HOW WHITE ADULT EDUCATORS CHALLENGE RACISM

by

KAREN ELAINE MANGLITZ

(Under the direction of Ronald M.Cervero, Ph.D.)

The purpose of this study was to understand how White antiracist adult educators challenge racism. This was accomplished by examining the experiences of both People of Color and White antiracist adult educators. The research questions guiding this study were: 1) What understandings of racism and white privilege do the adult educators bring to their work; 2) How do their understandings of racism and white privilege guide them to take action to challenge racism?

Data for this study were collected over a five month period by using interviews, documents, and participant observations. The twelve participants belonged to one of five different antiracist educational organizations. At least two participants, one White and one person of color were interviewed from each organization. Data analysis was completed using the constant comparative method. Data were analyzed separately for the Whites and People of Color in the study followed by a comparison of the commonalities between the two groups to explore the impact of their positionality.

Analysis of the data from the White adult educators revealed the following understandings of racism and white privilege: 1) racism as institutional and systemic; 2) importance of historical perspective; 3) colorblindness as a rhetoric of denial; and

4) an analysis of white privilege that included whiteness revealed first through difference, development of antiracist identity over time, "always undoing racism," and awareness of the contradictions related to being White and working to challenge racism. Their understandings guided their actions to challenge racism by helping them to maintain commitment, helping them to understand their own and others' behavior, and prompting them to use particular educational approaches.

Analysis of the data related to the People of Color revealed the following understandings of racism and white privilege: 1) racism as institutional and systemic; 2) recognition of the power embodied in the system of racism; 3) importance of historical perspective; and 4) an analysis of white privilege that included an understanding of the attributes of whiteness, the ability to interpret the impact of white privilege, and an understanding of the significance of emotions and pain for Whites who are challenging their own racism. Their understandings guided their actions by helping them to maintain commitment, to attain clarity about the system of racism, and to develop and maintain mutual respect and accountability.

Four major conclusions were drawn from the findings of this study. First, the system of racism continues to impact our society and the lives of everyone, albeit in different ways and with different ramifications. Second, there are White adult educators who are struggling with their own white privilege and racism in their continuing efforts to challenge racism. Third, the positionality of White adult educators both enables and constrains their ability to challenge racism. Finally, the findings emphasize the

significance of commitment, hope, and the educational process for challenging the system of racism that significantly impacts us all.

INDEX WORDS: Adult Education, Racism, White Privilege, Whiteness, Antiracism, Positionality

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by

KAREN ELAINE MANGLITZ

B.A., West Georgia College, 1980

M.Ed., Georgia State University, 1984

Ed.S., The University of Georgia, 1998

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for this Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2002

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KAREN ELAINE MANGLITZ

Approved:

| | |
|---|---|
| Major Professor: | Ronald M. Cervero |
| Committee: | Juanita Johnson-Bailey<br>Laura Bierema<br>Talmadge Guy<br>Robert Hill<br>Penelope Oldfather |

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December 2002

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people helped to make this dissertation possible, and I am deeply grateful to them all. First, Dr. Ron Cervero, my major professor, succeeded in making the entire process one that was challenging yet humane, and his insightful and intelligent comments added greatly to the realization of the final document. I consider him a mentor, a friend, and a consummate professional. I also thank Dr. Juanita Johnson-Bailey for her steady guidance both in terms of the methodological process and the process of completing a dissertation. Her sense of humor and wisdom definitely helped me to stay the course, and I am grateful. Thanks goes also to the other members of my committee, Dr. Laura Bierema, Dr. Talmadge Guy, Dr. Robert Hill, and Dr. Penelope Oldfather, whose comments and input especially during the dissertation defense have helped to make this a better document.

There are many others who helped sustain me through this process and who contributed to the ideas in this document. First, I would like to thank Dr. Linda Logan, my sounding board and cheerleader during these years. What a bonus to have found a dissertation partner and a friend! Also, I greatly appreciate the support of Dr. Joan Burke, Lisa Merriweather-Hunn, Dr. Scarlette Spears-Studdard, Dr. Cassandra Drennon, and Dr. Margaret Holt during the years I was navigating my way through the Adult Education program. They all helped to make this a wonderful learning experience!

I would like to publicly thank my participants who so willingly shared their lives, their joys, and their disappointments with me. I know they will always serve as an inspiration to me and remind me of how much we really can accomplish when we are committed, thoughtful, and compassionate. I can honestly say my life is better for having known them, and I truly believe that, indeed, our lives in this country are better for the work they do everyday.

Finally, I am truly grateful to my partner, Dr. Margo Habiger and my children, now outstanding young adults, Kara Manglitz Forbis and Justin Manglitz, for their unending belief in me and the many sacrifices they made to assist me in this process. Words really cannot express the gratitude and love I feel for them, and I thank them all for being with me on this journey. Without their presence, support, and words of encouragement this dissertation would not have been possible.

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

> "The task of counter-hegemonic groups is the development of counter-institutions, ideologies, and cultures that provide an ethical alternative to the dominant hegemony, a lived experience of how the world can be different. The entry point in terms of individual consciousness is the disjuncture between received versions of reality and lived contradictions" (Lather, 1984, 55-56).

Racism and its effects continue to forcefully impact American society. Efforts to combat racism have almost always addressed the issue and problems from the perspective of the groups affected by discriminatory policies and practices. However, during the last decade of the twentieth century, there was an increasing interest within several disciplines in foregrounding, interrogating, and rearticulating "whiteness." Within the disciplines of sociology, speech communication, cultural studies, critical race theory, and education, discourses have emerged to look at racism not from the perspective of the "other" but from the perspective of whiteness and white privilege. There have been strident calls for an analysis of whiteness as a racialized category and for an examination of how whiteness has (mis)shaped knowledge production in American culture (Keating, 1995).

This research has its beginning in the researcher's biography. The first major disjuncture between received versions of reality and lived contradictions that occurred for me in relation to growing up White in the South was as an adolescent. When I ventured to break a taboo against interracial dating in the early 1970s, I learned quickly and forcefully that the admonitions and words behind "treat everyone as equal" and "we are all humans first" were hollow indeed  at least in the context where I was living. The young, Black male and I were stopped by the local police on the pretense of a traffic violation and taken

to the city police station. Our parents were called to come to the police station and pick us up. I saw the ease with which some (most) Whites imagined things that never happened and indeed fabricated their own version of what did happen. The fictions created around a racial incident were easily believed by those who saw what they wanted to see and had the power to proclaim them as true. My innocence, naiveté, and idealism were shattered, and my eyes were opened wide to the truth behind the hollow words. Amazingly, I also found out at a young age that there are other White people who will stand behind those who commit what was described as an appalling, resistant action, a fact that helped me to sustain hope throughout the years. Since my adolescence, I have read, seen, and observed many situations that point to the power and evasiveness of whiteness and white privilege; however, the strength of my convictions to interrogate and rearticulate whiteness is tied to that time now thirty years ago. It was a true entry point into the contradictions between received and lived versions of reality.

## Background of the Study

Although the interest in examining whiteness as a social construction has gained ground within the last decade, authors and researchers have addressed the subject of whiteness before and indeed provide an abundant legacy of material and ideas to anchor the current efforts. Dyson, in an interview with Chennault (1998), asserts that we also must recognize that the current studies of whiteness and the groundbreaking writings by White scholars are building on the often unacknowledged tradition of Black critical reflection about the ways and meanings of whiteness, including the works of W. E. B. Du Bois (1903), James Baldwin (1963), and Zora Neale Hurston (1934), among others. In the 1970s, Robert Terry (1970) and David Wellman (1977) introduced the idea of White identity, both exploring what it meant to be White and connecting White identity with social interests, racial attitudes, and racism, while Katz (1978) introduced her work on White awareness and antiracist training. These works were followed in the 1980s by Bowser and Hunt (1981), Helms (1984), Jones (1981), and others who addressed issues

such as the motivations and effects of racism, the development of White racial identity theory, and the naming of racism as a function of institutionalized patterns of White power and social control (Bowser & Hunt, 1981). The writings and research of these and other authors provide a backdrop to the more recent investigations into the meanings of whiteness.

Although whiteness is conceptualized as socially constructed, its invisibility has profound effects on those defined as "others" by the dominant culture. It has primarily been the other marked subjects rather than White/Western unmarked subjects whose racial and cultural identities have been studied; studies of members of the dominant race bracket the issues of race and culture and presume the implied neutrality of subjects (Frankenberg, 1997). Whiteness itself has been constructed through social comparisons to those seen as less fortunate or inferior; whiteness has not been conceived as "the problem" in the eyes of White people, in research, educational settings, or elsewhere. It has made itself invisible by asserting its normalcy and transparency in contrast to the marking of "others" on which its transparency depends (Frankenberg, 1997). In addition, the power that whiteness holds for its beneficiaries has rarely been evident or explicitly acknowledged and documented (Harris, 1993). Whiteness and its denial of difference serve a function in masking social and economic inequalities in contemporary Western culture (Keating, 1995). In operating as a universality or the norm, the benefits of whiteness are de-emphasized as a function of a dominant group and the process of how members obtain power by group membership are mystified.

Several authors have asserted the impossibility of continuing to assume a normalized whiteness that is invisible and monolithic, due in part to the political and social milieu surrounding the racial conflicts of the post-Civil Rights era. Winant (1997) suggests that although the battles of the 1960s have not been won or lost, the demand for substantive racial equality still exists and while it does, white privilege and white supremacy are in doubt. Gallagher (1995) has analyzed the process of white

reconstruction taking place on college campuses and posits whiteness as no longer invisible or transparent but rather embattled and in crisis. Dyson, in Chennault (1998), asserts that what we have witnessed over the last decade is a crisis in the myth of whiteness; it has been exposed as a visible and specific identity not something that is invisible and universal. In a sense, whiteness has been "outed" and has to contend with its own history and meanings. As Winant (1994) explains, whiteness has gained a new saliency.

The interest in foregrounding whiteness occurs at a time when there has also been a proliferation in neoconservative racial projects in the United States (Omi & Winant, 1994) that seek to preserve White advantages through the denial of racial differences, the rhetoric of colorblindness, and the myth of social equality and opportunity. The rejection of affirmative action programs and the appeal to educational or literary standards subtly represents race in apparently egalitarian and democratic terms while also acting as a defense of the racial status quo (Fine, 1997). In general there appears to be a refusal among many to see institutional and systematic connections between white privilege, power, and success, with those who promote the colorblind viewpoint preferring instead to see achievement as totally meritorious and tied to individual achievement. Some of these reactions are influenced by the changing demographics in the United States, the changing economic and industrial conditions during the last few decades, and the declining real wealth for all but the most elite and richest Americans (Bowser & Hunt, 1996; McLaren, 1997).

The recognition of all racial categories as socially constructed and the naming and marking of whiteness have generated investigations into the examination of whiteness as a social construction and as conflated with power and privilege. Historical perspectives and analyses of whiteness have investigated how the concept of who is "White" has changed over time and the historical and social reasons for those changes. Understanding not just what whiteness is but how and why it has been created, maintained, and

transformed over time can provide perspectives on how history has shaped our current worldview and discourse in relation to racism, power, and unequal relationships (Good, 2000; Rodriguez, 1998). Current perspectives on whiteness as a racial marker emphasize the importance of examining whiteness within the contexts of power, privilege, and oppression and the impact whiteness has on institutional and societal structures and human relations. In addition, a compelling impetus to rearticulate whiteness as a productive, progressive, and antiracist identity has emerged from some of the authors and researchers engaged in deconstructing whiteness. Rodriguez (2000) calls for a critical pedagogy to link multicultural education, the examination of whiteness and power relations, and the creation of progressive racial identities as part of a broader democratic project to challenge social inequality and injustice.

## Educational Responses

Within the field of education, there have been attempts to address White identity and its concomitant privilege. Several multicultural educators have begun to look at the impact that white privilege has on the curriculum, practices, and interactions within schools and have called for a critical pedagogy of whiteness as part of a critical multiculturalism that would examine the instability of all identities, as well as the interplays of history, culture, power, and ideology that have specified difference (McLaren, 1995; Rodriguez, 1998; Scheurich, 1993; Sleeter, 1995). Antiracist education, beginning to surface more in the United States within critical multiculturalism, also critiques the construct of whiteness, especially the practices and ideas that establish and promote white hegemony over others. Antiracist education supports explorations of race, class, and gender as sources of socially constructed differences and as sites of power relations, calling for an understanding of how these processes are produced, reproduced, and contested in the everyday practices of schools (Dei, 1996a).

In the field of adult education, there has recently been an interest in looking at issues related to educational opportunities, classroom interactions, and expectations for

different groups juxtaposed against the norm of whiteness. Colin and Preciphs (1991) outlined the impacts of racism on the development of practitioners' perceptual patterns and showed how these patterns are reflected in adult education practice and the teaching-learning process. They further asserted that many adult educators are unaware of the extent to which theories and research reinforce White racist attitudes and assumptions about nonwhite learners, thus sustaining the perpetuation of inequities (Colin & Preciphs, 1991). Their statement that "almost nowhere in adult education literature and research is racism recognized as an integral and influential part of American life that requires our immediate attention" (Colin & Preciphs, 1991, p. 62) remains a powerful indictment and wake-up call to action. More recently, explorations have been made into the interlocking systems of privilege and oppression in adult education classes (Tisdell, 1993), the development of a consciousness of white privilege and its effects (Barlas, 1997; Barlas et al., 2000), practices related to adult community education that elide and disguise whiteness and its effects (Shore, 1997, 2000, 2001), and the power dynamics in teaching and learning practices that underscore how societal power relations affect classroom efforts (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998). Finally, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2000) have recently examined the historical and contemporary understandings of race in adult education and offer perspectives on race that inform current action in the field of adult education. They issue a call for adult educators to "name the racial barriers that cause some learners to be over-privileged and others to be under-privileged" (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000, p. 155) and to understand how the power relationships of society impact our lives in education. One of those barriers is whiteness and the power and privilege that comes with it; making hierarchies visible will not make the problem less complex but will hopefully make it possible to identify, name, discuss, and affect change in educational endeavors and society.

Embedded within much of the recent scholarship in adult education that examines the role of privilege and power and its impact on educational environments is the concept

of positionality (Brown, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2000; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Tisdell, 1993, 1998, 2001). Positionality recognizes that the social positions of the teacher and learner in relation to race, gender, culture, class, sexual orientation and other dimensions of societal privilege and oppression significantly impact the learning environment and learning opportunities (Maher & Tetrault, 1997, 2000). The practice of taking the position of the adult educator and the adult learner into account when discussing educational settings and institutions and broader societal interactions can illuminate how where we are influences how and what we know. The recognition, marking, and examination of whiteness as a racialized social position will also significantly illuminate ways that the norm of white privilege impacts the tenets and practice of adult education.

Adult education has a long and varied history related to social change and social justice (Cervero, Wilson, & Associates, 2001; Cunningham, 1988; Hart, 1990) and is also a diverse field that encompasses many areas of practice. A brief review of the most recent *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (Wilson & Hayes, 2000) reveals areas of practice that include, among others, adult literacy, human resource development, community development, professional education, correctional education, cooperative extension, distance education, higher education, and religious education. All of the fields in adult education exist within the structural power relations based on white privilege that exists in our country. As evidenced by the studies cited above, adult education is beginning to address inequities related to racism from the perspective of white privilege and not just from the perspective of the "other," which often means positing a view of the "other" that positions them as inferior, at-risk, or somehow deficient. In addition, there are an increasing number of activist groups and organizations within the U.S. that are examining white privilege and racism in order to explicitly take an antiracist stance.

## The Research Problem

Racism continues to be pervasive in American society and significantly affects the opportunities and quality of life of individuals and groups. Before the 1990s, theorists and researchers had rarely interrogated whiteness, implied but concealed in the concept of "race" (Hurtado & Stewart, 1997). For the most part, whiteness has been seen as the norm or background against which others are viewed and judged. However, during the last decade, disciplines within the social sciences, including education, began to consider White as a racialized identity with its own history and ramifications. The new scholarship on whiteness focuses on the project of unveiling the political, cultural, and social mechanisms through which whiteness is invented and used to mask its power and privilege (Giroux, 1997).

Researchers in adult education have also begun to examine how whiteness and its resultant power and privilege undergird and perpetuate systems of domination and opportunities within adult education practices (Barlas, 1997; Colin & Preciphs, 1991; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000; Shore, 1997, 2000). By examining how the invisibility/ norm of whiteness has influenced adult education curriculum, access, interactions, and structural relations of power, we can understand how whiteness still impacts in powerful ways to advantage those who have it and disadvantage those who do not. To date, the classroom and curriculum practices, underlying theories, and their connections to white privilege have been examined within the field of adult education (Colin & Preciphs, 1991; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000; Shore, 1997; 2000). In addition, researchers have begun to scrutinize the social positions of adult educators and adult learners as influences on the educational settings in which they practice and learn (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Tisdell, 1993, 1998, 2001).

