivist perspective, his white male experiences masquerading as universal truths provide some interesting foundational thinking on how

hegemonic dominant ideologies impact the development of both those in power and those subordinated by that power, especially when mapped against Helms's (2020) theory of white racial identity development. The challenging feelings experienced by white participants in my courses outlined above has been mitigated by engaging with these adult learners as adolescents in relation to their racial identity, as Erikson's articulation of the dystonic elements of shame, doubt, guilt, inferiority, and identity confusion throughout childhood and adolescence are analogous to those operating from a *Disintegration* schema (Helms, 2020). Extending the parallels further, in Erikson's seventh stage of development, once individuals reach adulthood, the contributing component of the syntonic element of generativity is rejectivity, much like those operating from the *Immersion/Emersion* schema (Helms, 2020). The psychosocial strength of care is sometimes withheld from those who are different from the dominant group and pseudospeciation can be a damaging result when that dominant group views others as a threat. Reconciling the two theories–Erikson's theory of adult development against Helms's theory of white racial identity development–reaching the more advanced stages of development for white folks can be disorienting and even frightening.

Kegan (2019) follows this line of thinking with his constructive developmental theory when he outlines the shift from the socialized to self-authoring mind. The former is promoted within the hegemonic views of the larger society, while the latter questions those views in pursuit of the emancipation that occurs when an individual can critically question the socialized identities and ideologies they hold and create newly individualized ones, similar to processes specific to whiteness described by Tanner (2019) and Black (2021). This is in essence what ushering white educators through their racial identity development requires, questioning their own epistemology and developing a schema of *Disintegration* where their sense of identity falls

apart before they can reintegrate and move into a *Pseudo-Independence* schema with an ultimate goal of *Autonomy* (Helms, 2020). Working through this process with adult learners may be aided by an explicit acknowledgment of these threats as an intervention. Validation of challenging emotions can help mitigate their negative effects, and as Kegan and Lahey (2001) suggested, shifting the ways in which we talk about our challenges in adult learning can even help us uncover our stated and hidden values. Further, Bohonos's (2019) work in Critical Human Resource Development suggested that incorporating critical race theories alone are insufficient to move white individuals to praxis; this requires explicit inclusion of critical whiteness studies in adult learning environments. This may be one way to help shift white adult learners' progress through their non-racist identity development, especially helping them identify the differences between the *Pseudo-Independence* and *Immersion/Emersion* schema, the former still locating power issues outside of whiteness while the latter centers the problems within whiteness (Helms, 2020). These concepts were a part of Turner et al.'s (2024) study of whiteness in English education curriculum at the university level. Among other findings, they noted the pervasiveness of whiteness within all facets of the teacher preparation programs; some instructors in the program found that they could only model appropriate culturally based practices for their adult students "after reflection on how whiteness influences them personally" (p. 50).

To provide space for white participants to move through these statuses without jeopardizing the psychological safety for participants of color, I have found racial affinity spaces help maintain this balance. An affinity space where white individuals using a more advanced RID schema can help their white peers move beyond immobilizing fragilities can save people of color from carrying that emotional weight. In the documentary *Cracking the Codes* (Butler et al., 2014), Peggy McIntosh describes this process of ushering white individuals past these difficult

emotions as quickly as possible an imperative component of antiracist work. The positive components of racial affinity groups for students and teachers from historically marginalized groups is well-documented in the recent literature, especially for people of color and members of the LGBTQIA+ community (Alicea & Johnson, 2021; Kohli, 2021; Moore-Southall, 2017; Myers et al., 2019; Suyemoto & Fox Tree, 2006; Tatum, 2017; Tauriac et al., 2013). Less research focuses on the necessity of white affinity spaces for students or adults; however, nearly two decades ago, Denevi and Pastan (2006) specified white affinity groups as a necessary component of helping whites move beyond negative feelings of guilt to more empowering emotions like pride to take action against racism. Later, Blitz & Kohl (2012) described the importance of a white racial affinity group within a large social service agency in shifting the institutional paradigm toward antiracism., and Tauriac et al. (2013) found that white high schoolers found racial affinity spaces far more challenging than did their counterparts of color. More recently, Maxwell and Chesler (2022) studied outcomes of white university students learning about identity and oppression in an environment that included both affinity and inter-racial spaces. They found that white affinity spaces provided a greater sense of safety for participants, while cross-racial dialogues helped connect white learners' abstract thinking to the concrete, lived experiences of participants of color.

Conclusion

Contemporary scholarly research on racial identity development continues to shape and evolve the foundational works from several decades prior as we consider the implications of new ways of thinking about identity. As these models and theories are applied in antiracist teaching practices through a lens of critical race theory in future generations, the models of ethnic-racial identity development that extend into adulthood will need to be further reconsidered as K-12

students develop a more complete sense of racial identity during their early childhood and adolescent education. This will be particularly true as the ever-evolving thinking on racial identity continues to shift based on its intersection with other socially constructed identities, as well as the larger social context in which we live. Much of the research currently suggests the importance of adults engaging in thoughtful reflection of their racial identity, particularly because of a lack of doing so earlier in life, so my study explored how facilitators of professional learning for educators can help usher a predominantly white teaching force through the more challenging aspects of their own racial identity development to a place where they can better serve all students as a result of their newfound understanding.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study explored the racial identity development of white K-12 public school educators in professional learning settings. Within a national context of a predominantly white educator workforce (Schaeffer, 2021), I conducted a case study of white educators in Massachusetts in a diversifying suburban public school system, exploring ways in which educators can develop and use the latter schemas of Helms's (2020) theory of white RID. This developmental theory ends with the *Autonomy* stage, in which the individual begins to successfully develop a positive sense of whiteness having reconciled its racist origins and contemporary impacts and commits to dismantling systemic oppression through ongoing learning and ally behaviors.

Research Questions

This study aimed to provide an in-depth analysis of the types of activities and maneuvers in professional learning environments that help white educators accurately assess their own racial identity development. The primary research question that guided this study was as follows:

1. How is white educators' assessment of their own racial identity influenced by participation in professional development focused on antiracism?

The following two sub-questions also guided the study:

1. How do white educators assess their own racial identity?
2. What lived experiences do white educators cite as having shifted their identity development?

Research Approach Rationale

Qualitative Inquiry

Since racial identity relies heavily on the personal meaning-making individuals undertake when grappling with the social construct of race, a qualitative approach was most appropriate. Qualitative research is often most helpful in exploring a social or human problem (Creswell & Poth, 2017). My research questions considered how individuals assess their own concept of a racialized self, as well as how they come to that understanding and how it may shift through conscious maneuvers in professional learning settings. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) detailed, the approach requires "researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." (p. 3); thus a qualitative approach was certainly appropriate for exploring how white public school educators come to understand the intersection of race and identity. Also of note is the manner in which qualitative research uses certain assumptions identified within a theoretical framework as a starting point for design and later for interpretation (Creswell, 2013). Without the framework of critical race theory and the assumptions of how race manifests as systems of oppression, the question of racial identity holds little value.

Methodology

As a methodology, case study works within a bounded system and provides an in-depth analysis of a handful of cases in pursuit of the research question (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this case, I chose to explore the experiences of white educators in public K-12 institutions who have completed professional learning focused on antiracism that includes explicit instruction on racial identity theories, specifically Helms (2020) and Cross (1991, 1995), with additional exposure to others (Kim, 2012; Poston, 1990; Root, 1990). Each case in this study was a participant in a

professional development course for educators within a specific school system. The methodological approach provided greater insight into the ways in which those participants made sense of how they had been racialized both internally and externally.

For many reasons, case study is most appropriately aligned with the intentions behind my study. Baxter and Jacke (2008) suggested that case study is best suited to address research questions that focus on the "how" and "why" of particular matters, to evaluate participant behaviors that are not easily manipulated, and to assess the conditions of a particular case, including exploring how those conditions may be impacted by the shared experience of participants and the context in which the participants exist. My study explored "how" and "why" white educators assess their racial identity in the manner they do; it sought to measure their assessment at various points in a professional learning environment without intentional manipulation, and it aimed to determine what lived experiences support that racial development and how reflection upon those experiences can be influenced within the professional learning setting.

Within the larger category of case study research, this study was defined as an explanatory case study, as the connection between the professional learning environment and participants' assessment of their racial identity development was essentially a form of intervention that may be too complex to assess with other methodologies (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In addition, this study was designed to be a multiple-case study given that the context for the assessment of racial identity development varied between participants, providing an opportunity to explore the similarities and differences between the lived experiences and perceptions of individual participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Finally, the study also fulfilled the criteria of an instrumental case study, one in which researchers attempt to provide greater scrutiny and focus

of a particular theory (Baxter & Jack, 2008), as is the case with my application of Helms's (2020) white racial identity development theories.

Setting and Participant Selection

Participant Recruitment

To protect the confidentiality of the participants in this study, I refer to the location of my study with the alias Sunnydale. At the time of this study, I worked in the Sunnydale Public Schools and co-taught a course focused on antiracism for educators (see Appendix A), a course I had taught for many years prior both in Sunnydale and in other communities and had taken myself in a longer format more than ten years prior. The Sunnydale course met for 25 hours over multiple months that covered concepts of power and privilege (DiAngelo, 2018, 2021; McIntosh, 1998; Tatum, 2017), cycles of oppression (Harro, 2000; Tatum, 2017), racial identity development theory (Cross, 1991, 1995; Helms, 2020; Tatum, 2017), and allyship (Butler et al., 2014; Crenshaw, 1991, 2016; Tatum, 2017), all within the context of public school education. I co-taught the course with a white instructor who also worked in the Sunnydale Public Schools. Of the ten adult learners in this particular course, some enrolled to satisfy a relatively new contractual requirement that they complete a course in cultural proficiency before the conclusion of their third year of employment, while others enrolled in the course voluntarily as part of their ongoing elective professional learning. All participants for my study were recruited and selected from this course.

Given my research question, participants were required to identify as white and work within a K-12 public school system. I used convenience sampling for my participants, inviting individuals enrolled in the course I co-taught in Sunnydale, where I worked as an administrator at the time of the study. In consultation with my doctoral committee and Lesley University's

Institutional Review Board (see Appendix H), I took several steps to avoid potential ethical considerations with regards to the situational power I held as the instructor of the course, as well as an administrator in the district where participants worked. I provided an overview of my research and reviewed the participation consent form (see Appendix G) in the initial communication sent to course participants, approximately two weeks prior to the start of the course. I explained that they could send completed consent forms to a third party staff member in the school district, one who regularly held confidential staffing data; I explained that I would not have access to the forms until the end of the course, and participants could contact this third party staff member at any time during the course or after to withdraw participation. I encouraged participants with questions to reach out via email, phone, or in-person, and they were encouraged to do so through the third-party staff member to maintain confidentiality of their participation or interest during the course. I had no knowledge of who had provided consent to participate until after the course had finished, and I did not have any knowledge of whether or not any participants withdrew prior to the end of the course. This was all outlined in the consent form (see Appendix C).

Participant Selection

Once the course had concluded, I reminded course participants of the opportunity to participate in the study and that I would soon be accessing the consent forms they filled out before our class began. Some may have chosen to participate after that final call for participants; however, since I did not have access to the forms prior to the course's conclusion, I had no way of knowing at what point participants opted into the study, except possibly by the date included next to their signature on the consent form (see Appendix C). Once I accessed and assessed the consent forms, I had a total of four participants, which was 50% of the participants in the course

who identified as white. One additional participant wanted to be a part of the study; however they could not locate their recording project, which was an important piece of the overall data. Since the artifacts of data between participants should remain consistent, I was unable to allow them to participate. Table 3 contains the demographic breakdown of the participants. Two of the participants enrolled in the course to satisfy a requirement of employment during their first few years working in the Sunnydale Public Schools, and the other two enrolled in the course voluntarily.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Years of Experience
Faith	Female	40-45	15
Joyce	Female	50-55	19
Tara	Female	40-45	15
Dawn	Female	25-30	4

Institutional Setting

Sunnydale is a suburban town in Massachusetts about twenty miles from a large urban center. Sunnydale has its own public school system of approximately 7,000 students in grades K-12. Table 2 shows the student demographics for the Sunnydale Public Schools, and Table 3 shows staff demographics, each at the time of the study, according to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2023). Sunnydale participates in a voluntary desegregation program that brings more than 200 students from the urban center to attend the public schools. Nearly all of these students are students of color and a large percentage are Black/African American.

Table 2

Sunnydale Student Demographics

Race	% of District	% of State
African American	4.3	9.6
Asian	45.6	7.4
Hispanic	5.6	25.1
Native American	0.0	0.2
White	36.3	53.0
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.0	0.1
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	8.2	4.5

Table 3

Sunnydale Staff Demographics

Race	% of District	% of State
African American	3.8	5.1
Asian	7.3	2.0
Hispanic	3.0	6.0
Native American	0.1	0.1
White	84.4	86.1
Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0.0	0.1
Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	1.4	0.6
Male	19.4	20.5
Female	80.6	79.4

The course in antiracism that the participants completed was taught at least three times a year for at least four years prior to the start of this study, and it was one of two options that satisfied a professional learning course requirement for new teachers to the district. As an administrator in Sunnydale myself at the time, I sometimes co-taught the class with a white administrator, including during this study; other times, the course was co-taught by other Sunnydale staff. New teachers satisfying this requirement typically accounted for approximately half the enrollment of any given section of the course; the other half was composed of more veteran teachers and administrators who were completing the course voluntarily.

Data Collection Procedures and Tools

All data collected for this study was qualitative in nature. Prior to the start of the course, participants completed a recording project (see Appendix B) in which they reflected on their ideas about and experiences with racism and ethnocentrism. Participants did not submit this to instructors as part of the course; they completed it and maintained the recording somewhere they could access it later. Approximately midway through the course, the instructors provided explicit instruction on RID theories; following this, participants wrote a short reflection paper for the instructors capturing their thoughts on RID (see Appendix F), including where and why they might locate themselves within those theories. These two artifacts constituted key points of data for this study. I also conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews (see Appendix E) with participants following the close of the course. The period of time between the recording project and the semi-structured interview was approximately three months.

Research Instrument

Since a portion of the data I collected for my study came from artifacts previously prepared for the professional learning course, the only research instrument I used was the

protocol (see Appendix E) for the individual semi-structured interviews I conducted following the completion of the course. I chose this format due to the complex nature of my research question. I used the same protocol for each interview with the same set of basic questions, but the semi-structured nature of the interview allowed me to ask additional probing questions in order to deepen my understanding of the participants' experiences and ideas. To test the validity of the protocol, some of the interview questions were part of a pilot study with sample participants and other questions were created or adapted based on that pilot study. Questions were also based on my personal experience of leading white educators through the process of RID in professional development settings for more than ten years.