What is missing at this point within the field of adult education relative to an examination of white privilege and racism that will allow us to move toward a more equitable practice? If whiteness and the privilege and power that accompanies it is one of

the barriers that cause some learners to be over-privileged and others to be under-privileged, understanding how one goes about in practice to challenge the institutionalized racism shored up by white privilege and power is one vital way we can move forward to uncover the insidious aspects of whiteness and develop strategic ways to address it. We need to take seriously the admonition of adult educators to consider the social position of adult educators as an aspect of practice and how their positions interact with the embedded norms and racist practices with which they come into direct contact. If we accept an explanation of racism as a system of oppression inseparable from the social and institutional power used to maintain it, we clearly see the need to examine what White educators can and need to do to challenge and transform that system. If fact, we would be remiss if we do not examine racism from the perspectives of members of the group who continue to benefit from its existence. White adult educators who on some level have recognized their own white privilege and the societal and cultural power bases that support it can inform us on how to operationalize many of the suggestions made by adult educators (Colin & Preciphs, 1991; Hayes & Colin, 1994; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000; Shore, 1997; 2000). It would also "broaden our vision of what is possible" (Wilson & Cervero, 2001, p. 282) in adult education as we seek to develop practical ways to respond to inequities in a responsible manner (Wilson & Cervero, 2001). This study sought to expand the field of adult education research and practice by examining how White adult educators who recognize their own position as privileged and imbued with power work to consciously challenge and transform the institutional structures and practices with which they come into contact. They can also help us to understand how to rearticulate a more progressive White identity that takes into account the assumptions and norms of whiteness and how these are reflected in educational practices. An exploration of the issues with which the White adult educators struggle and the strategies they use to confront and challenge the difficulties arising within their attempts at praxis will further the debilitation of racism. In addition, People of Color who work within the same

educational organizations alongside the White adult educators will be able to provide another valuable perspective on the efforts to challenge racism by elucidating how social positioning within the system impacts those efforts. An examination of many perspectives gives a more complete picture on how we can challenge the inequities that currently exist and develop more effective ways to challenge racism, but most importantly for this study allows us to explore how those who are positioned as White adult educators can step up and take action against racism.

The purpose of this study was to understand how White antiracist adult educators challenge racism. This was accomplished by examining the experiences of both People of Color and White antiracist adult educators. The research questions guiding this study were: 1) What understandings of racism and white privilege do the adult educators bring to their work; 2) How do their understandings of racism and white privilege guide them to take action to challenge racism?

## Significance of the Study

This study has the potential for both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of adult education. The study highlights the relationship between whiteness, white privilege, power relationships, and responses to those subjects by practitioners who are currently struggling within an institutional context with issues of racism. In doing so, it is able to add to an understanding of the relationship between theory and praxis as worked out in various lived contexts. The study will also expand the concept of whiteness and its concomitant and complex relationship to racial hierarchies, furthering the quest for a more egalitarian society. By examining the process of rearticulating whiteness that occurs alongside deconstructing it, the study will allow for a critical analysis of the social, historical, political, and economic contexts within which whiteness operates and push us to further analyze its role in maintaining the status quo. Raising questions about whiteness and white privilege may further the recognition that all races are socially constructed yet have powerful and real effects on people.

The study has practical implications as well. It provides examples of White adult educators who are simultaneously struggling with issues related to race, fairness, and social justice within their institutional contexts and challenging themselves to rearticulate and reconstruct whiteness. Other adult educators, trainers, and community workers are able to consider what they can do with their privilege in light of the broader project of expanding democratic possibilities (Rodriguez, 2000). In addition, the explication of the subtle ways that the manifestations of white privilege enters into our classrooms, our institutions, and our workplaces provides a mirror for adult educators to hold up to their own practice. Such information is especially valuable as our country becomes more and more diverse.

## Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions will be used:

White a social, political, and historical category of racialized identity; individuals who have been assimilated and acculturated into White Anglo-Saxon culture as it exists in the United States (Helms, 1992).

Whiteness A socially constructed racial category that has typically been shaped as invisible and the norm, leading to concomitant effects on "others" to whom it is socially compared and on whom its transparency depends (Frankenberg, 1997); the constellation of social effects and processes through which Whites acquire and deploy dominance (Levine-Rasky, 2002).

White privilege The resulting benefits that accrue to those who have been constructed as possessing "whiteness" or who are seen as White.

Prejudice - An attitude based on limited information, often on stereotypes. Prejudice is usually negative and when directed toward oppressed people is damaging as it denies the individuality of the person and often results in differential treatment.

Racism Prejudice plus social and institutional power; individual, cultural, and institutional practices and beliefs that function to defend a system from which advantage is derived on the basis of race; a defense of racial privilege (Wellman, 1993).

Antiracism interrogates how human difference is named and racialized identities are produced and enacted within relationships of power.

# CHAPTER 2

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review the relevant literature related to whiteness, including historical perspectives on whiteness, current theoretical perspectives and orientations on whiteness, and the broader education and adult education literature on whiteness, racism, and its effects. In addition, within the sections under educational responses it addresses how the positionality of the educator or researcher impacts the educational or research setting. The chapter begins by outlining three assumptions that guide the approach to the literature review as well as the exposition of the study. From that point, the chapter is divided into three major topical sections.

The first section addresses the historical perspectives on whiteness and racism, including a look at how and why the social construction of whiteness has changed over time within the larger context of racialized identities; this section makes a case for the instability of racial categories yet the staying power of whiteness. Tracing the history of the varied meanings of whiteness over time further destabilizes the construct of whiteness and explicates whiteness as an ideology with material consequences for those not seen as White.

The second major section presents a synthesis of the current research and writings on whiteness from varied theoretical perspectives and disciplines, including sociology, critical race theory, history, cultural studies, and critical White studies. It also addresses the different ways whiteness is being conceptualized in these disciplines and offers suggestions for how to move forward to address racism and rearticulate what being White means. These discussions are important for the framing of this study.

The third major section examines the literature in education, and more specifically in adult education, related to views on racism and the work being done on whiteness and white privilege. Overall, the chapter demonstrates the many ways whiteness and white privilege are enacted within the context of power and work to privilege those who have it and negatively impact those who do not. It shows the impact of whiteness on educational practices, the instability of whiteness and other racial categories, and provides the impetus for this study that examines how White adult educators challenge racism in their practice within the context of whiteness, power, and institutionalized racism.

## Assumptions Framing Literature Review and Study

I will clarify three assumptions before beginning the major sections of the literature review in order to provide a clearer context of my approach to this topic. First, although the literature review and study primarily looks at whiteness, it is important not to negate other signifiers, including class, gender, sexual orientation, disability or other social markers that affect people's lives. Most theorists and researchers are cognizant of how whiteness interacts in different ways with gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, as well as other races (Black, Native American, Latino(a), Asian) (Andersen & Collins, 1998; Frankenberg, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1994); however, these analyses have not yet been addressed in systematic ways within the research on whiteness and white privilege. This review and study assumes the ever-present concept of interlocking oppression and interlocking privilege (Andersen & Collins, 1998), but focuses primarily on exposing the effects of whiteness. Where appropriate, reference is made to aspects of interlocking oppression and privilege and how where one is situated within the field of whiteness impacts one's life differentially. It is also assumed that all racial categories are constructed relationally and indeed rely on each other for their existence (Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Omi & Winant, 1994). In addition, most of the material in the review and study focuses on whiteness as it targets and exploits Blacks and is viewed within the Black-White binary that is so entrenched in this country. Several researchers have

suggested that an explication of how whiteness and white privilege affect Blacks and the need for transformative strategies for thinking about whiteness can be used to analyze and affect the relationships between White Americans and other peoples of color (Feagin & Vera, 1995; Wellman, 1993).

The second assumption underpinning this study addresses the fact that although evidence will be presented that describes race as a social, political, and historical construction, it does have real effects in the world (Giroux, 1997). It is vital to see all categories of race as fluid, socially constructed, being made and unmade, contested, and capable of being transformed. Although racial categories are viewed as socially constructed and linked to relations of power rather than inherently meaningful categories, this does not diminish or downplay the fact that constructions and discourses about race have real effects in the world and impact individual's and groups' experiences and life chances (Frankenberg, 1997). It is actually in seeing reality as social and political rather than static and given that offers hope for the future.

The third assumption underlying the literature review and study relates to my belief that there is a relationship between educational theories, policies, and practices and the larger society and that it is still possible to challenge and transform relations of power in education and society (Apple, 2000). In addition, I agree with Apple (2000) who asserts the importance of attaching our criticisms to social problems and social movements and with Freire's admonition to "prefer knowledge that is forged and produced in the tension between practice and theory" (Freire, 1996, p. 85). In my study I searched for ways to understand how an analysis of the relationships between the constructions of whiteness and the realities of racism can lead to better ways to resist and transform racism and racial formations (Cuomo & Hall, 1999).

## Historical Perspectives on Race and Whiteness

The following section presents a summary of the historical perspectives on race, whiteness, and racism, introduces briefly the emergence of racial classifications and the changes

in these classifications over time, and provides information on different theories and ways to view race and whiteness. Most importantly, the section examines the knowledge behind the belief in the social construction of all races, including the racialized category of whiteness, and makes the connection between whiteness, white privilege, and racism vital for establishing the framework for this study. The historical and social consequences of racism and the ways it meets the needs of those Whites in power are addressed. The emergence of literature in the 1970s and 1980s that began to speak directly to white racism and racial identity is also examined and critiqued. (Bowser & Hunt, 1981; Helms, 1984; Katz, 1978; Terry, 1970; Wellman, 1977).

The section on historical perspectives provides a broad scaffold for the remainder of the literature review by introducing the concepts and ideas developed further in the section on the analysis of current trends and perspectives. We are able to follow the thread of the themes introduced here throughout a discussion of contemporary trends in the social sciences, education, and adult education, thus providing a strong foundation for this study.

## Racial Classification and Racial Theories

Racial classification and racial theories have their roots in the naturalistic sciences of the 18th and 19th centuries (Frankenberg, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1994; Wander, Martin, & Nakayama, 1999). Scientific studies classified humans in a similar manner as they did plants and animals, from less developed to more developed and complex, with the assumption of a natural and intrinsic hierarchy (Wander et al, 1999). The scholarship occurred during a time of global expansion by European countries and westward expansion in the United States. Although the racial classifications and categories developed and changed during these centuries, the racial categories and the research done to support the categories were used politically, socially, and strategically to justify the subjugation of people, to rationalize expansion and genocide, and to justify the practice of slavery (Omi & Winant, 1994; Wander et al, 1999; Webster, 1992). Biological explanations for the superiority of the White race and the inferiority of other races

abounded during this time, shored up by the connection between science, religion, and the quest for expansion and colonization.

As several authors assert, racial prejudice is not just a flaw in the White American character but intrinsic to the normative order of American society (Bowser & Hunt, 1981; Levin, 1975). The pernicious aspects of racism can be seen in policies of manifest destiny, Westward European expansion and imperialism, American colonialism, and of course, in the practice and legalization of slavery. As Lipsitz (1995) notes, whiteness emerged in American life largely because of the realities created by slavery and segregation, by Indian policy and immigration restriction, and by conquest and colonialism. Allen (1994) has also detailed how the need for a cheap source of labor in the American colonies eventually led to the social construction of a "White race," one in which racial privileges were intentionally provided for propertyless White workers to encourage alliances with the White elite rather than the enslaved individuals. An identity of "whiteness" appeared in law as an abstraction (Harris, 1993) and became actualized in people's everyday lives in concrete ways related to economic, political, and cultural practices. Lipsitz (1995) further chronicles how the early European settlers in North America established structures that encouraged the possessive investment in whiteness. The colonists and early national legal systems authorized attacks on American Indians and appropriated their lands, legitimated slavery, restricted naturalized citizenship to "White" immigrants, and provided justifications for exploiting the labor of Asian Americans and Mexican Americans, among others (Lipsitz, 1995). In order to justify their actions yet still cling to the American ideals of freedom and equality, the American elite developed ways to rationalize the treatment of others.

The system of racism has affected Blacks and other People of Color in this country in many ways throughout history. Feagin (2000) has described the legacy of racism by positing the idea of the undeserved impoverishment and undeserved enrichment that has been passed down throughout the years. These combined effects of

the system of racism have contributed to the impoverishment of Blacks and other People of Color and the enrichment and accumulated wealth for some Whites in our country. Feagin (2000) as does Lipsitz (1995) describe many examples of the effects of racism on People of Color, including patterns of discrimination in employment, housing, voting and representation, banking and insurance, education, the criminal justice system, and the environment. In addition, for centuries Whites have used brutal violence to keep Blacks in their place, violence that has often been condoned and practiced by Whites in political offices and law enforcement. After the Civil War, many Whites were wary of newly freed Blacks and engaged in violent acts to create and maintain a system of enforced segregation (Feagin, 2000). Contrary to what many Whites believe about American history, almost all of the racial riots in U. S. cities from the 1840s to the 1930s were characterized by Whites attacking and killing African Americans, including a dozen riots in cities in the North in the decades before the Civil War. After the Civil War there were many killings of Black men, women, and children by White mobs, including lynchings and attacks by Klan-type groups (Feagin, 2000). Sometimes Black communities, such as Rosewood, Florida, were destroyed and their residents driven away or killed. The violence was often in response, as in Rosewood, to Blacks who were becoming more successful and beginning to accumulate some wealth and power. In 1919 there were seven major riots by Whites throughout the country, with the growing competition between White and Black workers often an underlying factor in the White riots (Feagin, 2000). The effects of continued and systemic racism and discrimination against Blacks and other People of Color have resulted in the undeserved impoverishment and the lack of accumulation of wealth that continues to plague our country today.

The other side of the coin, the privileging of Whites and the set of benefits and advantages inherited by each generation of those defined as "White" contribute to the undeserved enrichment as outlined by Feagin (2000). Feagin (2000) describes how the framework of unjust impoverishment and enrichment were created under slavery and how

the White leadership of the nation set into motion the discriminatory means and practices for perpetuating these characteristics across the generations. Throughout the years, Whites have had privileged access to economic resources, including jobs, housing, politics, and education among others. Under the Homestead Act from 1862 until the early 1900s, the federal government gave away large amounts of land (originally Native American land) to White families. Black families were excluded from access to this land for the most part due to enslavement and then debt peonage (Feagin, 2000). There are many other examples of government-controlled resources being made available to White Americans almost exclusively, including access to mineral resources, radio and television airwaves, low cost housing subsidies, aid for farmers, subsidies for education, and access to exclusive government business contracts and franchises. The historical impact of systemic racism has continued to give many White Americans privileged access to many resources and abundant opportunities to build and accumulate wealth and power.

Throughout United States history, who has been seen as "White" has not remained stable. The reasons for the changes in classification can be linked to domination and subjugation and the need for a justification to explain policies and practices related to capitalism with its appetite for cheap labor and republicanism with its imperative for responsible citizenship (Jacobson, 1998). The Naturalization Act of 1790 established one requirement of American citizenship as the necessity of being White and developed the construction of a White identity that provided the basis for the incorporation of European immigrants into the society (Jacobson, 1998; Kushnick, 1996). Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, immigrants from Europe were viewed and treated differently, mostly in relation to how they differed from the Anglo Saxon ideal; at one time or another immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and southern and eastern Europe were considered "undesirable White persons" and were not considered fit for citizenship and self-rule (Ignatiev, 1995; Jacobson, 1998). After the Immigration Act of 1924, the focus on those deemed not easily assimilated for citizenship and whiteness shifted to the Chinese,

Japanese, and Mexican peoples along with the Blacks who already lived in the country, and the differences among the various European immigrants faded in importance (Jacobson, 1998).

As Omi and Winant (1994) note, theories of race, including its meaning, transformations, and significance, have never been a top priority in social science. The social theorists of the 19th century, such as Comte, Marx, Engels, and Weber, were all transfixed with analyzing the economic transition from feudalism to capitalism and all agreed with the belief that racial and ethnic bonds and conflicts were remnants of a preindustrial society which would decline in significance in the modern world (Omi & Winant, 1994). Although the founders of American sociology were concerned with domestic race relations, racial theory was one of the least developed fields of inquiry. According to Omi and Winant (1994), the influence of Social Darwinism and the adherence to biological explanations for racial differences limited interest in the field.

In the 1920s, the Chicago school of sociology began to address racial theory. Their theoretical and methodological formulations shaped the dominant assumptions about race relations for most of the twentieth century (Omi & Winant, 1994). These sociologists presented a race-relations cycle with four stages of contact, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation as a way of analyzing group relations and assessing various groups' progress along the developmental continuum. Their formulations and assumptions neglected the institutional and ideological nature of race in America as well as the systematic racism present in areas such as education, politics, social policy, and science (Omi & Winant, 1994). One can see the connection between these theories and the focus on individual pathologies as an explanation for racial difficulties. These assumptions also led toward models used in psychology and education that predicted the gradual absorption of groups into the mainstream of American life and ignored the power relationships undergirding racial conflicts in our country. It does not take a leap of faith to

see the link between these theories about race and the educational practices in our schools and society.

Omi and Winant's theory of racial formation (1994) views races as socially constructed, unstable, and changing over time in relation to the greater historical, political, and societal context. They have looked at history and the always evolving categories of race and racial difference to posit three historical phases for explanations of racial differences in America that have influenced and continue to influence the way race is constructed. Omi and Winant (1994) divided the evolving history of discourses on racial differences into three primary states that parallel the historical developments of the United States from the colonial period to the present. In the first stage, which attended to supposed physiological or biological differences, race was constructed as a biological category and the assertion of white biological superiority was used to justify economic inequities and differential educational practices, ranging from slavery to settler colonialism and Westward expansion (Omi & Winant, 1994). In the second phase, beginning around the 1920s, race differences were named in cultural and social terms; a focus on ethnicity was foregrounded as a way to explain differences. With the ethnicity paradigm as a way to describe difference came an assimilationist analysis of what should happen to those viewed as non-Whites in US society (Omi & Winant, 1994). This phase emerged at a time after there had been a large influx of immigrants from Europe, including immigrants from Ireland and southern and eastern Europe, among those immigrants who were not initially viewed as White. The third phase, according to Omi and Winant (1994) emerged during the 1960s and emphasized a resurgence and transformation of the "differentness" of peoples of color and a critique of racial inequality as a structuring feature of American society. Ethnicity theory was challenged by class and nation based paradigms of race that originated with the Black and other racial minority movements and rejected two aspects of the ethnicity approach: the analogy to European

immigrants that suggested all racial groups would be incorporated into American life and the assumption of a fundamental American commitment to equality and social justice for everyone.

Frankenberg (1993), following Omi and Winant's (1994) categorization of historical phases in racial construction recast the three phases as essentialist racism, essential sameness popularly referred to as "colorblindness" which she renames as "color evasiveness" and "power evasiveness," and as difference radically defined. The color and power evasiveness view asserts that we are all the same under the skin, that we are converging culturally and materially, and that any failure to achieve is therefore the fault of People of Color themselves (Frankenberg, 1993). We can see this rhetoric expounded frequently by politicians, media representatives, and educational leaders who reframe the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders, proclaiming that we live now in an age where all are judged by their character and actions. Frankenberg (1993) refers to the third phase of racial categorization as "race cognizance," one in which difference is articulated by People of Color rather than the dominant culture and where difference signals an autonomy of culture and values, with inequality primarily ascribed to the entrenched, racist social structure. Omi and Winant and Frankenberg suggest that all three ways of thinking about racial differences exist simultaneously, although the color and power evasiveness or ethnicity strand continues to be dominant today. We can see the use of this rhetoric among conservatives and neoliberals, who avoid as much as possible framing issues, social policies, or identities with explicit reference to race. The color and power evasiveness phase and Omi and Winant's assimilationist phase of racial relations are linked with the power and norm of whiteness, in ways that allow us not to name the privilege, but also contributes to conservative groups' ability to see whiteness as somehow under attack in a meritorious society.

During most of the twentieth century, racial relations and the problem of racism have generally focused almost exclusively on various aspects of the experience of blacks

and other People of Color, revealing almost nothing about the motivations of Whites (Bowser & Hunt, 1996). According to Bowser and Hunt (1996), such practices developed from the belief that racial prejudice and bias grew from personal ignorance and could be addressed by education and information. The problems of racism focused on those affected by racism instead of those who benefited from it, and the complex issues around the maintenance of White identity, power, and privilege were not examined. In the 1960s, there were surveys on White attitudes and opinions used specifically to contrast the differences, inequalities, and conflicts between the races, but according to Bowser and Hunt (1996) the attitudes were studied so narrowly that they were devoid of their social structural and social class contexts. White behaviors and attitudes were viewed as normative and not objects of study themselves.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, some researchers had begun to recognize and address the lack of attention to Whites, white racism, and the impact of racism on Whites (Ashmore, 1976; Pettigrew, 1975). Several researchers did attempt to outline the benefits of discrimination and prejudice for Whites, including the economic advantages for middle and upper class Whites, the higher status from advantaged dominant group membership, and the predictable and advantaged day-to-day interactions with members of less advantaged groups resulting from the advantages of whiteness (Simpson & Yinger, 1965). They also offered ideas about the costs and consequences of prejudicial attitudes on Whites (Simpson & Yinger, 1965; Weston, 1972).

As Bowser and Hunt (1996) recount, two works finally appeared that pointed more directly to the problem of white racism. Terry's *For Whites Only* (1970) explored what it means to be White and suggested that there was a close connection between White identity and racism. Wellman, in *Portraits of White Racism* (1977) provided an in-depth analysis of the lives of five Whites and used the cases to describe the way that White identity, personal and social interests, and racial attitudes intersect. Also, Katz (1978) presented *White Awareness: Handbook for Antiracism Training* in which she

acknowledged that the United States is based on and operates under a doctrine of white racism evidenced by the same historical and social actions and consequences discussed earlier. Katz developed a human relations training program with the purpose of helping Whites become aware of how racism affects their lives and to help them change their racist attitudes and behaviors (Katz, 1978). Although primarily based on psychological theory and the importance of the individual's beliefs and behaviors, the assumptions of the training program did reflect an understanding that racism in American was primarily a White problem, thus making some inroads to assess the context of American society and its social, structural, and material inequalities.

There were several variants of White racial identity theory that developed during the 1970s and 1980s and several of them have been expanded and updated. Racial identity development in general describes the belief systems that evolve in response to the racial categorizations given meaning by the larger society (Tatum, 1997). The first efforts assumed that White racial identity in Western nations was inherently tied to racism and described a process where individual Whites could learn to acknowledge and overcome their own racism (Howard, 1999). These first efforts were followed by theories that recognized the dimensions of Whites' attempts to achieve a positive view of what it means to be White and not racist (Helms, 1984, 1990, 1992).

There are many similarities among the theories of White racial identity development, including the presence of hierarchical stages or phases that individuals encounter and representing patterns of thinking that may occur at particular points in development (Howard, 1999; Tatum, 1997). Most of the theories also emphasize that even though the patterns in thinking are represented as hierarchical, it does not mean the process is linear and indeed there may be times where former ways of responding will re-occur or individuals can regress or advance depending on other circumstances in their lives (Howard, 1999; Tatum, 1997). The researchers also agree that racial identity development is an ongoing process that never ends (Thompson, 1999). Research has also

shown that one of the major benefits of the racial identity process for Whites is their increased effectiveness in multiracial settings and their deeper understanding of racism and respect for the struggles of People of Color (Tatum, 1997).

## Whiteness, White Privilege, and White Racism

It is difficult to make distinctions between whiteness, white privilege, and racism; indeed they are all connected and intricately linked with each other and with power relations. Whiteness is socially situated and changes as it encounters new and different historical and social contexts. As we have seen from examining historical perspectives, whiteness as an identity has changed over time but has primarily underpinned and been intimately involved with issues of power and power differences between those classified as White and those seen as nonwhite (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). As Gresson (1995) notes, ultimately it is about white privilege and is a theory of racial superiority to rationalize the right to exploit those seen as nonwhite. As such, whiteness was and is created and maintained in relation to those who are not White and has material and economic implications for all.

White racism is used to make explicit reference to the implications and responsibilities of Whites for the system of racism. Wellman (1977, 1993) describes white racism as a system of advantage based on race and a structural relationship based on the subordination of one racial group by another. This conceptualization drives an analysis of racism as a defense of racial privilege and not primarily a psychological and individual quality or problem (Wellman, 1993). It also allows us to examine the systems of cultural and institutional policies and practices that operate to advantage some and disadvantage others.

## Current Perspectives and Theoretical Orientations on Whiteness

In this section I will identify and describe the current perspectives on whiteness as a racial marker in the social science literature, discuss similarities and differences among these perspectives, and conclude with their implications for educational actions. Before

beginning the discussion of the current perspectives on whiteness, I will briefly describe the context leading up to the current focus in several disciplines on naming and exploring whiteness as a racial marker, outlining general responses from various fields and disciplines.

Before the 1990s, whiteness, implied but concealed in the concept of "race," had rarely been interrogated by White theorists and researchers and was seen as the norm or background against which others were viewed and judged. Whiteness has functioned as a pseudo-universal category that hides its values, epistemology, and other attributes under the guise of a supposedly colorless "human nature" (Keating, 1995). White privilege has been given a semblance of naturalness that in effect has hidden it from scrutiny (Hurtado & Steward, 1997). Thus, the power that whiteness holds for its beneficiaries has not always been evident or explicitly documented. In operating as the norm, the benefits of whiteness have been de-emphasized, and the process of how members obtain power by group membership have been mystified. Whites have not had to think about being White because white privilege and standards are so culturally embedded that it is considered natural (Keating, 1995). As Giroux (1992) asserted, whiteness, domination, and invisibility are linked; the dominant culture's inability or unwillingness to see it as a historical and social construction is partly the source of its hidden authority. Whiteness is viewed as an unrecognized and unacknowledged racial category that solidifies its power by refusing to identify itself (Giroux, 1992).

The invisibility of whiteness has profound effects on those defined as "others" by the dominant culture. Whites generally have seen the "other" as racialized but have viewed themselves as colorless (Frankenberg, 1997). It has primarily been the other marked subjects rather than White/Western unmarked subjects whose racial and cultural identities have been studied; studies of members of the dominant race bracket the issues of race and culture and presume the implied racial neutrality of subjects (Frankenberg, 1997). Whiteness has not been conceived as "the problem" in the eyes of White people, in

research, educational settings, or elsewhere. Whiteness itself has been constructed through social comparisons to those seen as less fortunate or inferior. It has made itself invisible by asserting its normalcy and transparency in contrast to the marking of "others" on which its transparency depends (Frankenberg, 1997).

Over the last decade, differences in the way whiteness and white privilege are viewed have emerged. Scholars from a range of disciplines, including history, cultural studies, sociology, speech communication, and literary studies, have put the social construction of whiteness and its link to power and privilege on the table to be investigated, analyzed, and probed (Giroux, 1997). Scholars such as David Roediger (1994), Ruth Frankenberg (1993), bell hooks (1992), Theodore Allen (1994), Noel Ignatiev (1995), Toni Morrison (1992), and Howard Winant (1997) have rejected the assumption that an analysis of race should focus primarily on People of Color and have addressed the social construction of whiteness across a spectrum of institutions and spheres (Giroux, 1997).

The new scholarship on whiteness focuses on the project of unmasking and naming the political, cultural, and social mechanisms through which whiteness is invented and used to mask its power and privilege (Giroux, 1997). Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) asked readers to divert their gaze and their scrutiny from the racial object to the racial subject, from the described to the describers, and from the serving to the served. There is a growing awareness that racial identities are not only Black, Asian, Latino(a), Native American but are also White. Work that has interrogated the "unmarked marker" status of whiteness has brought into the forefront how whiteness upholds racial domination/subordination and how the social and historical construction of whiteness is inseparable from the maintenance of social inequality, domination, and racism (Frankenberg, 1997).

Several authors have asserted the impossibility of assuming a normalized whiteness that is invisible and monolithic, due in part to the racial conflicts of the post-

Civil Rights era. Winant (1997) suggests that although the battles of the 1960s have not been won or lost, the demand for substantive racial equality still exists and while it does, white privilege and white supremacy are in doubt. Gallagher (1995) has analyzed the process of white reconstruction taking place on college campuses and posits whiteness as no longer invisible or transparent because it is in crisis. Gallagher reported that students he interviewed believed that overt racism, discrimination, and equal opportunity were addressed by their parents' generation and that we now live in a meritocracy where nonwhites have all the advantages Whites do and in come cases, more. According to Gallagher (1995), the students' belief in an egalitarian, colorblind society where opportunity is equal for everyone and where they in no way benefit from skin color allows their complicity to be removed from an analysis of racial relations. Although they are in reality still able to benefit from their skin color, embracing a colorblind perspective enables a retreat from issues that have roots in racial inequality and maintains the status quo (Gallagher, 1995).

Another branch of scholarship that led to refocusing the gaze of scrutiny on whiteness is that of critical White studies, which itself emerged from critical race theory. Critical race theory first emerged in the mid-1970s with the work of Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman and others, progressive scholars committed to racial and social transformation but discontented with the standard liberal approaches to racial justice (Delgado & Stefanic, 1997). These scholars saw many of the gains of the civil rights era of the 1960s stall and believed that new approaches and theories were needed to come to grips with the more subtle forms of racism that characterize our times (Delgado & Stefanic, 2000). They drew on critical sociology, neo-Marxism, and postmodern philosophy to develop an alternative assessment of our society's racial predicament and ways to affect it. Critical White studies emerged from critical race theory and attempts to address and ask questions about race, power, and society in relation to whiteness (Delgado & Stefanic, 1997).

Articles have also appeared within the popular press newspapers and magazines over the last few years that have called attention to whiteness as a racialized category and have promoted an antiracist identity for Whites. A Newsweek article titled *What's White, Anyway?* (September 18, 2000) highlighted within the popular press some of the same issues that are being examined within academic fields, including the recognition that who is considered White has changed over the years, the understanding that being White is not what it used to be, and an understanding that the issue all along has been about "where the line was drawn between those who could be admitted into the mainstream and those who could not" (p. 65). The President's Commission on Race (*One America* &1998), although not addressing whiteness specifically, did recognize the role that race has played to affect the extent to which a person is fully included in American society and afforded the rights and opportunities supposedly promised to all, stating " &we as a nation need to understand that Whites tend to benefit, either unknowingly or consciously, from this country's history of white privilege" (p. 46).

In general, we see that an impetus to focus our attention on whiteness and its relationships with power and privilege has emerged from many disciplines. Below I provide an analysis of the current perspectives on whiteness also indicating the one most fruitful for guiding this study.

## Analysis and Implications of Current Perspectives on Whiteness

In this section, I delineate and describe the major current perspectives on whiteness, discuss their similarities and differences, and indicate the implications for educational action. Rodriguez (2000) has categorized the literature on whiteness by discussing several phases, from its beginning attention to whiteness as a social construction to the later and current focus in several fields on how to deal with whiteness, or issues related to where we go from here. I will follow the same trajectory in my discussion of the current perspectives and implications of whiteness.

The first phase of the most recent attention to whiteness was marked by an emphasis on the social construction of whiteness and the marking and naming of whiteness as a racialized identity. There have been attempts to understand the multiple manifestations of whiteness and to consider how White identity has changed and has been constructed, shaped, and appropriated historically (Rodriguez, 2000). Investigations surrounding the social construction of whiteness have centered on the effects of the social construction of whiteness, how and where whiteness has been used and for what purposes, and how whiteness can be understood and defined (Rodriguez, 2000).

One of the primary areas to develop a critical understanding related to the social construction of whiteness and its effects have come from the field of historical studies. Several historical studies on whiteness have mapped out the salience of whiteness to the formation of class, nationhood, and empire in the United States and Europe (Frankenberg, 1997; Jacobson, 1998). These studies explicitly examined the historic relationship between whiteness and power, representation, and oppression. Ignatiev (1995) asserted how the Irish became "White" in America by participating in a variety of practices that enabled them to overcome prejudice and gain the privileges of whiteness at the expense of Blacks. Another historian, David Roediger (1994) detailed the intersection between race and labor in America by focusing on how whiteness as the dominant racial identity has shaped the history of American labor at different historical intervals. Ruth Frankenberg (1993) explored how race shapes the lives of White women, contributing to an understanding of whiteness as a concept and also to the importance of naming and marking whiteness as denoting privilege and power relations. Works from these and other historical studies (Lipsitz, 1998; Omi & Winant, 1994) highlight the changing nature of whiteness and how it is conflated with class, ethnicity, and gender issues. All have provided insight into the social construction of all races, the conflation of whiteness with power and its effects on others, and have established a base from which to pursue the next realm of questions related to what we should do with whiteness as a racialized identity.

There are two primary general perspectives among scholars, educators, and researchers who have examined and questioned the social construction of whiteness and its effects: one perspective views whiteness as nothing but oppression and calls for the renunciation and abolition of whiteness, and the second perspective calls for serious efforts to rearticulate whiteness into a progressive, antiracist White identity (Rodriguez, 2000). Before discussing the differences in these two perspectives, which center primarily on their implications for action, I will review their similarities.

There are several similarities among the current perspectives on whiteness. These include an awareness that whiteness and all racial categories are socially constructed, fluid, and constantly being made and unmade in response to changing historical, social, and political conditions. No place are the (mis)representations and social construction of race seen more clearly than in the current conservative approach in expounding a colorblind attitude toward race, an approach that attempts to reinforce the status quo and has dire consequences for many People of Color in this country. An appeal to Americans that we have addressed issues of inequality and are now a truly meritocratic society could only be "constructed" in a place where the evidence to support such a construction is clearly contraindicated. Another similarity and consistency among those who are currently examining whiteness is the recognition of the impact of interlocking oppression and privilege, with the understanding that whiteness is not monolithic and is differentially affected by positions within the class structure, gender, sexual orientation, and ableness hierarchies. Although recognized as nonessential, there is agreement that the social construction of whiteness and its historical use to position others as inferior has real impacts on people's lives and life chances. Current perspectives on whiteness as a racial marker emphasize the importance of examining whiteness within the contexts of power, privilege, and oppression and the impact whiteness has on institutional and societal structures and human relations. Implications for educational action for those who expound the beliefs outlined above include the continuing need to address systemic and

institutionalized racism by creating spaces for Whites to examine their own identity and how it is implicated in racism in this country (Giroux, 1997; Rodriguez, 1998, 2000).