The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and took place in person in each participant's workspace: two took place in classrooms, one in a private office, and one in a conference room. Each interview was private; the participant and I were the only two people in the room. Questions began with demographic information, including work history and experiences with professional development focused on antiracism. Next, participants were asked to share thoughts about how their RID had shifted over their lifetime, as well as in the course. Finally, I asked for overarching thoughts about discussing race in professional settings.

Data Collection Procedure

Following the conclusion of the course, I reviewed the collected consent forms (see Appendix C) in order to determine my participants. I contacted those individuals to request access to their recording projects and make electronic copies of them. I made copies of the participants' RID reflection papers (see Appendix F), which I already had access to as an instructor in the course. I then arranged a time for the one-on-one interview with each participant and sent an email confirmation (see Appendix D); I conducted interviews within one month of

the professional learning course's completion. During the interview, I used the protocol (see Appendix E) to open the interview, ask the questions, and close the interview, which were audio recorded via both smartphone application and a laptop computer. I transcribed the interviews via an automated transcription application, and sent the transcription back to participants for member-checking of the data.

Data Analysis Procedure

I redacted all identifying information, such as names of participants, towns, and institutions to maintain confidentiality through the data analysis procedure and beyond; participants were referred to by number in all study documents. I used a blended approach to all data analysis in this study, using both deductive and inductive methods. Many researchers understand deductive coding as a "top down" approach, whereas inductive coding is a "bottom up" method (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Naeem et al., 2023). As a first step in my data analysis process, deductive coding was in essence a version of "theoretical thematic analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83), providing an opportunity to code the data against Helms's (2020) RID framework in this study. Inductive coding, on the other hand, is "a process of coding the data without trying to fit into a pre-existing coding frame" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p, 83), which allowed the deductive coding categories to then become new forms of data that drove the development of new, spontaneous themes.

This process was used on all three major data artifacts: (1) the transcript of the recording assignment, (2) the racial identity development reflection paper, and (3) the transcript of the interview. Since all data was textual, coding was consistent between all artifacts collected. I recruited three coders who engaged in the process with me for intercoder reliability. Each of these coders had previously co-taught the antiracism course upon which I drew my sample and

each had an intricate knowledge of Helms's (2020) RID theory; however, we still spent a significant amount of time calibrating ourselves to the theory, ensuring we had an equivalent understanding of each schema and how they were distinct from one another. Of the four coders, including myself, all worked in full-time public education settings and also taught graduate-level courses that utilize racial identity development theory for learning; two of the coders identified as people of color and two identified as white.

We began with deductive coding, using Helms's six schemas–*Contact*, *Disintegration*, *Reintegration*, *Pseudo-Independence*, *Immersion/Emersion*, and *Autonomy*–as the predefined set of codes to build an a priori codebook. Phrases and sentences in the data were coded based on how they represented facets of the six schemas. After independently applying the shared codebook to an artifact of data, we compared coding across the researchers; typically we found a high level of intercoder reliability and there was little need for debate or discussion. This content analysis was tested against Helms's (2020) theoretical framework, seeking to determine in what ways the data validated or contradicted the schemas of RID theory as put forth by Helms. In this manner, we were able to map data against the framework in a deductive manner that, as described by Naeem et al. (2023), "can bolster and substantiate existing theoretical codes, reinforcing their relevance and applicability to the analyzed data, by linking direct expressions or ideas back to the theoretical constructs they represent" (p. 9).

Once we completed the initial deductive coding on an artifact, we then used inductive coding to create additional categories that connect schemas to lived experiences, taking a thematic analysis approach. Braun and Clarke (2008) described this approach as resulting in the identification of patterns and themes in the data by the researchers. They further pointed out that this identification of such themes is not a passive, natural process; the themes do not reside

within the data, but rather within the minds of researchers. To ensure our thinking was carefully calibrated, the coding team spent time reviewing the theoretical framework in the study and referred back to it often through the data analysis process. Rather than testing the hypothetical RID theories, this process allowed for hypothesis-building, particularly in response to the research sub-questions: "How do white educators assess their own racial identity?" and "What lived experiences do white educators cite as having shifted their identity development?" My study was designed to provide the opportunity to make rich connections between the content and thematic analyses.

Due to the personal nature of this analytical work, coders were required to engage in a process of personal reflexivity, exploring how their own values and lived experiences impacted how they were interacting with the data. As a primary marker of qualitative research, reflexivity is the manner in which researchers are mindful of and transparently convey their positionality in relation to the subject being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During the coding process, this took the shape of extensive conversations about the interpretation of data, particularly when it related to racialized interpretations that differed between the two researchers of color and the two white researchers. In these cases, the team referred back to the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two. As practitioners in the field of antiracist professional learning for educators, each of the coders had many personal experiences in the field upon which they based their interpretation. These experiences were transparently shared and discussed with the team in an effort to eliminate potential biases and misinterpretation.

This personal and collective interrogation of identity and experience was true for my entire process as the lead researcher following the period of data analysis. The coders I recruited for this endeavor have striven to make personal reflexivity an intricate part of the professional

practice, especially when it comes to racialization but also with all aspects of identity; I believe our collective awareness and incorporation of recent research, in particular our review of the literature outlined in Chapter Two, into our professional practice helped mitigate the potential pitfalls of practitioners who fail to engage in this process.

Ethical Considerations

As noted in several instances in the documentation provided to participants, an ethical consideration was safeguarding participants against challenging emotions that may arise as they consider their racial identity; however, this is a cornerstone of the course in which the participants were enrolled prior to the study beginning. My co-instructor and I worked hard during the class to create a community of learning in which participants could safely experience discomfort, and we often explicitly stated that our goal was not to eliminate discomfort completely, as that emotion and others like it are a necessary component of an individual's racial identity development, especially in Janet Helms's (2020) model for white people.

Limitations

One limitation of this research design was that the convenience sampling resulted in participants from one particular suburban school district. This further highlighted the absence of generalizability of this type of study. Would the results be the same for white educators in another part of the country? What about educators in the same region in an urban school system? As noted in chapter two, the cultural and political landscape in different parts of the country may impact white educators' ability to operate within the latter schemas of Helms's (2020) RID theory.

Another aspect of my research that may be limited is the situational power I held over some participants may call into question the validity of the data collected during the interviews.

However, I incorporated the rationale for conducting the interviews myself into the rationale and discussion of the study, and I was transparent and discussed this with my participants (see Appendix E). While traditional school leaders will always hold a sort of situational power over staff in the educational spaces they lead, finding ways to establish trust, especially across racial differences, is paramount. As a person of color in an administrator role interviewing white participants, the intersectionality of these various identities was quite complicated. On one hand, people of color must "be careful about the white people [they] trust when it comes to discussing race and racism" (Eddo-Lodge, p. 91). On the other hand, the definition of trust in these conversations for white people "comes down to this: I need to trust that you won't think I am racist before I can work on my racism" (DiAngelo, 2018). DiAngelo (2021) suggests that white people must "show vulnerability and humility in order to build trust across race" (p. 105). My interview protocol explicitly attempted to collect data on these concepts, including the interplay between race and the hierarchies that exist in traditional school leadership roles. Having assessed the various research design approaches and considered using an external interviewer, I believe the choice to serve as the interviewer provided opportunities for a rich discussion of the typical research design processes that have not considered the specific context in which I was working.

I also believe the voluntary nature of participation in this study helped mitigate concerns about the validity of the data collected. At the same time, validity may be impacted by a social desirability bias (SDB). Tourangeau and Yan (2007) summarized how SDB has been treated through the past few decades. Initially considered a personality trait, it was later more closely tied to the subject being studied than the participants themselves. More recently, SDB has been associated with participants' "inflated opinion of one's social and intellectual status" (p. 861), a process that can happen outside the participants' own awareness. SDB is a factor researchers

must consider in studies that involve sensitive topics, such as sexual behaviors or recreational drug use. Given that my sample was fairly homogeneous–white female K-12 public school educators from one suburban school district in New England–participants may have actually exaggerated the positive aspects of their RID as part of the cultural phenomenon deemed by Geismer (2014) as "Massachusetts exceptionalism" (p. 15) in which knowledge professionals in the Bay State have carefully cultivated a progressive personal identity even in spite of individual and collective actions that run counter to their purported liberal values. These limitations should have been neutralized however for individuals truly operating within evolving non-racist identity schemas.

Delimitations

This research study explored the professional development conditions that help promote positive white racial identity. The participants in the study shared some similar demographic information: white female professional public school educators working in an affluent suburban town in a politically liberal state. My sample and much of my design were based on the participants and contexts to which I had access. As a qualitative case study, the goal was to collect data that provided a depth of understanding not typically possible with quantitative approaches. While this type of research is not generalizable, the research instrument was designed to explore the connection between professional development settings and participants' lived experiences; thus some findings certainly implicate future research, especially since the vast majority of teachers nationally are white (Shaeffer, 2021).

The case study design allowed for an in-depth analysis of the specific factors that lead to individual participants' racial identity development. There were many factors I cannot control but the study hoped to uncover whether they are linked to RID; these factors include such

personal lived experiences as childhood neighborhood and school demographics; the level of racial diversity of an individual's family, friend network, or work environment; and the explicit incorporation of antiracist pedagogy in preservice teaching programs, among others (Appling & Robinson, 2021; Hagerman, 2018, 2020; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Safa et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2017; Sladek et al., 2021; Tatum, 2017; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2020).

Another component of the study that was delimited was that I served in several roles. These include lead researcher, an administrator in the school system where the participants worked, co-facilitator of a professional development course each participant had completed, and interviewer of participants. A component of the research instrument did deliberately attempt to explore how a school leader's intersectionality of identities, both personal and situational, can help or hinder a white educator's RID.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The intention of this qualitative case study was to understand how white educators' assessment of their own racial identity is influenced by participation in professional development focused on antiracism, as well as consider how white educators assess their own racial identity and what lived experiences they cite as having shifted their identity development. The data for this study was collected after participants completed a 25-hour graduate-level course in antiracism and included two assignments they completed for the course and a semi-structured interview (see Appendix E) that took place a few weeks after the course ended. The two assignments included an audio recording answering questions about their racial development prior to the course (see Appendix B) and a racial identity development paper midway through the course (see Appendix F). This chapter presents findings using the data analysis procedure outlined in Chapter Three.

Several themes emerged from the data analysis procedure specific to how white educators assess their own racial identity: Reflection on childhood and adolescence, disintegration through education, exploration of parallel identities, and a misunderstanding of the *Autonomy* schema. With regard to how white educators' assessment of their racial identity is influenced by professional learning focused on antiracism, the data analysis process produced the following themes: Opportunities for reflection, explicit education, instructor vulnerability, the difference between safety and comfort, and differentiation of activity.

The findings of this study are broken down into explicit connections to the research questions, beginning first with my two sub-questions, each of which provides important context for my primary research question. The first sub-question was concerned with how white educators assess their own racial identity and the second with what lived experiences those

educators cite as having shifted their identity development. The findings in relation to these two questions provide a foundation for explaining the findings for my main research question about how these educators' assessment of their own racial identity was influenced by their participation in the course focused on antiracism.

White Educators' Assessment of Their Own Racial Identity

My two sub-questions were "How do white educators assess their own racial identity?" and "What lived experiences do white educators cite as having shifted their identity development?" The findings of this study make it difficult to bifurcate the two questions, as all the participants assessed their racial identity by reflecting on the lived experiences that shifted their development, including during the recording project before they had the language of the racial identity development process. The first explicit identification took place in their RID paper (see Appendix F), which they wrote approximately halfway through the course. Each of the participants explicitly identified their primary operating schema after learning about Helms's (2020) theory of white racial identity development. The second identification took place during the semi-structured interview (see Appendix E) that took place a few weeks after the course had ended. During the data analysis procedure, the research team identified what they believed to be the participants' primary operating schema based on their responses in each of the three artifacts. Because so much of the data included reflection of the past, this required coding for both current and past operating schemas; for example, a participant may have been reflecting on a time in their childhood when they were using the *Contact* schema, but the reflection itself in the current moment when the data was collected was more representative of the *Pseudo-Independence* schema. Once the data had all been coded in this way, the research team assessed the operating schema that was most prevalent for the current time period, not the past experiences. The

self-identification and final coded schemas are listed in Table 4. Participants did not self-identify their operating schema in the recording project, so the table only reflects the coding results. For the RID paper and final interview, the table reflects both the participants' self-identification of their primary operating schema and the results of the coding process.

Table 4

Participants' Primary Operating Schema

Participant	Recording	RID Paper		Interview	
	Coding Result	Self-Identification	Coding Result	Self-Identification	Coding Result
Faith	Pseudo-Independence	Autonomy	Pseudo-Independence	Autonomy	Pseudo-Independence
Joyce	Pseudo-Independence	Pseudo-Independence	Pseudo-Independence	Pseudo-Independence	Immersion/ Emersion
Tara	Reintegration	Immersion/ Emersion; Autonomy	Pseudo-Independence	Autonomy	Pseudo-Independence
Dawn	Disintegration	Pseudo-Independence	Pseudo-Independence	Immersion/ Emersion	Pseudo-Independence

The discrepancy between participants' self-identification and the coded primary operating schema in most instances centered on the *Pseudo-Independence* schema, the name of which suggests a sort of false sense of independence. The participants' awareness of whether their independence within this schema was valid or not seemed to have manifested in Faith and Tara as a misidentification as operating primarily from the *Autonomy* schema, which is the true state of independence according to Helms's (2020) model. In her RID paper for example, Faith plainly stated, "I would consider myself in the autonomy stage" immediately after acknowledging that "I get irritated by people of my race sometimes" and that she feels more distant from other whites "the more I educate myself." Similarly, Tara suggested in her interview

that although she has conversations about race and racism at work "all the time…it can be hard when you have people who are in earlier phases of their racial identity development." The gravitation toward the positive reinforcement of other whites is a marker of the *Pseudo-Independence* schema. However for Faith and Tara, the focus on *Autonomy* may have resulted from an essentializing of the schemas rather than truly understanding the nuances that lead to the safety and security of a white racial identity in *Autonomy* that allows for a true commitment to interact with others regardless of comfort level. Further exploration of these discrepancies is discussed within the findings below. The focus on the *Pseudo-Independence* schema appeared to be an important component of these findings. This is in keeping with the research team's previous experiences teaching this particular class in the past: the vast majority of participants we have instructed identify themselves as either operating in the *Pseudo-Independence* or *Immersion/Emersion* schemas when they have written the RID paper.

Reflection on Childhood & Adolescence

All participants engaged in active reflection about their past lived experiences as part of the course assignments. The recording project (see Appendix B) explicitly asked participants to reflect on the racial makeups of their schooling and neighborhood environments during childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. All participants noted the lack of racial diversity in their K-12 education; each of the participants acknowledged having grown up and attended public schools in other Massachusetts towns, and data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2023) confirmed that two of the school systems were more than 80% white and the other two were more than 90% white at the time the participants attended. Faith articulated her elementary school as "extremely white" and her high school as "very white," while Tara stated her K-12 schooling was "largely white." None of the participants

acknowledged having moved out of the *Contact* schema until after leaving these racially homogeneous environments.

Faith, Joyce, and Tara all reported early friendships with one of the few Black students in their schools, yet those friendships failed to yield any conversations about race. Joyce and Tara both shared that they were not allowed to go to their Black friends' houses. Joyce said, "I remember asking my mom if I could go play at her house in [the city]. And my mom said no, and wouldn't really elaborate. So I don't think I asked again." Similarly, Tara noted the following:

> I couldn't go to her house. She'd come to my house–it wasn't that I wasn't allowed to be friends with her–but I couldn't go to her house. And when I would ask, it would just be like, shhh, we don't, we don't talk about that.

Tara also remembered being confused in her youth when she shared she lived on a particular street in her hometown–one where much of the town's Hispanic population lived and not on the white side of town–people would question her with incredulity: "People were like, you grew up here? I'm like, 'Yeah, I did.' And they just didn't believe me. [I was] trying to understand why those questions were being asked of me." The messages that these participants caught about race were clear: do not talk about it. Although she did not directly share an experience that mimicked that learning, Faith did convey a similar learned behavior that conversations about race were not a necessary component of friendship with a person of color. She described a friendship with a Black friend from early elementary school that lasted throughout high school and although they even attended prom together, she recounted their relationship as "just close friends; I wouldn't say we were very, very close. But friends…I wouldn't say we discussed anything of great depth and definitely nothing about race."

In response to being explicitly asked in the recording project, “What were you taught about people from different racial or ethnic groups other than your own?” only Joyce acknowledged learning about some standard historical components centered on people of color, such as direct instruction on Native Americans and Martin Luther King, Jr. Other participants either ignored the question or focused on implicit messages they received, such as those outlined above about visiting Black friends’ homes. Based on their own self-identification and the coding of data, none of the participants had these opportunities until early adulthood. All participants reported an important component of their assessment of their current RID was reflecting on the invisibility of these concepts in their pasts, including how that invisibility is a marked component of the *Contact* schema (Helms, 2020).

Disintegration through Education

Helms’s (2020) model noted the *Contact* schema can only be reduced or eliminated through development of the *Disintegration* schema, and this took place in early adulthood for each of the four participants. Faith, Joyce, and Tara, each had experiences in college that prompted the disintegration of their ignorance regarding white racial identities. Faith and Joyce noted the explicit incorporation of racial dynamics in their college studies as being instrumental in the shift away from a *Contact* schema, and Tara suggested the same took place in her graduate program. Dawn, who was more than a decade younger than the other participants, characterized instead the start of her racial journey in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd. Coinciding with the physical isolation of the COVID pandemic, Dawn engaged in autodidactic learning via the internet, a version of the self-reflective activities that Helms (2020) signified as a hallmark of the *Disintegration* schema:

> During the Black Lives Matter movement…that's when I was doing some more of my own, like, kind of digging on the internet and watching certain videos and trying to understand different perspectives…and I still, like, kept it inside, but it was because of COVID. I was stuck in that environment.

As noted in Figure 1, there is a special relationship between the *Disintegration* and *Pseudo-Independence* schemas. Helms (2020) stated that the disorienting emotions caused by use of the *Disintegration* schema can promote use of the evolving non-racist schemas, particularly *Pseudo-Independence*. Likewise, individuals using a *Pseudo-Independence* schema can still experience the disorientation of *Disintegration* as they develop, which can result in either progression to a more independent schema like *Immersion/Emersion* or regression into *Reintegration*. The findings in this study support this interpretation, as represented by the significant shift in Dawn's primary operating schema during the course of this study (see Table 4). She began with a *Disintegration* schema and progressed to *Pseudo-Independence*, although much of her data showed a significant conflict between her personal and professional lives. Regarding her personal life, she shared:

> It got like kind of ugly sometimes with my family. And I didn't have the tools or the strategies to help like the Felt/Found/Feel [strategy we learned in class], for example, or I didn't have like all of this wealth of information and knowledge that I felt that I could share, and talk to them about it in a way that was productive.

However, she said of her professional life, "In Sunnydale it's a little bit different because there's…a few more different ethnicities in there than in racial backgrounds." Since Sunnydale is majority students of color, she linked the diversity of the student population to her commitment to continue the work: "I see myself in this space because I think that I've shed the white fragility

aspect of things, and I'm ready to be a more, like a positive antiracist ally, and I'm working with my students and trying to change…" In the delicate balance between her home and work life, the comments that tipped the scales toward the former indicated a *Reintegration* schema while comments toward the latter suggested the fledgling aspects of a positive white racial identity necessary for use of the *Immersion/Emersion* schema. This was mirrored in Joyce's dilemma in her description that when it comes to talking about race and racism, "There are places and situations where it's easy to talk about, and there are situations where it's really hard. And I think family, and especially older family members, it's really hard."

Exploration of Parallel Identities

The exploration of parallel identities, in particular those that may claim marginalized status in some way, was another important theme from the data. In some cases, this provided an opportunity for developing a positive white racial identity and in other instances it hindered that development. Two participants mentioned women's studies courses in college as an important component of their racial awakening as these classes introduced them to intersectional components of race and gender. Joyce cited reading the work of Audre Lourde and Zora Neale Hurston for example as a major element of her *Disintegration* schema: "These women showed me a world that I did not know." Faith similarly said of her women's studies classes that she "would be attending lectures on these specific kinds of things I didn't know [and] I could feel myself really growing."

Ethnic identities also provided participants entry points to consider their own whiteness. Faith and Tara mentioned their Irish heritage as a component of their racial identity development reflections, although Faith mentioned it did not play a significant role in her current identity. Tara wrote in her RID paper, "When I think about experiences that have shaped my worldview and

racial identity, I think about my upbringing in my white Irish Catholic family," while Faith said in her recording project, "Yeah, I'm proud. I'm proud to be Irish. Does it make any difference in my life? Probably not." Dawn, on the other hand, self-identified as ethnically Greek and discussed at length its impact on her in the past and today: "And that is something I'm proud of. I'm very proud of my Greek heritage." During her interview, Dawn began to consider the connection between this white ethnicity contrasted with identities for people of color:

> One of my cousins, who was one of my best friends growing up, she's Greek, but also Puerto Rican. And I remember that people called her like, Puerto Greek-an, and, and I wonder, like, you know, I look back, and it helps me like, reflect. And I wonder how she felt with her identity, like, growing up in that environment with that overwhelming like, 'Greek, Greek, Greek is the best!' and how that other side of her family, like how she felt dealing with that.

This contemplation later turned inward:

> I do feel accepted by my community, sometimes not my Greek community. I don't speak as much Greek as I would want to. And because my mom was very Greek but my dad wasn't 100% Greek, I definitely was picked on for being Polish and made fun of by my cousins growing up for that. And other Greek ladies of the community, like the Greek ladies at church. This can be just paranoia, but you know, I don't speak Greek. They definitely–Greek people are very judgmental.

A hyperfocus on ethnic–rather than racial–identity is a prominent marker of the *Pseudo-Independence* schema (Helms 2020), as the individual is not quite ready to use the more advanced schema of *Immersion/Emersion* where the individual accepts personal responsibility for past and present contributions to racism as a system of oppression. Dwelling heavily on

ethnic identity was seen in the data for Dawn. When she pushed forward, attempting to use an *Immersion/Emerson* schema with her Greek family members operating with the *Contact* schema, she sometimes retreated to a *Reintegration* schema: "To avoid further hurt and conflict, I decided it was easier to pretend like all these terrible things going on in the world were not happening." At other times, she shared a commitment to learning more and moving forward: "I want to befriend more people of color to learn from them, but…I'm not looking to them to explain racism to me. If that makes sense, like, because it's not like their job to explain to white people why racism exists." Within the latter statement, Dawn was beginning to apply an *Immersion/Emersion* schema to her racial identity, developing a fledgling positive white identity and beginning to take on the personal responsibility for combatting racism.

In another example of the ethnic focus, Joyce detailed in several instances the impact of experiencing minoritization while living abroad in a geographic location where she was both the only white person and the only American. She remembered being socially ostracized by the local women of color because, as a local friend told her later, they believed all Americans had AIDS. She said, "As a person with a white, privileged background, I was shocked. It was the first time that I was conscious of the negative impact my race and identity was having on others." It is important to note that the cultural context for this realization–being white in a country populated primarily by people of color–can be a very different experience than recognizing whiteness in the context of power dynamics within the United States.

In the case of Faith, the data showed some contradictions between her marginalized identity as a queer person and her white racial identity: "I'm very white, racially, very white. Other people identify me probably being very white. I think I come across very white cis straight. But I'm not. I'm queer." Faith articulated what others assume about her: they accurately

assume her racial identity, but their assumption of her sexuality is false. Her assertion that "I'm not" was in reference solely to her sexuality, not her racial identity. She also acknowledged the absence of people who identify as Black in her life: "We don't have a lot of Black people come over…we've got gay friends, a ton of gay friends." In this statement Faith shifted the focus from the lack of people of color in her life to the presence of another historically marginalized group to which she belongs, implying that the gay people she was referencing are white. In the interview, Faith also noted some troubling recent interactions with an administrator that had limited her self-efficacy in fighting oppression at school: "In Sunnydale, being told like we should be taking action yet being treated like it's your problem when someone treats you unfairly, it was a really hard thing to think of…to really kind of dig into…because I have been taking action previously, but since that interaction last year, I've really stopped." In my follow up, Faith agreed that the administrator's lack of awareness about identity, including racial identity, prevented him from providing her the support she needed to consistently operate in her evolving non-racist schemas. Later, she expressed excitement when discussing leaders in her previous district who shared her marginalized sexuality: "When I started, it was phenomenal. It was a gay man and a lesbian assistant principal. And that was phenomenal. And then…they left and the leadership kind of just took a different role…so it was a good time for me to move." Again, the hyperfocus on sexuality, a parallel of the hyperfocus on ethnicity that Helms (2020) indicated as a marker of the *Pseudo-Independence* schema, seemed to eclipse racial identity here rather than the reality that both can exist in the same space–an experience I had myself as a gay man of color that I detail in Chapter One. This was certainly incongruent with primary use of the *Autonomy* schema that Faith self-identified.

Misunderstanding Autonomy

The two participants who self-identified as operating from the *Autonomy* schema were both coded as primarily operating from the *Pseudo-Independence* schema. As is indicated in the name of this schema, individuals operating from this may be unaware of the spurious independent status. The data showed this to be the case in both Faith and Tara. A key finding in this regard was the absence of white identification in relation to racial dynamics. In many instances, participants were able and willing to acknowledge the impact of oppression on people of color, yet they failed to simultaneously explicitly recognize the corresponding positive impact of that oppression on whites.

In sharing her response to a video on the internalization of anti-Black racism in young Black children, Faith connected the issue to her own children: "I have…kids that age…And I was like, 'Are they already realizing this?'" Faith's children are white, so the impact of the cycle of oppression and anti-Black racism should look very different in her children than how it manifested in the Black children in the video. She did not acknowledge this difference however, or even the identity of her children as white. In another example, Faith similarly failed to explicitly mention whiteness when recalling an experience with her college athletics team: "My core group of friends and myself were all on the basketball team. One of my teammates who was BIPOC…" The implicit suggestion here was that the other team members were white. This omission is more indicative of the *Pseudo-Independence* schema than *Autonomy*.

In the same way, Tara's stated primary operating schema of *Autonomy* contradicted the data analysis process that suggested her primary schema was more likely *Pseudo-Independence*. She acknowledged her whiteness in several instances–"I'm very cognizant of my whiteness"–however, in many instances there appeared to be an over-intellectualization of the

personal aspects of race and racism, a component of the *Pseudo-Independence* schema, as indicated in the following quotations from her data:

- "An ideology of colorblindness reinforces white identity as dominant and reproduces the embedded Eurocentric values and maintains the cycle of oppression."
- "These social constructions and implicit biases also have an impact on how policies and decisions are made within schools and about schools."
- "As I'm going about my day, I'm thinking about who are the people I'm engaging with. What are my lived experiences versus their lived experiences?"'
- "Equity and equality are not the same and…you need to give people different things to help people get to the same point."

During the coding process, researchers noticed the lack of specificity in how Tara puts these theories into action. Tara admitted to being distracted during the interview by some family issues, and as the lead researcher asking questions, I even prompted her at times to remind her of some of the personal knowledge I have of her work as a colleague outside this study; however, many of her responses failed to reach the threshold for the *Autonomy* schema, particularly acceptance of the personal responsibility for racism and the specificity of actions taken to dismantle racism. In contrast, Joyce, whose self-identification more closely matched the results of the coding process, identified the need for action and her growing capacity to follow through: "What changed for me in the course is realizing that being antiracist isn't an adjective. It's a verb…Do versus be."

An interesting component of this theme that resulted from the data analysis process was the way in which all participants were using a particular current schema to look back on past experiences when they operated from a different schema; often this meant using one of Helms's

(2020) evolving non-racist schemas to look back on an internalizing racism schema. During both the deductive and inductive coding processes, our research team found that reflective lens on the past revealed the ways in which participants misunderstood the difference between the disingenuous identity of the *Pseudo-Independence* schema and the truer, actualized independence of the *Autonomy* schema. For example, Tara shared the following experience that took place in graduate school:

> Well, I can share an example of, I got a half tuition scholarship to [my graduate school]. And my friend who ended up being my close friend…who was Black, she got a full scholarship. And I was like, well, we were like, talking about what our backgrounds were and all of that. And that was clearly to help narrow that gap and get more people of color into the program. I didn't understand that when I first got accepted into the program, I was fresh out of undergrad. And I was like, this doesn't seem fair.

The assumption that the full scholarship was provided in order to "help narrow the gap" is representative of the intellectual understanding of racism in the *Pseudo-Independence* schema, yet the implicit suggestion that the Black student received the scholarship as some sort of equity initiative rather than on her own merit and qualifications is reminiscent of racist beliefs that institutional racial diversity is unattainable because of a lack of qualified candidates (McDonald, 2021). Such nuanced explanations of racism, especially as it related to whiteness, were almost always missing from participants' responses when they were operating from the *Pseudo-Independence* schema.