The major differences between the two perspectives exist primarily in the area of suggestions for what we should do with our understanding that White is a racial category and is implicated in racism and unequal access to resources and opportunities. I will present some of the tenets of each perspective, highlighting the different approaches to action implied by each one.

In addition to analyzing whiteness from a social and historical perspective, one perspective suggests moving beyond the analysis of whiteness to the abolition of it (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1997). Ignatiev and Garvey (1997), the new abolitionists, equate whiteness only with domination and oppression and proclaim their desire to renounce whiteness and abolish the White race. Although professing to believe in the differences within whiteness, these scholars do not seem to understand how embedded race is within all levels of American life. Theorist George Yudice (1995) also expresses discomfort at the ease with which the new abolitionists feel they can renounce whiteness and the privileges that accompany it. He further asserts the irony that those who understand race and whiteness as a social construction believe they can proclaim themselves nonraced, yet not lose the power associated with being White (Yudice, 1995). Rodriguez (2000) notes that the insight that race is a social construction, a process that has taken place over a period of time and under various political conditions, seems not to play a significant role in the proposals by the new abolitionists for what should be done with or to whiteness.

The second perspective which also has implications for what should be done to decenter whiteness has been articulated by critical theorists such as Henry Giroux (1997) and George Yudice (1995). The recommendation they promote for responding to the knowledge, insights, and analyses identified by the examination of whiteness as a social construction is to rearticulate whiteness. Giroux (1997) agrees that whiteness is synonymous with oppression and privilege but questions the possibility and usefulness of

an approach that asks Whites, especially White youth, to give up their whiteness. Those in favor of rearticulating whiteness into a progressive, antiracist identity argue for the necessity of allowing for a critique and rejection of the oppression inflicted in the name of whiteness but also creating a space for a progressive White identity that transcends a narrow concept of political correctness (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998). Rodriguez (2000) calls for a critical pedagogy to link multicultural education, the examination of whiteness and power relations, and the creation of progressive racial identities as part of a broader democratic project to challenge social inequality and injustice. Giroux (1997) emphasizes the importance of deconstructing and rearticulating whiteness simultaneously in order to help prevent Whites from opting out of their whiteness disingenuously. Whites have to critically examine whiteness within its historical, social, and political contexts while also engaging in a process to allow them to begin to forge multiracial coalitions; this entails going head-on with, while at the same time, reworking one's whiteness (Clark & O'Donnell, 1999; Giroux, 1997; Rodriguez, 2000).

There are some examples of Whites who have recognized the privilege and power associated with being White and the impact it has on others not defined as White (Feagin & Vera, 1995; Frankenberg, 1997; McIntosh, 1992; Thompson, 1999). Although these and other individuals continue to exist within the frameworks of a society that privileges their race, they have begun to question and address the benefits associated with their racialized identities. Several writers and activists discuss their evolution toward a more antiracist stance but are critical of the individual focus of most of the current theories of White racial identity, believing they do not address the complexity of their experiences and the ways they benefit from the privilege and power associated with being White (Clark, 1999; Cuomo & Hall, 1999; Thompson, 1999). Instead, they emphasize the ongoing contradictions and difficulties in understanding and rearticulating their own progressive White stance that exists simultaneously with new evidence and understanding of the benefits that do accrue within this society to those who are White.

Many of the same writers and researchers who have brought whiteness and white privilege to the forefront have also expressed many concerns related to the renewed emphasis on whiteness. These concerns relate mostly to admonitions and cautions against further reifying and essentializing race and centering whiteness and the White perspective once again (Apple, 1998; Clark & O'Donnell, 1999; Cuomo & Hall, 1999; Thompson, 1999). Some critics also worry whether the surge of interest in critical White studies by leftist educators is just another way dialogue becomes recentered around whiteness (Clark & O'Donnell, 1999).

Although there is an explicit cognizance of the reasons not to further reify race and center whiteness, there appear compelling reasons to continue the work to examine white privilege and racism. As Rodriguez (2000) notes, naming whiteness and the power and privilege behind whiteness is the first step necessary to deconstruct or transform it. The move to mark and name whiteness as a racialized identity is especially important in light of the current discourse in education and the popular media around the idea of "color blindness." Dyson, in his interview with Chennault (1998), views the importance of continuing the studies of whiteness in the ramifications the studies can have for demystifying the ways that whiteness has produced its foundational myths and recovering the contradictory and contested meanings of whiteness from hidden histories of racial practice. Johnson (1999) reminds us to focus on the larger social discourses when examining whiteness, understanding that the work lies not just in getting individuals to examine and understand their role in perpetuating racism but also in challenging how whiteness and power are embedded in the social fabric and institutions. Keating (1995) also grapples with these issues and has come to the conclusion that it is important to take a twofold approach by striving to understand the artificial, changing nature of all racial identities without ignoring their concrete, material effects. An important part of examining whiteness is explicating the power, unequal struggles, and contested nature

behind it and how the category of whiteness is inextricable from the maintenance of social inequality (Stowe, 1996).

The marking and naming of whiteness that has occurred over the last decade has definitely opened the way to imagine and realize a new way to "be White." Although whiteness is deeply embedded and implicated in the power relations within our country and underlies much injustice and inequality, it is inspiring to see at least a small space for resistance and change in which to work towards a more egalitarian society. The difficulty becomes understanding how we can talk about and act on whiteness without further stabilizing it as a racial category or further stabilizing racial categories in general. We need to understand how we can rearticulate a way to be White without dominating and subjugating people and construct a way to confront the institutionalization of racism, making clear the connections between whiteness and race privilege while at the same time offering alternatives and actions we can take. Educators, and specifically adult educators, in the diverse fields in which they practice have the opportunity and means to impact how knowledge, resources, and opportunities are distributed within our society. Furthermore, White adult educators who have recognized and are confronting the norms and power linked to white privilege and racism are an especially valuable group from whom to learn about viable actions and strategies. It is to the educational literature and responses we now turn.

## Educational Responses

Within the field of education, there have been various attempts, especially within teacher education and critical multicultural or antiracist education, to address White identity and its privilege. McIntyre (1997) explored White racial identity with White teachers in an attempt to create a dialogue in which the participants would come to the knowledge of how their own whiteness situates them in privilege in relation to others. Sleeter (1994) and Kincheloe (1999) have also begun to look at the impact that white privilege and racism has on the curriculum, practices, and interactions within various

educational context and have called for White academics to make race privilege a central, self-reflective area of inquiry within the academy. Other educators have called for a critical pedagogy of whiteness as part of a critical multiculturalism that would examine the instability of all identities, as well as the interplays of history, culture, power, and ideology that have specified difference (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; McLaren, 1995; Sleeter, 1995).

Scheurich (1993) identified the lack of efforts within the academy for Whites to talk about their own racism and the ways that racism works. He attributed this lack partly to highly educated Whites who continue to think of racism as overt behaviors by individuals that can be clearly identified and labeled as racist, as well as the ubiquitous individualism prevailing in attitudes and behaviors that see achievement largely due to an individual's choices (Scheurich, 1993). These phenomena hide the inequities in our social structures that privilege some and deny others, as the ways and mores of the dominant group are universalized as, for example, standards of merit, hiring criteria, grading standards, and predictors of success (Scheurich, 1993). For Whites, the membership in a social group and the group-driven, inequitable distribution of resources and power disappear.

In a response to Scheurich's article, Sleeter (1993) agrees with the points Scheurich made about there being little discourse among White academics about racism and further suggests that Whites evade a discourse on racism partly to protect our own interests. Sleeter (1993) also discusses the ways that Whites use to evade taking responsibility for racism and turn the attention away from themselves, including relying on the ideology of individualism to explain our achievements and seeing racism only as an individual belief or action. She suggests that Whites need to develop a critical and explicit examination of what we know about racism and how all of us can dismantle it (Sleeter, 1993).

Maher and Tetrault (1997; 2000) examined how the ingrained assumptions of white privilege affected classroom practices and interactions within higher education classes. They were interested in how firmly the assumptions of whiteness existed within the institution's ideological frameworks, in the exercise of intellectual domination, and in the shaping of classroom knowledge (Maher & Tetrault, 1997). Within several higher education classrooms, they found whiteness assumed as a normal condition rather than a privileged position located within relations of power, more powerful still as it functioned to steer discussions of race toward experiences and features of "the other." (Maher & Tetrault, 1997). In other classrooms, under the guidance of teachers willing to openly discuss the norm of whiteness, whiteness as a racialized position began to come into focus for the students. Throughout their work, Maher and Tetrault (1997; 2000) emphasized how the assumptions of whiteness interact with constructions of gender, class, and ethnicity to shape classroom knowledge and how these social positions are susceptible to critique when they are explored rather than ignored, individualized, or universalized.

Although the discourse around racism in education and the academy has increased and many recommendations on how to uncover it have been made, there still exists few attempts or reports of attempts that document and examine how racism is challenged practically and discuss the complexity and contradictions involved in doing so. As Sleeter (1993) noted, "academicians can learn to talk proficiently about almost anything, but the point is what we plan to do to reduce or eliminate white supremacy" (pp. 14-15).

## Multicultural and Antiracist Education

Although there are various approaches to multicultural and antiracist education, it is vital to note that neither discipline is monolithic, linear, or stable but increasingly dynamic and fluid (Sleeter, 1995). Dei (1996a) asserts that the antiracism discourse began in Britain before it emerged in Canada, Australia, and the United States; he describes antiracism education as an action-oriented strategy for institutional, systemic

change to address racism and the interlocking systems of social oppression. Antiracism explicitly names the issues of race, social inequities, and differential treatment based on the social construction of differences, as issues of power and equity rather than cultural and ethnic difference (Dei, 1996a). Antiracism education calls for putting power relations at the center of the discussion on race and social difference; it attempts to center critiques of the discretionary use of power and privilege in discussions about social difference and how historically constituted relations of domination and subordination are embedded in the institutional structures of society (Dei, 1996b). Antiracist education moves beyond a focus on individual prejudices and discriminatory behaviors to examine how racist ideas and actions are entrenched and supported in institutional structures (Simmons, 1994). It supports explorations of race, class, and gender, as sources of socially constructed differences and sites of power relations of domination and oppression and an understanding for how these processes are produced, reproduced, and contested in the everyday practices of schools (Dei, 1996b). Antiracism education takes into account the fact that race does not operate in isolation but is linked with other forms of social oppression, including class, gender, and sexuality and must include and incorporate all bases of social oppression into an antiracism praxis that addresses the relational aspects of human experience (Dei, 1996b). Although antiracist perspectives view all categories as socially constructed, it does not negate the impact that the socially constructed identities have on people constructed as "other" or different.

Within antiracist education, several authors have validated the strategy of starting with the concept of race and also examining whiteness and white privilege as key factors in the perpetuation of racist discourses and practices (Dei, 1996a; Epstein, 1993; Sleeter, 1995). Antiracism education critiques the construct of whiteness, especially the practices and ideas that establish and promote white hegemony over others. Race is acknowledged as a central axis of power. Antiracist education attempts to problematize and deal with how schools function to reproduce White (patriarchal) dominance; antiracism discourse

approaches issues of knowledge production, curriculum, and pedagogy by critically examining institutional structures and processes for teaching, learning, and administering education (Dei, 1996b).

Antiracist education is practiced primarily in Canadian, British, and Australian contexts, although it is beginning to surface more in the United States, either within critical multiculturalism or as antiracist education. Multiculturalism, especially those branches expounding critical multiculturalism, is calling for some of the same practices and efforts as antiracist education, including a critique of whiteness, white privilege, and more directly relating differential educational treatment to issues of institutionalized racism and power (Epstein, 1993; McCarthy, 1995; Sleeter, 1996). Critical multiculturalists, like antiracist educators, examine how the mechanisms of domination work to reproduce and legitimize the entrenched nature of race, class, gender, and sexual hierarchies in education. The primary difference between multicultural education in the United States and antiracist education is the latter's recognition of unequal power relations as the most salient feature related to unequal treatment in educational settings (McCarthy, 1995; Ng, 1995).

Sleeter (1996) has responded to some of the critiques of multicultural education in the United States by arguing that multicultural education can be a form of resistance to the dominant culture in schooling and to white supremacy, if White educators address racism and make a connection between multicultural education and political action. She also responds to the critiques of multicultural education by radical educators by asserting that she believes many of them oversimplify the field; she recommends instead that the field identify ways it does work to challenge oppression and develop those dimensions (Sleeter, 1996). This view is also highlighted by other multicultural educators as they attempt to ground their current efforts in an understanding of the historical roots of multicultural education, yet develop ways to challenge oppression within our current social and political climate (McCarthy, 1995; McLaren, 1995, 1997). These efforts

include looking at how the supposedly neutral, universal set of cultural values underpin educational efforts and recognizing specifically how the ideology of white supremacy frames the wider context of power relations of which education is a part (McLaren, 1997).

## Adult Education, Race, and Whiteness

Adult education is informed by the same theories, including liberalism, humanism, progressivism, behaviorism as well as the more recent strands of critical theory, radical educational theories, and feminist theories that impact the traditional education of children and youth (Elias & Merriam, 1995). In general, traditional adult education, at least until recently, has followed the lead of mainstream education influenced by liberalism and humanism to view race only as a marker for "other" and not for Whites. Whiteness has been neutral, not usually recognized or named, but underlying the principles and theories through which programs are constructed and people are evaluated.. This belief is compatible with an educational philosophy that believes in meritocracy, individualism, and emphasizes rational, linear thinking. The impact of these theories can be seen in various ways: in Knowles' andragogical approach to teaching adults; in the tenets of self-directed learning; in program planning's focus on achievable and measurable goals and objectives; in education for democracy and social improvement; in the primacy of approaches that foreground learning from experience; and in the tenets of lifelong education, among others (Elias & Merriam, 1995). The more recent influx of critical and radical educational theories have led to a greater emphasis within adult education on challenging oppression (Freire, 1970), emancipatory learning (Hart, 1990), transformational learning (Mezirow, 1991), critical pedagogy (Tisdell, 1993) and social justice (Cunningham, 1988; Hart, 1990; Inglis, 1997).

Within the field of adult education, there has been an interest in examining issues of difference, race, and the norm of whiteness from several different perspectives. These efforts include writing that has addressed and critiqued the generic learner, the generic

teacher, and the practices in teaching and research related to the different social positions occupied by the adults doing them (Brown, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2000; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Shore, 1997; Tisdell, 1998, 2001). Additional research has addressed the underlying norm of whiteness and the impact it has on the curriculum, practices, and research of adult education (Barlas, 1997; Colin & Preciphs, 1991; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000; Shore, 2000).

This section examines the literature related to the investigation of race and whiteness in adult education. It also discusses research addressing the importance of the social positions of the teacher and learner, moving to more specific investigations of whiteness and white privilege and the impact on adult education.

Positionality and Adult Education

The social positions of the adult educator and the adult learner as they impact the teaching and learning process have increasingly been foregrounded by researchers and teachers within the field of adult education (Brown, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2000; Hart, 2001; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Tisdell, 1993, 1998, 2001). Some of the investigations examining positionality also identified whiteness and white privilege as a salient issue underlying discussions of social positions and educational practices. Positionality recognizes that the social positions of the teacher and learner in relation to race, gender, culture, class, sexual orientation and other dimensions of societal privilege and oppression significantly impact the learning environment and learning opportunities (Maher & Tetrault, 1997, 2000).

Tisdell (1993) investigated how power relations based on gender, but including other interlocking systems of privilege and oppression such as race, ethnicity, class, and age, are manifested in classrooms of adult students. Tisdell (1993) specifically examined the ways that the power relationships structured by society and brought into the classroom were supported and reproduced, and/or challenged and resisted. Among other findings, results from her ethnographic case study of two higher education classes showed that

students who benefited from more interlocking systems of structural privilege had more influence in the class from their peers' perspectives than students who had less privilege (Tisdell, 1993). In addition, although the professors in each class, one male and one female, challenged and resisted the maintenance of power relations based on gender, race, and class to some extent, the overt and hidden curriculum still favored the White male experience (Tisdell, 1993). Curricular materials still primarily represented the White worldview and predominantly male experiences. Tisdell (1993) concludes that power relations in the classroom and in society are challenged to the extent that teachers and students actively challenge them and consciously make a connection between theory and practice.

Johnson-Bailey & Cervero (1998) examined how power relations that exist in the wider social context play out in the teaching and learning dynamics of adult education classrooms. In a study of two classrooms, one taught by a Black female and one by a White male, the researchers found that the positionality of the professors more than any other factor affected classroom dynamics (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998). Among the factors that comprise positionality, it was race that was the most salient issue and, specifically, whiteness that emerged as the most important element. Review of the student and faculty interviews and peer debriefings revealed that it was the whiteness of the students and professors that influenced how the students evaluated the class and the professors' actions in the class (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998). The authors recognized positionality as a viable lens for interpreting adult education classroom experiences and suggested further efforts are needed to both understand how power relations affect teaching and learning and what responses can be made to negotiate them.