Influence of Professional Development

My primary question centered on considering how white educators' assessment of their own racial identity was influenced by participation in professional development focused on

antiracism. The themes that emerged regarding participants' assessment of their own racial identity was analyzed earlier in this chapter, and in this section, I will share the findings associated with what aspects of the professional learning environment impacted those assessments.

Table 5

Emotional Words at Start of Interview

Word	Instances	Participant
Excited	3	Faith, Joyce, Dawn
Nervous	3	Faith, Joyce, Dawn
Interested	2	Faith, Tara
Exhausted	1	Tara
Happy	1	Dawn
Important	1	Tara
Reflective	1	Joyce

At the start of each interview, which took place a few weeks after the end of the course, the participants were asked to identify three words that described their feelings as they began the interview. Table 5 shows the words the participants identified and the number of times each was repeated between participants. In spite of how conversations about race and racism often promote negative feelings in white people (Brown, 2012; DiAngelo 2018, 2020; Helms, 2020; Oluo, 2018; Smith et al., 2024; Stevens & Abernethy, 2018; Sue, 2015; Tatum, 2017; Walker, 2017), three of the participants acknowledged being "excited" at the start of the interview, perhaps in balance to the number of participants who shared being "nervous." Several of the other words were coded as positive, including "interested," "happy," and "important." For the most part, participants appeared to be in a positive frame of mind as they began the interview at

the conclusion of the course. Shifting focus from the negative emotions indicated in the internalizing racism schemas to the positive in the evolving non-racist schemas was an important element of Helms's (2020) model, so noting the emotions participants were feeling as they engaged in a conversation about race after leaving the professional learning environment was an indicator of how that environment had impacted them. In all cases, the mostly positive nature of these words matched the coded primary operating schema for the interviews, all of which were one of the three evolving non-racist schemas (see Table 4).

Opportunities for Reflection

As noted earlier in this chapter, reflection on childhood, adolescence, and even early adulthood was key to participants' assessment of their own white racial identity. Dawn captured the sentiments of all four participants well when she said, "When I thought about being an antiracist educator, I didn't really think about my own identity as being like a critical part of it. I thought it was learning strategies, analyzing material, sort of things outside of myself." Tara acknowledged having significant familiarity with much of the course content previously, yet when asked what aspects of the professional learning environment promoted the use of her current racial identity schema, she said, "I think just reflecting," noting the reflective papers and recording project as key components for her. "Having those opportunities to sit and reflect were good," she said. "A lot of it wasn't new to me, and so it was like rereading and thinking critically with a different lens."

Faith noted during the interview the importance of reflection in the course: "I felt like [in] this course…you really had to think about how you were raised…I've thought of those things, but…to kind of dig in a little bit more than I think I have in the past." In her recording project, Joyce noted the importance of having a Black teacher early in elementary school; however, upon

further reflection and learning in the course, she shared that it was "hard to listen to" her recording:

> …partly because I sounded so kind of sure of myself that I was like proud of some of these moments that I thought were really important and made me not racist because I'd had those experiences or because those things had happened in my childhood. And I realized like, that's such bullshit.

She related the experience to what she saw in many white people: "We, you know, use those things, as it's almost like a cover, like, you know, 'Oh, I'm liberal. I'm white. I'm not a racist.' Because there's these little tiny moments in my life that I can hide behind."

Explicit Education

Each of the participants received explicit instruction in racial identity development theory, specifically Helms's (2020) model for white individuals and Cross's (1991, 1995) for people of color. When asked about their thoughts on that instruction in assessing their racial identity, all four participants affirmed the benefits. Faith and Tara had prior knowledge of the theories, yet both found it helpful for their own development to revisit these theories in the professional learning context. Tara shared, "I think it's very helpful…I think it's helpful to have the structure." Having been introduced to the theories for the first time in the course, Joyce said, "I think it's necessary…you need the language, you need the words to be able to understand it" and Dawn said, "I definitely think that that helped, I guess, label where I was in my journey and see where I need to be."

Joyce connected the explicit instruction in RID theory to recognizing the existence of her own white identity:

> I even remember in class saying, like, I don't want to be in…the white group, or I don't like it. And then [the white instructor] was like, 'You can't not be white. You know, you don't get a choice on that.' Like that really sunk in with me. I was like, 'Okay, yeah, I'm white, and that's how people see me…I have to own that.'

Dawn said learning about the theories helped her "move forward" because it helped her "understand that, okay, like, I'm not the only one who has been in this situation and not to feel like guilty of your past, but to feel more hopeful for moving forward in the future." This showed a marked shift in Dawn's thinking about her identity. In response to the question of how she feels being born white in the recording project a few months earlier, she said:

> Sometimes I do feel bad…I feel like in today's time it's almost like a bad thing to be white. Like when I say white, like white supremacy, I feel almost like guilty of something that I just feel like happened by other people and not…necessarily me, like I didn't ask for this to be the case.

In her interview, Dawn attributed this shift–from feeling "bad" about being white before the course began to feeling "hopeful" about moving forward in her racial identity journey–to the explicit instruction in racial identity theory.

Instructor Vulnerability

The issue of trust and safety in the professional learning environment was mentioned often by all participants. As noted in Chapter Three, a major component of the course the participants completed was establishing a community of learning that creates an atmosphere of trust and provides reasonable assurance of safety. During the interview, participants had several opportunities to describe what created a sense of safety and trust in the professional learning environment for them. Repeatedly, they pointed to the vulnerability of the instructors. Faith

shared that it "was really nice…that [the facilitators] both have like really opened up, and so it allows everyone else to do that…you were able to be so vulnerable with us. It's hard to not see that as a person to trust." When asked about whether she felt like she could be honest in the interview, Joyce said, "I do feel like I can be honest with you because you shared so much about your personal life in our course," and Dawn said, "I feel pretty safe here…I think we're doing the right kind of work," implying that my role as colleague as much as facilitator helped promote that safety.

In recalling a previous professional learning experience I led about two years prior, Dawn remembered when I shared a racist experience my Black son had had at school with a white staff member: "I guess I hadn't really thought about that and with other students here who are Black." The painful memory that I shared in that space as a facilitator seemed to have promoted use of the *Disintegration* schema in Dawn. In our course, when I shared vulnerabilities like this, I always commented on the ways in which I was making a conscious choice to provide those stories to participants for the purposes of their learning and that that is not something that they should expect from other people of color. Most participants seemed to recognize this distinction with regards to their daily interactions with people of color, which Joyce summarized well: "White people need to learn, but people of color…it's not their job to teach it." She also said, "I should not be dependent on people of color to help me confront and uncover racism."

Within these findings are two significant themes: (1) instructor vulnerability, especially instructors of color, was particularly valuable for folks operating in the *Pseudo-Independence* schema, and (2) a community of safety must be built in order to prevent this vulnerability from producing new trauma in the facilitator. Satisfying white participants' need to hear directly from people of color about their traumatic experiences with racism helped move folks forward, or at

least prevent them from returning to an internalizing racism schema. This vulnerability, however, did not necessarily always have to come from the facilitator when it came to unlearning biased information and learning about authentic experiences of people of color, which can be accomplished through other forms of media, as discussed in a later section on differentiation of learning.

Safety vs. Comfort

Another important component of these findings is that participants may need greater differentiation between *safety* and *comfort* as concepts. Helms's (2020) RID theory discussed the many ways in which either preserving or relinquishing white comfort around racial dynamics can be representative of how developed a white person's operating schema may be. While losing social capital with other whites operating in internalizing racism schemas can feel unsafe, it is really a lack of comfort. The long history of physical danger and loss of liberty for people of color when it comes to disrupting white people's sense of racial superiority (Alexander, 2012; Anderson, 2016; Crenshaw, 2016; DeGruy, 2019; Kendi, 2017; McGhee, 2021; Oluo, 2020; Wilkerson, 2020) hardly compares to the loss of friendships or even dashed professional opportunities that may occur for providing an opportunity for other whites to enter the *Disintegration* or *Pseudo-Independence* schemas. In fact, recognizing this dichotomy is a component of operating from the more advanced schemas in Helms's (2020) theories, like *Autonomy*. Each of the participants were asked how they felt speaking with me about these topics during the interview, acknowledging the many roles I played in their life: instructor of their course, administrator in the Sunnydale Public Schools, and lead researcher in this study. They each mentioned my own openness, honesty, and vulnerability as a key component to promoting and earning their trust. These findings suggest that facilitators and leaders engaging in this work

with white educators may be able to leverage that trust once it is established to help them see the difference between white comfort and a lack of safety for people of color.

Differentiation of Learning Experiences

Table 6

Learning Experiences by Content Objective and Schemas

Activity	Type	Content Objective	Schemas
Butterflies	Reading	Assumptions, Perspectives; Cultural Vantage Point	Disintegration
Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack	Reading	Privilege; Whiteness	Disintegration
The Lunch Date	Video	Assumptions; Stereotypes	Disintegration
A Girl Like Me	Video	Definitions of Racism; Cycle of Oppression	Disintegration; Pseudo-Independence
Chris Rock	Video	Definitions of Racism; Cycle of Oppression	Disintegration; Pseudo-Independence
Stereotypology	Video	Definitions of Racism; Cycle of Oppression	Disintegration; Pseudo-Independence
Bootstraps	Activity	Cycle of Oppression; Privilege; Intersectionality	Disintegration; Pseudo-Independence
Crossing the Room	Activity	Cycle of Oppression; Allyship	Disintegration; Pseudo-Independence; Immersion/Emersion
Going to the Beach	Activity	Power & Privilege; Allyship	Disintegration; Pseudo-Independence; Immersion/Emersion
Felt/Found/Feel	Activity	Action; Disrupting Racism	Immersion/Emersion; Autonomy
Bead Activity	Activity	Action & Choice; Relation to Systems	Pseudo-Independence

The professional educational environment that these participants encountered during the study included a balance of many different types of learning experiences, including readings, videos, physical activities, and discussion. During the semi-structured interview that followed the conclusion of the course, participants were asked to identify any learning experiences that stood out as having promoted their current racial identity schema. Table 6 shows the specific learning experiences that participants cited in response to the question, the type of experience, the content objective, and the RID schema that is most impacted by the experience. A finding related to these experiences that emerged during the data analysis process was the value of balanced, differentiated activities. Three of the four participants noted videos that drew connections to their personal lives. The film "A Girl Like Me" (Mediamatters, 2007) created by Black teenage film director Kiri Davis explored the contemporary impact of the cycles of oppression on young Black children, including a recreation of Kenneth and Mamie Clark's (1947) famous doll experiment that helped desegregate schools in the mid-twentieth century in which young Black children correlated positive markers with white dolls and negative markers with Black dolls. Faith drew connections between the video and her own white children at home who were of similar ages to those in the film. Dawn noted how the video promoted reflection on members of her family who seemed to eschew their identity as biracial persons of color. The short film "The Lunch Date" (Davidson, 1990) detailed the racialized assumptions of people of color by an older white woman. Faith said the film "had a big impact on" her but that she "can't even watch those things anymore because they're so off-base on so many levels." Joyce found the video reminiscent of her own mother, saying that she had seen the same types of problematic behaviors "a lot." The short video "Stereotypology" (Stuff Mom Never Told You, 2015) detailed the formation and impact of the "China Doll" stereotype for Asian women. Faith said that made her

think about her brother and his Asian wife and whether or not they had considered the role race will play in their future children's lives, although she admitted "it hasn't been a conversation we've had." Joyce also noted the impact of a clip from *The Black List: Volume 1* (Greenfield-Sanders, 2008) in which actor and comedian Chris Rock described his affluent neighborhood in California: the few Black residents that live there are huge superstars in their professional arenas while his white wealthy nextdoor neighbor is simply a dentist. In most instances, these videos appeared to mimic the impact of facilitator vulnerability in that each conveyed the deeply personal and often harmful impacts of racism on people of color. These are the types of experiences that tended to push white participants into the evolving non-racist schemas of Helms's (2020) RID theoretical model.

The activities in which participants engaged physically with the material seemed to be of particular note as well. In the Bead Activity, participants were asked to place different colored beads, each color representing a different racial category, into a transparent cup as they finish certain sentence starters, such as "I am…" or "My best friend is…" The activity led participants to take an inventory of the level of racial diversity that exists in their lives, both personal and professional. Joyce said at the end of the activity, "I only had like one or two beads of color. And I was like, ah, that's my reality. Like, seeing it like this white cup of beads was really striking." She had similar reactions to other physical activities like Crossing the Room in which different identities literally walk across the room together and voluntarily share their experiences with their classmates. Felt/Found/Feel was an activity participants engaged in to learn strategies to disrupt microaggressions and implicit racist behaviors. Faith and Dawn found it particularly helpful as they moved beyond the class, Dawn acknowledging that she had already used the strategy in her personal life:

> I have actually used that since the course, and it helped…because before I would get a little too, like, passionate about what I was saying…so when I was able to use that and have it end on good terms…with my brother…it was a good fit. It was a good feeling.

Conclusion

The findings of this study captured the experiences of four white, female public school educators who completed a course in antiracism and engaged in assessment of their racial identity status. Through analysis of their reflections recorded over approximately a three month period, I was able to extract themes from their experiences. Several factors appeared to impact how educators assess their own racial identity development and the lived experiences that contributed to that development, including reflection on childhood and adolescence, promotion of the *Disintegration* schema through education, exploration of parallel identities, and misunderstandings of the *Autonomy* schema. Likewise, several themes resulted from the data analysis process with regard to how that assessment of racial identity development was influenced by the professional learning environment, including opportunities for reflection, explicit education, instructor vulnerability, distinguishing between safety and comfort, and differentiation of learning experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter includes a summary of key elements of this study. It consists of a discussion of the findings in Chapter Four and an incorporation of salient ideas from the literature. My primary research question focused on how professional learning environments can influence white educators' assessment of their own racial identity, with sub-questions aimed at articulating how those educators actually engage in that assessment through reflection on their lived experiences. This chapter takes the findings from Chapter Four to develop a discussion of ways that facilitators of professional learning spaces can better support white educators' self-assessment of racial identity. In addition to a discussion of the themes from Chapter Four, this chapter will explore recommendations for future research.