Tisdell (2001) considered the possibilities and limitations of higher education classrooms as sites of social justice and resistance to dominant practices, spurred by her description of a class in which she and her teaching partner, along with the class participants, specifically addressed issues related to diversity, positionality, and power

relations in higher education. Tisdell (2001) emphasized the need to honestly deal with how the positionality of class participants operates in the teaching and learning environment, while also critiquing the various social positions and their connections to the dominant society. An analysis of the curriculum and pedagogy of higher education institutions can uncover assumptions as to how positionality affects the politics of knowledge production, what counts as "valid" knowledge, and the forms that knowledge takes. Tisdell (2001) suggests creating a community of practice to examine the politics and power relationships inherent within the knowledge production process and offers several strategies for adult educators who are teaching for social change, including the integration of affective and rational ways of knowing, attention to the politics of positionality within the class, and consideration of how curricular choices and unconscious behavior contribute to challenging or reproducing power relations. Tisdell provides a cogent example of adult educators who make the connection between the content of their course and the practices of both their classroom and societal interactions to construct strategies and educational avenues to critique higher education classrooms.

Hart (2001) described the steps she undertook to expand her understanding of *la mestiza*, a concept that refers to cultural, political, and epistemological border crossings. As Hart (2001) notes, all of us are located somewhere in the topography of power relations that impact our lives and our opportunities. Her efforts to examine and understand what it means to a person's sense of self when she must move between several identities and positions tied to social and political power relations began with her own examination of her place within white privilege and the benefits and power that accrue from it. Hart (2001) emphasizes the importance of persons from the dominant group being able to truly listen to others' life stories and how they have been affected by the dominant group. She offers concrete suggestions for how someone who belongs to the dominant group but who feels a sense of political affiliation to less dominant groups can locate herself on the power map, take stock of how the position of privilege was granted

by a hierarchical social system, and move to learning and relearning how to practice as an ally teacher and ally learner (Hart, 2001).

All of the studies in adult education that describe the impact of social positions on the teaching/learning interaction emphasize how the power relationships structured by society and brought into the classroom impact the interactions in the classroom. They further suggest moving from a naïve conceptualization of the ahistoric teacher and learner to one that takes social position into account and deals with it throughout a conscious, emancipatory practice. These studies have provided a window through which to view an emerging praxis within adult education, one that takes into account the importance of consciously and explicitly examining curriculum and teaching practices and working toward social justice within our current society.

Race and White Privilege

Colin and Preciphs (1991) named white racism as a specific problem in adult education and discussed the lack of attention given in adult education literature and research to the powerful influence of racism on our attitudes, assumptions, practices, and policies. They discussed white racism primarily from the vantage point of the White adult educator and the perceptual deprivations that arise and impact educational environments through attitudes, behaviors, and institutionalized policies (Colin & Preciphs, 1991). Colin and Preciphs (1991) provided examples of how the distorted perceptual patterns lead to biased interpretations of learners' performances, including the impacts of labeling, the judgments made according to White skills and standards, the reflection of the White worldview in curricular materials, and the content of teacher/learner interactions. They recommended that adult educators assume an active role in ending distorted perceptions that foster racism by acknowledging that racism exists, by making a commitment to address racism in the learning environment, by exchanging information about other cultures, by utilizing the affective domain to facilitate critical self-reflection, and by assessing the learning experiences that occur in the classroom (Colin & Preciphs, 1991).

Racism and sexism were discussed more broadly by Hayes and Colin (1994), as they examined the impact of racism and sexism on the income and occupations and the educational attainments of women and People of Color within our society. They also discussed how racism and sexism are part of the fabric of our society and reflected not just in our individual actions but in our institutions as well. Hayes and Colin (1994) identified how racism and sexism are perpetuated by educational institutions and their policies and procedures, both within the formal and informal curriculum and the organizational policies and practices. They suggested adult education can be a vehicle for confronting racist and sexist practices and emphasized the importance of adult educators recognizing the bias in their own practices and challenging them there.

Shore (1997; 2000) has also situated theories of learning and adult education within the context of the raced, gendered, and classed lives of the learners. Working in Australia, Shore (1997) has addressed concerns related to who the adult in adult education is, commenting that although learners are often framed as generic learners, without race, class, or gender, the norm of whiteness and maleness is often assumed. Learners who are other than White are often described in ways that position them as deficient or disadvantaged in some way and in need of attention by the dominant group. Shore (1997) critiques much of the adult education literature as promoting assumptions that reinforce several dominant beliefs, including those assumptions that position whiteness as the invisible norm against which all others are compared. Shore investigates how various social and cultural groups are identified and targeted for special programs based on the assumption of a robust center and a struggling margin and identifies the ways these groups are encouraged to participate in programs because of their difference from the White norm. One of Shore's main concerns is with the discourses surrounding whiteness and how they frame what is and is not legitimate in adult education. She issues a call to adult educators to understand how they play a part in perpetuating inequitable

practices and beliefs and calls for a critical discussion on whiteness, along with a different conceptualization of the adult learner (Shore, 1997).

In a subsequent piece, Shore (2000) discussed the contemporary trend in studies about whiteness and chose to examine textual practices in policy inquiries in Australia that are structured around a White center, how the repertoires of whiteness and their effects are disguised, and how power and productivity are constructed around representations of whiteness. The policy documents she examined discussed programs for producing effective citizens, specifically promoting and encouraging diversity yet simultaneously remaining unaware of how the policies are framed by White standards that prejudge the learning objectives and curriculum (Shore, 2000). Her discussion and critique mirror some of the same critiques of adult education in America made by Colin and Preciphs (1991) and Hayes and Colin (1994).

Barlas (1997) and Barlas et al (2000) have undertaken several studies related to developing white consciousness and unlearning white supremacist consciousness. Barlas (1997) examined a process of group learning in which individuals and groups experienced a transformative change in consciousness about their white privilege. The study is prefaced on the assumption that many of the problems in American society related to racism are predicated on the lack of consciousness of white privilege. The researcher used an inquiry process for a case study that engaged the participants in examining their own and other's consciousness at three levels of consciousness and across individual and group systems. The study found that the participants learned how to transform and expand their individual and group consciousness about white privilege and were able to being integrating these experiences into their personal and academic lives (Barlas, 1997).

In a second study, Barlas et al. (2000) examined how a group of people with the power and privilege conferred by white skin used a cooperative inquiry process to change their consciousness and behavior and to specifically examine the meaning and impact of

white supremacist consciousness within their own lives. Groups engaged in cycles of action and reflection in which they made meaning of the members' life experiences. Several changes in consciousness and examples of changed behaviors were attributed to the inquiry experiences. Barlas et al. (2000) found that although the participants entered the inquiry process at different points on a continuum of white consciousness, from complete unconsciousness to disdain for other White people who were racists, almost all the participants learned a new compassion for themselves and other White people when they expressed racist thoughts and behaviors. Other changes in consciousness related to a growing appreciation of the debilitating effects of the White norms of individuality and dualistic thinking for Whites and other groups. The changing views translated into changed behaviors and actions, ranging from developing a new awareness of racist thoughts and white privilege to initiating systemic changes in the workplace (Barlas et al., 2000). Participants related a greater willingness to speak out against racist remarks and practices from others and to address the issue of race with Black clients rather than acting like it is not there. Although cognizant of the presence of institutionalized racism and the power differentials that occur around white privilege, both studies (Barlas, 1997; Barlas et al., 2000) took a predominantly individualistic and psychologically-oriented view. The second study did investigate the role of white privilege in the participants' lives and how their participation in the group changed their actions. Subsequent explorations into the participants' lives would possibly demonstrate ways that they have indeed challenged racism within their academic and career contexts, a facet that my study will investigate more completely.

Finally, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2000) examined the historical and contemporary understandings of race in adult education and how these views have framed the practice of adult education. As race has signified primarily People of Color, the invisibility of whiteness as the norm against which all others are compared has been left uncontested until recently. As Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2000) note, this has led to

educational responses reflected in how we write, research, and teach and has deleterious effects on other disenfranchised groups. Whiteness as the unexamined norm in adult education has left the burden on groups who have less power to create ways in which they can achieve more and become more like the norm, read White. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2000) also examined adult education's responses to issues of race, discussing the colorblind, multicultural, and social justice perspectives. They end by aligning themselves with a social justice perspective that recognizes the social positions of teachers and learners and their differential capacities to act, as well as the understanding that the power relationships of the broader society continue to impact us all (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000).

This study intentionally engages White adult educators who have recognized the issues connected to the normalcy of whiteness and the need to rearticulate the construct of whiteness. Although whiteness is not monolithic and exists in relation to gender, class, sexual orientation, and disability, White adult educators practice within the confines of a society and political structure that favorably positions members of their race. White adult educators who are practicing an explicit antiracist agenda and who are struggling within their practice to consciously challenge white privilege and power can provide valuable and concrete information for other adult educators who want to understand how to challenge and change the effects of racial oppression. Within the context of actual practice, we can learn how the complexities and contradictions of racial relationships are enacted within the power relationships inherent within our society.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how White antiracist adult educators challenge racism. This was accomplished by examining the experiences of both People of Color and White antiracist adult educators. The research questions guiding this study were: 1) What understandings of racism and white privilege do the adult educators bring to their work; 2) How do their understandings of racism and white privilege guide them to take action to challenge racism? This chapter describes the qualitative methodology of the study and addresses the following components: the research design, sample selection criteria and process, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, researcher bias and assumptions, and limitations of the study.

## Research Design

Qualitative research is a concept covering several forms of inquiry that help a researcher understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena (Merriam, 1998). Although there are many variations of qualitative research, in general the term refers to research approaches and strategies that share common characteristics and assumptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The philosophical roots of qualitative research lie in phenomenology, a philosophy that considers anything that presents itself to consciousness as a potential inquiry and implies a direct concern with experience as it is lived (Merriam, 1998). One of the key assumptions of qualitative research is based on the view that reality is constructed by people interacting with their social worlds. Qualitative researchers strive to understand the meanings people have constructed and the ways they make sense of their experiences (Merriam, 1998). Other characteristics of qualitative research include the study of a process in its natural setting, the predominant use of

fieldwork and interactions with participants to elicit data, and the unique role of the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In addition, qualitative research traditions assume that meanings are socially constructed and multiple, complex, and contextual; the best way to understand these meanings are for qualitative researchers to engage more fully with the contexts and the participants within the contexts they wish to understand (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative researchers ask questions that relate to "How?" and "Why?" about a phenomenon or experience.

## Critical Qualitative Research

In general, the purpose of a study, along with the methods likely to answer the questions proposed in a study, drive the design of the study. As Patton elucidates (1990), the primary criterion for judging methodological quality is whether or not one has made sensible methods decisions given the purpose of the inquiry, the research questions being investigated, and the resources available. Thus, different methods are appropriate for different situations. Answers to questions such as the following will determine the kinds of data and the methods most appropriate for a research investigation (Patton, 1990): what kind of information is being sought; how is the information to be used; and what resources are available to best conduct the research?

With regard to qualitative inquiry, several of the characteristics of qualitative design make it appropriate for this study. As Patton (1990) explains, qualitative and naturalistic approaches are particularly useful when one wishes to inductively and holistically understand human experience in context-specific settings. Topics oriented toward exploration and discovery are particularly suited for qualitative investigation. Whenever one's purpose is to understand someone or something in-depth, and when one can identify cases that are rich in information, qualitative research can yield data from which much can be learned from a few exemplars of the phenomenon in question (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Research purposes and questions that focus on process,

understanding, description, and interpretation, and which attempt to describe experiences contextually and holistically, are well-suited to a qualitative approach to research.

Critical qualitative research is based on a critique of power relationships in society and is openly ideological (Lather, 1992). By keeping the spotlight on power relationships in society, it counters some forms of interpretive inquiry that ignore how structural forces subtly and not so subtly impact all our lives (Crotty, 1998; Sears, 1992). Critical inquiry takes into account how our lives are mediated by systems of inequity such as classism, racism, sexism, and heterosexism (Lather, 1992). As Crotty (1998) notes, researchers who conduct qualitative research based on critical inquiry find themselves interrogating commonly held values and assumptions, challenging conventional social structures, and often engaging in social action. Critical researchers also assume overtly political research that is openly opposed to power inequities and questions the institutions that continue to perpetuate inequities is no more or less ideological than mainstream research (Lather, 1992). In fact, the foregrounding of the political values and assumptions underlying the research is seen as a strength rather than a limitation in that it explicitly situates the research and the researcher enabling readers to more completely judge the value of the research in relation to their own situations.

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) describe some of the basic assumptions that critical researchers who use their work as a form of social or cultural criticism generally accept: all thought is mediated by power relations social in nature and historically constituted; facts can never be isolated from values; some groups in a society are privileged over others; oppression has many expressions and are interconnected; and mainstream research practices are implicated in reproducing systems of oppression. The assumptions of critical research drive the purpose of a study, the types of research questions asked, the choices of data to collect, and the analysis of the data collected. As Crotty (1998) states, "the spirit of social critique, expresses itself in many ways. Through all this diversity, however, critical inquiry remains a form of praxis a search for

knowledge, to be sure, but always emancipatory knowledge, knowledge in the context of action and the search for freedom" (p. 159).

This study was a critical qualitative study designed to engage adult educators who have recognized the norms of whiteness, white privilege, and the power differentials associated with racism and are attempting to challenge or transform those relations of power within their practices. It was essential to obtain rich, complex descriptions to further the goal of understanding how and why they do what they do. The primary way to elicit such information was to talk with the research participants, exploring the complexities, contradictions, and challenges within their everyday practices. Critical qualitative inquiry presented the best means and opportunity to understand the phenomena holistically, juxtaposing the participants' understandings and interpretations with those of the researcher and the broader societal context, including the systems of privilege and inequity that inform our lives. In my study, meaning was assembled from the data but was also informed by examining theoretical constructs of the social construction of race, including whiteness, and the impacts on our lives in this country.

## Sample Selection

In a qualitative study, an effective sampling strategy is described as purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the participants selected are those information-rich cases from whom one can learn the most based on the questions under study (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990).

Several strategies for selecting information-rich cases are available to qualitative researchers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used both criterion and maximum variation sampling in this study. Criterion sampling reflects the choice of participants based on predetermined criteria of importance; maximum variation sampling is a strategy that directs one to purposefully choose participants in widely varying instances of the phenomenon under questions. Maximum variation sampling attempts to cut across participant variation, turning an apparent weakness into a strength by applying the logic

that any common patterns emerging from variation are of particular importance in capturing the core experiences of a phenomena being studied (Patton, 1990). In a maximum variation sample, data analysis generally yields two kinds of findings: (1) highly detailed descriptions of each case, useful for documenting uniqueness and variation, and (2) important shared patterns that exist across cases and derive significance from having emerged from heterogeneity (Patton, 1990).

The field of adult education is broad, diverse, and varied in scope. In this study, I included participants from several areas of adult education: an organizational consulting group, specializing in the creation of antiracist organizations nationwide; a church that has undertaken many efforts to challenge racism; a nonprofit organization involved in prison activism; an antiracist campus organization; and a nonprofit, nationally-focused educational organization. The reach of white privilege and racism are pervasive in our society; exploring the lives of adult educators who are intentionally challenging racism in as many areas as possible can only increase our understanding and lead to further efforts to combat racism and rearticulate a more progressive White identity.

In an attempt to effectively examine adult education in a wide range of settings, I chose five different organizations and then selected at least two individuals from each organization. Although this is not a case study, brief descriptions of the organizations are presented in an abbreviated case study format. The organizations were selected according to two key criteria: 1) they had an explicit antiracist stance; and 2) specifically stated one of their purposes as confronting or challenging white privilege and racism. I used the internet, professional connections, and snowball sampling (Patton, 1990) to identify possible organizations from which to select individuals as study participants. These methods proved successful as I was able to locate various organizations who identified themselves as antiracist and who specifically stated the need to challenge white privilege and racism within their work. The snowball sampling technique (Patton, 1990) in which initial participants suggested additional individuals able to provide relevant information

related to the questions addressed in my study was especially valuable; indeed many of the participants suggested each other as possible participants. As noted above, I chose five varying types of organizations within the above criteria in order to gain as broad a representation across the areas of adult education as possible. In Table 1, I provide basic information about each organization, followed by a narrative in which I will briefly describe each organization and its orientations, purposes, and goals.

Table 1

Organizations

| Organization | Primary Purposes | Location |
|---|---|---|
| Prison activist; focuses on jails, prisons, and systems of social control; grassroots activist | Monitors conditions in jails and prisons; increases public awareness; explores viability of alternatives to incarceration; advocates on behalf of prisoners and their families; collaborates with other local organizations | Southeastern U.S. |
| Religious; Presbyterian Church | Conducts workshops for own and other congregations to address racism; collaborates with other community groups to challenge specific incidents; is currently working on broad initiative to confront predatory lendors | Southeastern U.S. |
| Multiracial educational organization; addresses White culture and role in racism | To educate others on White culture, racism, decentering whiteness, and developing multiracial values | Northeastern U. S. |
| Organizational consulting group | Works over a period of time (not less than 1 year) to assist organizations in developing and implementing antiracist organization | Southeastern U. S. |
| Campus antiracist organization | Educate others on campus and in community about racism and its impact | Southeastern U. S. |

## Program Descriptions

The prison activist organization is located in a rural section of the southeastern United States; in the words of its director it is a "very small, very grassroots" antiracist organization that exists to "monitor what goes on in the so-called criminal justice system of area communities." A brochure from the organization states explicitly that our jails in America "do not protect society from crime but instead reinforce patterns of racism and social inequality, enabling us to avoid the far more challenging solution to a crime-ridden society  economic justice." At this time, there are two full-time employees of the organization with plans to bring another person on board, at least part-time. It is a nonprofit organization and is supported by grants from several foundations, including the Unitarian Universalist Fund for a Just Society, the RESIST Foundation, a Presbyterian Church, and by branches of several county NAACP offices. The organization's many activities include visiting prisons and prisoners regularly, as well as advocating on behalf of prisoners and their families which often includes attending court with the defendants to monitor and ensure their rights are not violated. The organization also calls attention to the system's inadequacies by taking steps to initiate investigations into the conditions of county jails, to initiate investigations into racist practices of judges, and to increase the public's awareness of all these conditions. The organization works with other local organizations and communities to form watchdog groups to monitor the jails and judges and to organize people to speak out against the use of capital punishment. They organize an annual Freedomwalk in which participants march 80+ miles through five counties to call attention to human and civil rights abuses in jails, prisons, and courtrooms and to further educate the public about the issues involved in the criminal justice system. They also offer a Civil Rights and Wrongs Tour for groups of students, community organizers, and interested parties to learn about and observe some of the historical and current conditions that have existed in their part of the state.

The second organization, a Presbyterian Church in the southeastern United States, is a multiracial church community. They actively work to challenge racism throughout the area where they are located. The minister and a church elder have completed many workshops on racism for church groups within their denomination and geographical area, as well as around the country. They also chair a Racism Task Force with other Presbyterian ministers in the local metropolitan area and support several committees within their congregation that take an active stance in working for social justice, including the Peacemaking and Justice Committee. The minister and one of his church elders, an African American woman, have written and published a book chronicling their church's experiences, struggles, and successes in developing a multiracial congregation, and in which they specifically examine the impact of racism. A perusal of the book shows several chapters related to racism and the pastor and church's continuing efforts to honestly acknowledge and then challenge the system of race. Most recently the church has become involved in several other initiatives in coalition with other groups; they have worked concertedly to challenge the prison industrial system in their state and have successfully called on legislators to not allow private prison groups to establish prisons in their state. They are currently collaborating with several groups to increase awareness about predatory lending practices within the state and their local area and have lobbied successfully for the passage of a legislative bill to address this issue.

The third organization, a multiracial educational organization located in the northeastern United States, is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 to support cultural exploration and self-discovery among White Americans. It is a multiracial organization that recognizes longstanding racism, racial inequality, and injustices in our society, citing the Kerner Commission and *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944) by Gunnar Myrdal as historical support and documentation. The Center, co-founded by a Black woman and a White man, examines White culture in the context of the greater American culture, specifically addressing issues relating to the

norm and invisibility of whiteness and white privilege. They formed an explicitly multiracial organization and predicate their work on the belief that an examination of White American culture should include the perspectives of both insiders and outsiders to that culture. The impetus for the creation of the organization lay in the lack of information and discussion of the roles White people might play in creating a multiracial society as well as the lack of discussion of whiteness and White culture. They maintain a national network of relationships with activists and scholars who share similar concerns and endeavor to foster growing awareness and discussion among a broader public. They continue to raise consciousness on the topic of whiteness, create forums for dialogue, bring scholarly perspectives to the attention of the general public, assist organizations with their internal growth toward a multiracial culture, and encourage the development of new perspectives designed to help Whites participate actively in building a multiracial society. They maintain a website, publish a quarterly newsletter, and have published several papers related to decentering whiteness and creating a multiracial society.

The fourth organization, an organizational consulting group, is primarily based in the southeastern United States but also contracts with organizations and groups nationwide. There are several facets to the work they do; however, one primary component is the work they undertake to struggle against racism by creating antiracist organizations. They work with organizations, primarily nonprofits but increasingly several county health and housing organizations, over a period of one to two years to enable the organizations to create their own antiracist organization. As the leaders describe, it is a developmental process that entails several phases, including bringing a shared antiracist analysis into the culture of the organization, conducting an assessment of where the organization currently stands, creating a change team within the organization to develop a plan and monitor the process, conducting ongoing caucuses with People of Color and Whites within the organization to address internalized racist oppression and internalized racial superiority, and collectively gaining support for the efforts. At some

point within the process, the consultants begin to pull back from the organization and offer more indirect support with less direct engagement. Within their program, they conduct a *Dismantling Racism* workshop that addresses the history and legacy of racism, the impact of whiteness and white privilege on our society, and an exploration into collaborative efforts to challenge racism.

The fifth and final organization, a campus antiracist organization, is located on a university campus in the southeastern United States. Their primary goals are to promote human equality/social equality, define the basis of racism, target institutional racism, dismantle ignorance through education, promote racial equity by speaking out against inequality, promote awareness of racism, and explore racial diversity. It was created by a group of undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty members after participation in an intensive workshop related to understanding and challenging racism. The group has built alliances with community groups, and recently the energy has begun to be refocused into several different local initiatives, including a living wage campaign on the campus and a broad-based community group formed initially to demand accountability and increase awareness about the questionable death of a prison inmate. They have facilitated workshops for various community groups including mental health professionals, women's shelters, church groups, and the campus community.

Within each of the five organizations, I chose at least two participants for my study, one White and one a person of color, in order to obtain the perspectives of adult educators who work within the same or similar antiracist organizations but who are positioned differently in society. The criteria used to select participants within each organization were based on the following criteria: 1) they work with adults in an educational capacity; 2) they are over the age of thirty; and 3) they have been working in their current organization or similar organizations for a minimum of five years.

As for the first criterion, this study was specifically investigating adult educators who have recognized the norms of white privilege and racism and are challenging them

within their practice. Adult educators who understand and resist the power of whiteness can describe the beliefs, practices, and strategies they use to confront racism within our racialized society. The reasoning behind criterion two and three also relates to the purpose of the study and the research questions. In order to understand how adult educators have come to recognize and challenge white privilege and institutionalized racism, I assume that their capabilities and experiences in doing so have developed over time. The abilities to describe an evolution in beliefs and practices related to racism, as well as to conceptualize and use strategies to confront racism presuppose a maturity developed through addressing and examining the complexities and contradictions of racism. This is supported by the literature on Black and White racial identity development and by those who have written about their experiences in challenging and attempting to transform white racist practices embedded within institutions and society (Kivel, 1996; Sleeter, 1995; Tatum, 1997; Thompson,1999; Wellman, 1999). In Table 2, I provide the key characteristics of each participant in addition to the pseudonym used for each participant in this study. Following the table, I offer a brief profile for each participant in the study.

## Participant Profiles

I will provide a brief profile of each participant in the study; they are grouped in accordance with the organization in which they work, as outlined in the table above. As can be seen from the table, all but one of the participants in the study were either Black or White. Hernando, a Cuban male who self-identifies as a Person of Color, was the lone person of Latino descent interviewed for the study. He has worked with the antiracist campus organization, as well as community organizations for many years. The interview with Hernando offered the opportunity to understand racism from the perspective of someone who has lived in the United States since the early sixties, has experienced discrimination and racism, but is outside the Black-White binary that has existed during this country's history (Feagin, Vera, & Batur, 2001).

Paul

Paul is a White male in his early fifties. He has worked in his current organization for nine years but has worked in the areas of prison activism and antiracism in various capacities for about thirty years beginning in his home state of Louisiana. He also has been involved with a longstanding community in the southeast that has a social justice

Table 2

Participants

| Pseudonym | Race | Sex | Age | Organization |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Paul | White | Male | early-50s | Prison activist |
| Linda | Black | Female | late 40s | Prison activist, community organizer |
| Sara | White | Female | late 30s | Prison activist |
| Robert | White | Male | mid-50s | Pastor/multiracial church |
| Marie | Black | Female | mid-40s | Member/multiracial church |
| Christine | Black | Female | mid-40s | Multiracial, educational org. |
| Jim | White | Male | late-40s | Multiracial, educational org. |
| Terry | White | Female | mid-40s | Organizational dev.; consulting group |
| Kevin | Black | Male | mid-40s | Organizational dev.; consulting group |
| Alex | White | Male | mid-40s | University antiracist group |
| Steven | White | Male | mid-40s | University antiracist group |
| Hernando | Person of Color | Male | late-40s | University antiracist group |

and theology or faith-based focus. In fact, his current organization grew from an impetus within the faith-based community to address issues surrounding prisons and inequities in

the region. Paul talked about his longstanding commitment to challenge wrongdoing and to help people who are oppressed "develop a voice that can be heard by those who are in control and who we feel do damage to lives in their communities." He also expressed a strong commitment and belief in grassroots, community organizations and said "I've personally come to a place where I believe that if change is to occur in any of our institutions but particularly in the criminal justice system, it's got to start at a very grassroots level." His continuing efforts embody his beliefs and commitment to what he does.

Linda

Linda is a Black woman in her late forties; she grew up and still lives in a rural area in a southeastern state. She works now as a community activist and organizer, collaborates with the prison activist organization, as well as with another member of the prison organization, Sara, to create and develop a neighborhood community center in the rural town where she lives. Recently, she has begun speaking and working with others to conduct workshops and is considering a run for city council or mayor in the town where she lives at some point in the future.

Sara

Sara is a White woman in her late thirties who currently works with the prison activist organization in a southeastern state. She formerly worked for fourteen years at a community in a metropolitan city in the South that was responsive to the homeless of the city and was "about undoing racism and sharing life together in a diverse community." Sara was born and raised in South Florida by parents who were active in the Civil Rights movement. Her father, now a retired Lutheran minister, started a mission congregation in South Florida during the 1960s. Sara later attended school in the Northeast, earning a Master's degree in English literature. Shortly after graduation she moved south to work with the homeless population in a large Southern city. She has participated in many social justice and antiracist initiatives throughout her life.

Robert

Robert is a White male in his mid-fifties who has been the pastor of a Presbyterian Church near a large metropolitan area in the southeast for almost twenty years. He grew up in the Mississippi Delta region, spending most of his youth in a farming town in Arkansas on the Mississippi River. He later attended college in Memphis where he began to actively work to challenge racism. He worked in the political campaign for the first Black candidate to run for mayor of Memphis, was part of a group that demonstrated and boycotted a local restaurant that refused to serve Black students, and worked in support of the garbage workers' strike in Memphis in 1968. After graduating from divinity school, Robert became an ordained pastor, married a pastor, and
with his wife, co-pastored a church in Norfolk, Virginia. He went from there to Nashville and then to his current church where he has served as pastor since 1983.

Marie

Marie is a Black woman in her late forties; she was born and raised in the South prior to and during the Civil Rights movement. Marie is a member and elder of the Presbyterian Church and has worked closely with the minister, Robert, as well as other church organizations to build a multiracial, inclusive church environment and to challenge racism. She has written passionately about her experiences, struggles, and joys in working within her church and community to challenge the system of race. In addition, she has co-led antiracism workshops for members of her own congregation, for other church groups within the Presbytery locally and nationwide, and for various community groups. She is currently focusing her work in the church on young people and children.

Christine

Christine is a Black woman in her mid-forties; she was born and raised in South Carolina and attended schools during the era of school segregation. Christine is a sociology professor at a university in the northeast; she specializes in race, gender, and criminal justice issues. She was the first African American woman to obtain a Ph.D. in

sociology at Rutgers University in 1981. She is the co-founder of the multiracial organization that seeks to address White American culture, its part in racism and in developing a multiracial society. She has had a major role in developing the activities and materials used in the workshops conducted by the organization, has written several pieces published by the organization, and has presented the workshops to various groups. She is married to Jim, another participant in this study, and they have two sons.

Jim

Jim is a White male in his late forties. He co-founded the multiracial, educational organization that looks at White culture and its roles in perpetuating racism and creating a multiracial, socially just society. He states that the organization operates on the premise that "knowledge of one's own racial background and culture is essential when learning how to relate to people of other racial and cultural groups." Jim has an M.B.A. and fifteen years managerial experience in the nonprofit and private sectors with small organizations and Fortune 100 companies. He also worked as vice-president of a diversity and organizational development consulting firm, owned by a woman of color. Jim is married to Christine, another participant in this study, and they have two young sons. He has published a book, now in its second printing, that describes many topics, including the history of racism in our country, the prevailing theme of colorblindness that now exists, and the ways that White people can learn and work for a society that centers multiracial values and experiences.

Terry

Terry is a White woman in her mid-forties; she was born and raised in a university town in the southeast in what she describes as "an upper-middle class, white, college, liberal town in a college, liberal family" and has worked for approximately fifteen years in various antiracist organizations in the southeast. Terry currently works as a trainer in an organizational development consulting group, with a focus on planning and creating antiracist organizations primarily within social justice, nonprofit organizations. She and

Kevin, another participant in this study, have been major contributors to the *Dismantling Racism* workshop that is presented at the beginning of their work with organizations in order to develop and build a shared analysis of racism.

Kevin

Kevin is a Black male in his mid-forties who has been doing work around racism for nearly twenty years. He began his work with issue training for the United Methodist Seminars on National and International Affairs and in 1985 began doing organizational development work. He started with the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign as their national training coordinator and then went to Peace Development Fund in Massachusetts as the lead trainer and then the director of training. He has done workshops and training related to racism throughout his career but began to focus on dismantling racism while at Peace Development Fund, as several peers there were beginning to develop the model and program, *Dismantling Racism.* He and his colleagues worked over the years to try to open up the primarily white peace groups to People of Color, as they had seen how movements had repeatedly broken and split due to racism within the groups. Kevin eventually left Peace Development Fund and began his own organizational development group. Although Kevin says methods have changed over time and continue to develop to meet the needs of the groups you work with, he continues to "believe that the best way to struggle against racism is to create antiracist organizations." He and his colleagues have begun to work with organizations over a longer period of time, a couple of years or so, in order to develop and build antiracist organizations, a process Kevin sees as developmental and ongoing.

Alex

Alex is a White male in his mid-forties; he was born in Chicago but moved to Florida when he was ten years old. He is currently a philosophy professor in a university in the southeast and was instrumental in the creation and development of the campus antiracist organization as well as other efforts in the community and campus to establish

an antiracist awareness. He had previously been introduced to the ideas of Cornel West during a summer seminar and became more interested in his philosophies and writing; at the suggestion of his department head, Alex began incorporating West's books and ideas into his Introduction to Philosophy classes. A friend and antiracist activist also brought a filmmaker, Francis Reed, and the film, *Skin Deep*, which concerns racism on college campuses to the campus where Alex teaches in the mid-1990s. The discussion of some of the audience members after the film was the springboard for the creation of the campus antiracist organization in which Alex was active. He continues to infuse his philosophy classes with topics that address race, class, gender, and sexual orientation; in 2000, he was the guest editor of a topical issue on racism for a journal. In his piece within the issue, Alex presents "a discussion of the application of democratic educational principles in a college setting. The paper explores the implications of such principles for the work of antiracism and, conversely, how knowledge of antiracism forces one to reexamine one's pedagogy" (p. 298).

Steven

Steven is a White male in his mid-forties. His father was in the military; therefore, Steven grew up around and on army bases, primarily in the southeast. He is currently a biology professor at a university in the southeast. He became involved in the antiracist organization on his campus, participating in meetings, weekend retreats, and in several demonstrations. Steven also worked with other members of the organization to document the layout of the campus in terms of race, job placements, and wages. He has also worked to address racist practices in the community where he lives.

Hernando

Hernando is a Cuban male, self-described as a "person of color" and as he describes "my color is in my tongue. When I speak everybody here defines me." Hernando was born in Cuba, moved to Spain in 1961, and has been in the United State since 1965. He has lived in various parts of the U.S., including New York City, Orlando,

New Orleans, and North Dakota. At one point, he was drafted into the U. S. Army and served overseas for two years. Hernando is currently a Romance Languages professor at a university in the southeast. He was active in the antiracist campus organization as well as other community and campus initiatives. He directly challenges racist practices at the university where he works by calling attention to the racist practices of the institution and by speaking out publicly against them. He has also written several pieces addressing racism, including a book of short stories published in 1998 which details acts of racism in a rural, Southern town.

Another major aspect of this study was to keep White adult educators as the primary emphasis in the study but include the perspectives of People of Color within the same organization. Although both perspectives are equally important, the focus in this particular study was to learn what White adult educators can and need to do to challenge racism viewed from the perspectives of White antiracist educators and People of Color within the same organizations. Examining each set of experiences provided a way to learn from the perspectives of two groups differentially affected by a racist society. These are individuals who share many of the same goals and ideas but enter and conduct their work based on the interlocking systems of oppression and privilege that exist in society, thus experiencing and interpreting their work and the work of their organizations in relation to their positionality.

## Data Collection

Different methods of data collection are available for the qualitative researcher to reconstruct, describe, and interpret social phenomena. The data collection methods used are determined by the problem and purpose of the study, the researcher's theoretical orientation, and the sample selected for the study (Merriam, 1998). Observations, interviews, and documents are the most common forms of data collection in qualitative studies in education (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Merriam, 1998, Patton, 1990). I used three types/sources of data in this study: interviews, documents, and participant observations.