Authentic RID Assessment

All four participants hovered around the *Pseudo-Independence* schema, either by self-identification or through the researcher coding of their data. As noted in Chapter Four, this is historically also where many participants in this course have self-identified themselves after learning about or revisiting racial identity development theories in their professional learning environment. In most cases, participants did not have the words to connect their perceptions and lived experiences to their commitment and values as antiracist educators. In trying on those labels and reflecting on their identity, the *Pseudo-Independence* schema was more prominent, although Faith and Tara misidentified themselves as operating within the *Autonomy* schema according to the data analysis. As noted in Chapter Four, the absence of white identification was a key component of this finding, parallel to Abioye and Sasso's (2023) findings in which participants failed to connect their white identity to concepts of white supremacy.

This sense of feigned independence masqueraded as the *Autonomy* schema for Faith and Tara, somewhat consistent with the contradictions found in participants in Malott et al.'s (2015) study of individuals supposedly using the *Autonomy* schema. The desire or need to be seen as using a more advanced RID schema could also be a component of the political atmosphere in the geographic location of Sunnydale, where each of the participants worked. Sunnydale as a town takes immense pride in its long history of revolutionary thinking. The municipal government has a Chief Equity Officer and an active human rights committee, as well as more than a dozen community organizations dedicated to promoting and protecting the identities of historically marginalized groups. In the 2020 presidential election, more than 80% of the votes in Sunnydale were cast for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, and Sunnydale's federal Democratic senator and representative were re-elected with 80% of the vote. While these are clear markers of Massachusetts liberalism, it is important to note that this community identity does not necessarily translate into a commitment to structures that dismantle racial inequity or diminish white supremacy culture. As Geismer (2014) pointed out in her study of towns like Sunnydale in Massachusetts, "Putting up a yard sign for Obama might offer a means to outwardly demonstrate a liberal political identity and commitment to socioeconomic equality, [but] it is not the main route to confront or solve structural inequity" (p. 286).

These contradictions in New England are abundant. It has a complicated history of Puritanical roots and contemporary acceptance. While it is home to some of the most liberal higher education institutions in the country, the region also has some of the most segregated schools in the country (Hannah-Jones, 2016; Scharfenberg, 2020). The realities of this segregation, including the achievement and opportunity gap that consistently falls along racial lines, and the predominantly white teaching force that has done little to shift these outcomes

indicate just how challenging the disruption of these systems can be. I have worked with literally hundreds of white educators who self-proclaim to be antiracist whose actions and rhetoric betray their hesitancy to relinquish their unearned advantage in support of true equality. The argument that the superficial liberalism of the Northern United States has significantly contributed to the stagnation of racial equality is not new; Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968), spoke openly in his book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* of the dangers of the Northern white liberal, and Robin DiAngelo's (2021) recent description of "nice racism" expands on the ways in which seemingly liberal attitudes are betrayed by historical and contemporary examples of whites consistently choosing to maintain the racial power structure in the United States (Anderson, 2016; McGhee, 2021; Rothstein, 2017). Although Massachusetts itself has yet to pass legislation restricting access to credible information about Critical Race Theory (UCLA School of Law, 2022), regional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Directors in public schools indicate the attacks are infiltrating even our seemingly liberal enclave (Cole et al., 2021).

Within this politically liberal context, the Sunnydale Public Schools follows suit, where a version of this progressive community identity is a major component of the public schools' core values. The district has published several papers and reports about their efforts to dismantle the barriers to equity, including racial equity. Of course, an intellectual awareness of how race and racism operate can be an important part of developing a positive white racial identity. Malott et al. (2021) found this learning to be an important component of "proactive efforts in managing racial bias" (p. 142) for the ten participants they studied who they previously had verified were operating in the *Autonomy* schema, although in the discussion of their findings they questioned whether the participants had "been erroneously assigned an autonomy status" (p. 145).

As is representative of the larger political context in which Sunnydale is situated, participants had a clear intellectual understanding of racism within the cycle of oppression; however their lack of specific actions they individually were taking to combat the cycle were mired in *Pseudo-Independence*. While there is a wide body of social psychological research that supports the idea that awareness and knowledge are not enough to promote behavior change, when it comes to the promotion of racial equity and the dismantling of other forms of oppression, Gorski and Swalwell (2023) noted, "Awareness does not magically translate into action." In their review of research that explored the relationship between Critical Race Theory (CRT) and praxis in K-12 education, Ledesma and Calderón (2015) concluded that "the depth of this work demonstrates the necessity of CRT in education, illuminating that we cannot truly assess, respond, and promote educational research and praxis devoid of the deep and entrenched nature of White supremacy in U.S. Society" (p. 208) and that "using CRT to highlight challenges is not enough. We must go beyond rhetoric to advance praxis, a politics of action" (p. 212). Bohonos (2019) coupled antiracist praxis for white individuals with the reflection and ownership of power and privilege accompanying whiteness and said the promotion of white antiracism "will require sustained investments in workshops, facilitated dialogues, and other consciousness-raising activities" (p. 326), and according to Turner et al.'s (2024) findings, white educators are only able to take action after they have reflected on their own whiteness.

Smith et al.'s (2024) findings provide potential insight into why the intellectual understanding does not always translate into action for participants in professional learning:

> Through our data, we noted that despite our prior knowledge and engagement in justice-oriented teaching and PD, in the context of this experience, self-doubt, in its

> multiple versions, was still pervasive across our varied institute positionalities and social and racialized identities. (p. 10)

One participant in their study named that as educators they are typically seen as the experts, and learning about critical contexts like those in my study may require educators to shed that persona.

The antiracism course the participants in my study completed was required of new staff in Sunnydale, so the expectation for fighting systems of inequity was built into the atmosphere there. However, as Dena Simmons (2021) noted, many school systems publicly proclaim to fight systemic racism and then focus on programs that do little more than serve up "white supremacy with a hug." This type of approach in the Sunnydale Public Schools situates the *Pseudo-Independence* schema as the norm. Even Joyce, who was coded as operating from an *Immersion/Emersion* schema by the end of the course (see Table 4), did not assess herself as having progressed as much as she did in the preceding months and was still identifying as using a *Pseudo-Independence* schema. Given this particular context–a politically liberal and progressive suburban town in Massachusetts–it may be all the more challenging for white educators who work in Sunnydale to truly recognize when they do or do not operate in the *Autonomy* schema. The discussion that follows includes considerations to help white educators more accurately assess their racial identities.

Explicit RID Theories

While not necessarily sufficient for accurate self-assessment in this study, the explicit instruction on racial identity development theories had a significant impact on how participants thought of their racialized selves, mirroring the conclusions in both Wantchekon et al.'s (2021) and Sladek et al.'s (2021) studies in their work providing exposure to racial concepts to

secondary students. My findings suggest an increased focus on RID theories may be necessary for participants to more accurately assess their primary operating schemas, especially clarifying and differentiating between the three evolving non-racist schemas. This in turn would allow them to operate within the more advanced schemas to seek out white allies, creating an affirmative culture of social influence where they can learn and unlearn information about their own group and others, and, most importantly, take action regardless of the lack of personal comfort. Much like a doctoral student identifies their theoretical framework in a dissertation, naming that framework in the professional learning environment is an important component of promoting positive RID and identification of explicit action steps individuals can take toward antiracist action representative of the most developed RID schemas in Helms's (2020) model.

For the participants in this study, the incorporation of these theories introduced or reinforced the idea that the personal work of white educators must be a part of shifting to a professional antiracist practice. Before being introduced to the theories, participants did not have the common vocabulary to apply to nor an understanding of the meaning of their own perceptions and experiences. They also had a harder time understanding the difference between individual and institutional actions on the cycle of oppression before the explicit learning. Once they had that common language, facilitators can support further development–and other class participants operating from more advanced schemas, like *Autonomy*, can do the same.

Connecting Learning Experiences to Schemas

The findings suggest an expansion of explicit RID theories may be necessary to help participants more accurately assess themselves. Making explicit the goals and schemas that are best served by learning experiences in the professional learning environment, such as those outlined in Table 6, may help educators connect what they are learning to their personal racial

identity development. The types of learning experiences that Faith and Tara identified as meaningful were much more internal than those identified by Joyce and Dawn. The former highlighted the impact of private reflection activities, such as writing a paper or reflecting after passively watching a video, while the latter identified experiences that required public action, such as filling a transparent cup with different colored beads in front of their colleagues or role-playing strategies that disrupt the cycle of oppression. The findings suggest that explicitly matching the nature of these activities–reflection versus action–with a theoretical framework like Helms's (2020) might promote more accurate self-assessment. As was the case with the four participants in this study, white educators enter these learning spaces in very different statuses of racial identity development and each progresses at their own pace. Learning experiences must be balanced. In all cases, the participants ended in an evolving non-racist identity even if they self-identified differently than the coded data suggested. They each still developed or maintained a positive racial identity through the learning experiences in the course: three of the four participants progressed and one remained in *Pseudo-Independence*. What could be improved is their own accurate awareness of their racial identity which might help them feel an urgency to continue learning, a hallmark of the *Autonomy* status.

Participants noted how elements of the learning in the antiracism course provided opportunities to disrupt their understanding of race and racism, elements of the *Disintegration* schema when it disrupts white individuals' ignorance of their racialized selves or the *Immersion/Emersion* schema when it helps individuals reorient themselves toward a positive racial identity (Helms, 2020). For the participants in Turner et al.'s (2024) study of the perceptions of English education instructors and their efficacy with culturally-based practices, this tension between *Disintegration* and *Immersion/Emersion* was a major stumbling block,

although the researchers did not use Helms's (2020) theories as a framework. Turner et al. couched some of their findings within the context that a majority of English education teachers are white women, similar to my own participants' identities, as well as national statistics for all educators where approximately 75% of all teachers in the United States are female (Schaeffer, 2021). Given these factors, identifying for white participants when learning experiences lend themselves to *Disintegration* or *Immersion/Emersion* may help them more accurately identify their primary operating schemas.

Continuous Reflection

Probably most key to the findings in this study is the continuous reflection required in professional learning settings for educators to engage in their own personal identity work in order to improve their professional practice. This is particularly true given the prominence of *Pseudo-Independence* in the findings and Helms's (2020) acknowledgment that learning from other white people is a feature of the schema. Once participants had the language and understanding to look back and apply the RID framework to their experiences, particularly in contrast to their current experiences and perceptions, they were able to attempt RID self-identification and plan for progress forward. The discussion that follows includes specific points of reflection that appeared to be especially meaningful in impacting white educators' assessment of their racial identity in the professional learning setting.

Depth of Relationships

Interrogating the nature of relationships with people of color is an important component of the self-reflective work for white individuals considering their racial identity. As Fleming (2018) pointed out, white individuals can have seemingly meaningful relationships with people of color, through marriage or parenting for example, and still uphold systems of white

supremacy. Providing opportunities for reflection about the true nature of their relationships with others appears to be key to promoting a positive RID in white educators. In some cases, these opportunities provided participants a chance to recognize the superficial nature of their previous relationships with people of color, as well as with other white people. Since each of the participants acknowledged growing up in racially homogeneous environments, what little racial diversity existed at the time carried greater meaning for them. These tenuous relationships with people of color were marked by superficiality, especially in the absence of actively discussing race or racism with these individuals, such as the relationships that Joyce, Tara, and Faith all described in childhood and early adolescence with Black friends in which they never discussed race or racism. According to Syed, Juang, and Svensson (2018), the diversity, or lack thereof, of childhood and adolescent environments may play a particularly important role in the development of how an individual views their own ethnic or racial identity. Coming of age in predominantly white environments for all participants proved to challenge the development of a positive sense of racial identity. Such environments may promote stagnation in the *Contact* schema in terms of their racial identity development, especially because many white students are socialized by their peers far more readily than they inherit the ideologies of their parents (Hagerman, 2018, 2020).

Some participants were able to look back with their newly acquired learning and language, including about RID theory, and recognize that, as Joyce stated, these flimsy relationships with people of color, like the one she described with a Black elementary school teacher in her recording project, were merely “little tiny moments in my life that I can hide behind.” This lack of authentically deep relationships with people of color may perpetuate the preservation of white children’s ignorance of the role race plays in everyday interactions, which

is a staple of the literature referenced in Chapter Two (Bernstein, 2011; Hagerman, 2020; Hazelbaker & Mistry, 2022; Heberle et al., 2023; Irving, 2014). Helms (2020) specifically pointed out that engaging in even superficial relationships with people of color can promote movement out of the *Contact* schema, however, so reflecting on the absence of explicit acknowledgement of race in these relationships was still an important component of the participants' assessment of their current racial identity as adults. While the minimal relationships with people of color may move individuals out of the *Contact* schema, participants could have been pushed further in their learning to reconcile how a lack of meaningful relationships with people of color is highly incompatible with the *Autonomy* schema.

Reflection on all relationships, including those with other white people, was another component of the findings that necessitates further discussion. Joyce and Dawn detailed how their experiences hiking with white friends have shifted to include regular conversations about race and racism. This was indicative of the *Immersion/Emersion* schema, particularly in how these participants actively sought out the company of other white people engaged in the same level of learning (Helms, 2020). This camaraderie with other white people is an important facet of the evolving non-racist schemas, and the absence of honest reflection about the nature of these relationships with other whites can promote problematic internalizing racism schemas. It is important to note that the only participant coded beyond the *Pseudo-Independence* schema was Joyce who articulated having a particularly deep and meaningful relationship with a Black female colleague, and even in that case, the opportunity for reflection was sobering for her: "I mean, asking [my friend] to explain something to me. You know, like, I think about that, I'm like, okay, yeah, that's something I've done. I don't anymore, but like, I think of that." It appears that only through careful examination of their relationships with people of all racial identities can

white educators accurately assess their own development. When those relationships are family members, as in the case of Dawn, the push toward *Immersion/Emersion* and *Autonomy* can be particularly challenging, as it is often more difficult for individuals to extricate themselves from familial relationships operating with internalizing racism schemas than friendships doing the same.

Trauma & Intersectionality

A significant stumbling block for Faith's accurate assessment of her own racial identity appeared to be the challenges associated with her marginalized status as a queer person. She pointed to difficult experiences with administrators involving that identity that prevented her from being as active in her commitment to antiracism as possible. This was in stark contrast to her exclamations about how "phenomenal" it was when she had school leaders who shared her queer identity. Much like my own experience detailed in Chapter One in which I was unable to reconcile my racial identity until I had adequately dealt with my identity as a young gay man, the findings here suggest that white individuals who hold other historically marginalized identities may first need space to safely explore the trauma associated with that status, especially when experiencing the type of difficulty with leadership that Faith acknowledged in her interview that caused her to stop taking action in the name of equity. The implications here extend Cooley et al.'s (2019) findings about the necessity of teaching about white privilege in the context of intersectional systems of oppression into the antiracist professional learning arena for educators.