## Interviews

In qualitative research, interviewing is probably the most common form of data collection. The most common type of interviewing is the individual, face-to-face verbal interchange, but interviews can also encompass face-to-face group interviewing or phone interviews. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Merriam, 1998). The general purpose of an interview is to allow the researcher to enter into and comprehend others' perspectives and the meanings they construct around their experiences.

I used semi-structured interviews as the primary means of data collection for my study. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to use a mix of more and less structured questions, enabling me to respond to each participant's situation, to the emerging views of the participant, and to new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 1998). After gaining permission to conduct interviews, I used interview guides (Appendices A and B) to conduct face-to-face interviews with the twelve participants across the five different organizations. I interviewed at least two participants from each organization; if only two people were interviewed, one was White and the other a person of color. The interviews were conducted within three different southeastern states and one northeastern state, requiring extensive travel and prior arrangements made with participants in order to select a mutually agreeable time frame for the interview. The interviews ranged in length from an hour and a half to two hours, with the majority lasting an hour and a half. I tape-recorded each interview and transcribed each one verbatim into a word processing document. The transcribed interviews ranged in length from twenty-five to forty-nine double-spaced pages. The interviews were conducted over a time span of five months.

The question of how many individuals to interview for a study depends on the questions being asked, the data being gathered, and the resources available for the study, among other factors (Merriam, 1998). The most important factor in making the decision relates to the adequate number of participants, sites, or activities needed to answer the

questions posed by the research study (Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) recommends specifying a minimum sample size based on a reasonable expectation of the coverage needed to investigate the phenomena related to the purpose of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend sampling until a point of saturation is reached, at which point no new information related to the research purpose is being collected and documented. I interviewed twelve participants for this study, as I was beginning to note data saturation in the responses after the seventh interview.

## Documents

There are various types of documents available to qualitative researchers for analysis, including personal documents, public records, and physical materials (Merriam, 1998). Documents can be used to ascertain additional information or insights relevant to the research questions, although their usefulness can be affected by limitations related to their form, accuracy, or completeness (Patton, 1990). However, documents can often furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, offer historical understandings, and track changes (Merriam, 1998). They can also ground an investigation within the context of the problem being investigated and offer data on real-world and day-to-day issues that are sometimes not as accessible through interviews (Merriam, 1998).

I used the documents in which the program or organization's purposes are described, as well as any publications or educational materials about the program as an additional type of data. In addition, three of the participants have written books outlining their views on racism, whiteness, and/or white privilege. Two of the organizations provide a periodical newsletter to which I subscribed and also obtained back issues. Two organizations have information available on the internet, one of whom uses the internet as one of their primary means of education, awareness, and advocacy. Finally, one of the organizations has a curriculum guide explaining their understanding of racism and white privilege. The documents were analyzed to provide information about the program's

stated purpose or goals and how information about the program and its achievements are communicated to its supporters. This enabled me to understand how the program officially positions itself in relation to white privilege and racism. The documents provided a wealth of descriptive information, as well as material that supplemented the information gained from the face-to-face interviews with participants from each organization. I was able to explore how the program's goals impact the adult educators who enact them and how the stated goals are realized in actual practice.

## Participant Observations

During the data collection phase of my dissertation, I attended two workshops designed to address and challenge racism in our society, one in December and one in January. One of the workshops was titled *Dismantling Racism* and was conducted by two of my participants. It occurred over a weekend in December, with all day Friday and Saturday sessions. The workshop was sponsored by an activist group who primarily works to challenge environmental racism in the Northeast Georgia geographical area. I also attended an extensive workshop, *Undoing Racism*, sponsored by the People's Institute of New Orleans that took place in a major metropolitan city on a Friday evening, all day/evening Saturday and during the day on Sunday. It was co-sponsored by a local organizing committee, a group of seasoned and veteran activists. I was a full participant in each of the workshops. During the workshops I took notes primarily on the educational aspects of the material and jotted down notes related to feelings and thoughts I had during the discussions, as well as on any particular cogent interactions that occurred during discussions or small group activities. Immediately after each session I reflected on my own feelings and the events in the workshop, composing notes to myself. This helped not just in my understanding of how the adult educators in the workshops approached and educated others about racism, but also in developing a deeper understanding of my own awareness of racism. This in turn led to more astute observations and questions when interviewing participants in the study.

## Field Notes

Field notes are data in the form of journal entries, notes and memos written by the researcher to herself, notes written based on observations, feelings, and interactions before, during, and after an interview session, and numerous other texts created by researchers to represent aspects of field experiences (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992). They are constructed representations of the researcher's experience with participants and the phenomena under investigation and as such can be valuable sources of insight for research studies.

I composed field notes before and after I conducted each interview, reflecting on subjects such as my expectations of the interview, the nature of the interview, the feelings I had during the interview, the setting of the interview, and any other aspects of the interview or context that seemed relevant. In addition, the day after each interview I recalled and documented the salient points from each interview framed by the purpose of my study and research questions. I typed and dated the fieldnotes I completed after conducting the interviews as well as those I wrote during and after my participation in the antiracist workshops. I kept them on my hard drive and printed them out for review at various periods during the data collection phase of the study. I was thus able to begin the process of data analysis that continued with each subsequent interview. These observations enabled me to track emerging insights as I proceeded through the data collection process.

## Data Analysis

There are many types of data analysis available for qualitative researchers to employ to understand and interpret their data. The process of qualitative data analysis is one of culling for meaning among the words and actions of the participants, the observations and ideas of the researcher, framed by the researcher's focus of inquiry (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The task of analysis as described by LeCompte (2000) requires researchers to first determine how to organize their data and then how to "use it

to construct an intact portrait of the original phenomenon under study and second, to tell readers what that portrait means" (p. 147). According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996), what links all the approaches to analysis is a central concern with transforming and interpreting the data in a rigorous and scholarly manner in order to capture the complexities of the social worlds we seek to understand. It is also important to make informed decisions about the analytic strategy(ies) adopted for a research study, again linking the research purpose and questions to the most desirable data analysis techniques for a particular project (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

As noted earlier, after completing the interviews for the study, I wanted to keep the primary focus on how White adult educators challenge racism but in a way that also valued the ideas and experiences of the People of Color within each organization. There were several reasons for this decision: 1) to counter the tendency to again contribute to the concept of the generic adult educator and the generic learner that undergirds so many assumptions and aspects of our theories, programs, and instructional methods within adult education; 2) to make positionality a cogent, viable part of the analysis rather than to ignore the part it may play in the perspectives and experiences of the participants; and 3) to purposefully keep the impetus on White adult educators' responsibility to address issues of their own racialized identity, white privilege, and racism, the major purpose behind the study. Even though the decision to interview People of Color within each organization would also allow for triangulation, its major purpose was to round out the perspectives related to how White adult educators can explicitly challenge racism. It also connects with a long history of work that has understood how the oppressed are in a better position to describe and critique the ways of the oppressor (hooks, 1992). Using both perspectives added to a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied.

## Constant Comparative Method

I used the constant comparative method of data analysis to analyze the interview transcripts, documents, and field notes gathered during my study. Constant comparison involves comparing one particular incident or segment of data from interviews, field notes, or documents with another segment in the same or a different data set (Merriam, 1998). The comparisons lead to the identification of similarities and differences across the data, building tentative codes and categories of data that are then compared to other instances (Merriam, 1998). The comparisons also lead to ever-increasing levels of abstractions as the categories eventually assist us to develop concepts to describe and interpret the phenomena we are studying. Categories and concepts then enable us to "think" about the data in a way that allows us to take the step toward interpreting some aspect of educational practice or research and drawing inferences about future action (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

In my study, I primarily used the constant comparative method as developed and described by Maykut & Morehouse (1994). The authors used Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method along with procedural detail developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Taylor and Bogdan (1984) to develop a way to conduct a systematic and inductive analysis of qualitative data that allows the researcher to stay close to the participants' feelings, thoughts, and actions as they relate to the focus of inquiry. Maykut & Morehouse (1994) describe the constant comparative method as a way of analyzing qualitative data that combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained. In the coding and categorizing process, the researcher seeks to develop a set of categories that provide a reasonable reconstruction of the data she has collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Unitizing the Data

The process of searching for meaning among the words and actions of the participants framed by the researcher's focus of inquiry begins by identifying chunks or

units of meaning in the data, a process sometimes referred to as unitizing the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The smaller units of meaning then serve as the basis for defining larger categories of meaning (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Units of meaning are identified by carefully reading through transcripts, field notes, and documents; the next step is to indicate by a word or phrase the essence of the unit's meaning.

I began the analysis process by reading through the transcripts, field notes, and documents to identify units of meaning contained in the data. I indicated by a word or phrase the essence of the unit's meaning. After completing this process, I then reread all data and generated a list of recurring phrases, concepts, patterns, ideas, topics, and possible themes grounded in my data and framed by my research purpose and questions. I did this first for the data collected with the White adult educators and subsequently for the data collected with the People of Color. I subsequently looked at the commonalities and differences between the two groups of adult educators in regard to their understandings of racism and White privilege and how their understandings guide their efforts to challenge racism.

Inductive Category Coding

Inductive category coding begins the process that allows the researcher to organize and categorize the data into relevant, meaningful units based on an organizing system predominantly derived from the data themselves (Tesch, 1990). Coding is the process that enables the researcher to compare units of meaning across various categories; it occurs in several phases as the analysis progresses and eventually leads to the discovery of conceptual similarities and patterns (Tesch, 1990).

To begin the process of inductive category coding, I used the unitized data cards, the list of recurring phrases and concepts, and my research focus. I revisited the list of recurring concepts and combined several areas that overlapped. I selected one concept or idea from the list as my first provisional coding category and examined the unitized data cards for any that would fit the first provisional category. For example, one of my initial

recurring phrases was "history;" I collected the unitized data cards that fit this initial category and placed them under "history." I used the looks like' or feels like' strategy suggested by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) to compare each subsequent data card in order to decide whether or not it belonged under the provisional category "history." The look/feel-alike' criteria was developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a systematic way of developing salient categories of meaning that are inductively derived.

As I came across unitized data cards that did not fit the first provisional category, I examined my initial list of recurring ideas and concepts to determine if the data might fit any of those provisional categories. If so, I categorized accordingly. In addition, when I found data cards that did not seem to fit any of the initial recurring concepts, I created a new provisional category. I continued in this manner until all unitized data had been placed under provisional categories. The initial inductive category coding resulted in approximately forty categories.

Refinement of Categories

In order to refine and develop the categories discovered in the initial phase of inductive category coding, Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest rereading the cards tentatively placed under the provisional categories and identifying the properties or characteristics of the group of cards clustered under the category. The goal is to distill the meaning carried in the data cards and develop a rule to serve as the basis for including or excluding data cards in the category. The rules for inclusion can be facilitated by noting the properties as they are identified or by highlighting the quotes or information on each data card that led to its categorization. The rules for inclusion begin to reveal what you are researching and are important in deriving research outcomes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

I returned to my provisional categories and codes and reread each one, noting the meanings contained on each data card that prompted me to code it under each category. For example, for the category Whiteness Revealed First Through Difference, the rule for

inclusion stated that "White adult educators first recognize racial differences before they learn to see their own racial identities as White." I completed this process for each provisional category and the codes contained in the data set. Several categories were combined and others revised. This resulted in a set of categories that could be used as preliminary answers to my research questions, although the relationship among the categories was only beginning to emerge.

Exploring Relationships and Patterns Across Categories

The next step in the constant comparative method allows the researcher to develop a story line to integrate the data and create a picture somewhat different but accurately reflective of the data with which one started (LeCompte, 2000; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). As described by LeCompte (2000), in this phase of data analysis, the researcher is reassembling the pieces into "structures or groups of related or linked patterns that, taken together, build an overall description of the program or problem being studied" (p. 151).

I returned to the categories and the rules for inclusion I had written to describe the underlying meaning contained within each category. In this phase of data analysis, I was primarily reviewing the rules for inclusion, or the propositions I had written for each category, looking for how they were connected with each other and with the research questions. I reviewed each set of propositions and categories and considered for each one whether or not they could stand alone and describe an aspect of the phenomenon I was investigating or whether they related to each other in more important ways to form salient relationships and patterns (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This process resulted in the outcome propositions or major themes of my study that answered my research questions and contributed to the purpose of my study.

Some qualitative researchers describe writing the results as an important part of the analytic process (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Wolcott, 2001). I definitely found this to be true. Determining the priorities and sequence of data presentation and communicating the outcomes of the study in a way that stayed close to

the data yet attended to the focus of my inquiry definitely yielded new insights and understandings related to my research questions. It was also during the writing phase of data analysis that key ideas related to the conclusions and implications of my study became apparent to me.

## Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability in a qualitative study can be approached through attention to a study's conceptualization, the way in which the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way the findings are presented (Merriam, 1998). However, the nature of qualitative research means that the ways for accounting for validity and reliability take different forms than in quantitative research studies. The trustworthiness of results reflect how confident practitioners and consumers of research are in the findings of the study.

### Internal Validity

Internal validity deals with how well the findings of a study match the real world (Merriam, 1998). However, an assumption underlying qualitative research is that reality is multidimensional, contextual, and changing, not a single or fixed entity waiting to be discovered and measured (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, determining the congruence between the results of a study and reality presents a perplexing dilemma. Whose reality are we matching? And how do we determine what it is? The qualitative researcher interacts with participants to understand their constructions of their experiences and then presents a representation and interpretation of some aspects of the participants' experiences.

Although most qualitative researchers believe that internal validity is a strength of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998), they also make recommendations for strategies to increase the internal validity of a research study. These strategies include triangulation, member checks, clarification of researchers' assumptions and biases, peer examination, and long-term data collection (Merriam, 1998). In this study, I employed triangulation, or "using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm

the emerging findings" (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). I used multiple sources of data and methods, including face-to-face interviews, participant observations, and documents; in several instances, I was able to participate in a program conducted by participants whom I later interviewed. I was also able to talk informally with participants during the data collection period to clarify my developing interpretations, as well as to follow-up with questions that occurred as I reviewed interview transcripts. I was thus able to get a richer understanding of their perspectives and the difficulties they face in their day-to-day lives. Tracking my own developing understandings related to racism also enabled me to surface and clarify some of my own biases related to the topic of my study. Although none of my participants opted to review the interview transcripts from the study, several did review my tentative interpretations as well as my findings. By using these strategies, I believe I was able to better construct a holistic understanding and plausible explanations for the phenomena being studied without coming to premature judgment or closure (Mathison, 1988), thus enhancing internal validity.

## External Validity

External validity, or generalizability, is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to another situation (Merriam, 1998). As qualitative research intentionally produces rich, contextualized descriptions of a phenomenon, generalizibility is not considered by some to be a useful concept. Concepts such as transferability, authenticity, and trustworthiness have been identified as better ways to refer to the credibility of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Providing rich, thick description, describing the contexts in which the participants work, and using multi-site designs can document and lend credence to the authenticity of the study (Merriam, 1998). I endeavored to increase the external validity of this study by using maximum variation sampling to search for and explore sites and individuals that maximized diversity related to the phenomenon of interest, thus allowing any results obtained to be applied by readers to a greater range of situations (Merriam, 1998). I also gathered data

using multiple methods to allow me to provide thick, rich descriptions of the organizations and individuals interviewed.

## Reliability

Reliability generally "refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Again, qualitative research does not assume one reality that is accessible to everyone. Instead, qualitative researchers seek to describe the world as those in the world experience it, understanding that since there are so many interpretations of experience, there are no established benchmarks by which to establish reliability in a traditional sense (Merriam, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest instead that we should examine the dependability or sensibility of the results based on the data collected and analyzed. The standard for reliability then is related to whether the results obtained are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) suggests several strategies to increase the dependability of the results, including triangulation, a detailed audit trail that describes how the data were collected and the categories and patterns derived, and clear statements of the researcher's position and assumptions. In this study, I employed triangulation, kept field notes throughout the study to document decisions made during research, and explicitly stated my assumptions regarding all research and this study in particular. All of these strategies increased the reliability of this study.

## Role of the Researcher and Researcher Subjectivities

The perspectives and assumptions the researcher brings to the research study are important aspects of conducting qualitative research. I identified my belief that research is political and the assumptions related to my own positionality as two of the most salient aspects related to my own perspectives and subjectivities that could impact my study. I will discuss each of these topics in turn.

## Research as Political

The argument that all research is inherently political can be traced to the critical theory tradition that questioned what the role and focus of social research should be, what criteria should be used to measure its validity, and the relationship between social research and political struggles (Habermas, 1972; Mills, 1959). Feminist and antiracist critiques of social research emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, sharing the notion that all research is political and involves issues of power and rejecting the notion of objective, apolitical research (Neal, 1998). According to Troyna (1995), explicitly political or critical research has several characteristics in common, including the belief that research takes place in social settings where power relations are stratified by class, race, gender, age or other characteristics and recognition that the production of knowledge through research may be a tool in the reproduction or subversion of dominant assumptions both within and beyond the research process, something not always known or acknowledged when research is begun (Apple, 1996).