Reminiscent of Crenshaw's (1991, 2016) work on intersectionality, the findings suggest a need to help participants reflect on the overlapping systems of oppression that may be opposing one another as in the case of Faith's marginalized status as a queer person and her privileged status as a white person. In most cases, racial identity operates differently than other deeply held

personal identities, as it is one of the few that others make assumptions about based on what they see (Kelley, 2003). Participants in professional learning sessions may need to explicitly take inventory of these types of identities and differentiate between feelings of discomfort associated with hidden marginalized identities and the power and privilege that accumulate from a white racial identity they cannot hide. This thinking was explored in prolific Black writer and civil rights activist James Baldwin's (1967) provocative titled essay, "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White," in which he suggested whiteness supersedes all other identities, marginalized or not, for those who are oppressed by racism.

The findings around the participants' focus on ethnic identity suggest this is another area for deep exploration on intersectionality. Dawn's description of her experiences growing up as a Greek American and feeling ostracized because she was not fully biologically Greek are a somewhat distorted version on marginalization within a larger dominant group. Dwelling too much on ethnic identity can be an opportunity to eschew the responsibility of one's whiteness (Hazelbaker & Mistry, 2022; Moffitt & Rogers, 2022; Sladek et al., 2021), which is quite the opposite of what can happen for young people of color (Huguley et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2017; Sladek et al., 2021). Therefore, the opportunities for reflection on the intersectionality of ethnicity and race must be carefully cultivated. This is the difficult aspect of Umaña-Taylor et al.'s (2014) combination of ethnic and racial identity into a singular developmental model. This can be a helpful blending for people of color, yet it can prevent white individuals from progressing appropriately to the evolving non-racist schemas.

Promoting Comfort and Preserving Safety

Based on the findings of this study, the challenging emotions that often come up for white participants can be mitigated, particularly with appropriate displays of instructor vulnerability.

Within Helms's (2020) theories though, helping participants differentiate between safety and comfort may be an important component of improved reflection as well as safeguarding facilitators of color and participants of color from their pain being used to promote white participants' positive racial identity development. While all the participants pointed to my own vulnerability in sharing my experiences with racism as a valuable component of building trust for their own sharing, none of them acknowledged how hard that vulnerability may have been for me. Of course, as noted in previous chapters, there were several power dynamics at play in the relationship between me as researcher and the participants. They could view me in a variety of ways. They could see me as an administrator in Sunnydale who had the power to make decisions that would impact their professional life and future job opportunities. They could see me as the leader of their professional development and learning about racial identity development and antiracist practices. They could see me as a person of color who is oppressed by systemic racism that lifts them up.

Viewing our relationship through a lens of racial acknowledgment would have been key to their learning about white racial identity, and perhaps it was more than my vulnerability as the facilitator that manifested as trust during this study, especially the interview process. Perhaps it was my transparency about my own identity that prompted that trust, as all participants did refer to both my and my co-teacher's open sharing of our racial identity development when providing explicit instruction on RID theories. The findings here identify a benefit to school leaders doing for staff what Parmar and Steinberg (2008) referred to as "locating yourself" (p. 283), although their work focused on the power dynamics between teachers and students. Parmar and Steinberg asserted that "the denial of the existence of the educator's own positionality creates more barriers and a lack of trust, especially when students are asked so often to name theirs" (p. 285). The

findings suggest this was true for the participants who were in the role of student in this particular professional learning environment, and the same may be true for the other relationships I shared with the participants, including my role as a school leader. Similarly, the findings have implications for the role of researchers conducting studies in the places where they work. This may especially be true for research focused on dismantling systems of inequity. As Taylor (2019) stated, "If we're going to insist that systemic research is necessary to provide evidence that any new approach works…we need to reframe our expectations of who can do the research."

Obviously, vulnerability operates differently for white participants than participants of color in these types of learning environments, a theme in Smith et al.'s (2024) findings where participants of color felt they had to limit how much they shared of their personal experiences in order to preserve their mental health and avoid emotional fatigue and exhaustion, while white participants worried that showing vulnerability, particularly in sharing what they did not know, may be interpreted as white ignorance about positionality. When paralleled next to Helms's (2020) theories, Smith et al.'s white participants' fear represented elements of a *Pseudo-Independence* schema, whereas those operating in *Immersion/Emersion* and *Autonomy* schemas would take those risks without fear of how people of color will view them. This again appears to be a question of confusing comfort for safety.

Study Implications

The implications of this research serve to improve professional learning environments that help move white educators to a more consistent use of an evolving non-racist schema, as well as help those educators more accurately assess their own identity. Facilitators, including those who identify as people of color, must be prepared to create a sense of comfort for white

participants, and this will likely require vulnerability on their parts. This type of vulnerability from people of color should not be required in other aspects of public education, but when taking on the leadership role of facilitating this type of learning, that vulnerability may be a key component to the development of a positive racial identity in white participants. Of additional importance is the necessity to provide explicit, ongoing opportunities for reflection for participants, especially to allow for them to assess their past experiences and their connection to different operating schemas within Helms's (2020) RID framework.

Suggestions for Future Research

Generalizing RID Findings

As a qualitative case study, the question of generalizability is certainly something to explore in future research. Although a few researchers have made the case that some aspects of case study can in fact be generalized, the most common agreement in academia is that the data in a qualitative case study cannot explain phenomena outside the bounded system that is being studied (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Therefore, the findings in this study could be explored within a different, more generalizable methodology; however, these approaches may also be too limited to delve deeply enough into the nuanced aspects of Helms's (2020) most recent model of white RID. The efficacy of early attempts by Helms and Carter (1990) to create a quantifiable survey called the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS) for an earlier and slightly less complex version of Helms's (1984) RID model were later called into question by Behrens (1997) and others (Ottavi et al, 1994; Rowe et al., 1994; Rowe & Atkinson, 1995; Swanson et al., 1994), illustrating how challenging it can be to research racial identity in a quantifiable manner. Behrens' (1997) study found that white RID was simply too complex to measure via the WRIAS, although there was some validity to the WRIAS's ability to place subjects within a general

negative racial identity, Helms's (2020) current internalizing racism schemas, or a general positive racial identity, Helms's current evolving non-racist schemas (see Figure 1). Given these findings, Helms's current RID model in which the schemas are clearly no longer distinct stages addresses the complexities that arose from the early attempts to study whiteness in a quantitative manner.

It is important to note the complexities and intricacies of creating identity attitude scales used to specifically measure concepts of racial identity since as a social construct it operates quite differently than others like gender or sexuality. The invisibility of whiteness as an identity and the privilege and power white people garner by remaining blind to that identity has been well documented and discussed (Anderson, 2016; Batt, 2017; Casey, 2023; Chan, 2023; DiAngelo, 2018, 2021; Eddo-Lodge, 2017; Helms, 1995, 2014, 2017, 2020; McIntosh, 1998, 2009; Oluo, 2018; Saad, 2020; Sue, 2015). To the contrary, other dominant groups in the United States such as men, heterosexual people, and Christians often are extremely aware of those identities and often take pride in them. Thus, attitude scales that measure these other aspects of identity can offer only limited possibilities of informing RID scales that might promote more quantifiable research. Siegel and Calogero (2021), for example, reviewed measurements of feminist identity and attitudes over a half century and suggested that the rapidly shifting nature of women's rights in this country have necessitated vastly different measurement tools over time. In addition, they found that "validity evidence was minimal across the scales" (p. 266) and that although most of the tools during that period did yield interesting data in relation to the subject, they did not always precisely measure that which they were dedicated to. Interestingly, Siegel and Calogero did note several times the historical criticisms of measurement tools that centered the experiences of middle class white women that masqueraded as universal to all women. This is

the power of the invisibility of whiteness that leads to its normalcy, and it is a criticism that continues to echo within the feminist movement in recent years (DiAngelo, 2018; Fleming, 2018; Nash & Pinto, 2021; Neville-Shepard, 2023; Zakaria, 2021).

While attitude scales used for other aspects of identity may provide some insight to how race operates within individuals, the slow pace of racial civil rights in comparison to the relative speed of other movements that intersect with whiteness suggests racial identity must be addressed very differently. Richen (2014) noted the ways in which the gay rights movement used tactics from the Black civil rights movement to gain legal equality within one generation, something that took Black civil rights leaders multiple generations to achieve. More recently, many have also noted the erasure of people of color from that movement, such as their presence and leadership at the Stonewall Riots (Broady & Romer, 2021), the event often noted as the start of the modern gay rights movement. In these examples, race, and specifically the dominance of whiteness, has played an important role in societal gains and shifts in attitude, suggesting again the ways in which racial identity likely develops and operates differently than other aspects of identity.

While Helms (1999) and Thompson (1994) provided plenty of counterarguments to the validity of the WRIAS, my own attempts to help white participants in workshops and courses accurately assess their own white racial identity has required hours of learning and unlearning coupled with constant personal interrogation on the participants' part–and as evidenced in this study, the ability to accurately self-identify is still extremely challenging. In her most recent publication explaining her theories, Helms (2020) incorporated several activities and exercises that provide readers the opportunity to explore their primary operating schemas; however, the

findings of my study suggest the accuracy of racial identity reflection may require more than simple self-interrogation: the value of a facilitator or guide seems vitally important.

Given the findings on the prevalence of the *Pseudo-Independence* schema in these participants being potentially connected to the geopolitical aspects of Sunnydale as a community and school system, future research could explore these themes in a different locale, particularly a different part of the country. However, the limited number of participants in this study might make further exploration of white educator racial identity development in suburban liberal enclaves like Sunnydale another worthy future research endeavor.

Adaptations of the RID Model

Another area for potential future research is further considerations of how Helms's (2020) model might be further adapted for the ever changing social construct of race and its intersectional nature with other aspects of identity. Oluo (2024) pointed out that "oppression doesn't fit neatly into boxes" and that the relative nature of privilege:

> means that one aspect of our identity may be oppressed by a particular system, while another aspects may give us privilege over others, and we may fail to recognize the different ways in which the same system can be harming others. (p. 15)

Perhaps Helms's (2020) model could be reconsidered in this light, especially given how hard it seemed for the white participants in this study to parse out other aspects of identity, like those elements that lack privilege and power within the larger cultural systems in which they exist. Helms's (1995, 2020) most recent models addressed some of the criticisms (Behrens, 1997; Leach et al., 2002; Malott et al., 2015; Rowe et al., 1994) of her earlier theories, particularly how the six schemas can operate in conjunction with one another rather than in a linear fashion as in some other developmental models; however, perhaps future research could delve more deeply

into how white RID is impacted by other aspects of identity, such as sexuality and ethnicity, as evidenced in this study, which in turn may provide suggestions for future iterations of Helms's (2020) most recent version of her white RID model.

Studying the Facilitator Role

Studying the implementation of the recommendations in this chapter and their efficacy in promoting white educators' racial identity development could also be an interesting focus of future research. This potential future research is in line with much of the literature on trust I reviewed, which was focused primarily on the trustworthiness of findings and on building relationships with participants. In his review of promoting dependability in qualitative research, Subedi (2023) recognized "member checking fosters a collaborative approach between the researcher and the study participants and promotes transparency and mutual trust" (p. 64). Henderson et al. (2024) explored the same concept of conducting research in Black communities specifically, finding that the researchers bear sole responsibility for building trust and that it must also be built at the institutional level. In their study, Pribbenow et al. (2021) developed a facilitated workshop that aimed to help participants reduce racial bias after they had played a video game called Fair Play in which they took on the role of fictional Black graduate student Jamal Davis who encounters implicit racial bias on his way to earning a PhD. They noted "because the topic of implicit bias can be uncomfortable, a presenter who can talk about the ways in which they have done something biased allows for an openness and vulnerability that resonates with the players/workshop participants" (p. 397). These studies alongside my findings suggest the value of further research into the role of facilitator specific to how vulnerability can lead to trust for participants.

The extension of this literature in future research based on my findings could take many forms. For example, future research could look at the issue of instructor vulnerability, especially examining the differences between white instructors and instructors of color, and any focus on instructors of color would require cross-referencing RID theoretical models specific to the individual's racial group, such as Cross's (1991, 1995) model. With Helms's (1984, 1990) early work paralleling RID for white folks to theoretical models for people of color, especially Cross's (1991, 1995) model, these results may need further analysis through identification of the statuses that people of color are operating through in these professional learning environments. Does the operating status of an instructor of color within a model like Cross's (1991, 1995) influence the RID of white participants in these spaces? This could be particularly important to consider in light of Gorski's (2019) findings about racial battle fatigue hastening burnout for racial justice activists at predominantly white institutions of higher education.

Further, while the participants each tied their honesty in the interview at least in part to my own openness in sharing my own racial identity development, future research could attempt to parse out the various roles I played in relation to the participants: administrator, facilitator, instructor, person of color, gay man, and member of a biracial family, to name a few. Did one element of my identity or did a role I played in their professional or personal lives help promote trust and comfort more than another? What about the parallel identities and roles held by my white co-teacher?

Participants of Color

Finally, since this study focused solely on white educators, the impact of this study's findings on participants of color in these same learning spaces could be important companion research. How does the promotion of positive racial identity development in white participants

affect participants of color in professional learning focused on antiracism? Is the racial identity development of participants of color influenced by the same elements of the professional learning environment as white participants' RID? Any future research on this topic would certainly need to take into account concepts of emotional labor like those explored by Evans and Moore (2015), Neal and Espinoza (2022), and Casado et al. (2023).

Conclusion

The long history of the social construct of race clearly provides for a complicated landscape through which facilitators of professional learning focused on antiracism must lead white participants. However, the exploration of racial identity shared by the participants in this study demonstrates that this is not an impossible journey. Through careful maneuvers and the promotion of honest, thoughtful reflection, facilitators can help white educators more consistently utilize an evolving non-racist schema, which will ideally aid in the dismantling of systems of oppression within the public school setting.

As school systems like Sunnydale commit to removing barriers to equity, the question becomes how does a predominantly white work force with a positive racial identity take action to promote racial equity in a public school setting? The true test of Helms's (2020) RID model will be examining whether the use of evolving non-racist schemas by white people actually translates into the eradication of white supremacy culture–and in those cases what equitable system will replace it?

Some studies have attempted to assess the microcosms of systems change in certain educational arenas. McLaughlin (2020) for example assessed the practices of 18 leaders of schools where 80% or more of their Black and Latinx students had achieved proficiency on their state's standardized tests in English and mathematics. While her recommendations included

elements of this study, including helping teachers explore their own and students' racial identity development and promoting "difficult but constructive dialogue on race" (p. 138), focusing on proficiency on state standardized tests may not be emblematic of systems change that replaces white supremacy culture; it may simply be that the students of color are learning how to succeed within that oppressive system.

Extending this thinking, Warikoo's (2022) examination of a school system very similar to Sunnydale found that white students and their families only decried the flaws of standardized testing after Asians began outperforming them: "A different response to Asian American academic success by some whites is to change the criteria for success…Why are we only taking these critiques seriously now?" (p. 7). The racist history of standardized tests like the SAT are not new (Knoester & Au, 2017; Troy, 2022), but Warikoo theorized that the desire to shift definitions of success to other metrics at the time of her study was essentially representative of a culture of white supremacy that sought to maintain the dominance of whites over people of color.

Since the forces of imperialism have colonized the globe to promote the dominance of white Western identities and cultures since the inception of race as a social construct (Anderson, 2016; Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Kendi, 2017; McGhee, 2021; Okun, 2022; Oluo, 2020; Rodriguez, 2018; Smith, 2021; Wilkerson, 2020), this equitable system is difficult to imagine. Whatever that system is, it will require the positive white racial identity development this study explored, for as Eddo-Lodge (2017) noted:

> The perverse thing about our current racial structure is that it has always fallen on the shoulders of those at the bottom to change it. Yet racism is a white problem. It reveals the anxieties, hypocrisies and double standards of whiteness. It is a problem in the

> psyche of whiteness that white people must take responsibility to solve. You can only do so much from the outside. (p. 219)

Perhaps once enough white educators develop a positive sense of racial identity as envisioned by Helms (2020), public schools can move away from the oppressive structures that created the systems of inequity that still thrive today. Perhaps what will replace that inequitable system will be a promotion of collectivist culture, one in which students, staff, and families work together to promote the academic excellence of all students. When it comes to dispelling white supremacy culture in schools, this may be the end result, for learning to promote collectivism is a component of the *Autonomy* status for white individuals. It is certainly no coincidence that the vast majority of the world's collectivist countries are inhabited by people of color (Načinović Braje et al., 2019), countries that have suffered centuries of white colonization and imperialism yet whose citizens still live happy, productive lives in so many ways (Reyes-García et al, 2021; Suh & Oishi, 2002). Perhaps when enough of our white educator work force operates from an authentic *Autonomy* schema we will finally understand how to educate children to achieve and excel regardless of membership within particular demographic groups.

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Appendix A: Graduate Course Description & Objectives

Course Description

This 25-hour course is designed to introduce educators to the complex issues raised by race and racism and their impact on student learning and achievement. The course will encourage educators to recognize the link between self-awareness and professional development as a component of providing equity to all students.

Participants will explore the current personal, interpersonal, social, and structural meanings of race, ethnicity and culture, the cycle of oppression as well as the roles of power, oppression, and identity. Furthermore, participants will discuss how these issues affect classrooms and school systems, their impact on the academic achievement gap and how to develop and implement practical ideas to help narrow the gap. In addition, this course will also help increase the skills of cultural proficiency.

The course will meet for 25 hours and offers 2 graduate credits from [school name] as well as professional development points (PDPs).

Course Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Examine different situations and interactions through the lens of race, culture and class.
- Evaluate issues such as "colorblindness" and "treating all students the same.”
- Gain strategies for responding to "uncomfortable" moments when interacting with colleagues, students and parents from varied racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.
- Acknowledge the influence of white privilege and internalized oppression.
- Recognize the importance of racial/cultural identity development and learn ways to reduce racial, ethnic and other “identity” isolation.

- Recognize that race matters and that as individuals we live very different sociopolitical realities based on how we identify.
- Explain the implications of history, culture and oppression in the context of school engagement.
- Identify ways to be an ally to others and take action against racism in both professional and personal spheres of concern.
- Identify which of our everyday acts move specific students or student populations toward educational opportunity, and which move them further from it.

Appendix B: Recording Project

Overview

Please do this prior to reading the assigned chapters in *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* This can be any form of audio production: cell phone, computer file, tape, CD/DVD, flash drive, etc. This can also be done as a written response; however, many participants find it more meaningful to reflect on an audio or visual recording of their responses.

The purpose of this project is for you to do an initial assessment of your own ideas and attitudes about racism and ethnocentrism. In order to do this project you will need the attached interview guide and a device for recording.

Instructions

1. Answer each of the questions in the following interview guide as though someone else was interviewing you. Try to make your answers as complete as possible so that if someone else were listening, s/he would understand what you meant by your response
2. We appreciate you taking time to answer the many questions below. It is our belief that this will help you focus on some of the work we will be doing together in class.
3. Be sure to record all your answers.
4. Either turn in the tape, CD, labeled with your name, written responses or alert instructors when you arrive if you will be holding the recording on a personal device.
5. Although tapes, CDs or written responses are collected, you will be the only person to listen to or re-read it. Your confidentiality is assured. Feel free to be as candid in your responses as possible. The recordings will be returned to you near the end of the course. At that time you will be asked to reflect on your recording.

This exercise was developed by Beverly Daniel Tatum. The interview guide was adapted from an original source by David Wellman.

Interview Guide

Background

- Age
- Birthplace
- Current job

Early Experiences

- What was the racial and ethnic composition of:
    - Your neighborhood where you grew up
    - Your parents' co-workers or employees
    - Your grade or elementary school
    - Your Junior or Middle School
    - Your High School
    - Your College
    - The jobs that you have held
- When did you first realize there were different racial and ethnic groups in this country?
- Do you remember your first contact with a person of a racial or ethnic group other than your own?
- What kind of relationship was it? Think about:
    - The frequency of contact
    - How close the relationship was
    - How you got along together

    - What you discussed
    - What you did NOT discuss
- What were you taught about people from different racial or ethnic groups other than your own?

Current Experiences

- What is the racial/ethnic composition of:
    - Your neighborhood
    - Your network of friends
    - Your work/colleagues
- Do you actively seek out and nurture interethnic/interracial friendships? How do you do this?

Personal Beliefs and Understandings about Racism and Ethnocentrism

- How do you define the word “prejudice”?
- Are most of the people that you know prejudiced or unprejudiced? Give examples of why you think this.
- How do you define “culture”?
- Do you consider yourself as having a culture? If so, how does this interact with the culture of your:
    - Students
    - Friends
    - Coworkers
    - Workplace
- How do you define the word “racism”?

- What is the difference between racism and prejudice?
- How do you define the word “ethnocentrism”?
- What do you think is the distinction between institutional racism and individual racism?
- The U.S. Riot Commission Report (Kerner Commission) concluded that America is a racist society. Do you think that this is a fair statement? Why? Do you think you hold any racist beliefs?

Talking about Race and Diversity

- When was the last time you talked about race or diversity?
- When and where did that occur?
- What was the discussion about?
- What groups were talked about?
- What began the conversation?
- Who were you talking with?
- What did you say?
- How often do you talk about these issues?
- Do you have any fears concerning talking about issues of race or diversity?
- Do you actively seek out books, movies and other forms of entertainment that reflect racial and ethnic groups other than your own?

Personal Identity

- How do you identify ethnically?
- How do you identify racially?
- How do other people identify you? How does their identification affect you?
- Do you ever feel good or bad about not being born a different race/ethnicity?

- What does it mean to you to be a person from your racial or ethnic group?
- Is this a source of pride/strength for you?
- Do you think it has made any difference in your life?
- Do you think you have any advantages based on your race and/or ethnicity? If so, describe within:
    - Society
    - Your race/ethnic group
    - Between your and other race/ethnic groups
- Do you think you have any disadvantages based on your race and/or ethnicity? If so, describe within:
    - Society
    - Your race/ethnic group
    - Between your and other race/ethnic groups
- Do you feel "accepted" by your race/ethnic community?

Social Change

- Do you see yourself as an ally for people from other racial and ethnic groups?
- What actions have you ever taken to fight against racial and ethnic oppression for your own group?
- What actions have you ever taken to fight against racial and ethnic oppression for another group?
- What are some of the consequences (i.e. costs) of acting against racism?
    - With friends
    - Family

    - At work
    - School

- What concerns do you have about how you are impacted by racism in our society?
- How do you think your students are impacted by racism in our society?
- What do you think society would be like if power was shared or minorities were in power?

Academic Achievement

- Do you think racism impacts academic achievement? Please explain your answer.
- How would you define the academic achievement gap?
- What evidence would you use?
- What does this look like in your classroom/school?
- What strategies do you currently use to narrow the academic achievement gap?

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Promoting Positive White Racial Identity Development in K-12 Educators:

A Qualitative Case Study

Dear Course Participant,

I am currently in a PhD program at Lesley University where I am studying how to promote a more healthy white racial identity development in pursuit of antiracist goals. This is also a goal of the current course in which you are enrolled. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with me either personally or professionally.

Data will be collected at the completion of our class, after final grades have been submitted. Data will consist of three items: (1) the recording project assignment you complete prior to the start of our course, (2) your racial identity development paper submit at approximately the midpoint of our course, and (3) a semi-structured 30-45 minute interview after the course has ended.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before or after you decide whether to participate. Participation in research is voluntary. If you opt to participate, you have the right to refuse to be in this study, and you can drop out at any time. Whatever you decide you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your name, voice, or image will not be associated with the research findings in any way. Your name and other facts that might identify you will not appear when we present this study or

publish its results. If for some reason you do not wish to remain anonymous, you may specifically authorize the use of material that would identify you as a subject in the research.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study, although reflecting on the learning in our course and your lived experiences can sometimes promote challenging feelings. The expected benefits associated with your participation are to better inform your own racial identity development journey and those of your future colleagues who will complete professional development with improved curricular and pedagogical elements.

If you opt to participate, this signed consent form will be held by the Sunnydale Public School's [administrator role] in a secure location. I will have no knowledge of who chooses to participate until after our course has concluded. If at any time during our course, you may contact the [administrator role] to withdraw your consent, and I will have no knowledge that you had initially consented. As noted above, you can also withdraw after our course has concluded.

Please check the box below and sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

☐ I am 18 years of age or older. The nature and purpose of this research have been satisfactorily explained to me and I agree to become a participant in the study as described above. I understand that I am free to discontinue participation at any time if I so choose, and that the investigator will gladly answer any questions that arise during the course of the research.

_____	_____	_____	_____
NAME (Print)	PRONOUNS	SIGNATURE	DATE

Sincerely,

Johnny Cole

Doctoral Student at Lesley University

jcole14@lesley.edu

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu.

Appendix D: Interview Confirmation

Dear ____,

Thank you for consenting to being interviewed as part of my pilot study: "Promoting Positive White Racial Identity Development in K-12 Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study." As a reminder, any data collected for this pilot study will be kept strictly confidential and will only inform my dissertation in pursuit of my PhD degree, and you are welcome to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with me either personally or professionally. I hope that you will ask any questions you have along the way as well!

I am looking forward to our meeting on ___ at ___. I anticipate the interview will last approximately 30 minutes, and I would like to audio record the meeting to ensure accuracy of the data. The recording will not be shared with anyone, and any data that I use for my pilot study will be anonymous and unidentifiable. I will keep the recording for five years following the completion of my research, and then I will permanently delete the recording, along with all other artifacts you provide me.

During the interview, I will be asking you a series of questions about your racial identity journey. In preparation for our time together, I would like to ask you to complete a few tasks:

1. Please send me a copy of your recording project you completed prior to our course beginning.
2. Please bring the six-word phrase or sentence you wrote in our last class together based on Michelle Norris's The Race Card Project. If you no longer have your "race card," please create a new one.
3. It may be helpful to review the attached list of activities from our class prior to our meeting; however, this is not required.

Thank you again for your help with this research project!

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Opening Script

I am a graduate student at Lesley University pursuing a Ph.D. in Educational Studies. Thank you for signing the consent form and agreeing to this interview. Thank you as well for allowing me access and use of your assignments from our class for the purposes of this study. Through this study, I hope to understand how school leaders can better support the development of a positive racial identity in their white staff members and thereby work to develop an antiracist school community. I want to remind you that a benefit of participating in this study is to help other white educators become effective allies in fighting systemic oppression in schools. A potential challenge of participating in this interview is the difficult emotions and memories that may come up in response to the questions. I appreciate your honesty and all of your responses will remain strictly confidential; the information you share today will only be used for the purposes of this study, and I will work as hard as I can to prevent this conversation from impacting our professional or personal relationships outside of this study. We can stop the interview and/or you can withdraw from the study at any time, and it will not affect our relationship. I expect this to take approximately 30 minutes. I also want to remind you I will be recording this interview and saving it in a secure location for five years. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions

1. What three words describe your emotions as we begin this interview?
2. What is your age?
3. How long have you been an educator in public schools?
4. Where have you taught during those years? Please describe the student and staff populations in those schools.

5. Prior to taking this class, what were your professional development experiences focused on antiracism?
6. Please share your "race card." How do these six words describe your current thinking on your racial identity journey?
7. Were you familiar with racial identity development theory prior to our course? How did learning/revisiting those theories impact your self-awareness?
8. When you wrote your RID paper, you identified as primarily operating from the ___ schema in Janet Helms's model of white racial identity development. Do you still see yourself in that place? Why or why not?
9. In reviewing your recording project, do you believe your racial identity shifted during the course? Why or why not?
10. You identified _____ as salient experiences that promoted your current RID in your paper. Would you like to say anything more about those experiences?
11. Please take a look at the list of activities and readings we completed during the course. Was there anything on the list that stands out as having promoted your current RID status as ___?
12. Please share your thoughts on having explicit instruction on racial identity development theory as part of our class.
13. Are there specific experiences in your personal history that you can identify as having moved you from the first three schemas of Helms's model to the latter three? [Provide visual of Helms's model for reference.]

14. What do you think you need to do to move forward in your racial identity development, specifically the next schema of Helms's model? [Provide visual of Helms's model for reference.]
    a. If the individual identifies themselves as being in *Autonomy*: What do you think you need to do to maintain your *Autonomy* RID status?
15. How do people of color play into your thinking about your own racial identity?
16. How does it feel to discuss topics of race and racism with others?
    a. What is the race of the people you are describing?
    b. Is it harder/easier to speak with people of color about race and racism than white people? Explain.
    c. How does it feel discussing all of this with an administrator in your district? Do you feel you are able to be completely honest?
17. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Closing Statement

Thank you again. I want to remind you that I will keep everything you shared with me confidential and any information I incorporate into my dissertation will be anonymous. I will share a transcript of this interview with you soon so you can review it before I use it as data in my study. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions at any time.

Appendix F: RID Reflection Paper Instructions

Please listen to your recording project prior to writing your RID paper.

We are all works in progress, developing a solid racial/cultural identity. Using the readings and class discussions to support your reflections, please answer the following questions.

Intrapersonal Reflections

Frequently, people have certain life experiences that have shaped their racial identities. Identify 1 or 2 of these experiences and explain how they have shaped your understanding of racial identity.

Interpersonal Reflections

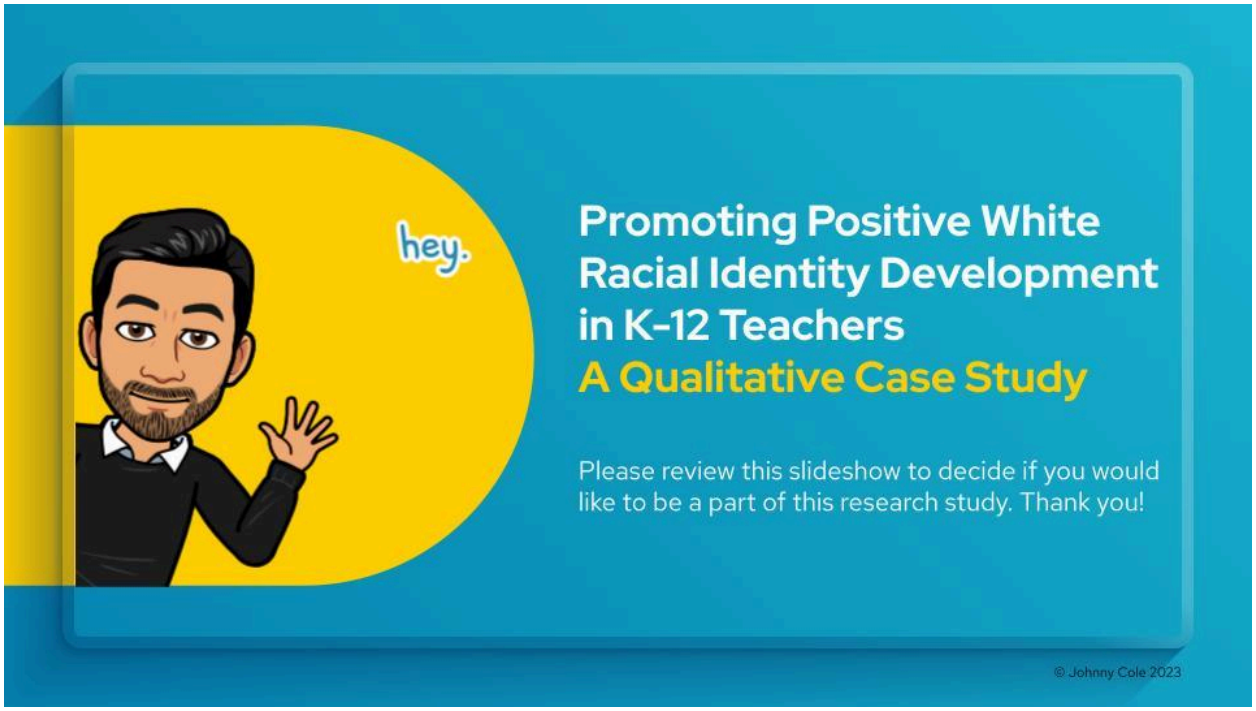
How does where you see yourself in your process of RID development (considering your current status/stage) influence your interactions with other members of your race, and with members of other races?

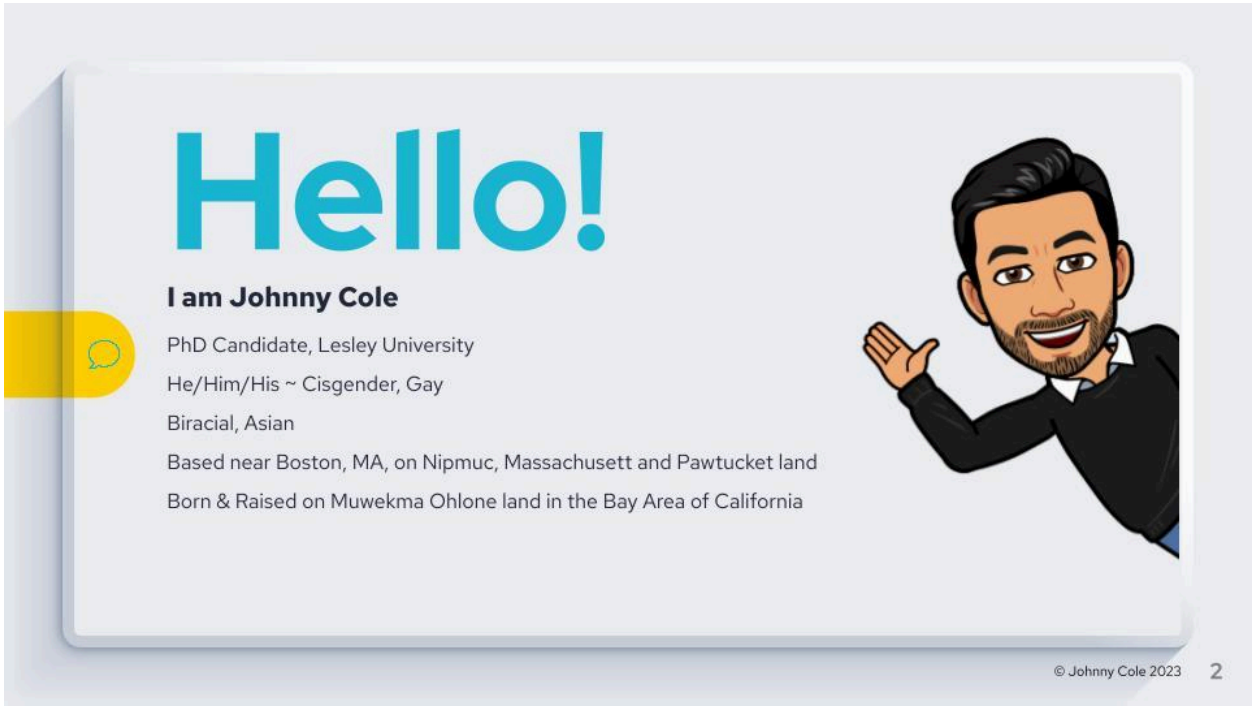
Reflections on your role as an educator

How does racial identity development impact academic achievement? As educators, how can we be intentional in our practice to help foster a positive sense of identity and encourage students to see themselves as learners?

Appendix G: Participation Recruitment Slideshow

The following slides were redacted for confidentiality.





My Doctoral Research

The goal of my research is in line with our course.

- Promoting a healthy white racial identity development in pursuit of antiracist goals

The information in this slideshow is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study.

 3

No Impact

You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at *any time* without affecting your relationship with me personally or professionally!

What about our class?

Participants will provide signed consent forms to a third party, Sunnydale Public Schools administrator _____ who will keep the information secure and confidential until after our course has ended.

[This third party] regularly holds and maintains confidential staff information for Sunnydale Public Schools.

I will not have any knowledge of who consented to participate until after the course is complete; similarly, if you decide to withdraw prior to the end of our course, I will not know that you had previously submitted consent. (You are of course welcome to withdraw even after I learn of your participation.)

 5

Data Collection

These are the items that will be used for the research study *after* our class has concluded.

Recording Project*

You will complete this assignment before our first session. Typically, you do not share it with instructors.

RID Paper*

You will write this paper and submit it to the instructors about midway through our time together.

1:1 Interview

We will sit down for an approximately 30-minute interview after the class has ended.

**These assignments will be completed for our class whether you participate in the study or not.*

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Confidentiality
Your name, voice, or image will not be associated with the research findings in any way.
Your participation will not be shared with anyone in Sunnydale Public Schools or beyond.
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Risks
There are no known risks associated with this study, although reflecting the learning in our course and your lived experiences can sometimes promote challenging feelings.
Benefits
Your participation will better inform your own racial identity development journey and those of your future colleagues who will complete professional development with improved curricular and pedagogical elements.
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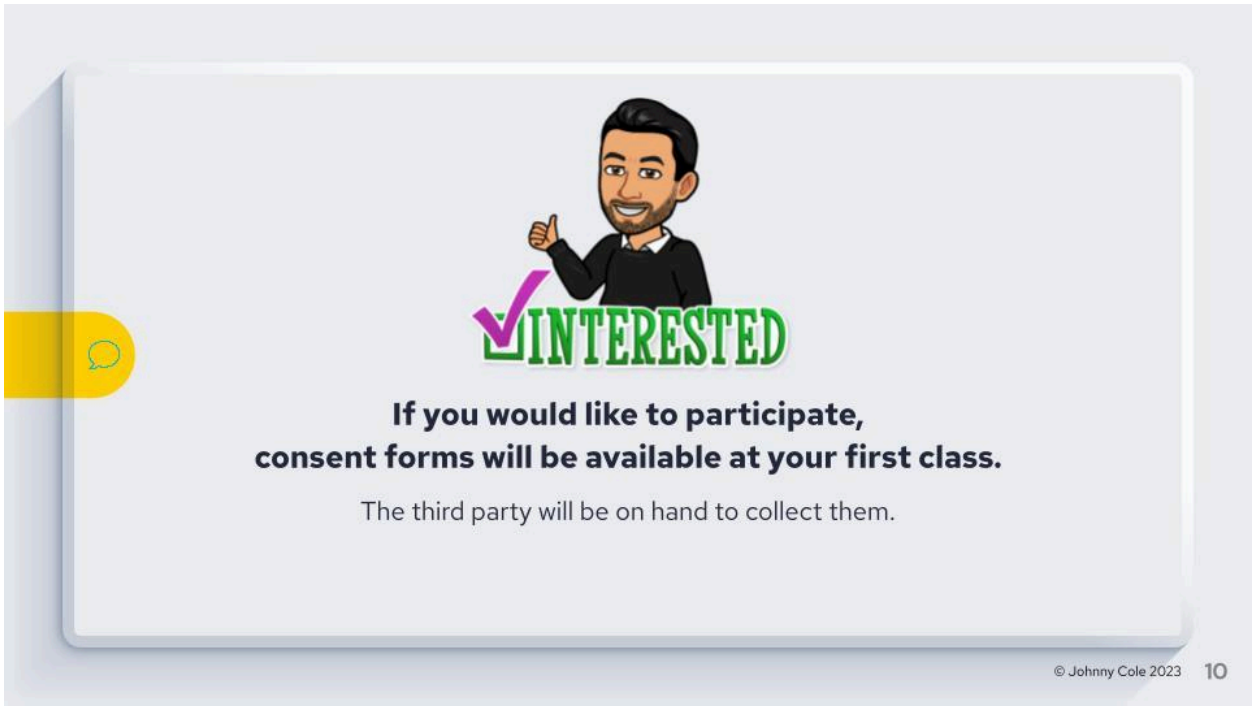
INTERESTED
If you would like to participate,
consent forms will be available at your first class.
The third party will be on hand to collect them.
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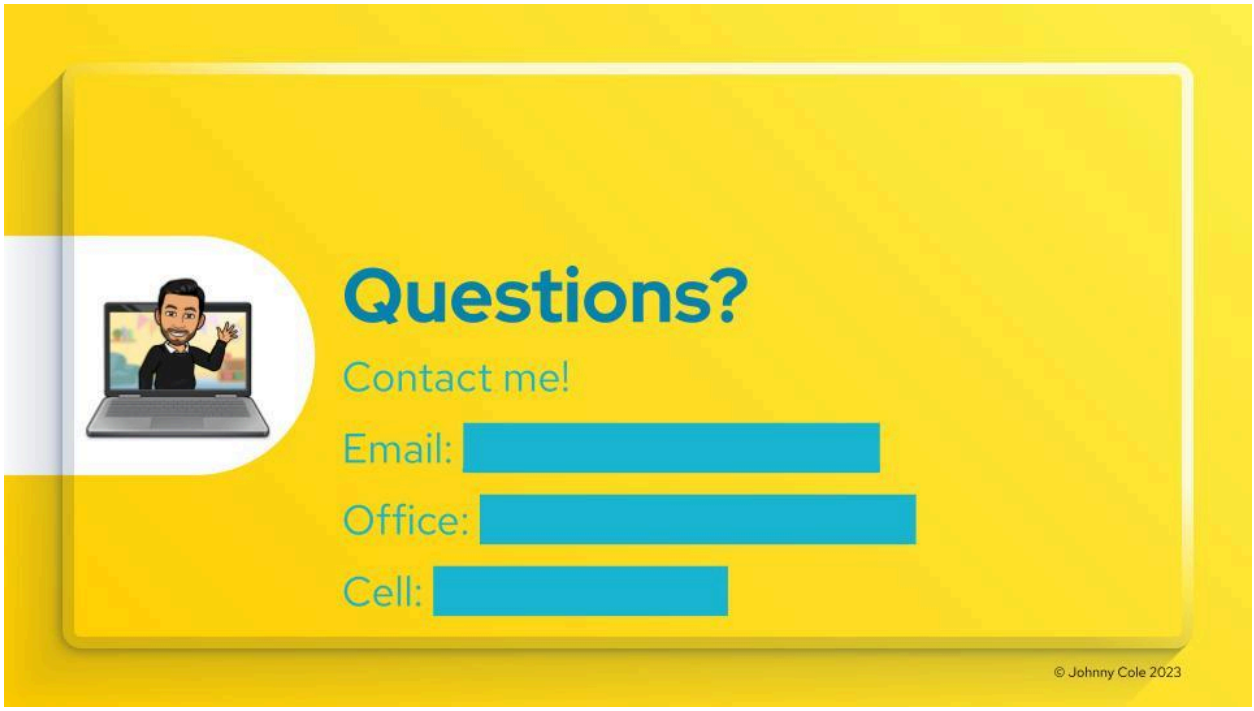
Questions?
Contact me!
Email:
Office:
Cell:
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Appendix H: Institutional Review Board Approval

29 Everett Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
Tel 617 349 8234
Fax 617 349 8190
irb@lesley.edu

Institutional Review Board

DATE: 10.11.2023

To: Johnny Cole

From: Ulas Kaplan & Jason Frydman, Co-Chairs, IRB

RE: **IRB Number: 23/24-06**

The application for the research project, "Promoting Positive White Racial Identity Development in K-12 Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study" provides a detailed description of the recruitment of participants, the method of the proposed research, the protection of participants' identities and the confidentiality of the data collected. The consent form is sufficient to ensure voluntary participation in the study and contains the appropriate contact information for the researcher and the IRB.

This application is approved for one calendar year from the date of approval.

You may conduct this project.

Date of approval of application: 10.11.2023

Investigators shall immediately suspend an inquiry if they observe an adverse change in the health or behavior of a subject that may be attributable to the research. They shall promptly report the circumstances to the IRB. They shall not resume the use of human subjects without the approval of the IRB.