I believe that research by its nature is inherently political (Connolly, 1996) as it is always about power and the access to knowledge and power. I also believe that all research projects are political and that researchers who represent themselves as detached and objective only camouflage their interests. Even if not explicitly stated, there is a political aspect to all research in terms of its topic, methodology, and theoretical approach (Lamphere, 1994). All researchers are agents, who choose, consciously or not, from a set of stances and epistemologies and position themselves in one way or another in relation to their stance (Fine, 1994). As Fine (1994) suggested in her discussion of activist research, I positioned myself as interested in political outcomes, as one who hopes "to unearth, disrupt, and transform existing ideological and/or institutional arrangements" (p. 17).

There are several political issues within the context of my proposed study that shaped my methodological lens and affected my research design. My position as a White

female exploring facets of whiteness, power, and institutionalized racism positioned me as someone who is looking at my own group, as one who is making politics and power an explicit and integral part of the research. This stance positioned me in the research rather than neutral or removed and will possibly open me to questions of reasonableness of my results. Also, the decision to focus on White adult educators as my unit of analysis, no matter the reason, opens me up to criticism for further centering whiteness. Another political aspect of my study was the fact that I extended the research gaze into the activities of the powerful in order to unearth and challenge patterns of oppression. I had to contend with issues related to the blindspots that arise when the research gaze is transferred from the other' to the group to which I belong. I had to assess how easy it is for members of powerful groups to decenter and realistically make the group, and possibly the personal investment in belonging to that group, the object of inquiry (Blair, 1998). I also examined the extent to which this dynamic influenced and affected the knowledge constructed during the research process. In addition to the aforementioned strategies designed to increase validity and reliability, I maintained a self-reflexive stance toward my own political views and my own white privilege in order to minimize as much as is possible the impact of my own biases on my research study.

## Positionality and Insider/Outsider Status in Qualitative Research

Positionality is a concept advanced by postmodern and feminist thinkers that validates knowledge only when it includes attention to the knower's position within a specific context (Maher & Tetreault, 2000). Positionality includes the awareness that one's position is defined by gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ableness, or any other dimension of social domination and oppression; it is always evolving, context dependent, and relational (Maher & Tetreault, 2000). Positionality refers as well to how aspects of one's identity such as race, gender, class, etc. affect how one is "positioned" relative to the dominant culture (Tisdell, 2001). People's locations within the networks of privileges and oppression based on socially constructed aspects of identity are open to critique and

change when explored rather than ignored, individualized, or essentialized (Maher & Tetreault, 2000).

Insider/outsider status in qualitative research refers to the social positions and characteristics that researchers share or do not share with their participants in a qualitative study. Beliefs and practices related to insider/outsider status have changed over time and have generally evolved to an understanding that the impact of race, racial difference, and racial sameness are complicated by age, class, education level, sexuality, regional affiliation, among other characteristics during a research study. The extreme model of racial matching that characterizes all researchers as absolutely inside or outside a sociocultural group usually does not play out so rigidly in actual research situations (Twine, 2000). Researchers attest to this finding (Facio, 1993; Gallagher, 2000; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Mirza, 1998; Twine, 2000). Johnson-Bailey (1999) in exploring the complexities of researching within one's own culture, found that both unifying themes and barriers arose during the interview process. Issues of race and gender were unifying issues, while differences in color and class caused some tensions during the interviews, leading Johnson-Bailey (1999) to reiterate the importance of developing a keen awareness of the dimensions of interviewing within her own racial and gender group. There were thus many complexities that can arise during the interview process and a study related to the positionality and insider/outsider status of the researcher and research participants. In my study, it was vital for me to surface these complexities as they arose and to reflect on their impact on the research being conducted.

Based on the literature and discussion above, there are several ways my insider/outsider status and my positionality engaged with and affected my research. My position as a White woman when interviewing the White adult educators did not automatically position me as an insider; I had some characteristics and life experiences in common with the participants, specifically my race, which positioned me as an insider. However, other aspects of my identity that came into play, especially my gender, religious

beliefs, and position as an academic researcher were different from some of my participants. Each interview had its own set of dynamics depending on the dimensions of identity that I shared or did not share with the particular participant. My goal was to be cognizant of these differences in order to reflect on them after each interview and during the analysis process. I found the aspects of gender and religious beliefs to be the most troublesome for me personally as I interacted with some of the White adult educators. Several of these educators ground their work in Christian religious beliefs. As I have not yet reconciled my religious beliefs with what I know about the damage that has been done to people and groups in the name of religion, I had to stay attuned to this aspect of my thinking in order to fully consider my participants' perspectives on their work to challenge racism.

My positionality and insider/outsider status came into play in different ways when I interviewed the Black adult educators. The aspects of my identity related to gender, class, and educational background were more prevalent. I believe that all my participants were open with me during the interview process, and it is difficult to separate the facets of identity that may have been in play in each interview. I tried to be cognizant of differences in educational background and class in some situations; however, I found our gender afforded us opportunities to connect across some of the differences. I also was born and raised in the rural South as were many of my participants which afforded us a similar background in many ways.

During the study I kept a log of my feelings, biases, and assumptions related to white privilege and racism. My feelings and assumptions changed as the study progressed, especially as a result of my participation in the two extended workshops. I became more aware of where I was in my own journey to be an antiracist White person, and especially became aware of my tendency to discount, disregard, and show anger toward Whites who do not acknowledge or understand the legacy of racism and its impact on others in this country. I also became less the "protector" and "avenger" and began to

understand the impact of racism on Whites as well as People of Color, not just intellectually as I had before but emotionally, too. I saw my own feelings of guilt and self-righteousness displayed before my eyes in the words of my participants and others within the workshops I attended. I also realized that I over-identified with and valorized the oppressed, leading to less than effective strategies in my own work to challenge racism. I thus became more attuned to my own feelings and biases which I believe led to a more complete perspective on the topic I was studying.

In addition, I tend to overplay the impact of structural forces on our lives and as the root of the problems related to inequality and oppression. I had to remain open to the roles of personal responsibility and agency in the lives of my participants and in the decisions they make in their efforts to challenge racism. Although this was not difficult to do during the interviews when I was interacting with the participants and listening to their powerful stories, I did find it more difficult to keep this in mind as I analyzed the data.

## Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this study. One, this study was situated within the context of the United States. The reasoning behind this decision related to the particular circumstances of racial oppression in this country with its legacy of forced slavery and European assimilation. Although the U.S. situation shares some similarities in its enactment and history of racism with some countries, it is also different in many aspects. Thus, I am not able to extend observations to more global contexts where indeed whiteness and racism do function to oppress others, albeit with different methods and within different contexts. However, as several researchers have noted, it is vital that we in the U.S. deal with our own particular brand of racial oppression in order to learn to deal with the changes that will most certainly come from the changing demographics in this country.

Another limitation is related to several characteristics of the organizations I sampled for my study. Most organizations are located within the Southeastern United

States, replete with its own type of racism. Although I was able to talk with members of one organization in the Northeast and found out during data collection that one of the organizations located within the Southeast also works nationwide, the major focus of the study was with organizations that function primarily within the South. Although there were various kinds of organizations and contexts sampled, an even greater variety would have added to the study and possibly influenced its findings.

Finally, one of the criteria for the sample selection related to the age of participants, stating they should be over the age of thirty. Even though there was some variation among the participants, generally their ages were within ten to twelve years of one another. They all grew up within the same historical context in this country, and although this factor contributed to some of the findings of the study, it would have been interesting to have a broader range of ages represented.

# CHAPTER 4

# FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how White antiracist adult educators challenge racism. This was accomplished by examining the experiences of both People of Color and White antiracist adult educators. The research questions guiding this study were: 1) What understandings of racism and white privilege do the adult educators bring to their work; 2) How do their understandings of racism and white privilege guide them to take action to challenge racism?

I have divided the findings of my dissertation into three separate parts within chapter four. In the first part, I present findings from an analysis of the data related to the White adult educators in the study. In the second part, I present findings from an analysis of the data with People of Color who work within the same organizations. In the third part, I discuss the similarities and differences between the two different groups of adult educators within the organizations, with an emphasis on the similarities and differences in relation to their racial positionality, as well as their understandings of racism and white privilege and the ramifications of those understandings for White adult educators who endeavor to challenge racism.

## Whites as Antiracist Adult Educators

In the first part, I discuss the themes and categories that emerged to describe the understandings of racism and how those understandings guide the White adult educators to take action to challenge racism. Table 3 provides an overview of those themes.

### Understandings of Racism

The White adult educators' understandings and analyses of racism were demonstrated by their understanding of racism as institutional, cultural, societal, and

Table 3

White Adult Educators' Understandings of Racism and Impact on Practice

| |
|---|
| Understandings of Racism |
| Racism as Institutional, Cultural, Societal, and Systemic |
| Importance of Historical Perspective |
| Colorblindness: Rhetoric of Denial |
| Analysis of White Privilege |
| Whiteness revealed first through difference |
| Development over time |
| "Always undoing racism." |
| Aware of contradictions. |
| How Understandings Guide Actions to Challenge Racism |
| Helps Maintain Commitment |
| Helps Understand Own and Others' Actions |
| Offers Educational Approaches and Strategies |
| Importance of relationships |
| Experiential approaches |
| Hold self and others accountable |

systemic, by their emphasis on the importance of a historical perspective, by their cogent and strident analysis of the use of the rhetoric of colorblindness as a denial of racism, and by their analysis of their own white privilege. I will now discuss each of these major themes as well as the categories related to the themes in order to explicate how these White participants view racism in our society.

Racism as Institutional, Cultural, Societal, and Systemic

The participants in the study all shared an analysis of racism they described in many different ways as more than individual but also as institutional, societal, cultural, and systemic. During most of the interviews, this analysis and understanding of racism emerged very early in the discussion, as a guiding or talking point for what racism is like in our society. Although they did not deny the role that individuals have in perpetuating racism and carrying out discriminatory acts due to prejudices and stereotypes, they were all clear about the system of racism within our society and its institutions. The ubiquitous nature of racism in our society and the interlocking nature of oppression and privilege were other ways they elaborated on their description of systemic racism. Several participants either currently or formerly work to challenge racism within the criminal justice and prison system. Robert, now a Presbyterian minister, talks about his work in the early 1970s, noting:

> It was obvious that most of the folk in prison, even at that time, were Black folk which was in 1970, '72. And they got much worse treatment than White folk, and so I began to make connections, just make observations when I went into court to observe I guess at that time 60% of folk were Black; now it's almost 100% that come through those county courts.

Terry, who has been working in one capacity or another in various antiracist organizations for fifteen years began early in her career to get a "power analysis that I didn't have before. I learned a lot from all these trainings and got this analysis about how racism is more than just personal prejudices that we have against each other." She further explains:

> The system creates dysfunctional people. White people, we have our set of dysfunctions and People of Color have their set of dysfunctions, and sometimes they overlap and they certainly play off each other very well, and the more official word for that would be internalized racial oppression for People of Color and

> internalized white supremacy for us, but those in real language what it translates to is that folks have learned a way to cope generally in this society and this structure.

The fact that we have all been affected by the systemic racism within our society is foregrounded by Sara, a prison activist, when she talks about the city council and mayor in the small town near where she works. In a majority Black town with a city council that is also majority Black, Sara relates how the "mayor, who's White, runs everything." When discussing a motion that passed before the city council, Sara says:

> It was just an experience of how the mayor is the one who puts into the mouths of the other city council members what the decision is going to be. I think that's another example of the way systemic racism works in our culture and in our society. Here there are folks who have been elected to serve, but they don't feel empowered to make a motion on their own. That happens all the time.

Another participant, Paul, who currently works to monitor and challenge the courts, prisons and jails, and the criminal justice system talks about how he has recognized the systemic connection between the criminal justice system and racism. He says:

> The criminal justice system in [state] has existed to crush People of Color. I mean there's no other way to explain it. Our prisons went from being filled up with poor Whites in the early 1860s to being slave labor camps shortly after Emancipation. Slaves went from the plantation to prisons and were leased out and we have this institutionalization of racism affecting those who violate the law. We created laws to keep people in bondage essentially and if we couldn't legally enslave them on the plantation we'd figure out other ways to keep them from being complete citizens in [state] and throughout the South.

This passage offers a powerful indictment of both the legal and criminal justice institutions and their outright connection to the racist system that exists in this country.

Other institutions/systems were also mentioned as complicit with racism, including the economic, educational, and political institutions. One antiracist group on a college campus attempted to "document the layout of the campus in terms of race, you know, People of Color, who works where, what their positions are in the whole structure." Another participant at the same college said "you always have to keep in mind that the educational institution is part of a bigger community, and the larger community has a certain political mindset that it ultimately pushes, and it comes back to you."

Several participants referred frequently to the ubiquitous nature of the institution of racism, as well as the way it treats people differentially. Sara, when commenting on a judge's behavior, said "he's acting out of the institution of racism that has blinded him so that he pays deference to White people" and when recalling the actions of the town's White mayor says "the police officers know that they have the sanction of the political power to charge people in such a way that they are not going to be able to afford bail." She added that "this is the kind of system of racism that we come up against that controls people and I think really treats people in a very different way."

The cultural aspects of racism were described eloquently by several participants. Alex, a college professor and founder of the campus antiracist organization, when discussing White culture and its particular attributes said:

So, you have all these norms. And I'm not saying People of Color don't have this, but it seems like in White culture it tends to be very individualistic. And we can do that because the institution is going to take care of us as long as we play by the rules. So, one of the obstacles then for organizing the White communities is that you have this culture that resists it.

Jim and the educators in the organization he directs carry out work specifically related to White culture and the effects of the centering of White culture within our society. He explains one of the activities he and his colleagues do to prompt White people to recognize White culture and its relationship to racism. He says:

Our target in this case is White people. They are not aware of what some of the barriers are to achieving a society in which race does not differentially disadvantage or privilege people and how our society is structured around whiteness. So the workshop raises awareness of White culture and gives people permission to talk about it and as they talk about it they start to see that it is a part of our social structure and it's the part that's centered. And then their own training from other times basically kicks in and says "this is not fair; this is not right," and that leads them toward recognizing that, in fact, it's a racist structure without us having to tell them that.

Some participants clearly recognize how the systems are set up to benefit White people. In discussing a local research university and the controversies it was going through with the admissions process at the time of the interview, Robert says:

> I mean the realities are the good old boy network is going to work at [university], it has, it will, and any kind of quote affirmative action to just try to open the doors just a little bit for others is gonna be knocked down. And so, I think every White student who gets into [university] next year ought to realize the main reason they got in was because they were White. That doesn't demean their academic achievements, but it just means that the system is set up for White kids to succeed.

The participants did not negate the role that individuals play in their efforts to make changes in themselves and society in relation to racism but were insistent as Robert said that we "have to go at the systems also." Several participants talked about the difficulty of changing systems, or as Alex said, "trying to get people to organize, to change, and to make changes in institutions, be more accountable to people in those institutions" or even getting other Whites to acknowledge that racism is systemic and institutional. They also frequently acknowledged the power and pull of systemic racism, along with its impact on Whites and People of Color, albeit in different ways. Robert explains how when he first began to understand racism:

> I felt like most White people were evil; they were overt racists. It has shifted a lot since then to see that the issue is not particularly the people although certainly people can do really evil things, but that eradicating those people doesn't change the system so it's helped me get a much more I would say sophisticated and realistic understanding of the powers and that the structures of reality that shape us are much more difficult to get at than I thought.

Paul expands on the theme discussed above:

> It's hard to get to the next place in explaining racism and the racist nature of the system. And especially when most of the actors, most of the key players are still White folk. Even if the judges were fairly conscious of the race issue there's still no real identification with People of Color and the issues they're faced with. I mean the institutionalization is the biggest issue, the institutionalization of racism.

When discussing an antiracism training conducted in the town where he works as a college professor, Alex relates how he and his fellow group members would try to get anyone they could to participate in the training:

> We found that people would go there, and they'd really get into it, the struggle, get into a deeper place and leave with this sense of "wow." But then they'd go back into their regular lives and run up against their parents, their spouses, their co-workers who tell them, "you're crazy." And it just doesn't do anything for them, so even in the best case scenario when the participants really got something out of it, chances are that whatever level they went to, they would just slip back in because their own institutions are pulling them there.

Official documents and curricula used by participants in the study directly discuss racism as institutional, cultural, and individual. For example, both workshops I attended defined and discussed racism in similar ways. The definition used by the People's Institute in the *Undoing Racism* workshop centered around racism as a system, specifically a historical and ongoing system of white supremacy, and racism as prejudice plus systemic

and institutional power. Their explanation of power refers to power as having legitimate and collective access to and control of systems and institutions sanctioned by the authority of the state. The definition and explanations of racism by the People's Institute are similar to many other antiracist organizations' written materials, as well as those used and discussed in the other workshop I attended. The *Dismantling Racism* workshop materials also discuss racism as social and institutional power plus race prejudice, as a system of advantage based on race, as a system of oppression based on race, and as a white supremacy system. They elaborate on the definition of social and institutional power defining it as access to resources, the ability to influence others, access to decision-makers to get what you want done, and the ability to define reality for yourself and others. In addition, they describe the three expressions of racism in our society as cultural (defined as the norms, values, or standards assumed by the dominant society which perpetuate racism), institutional (the ways in which institutions including government, education, media, business, health care, criminal justice, employment, religion, housing and others perpetuate racism), and individual (the ways in which each of us perpetuate racism on an individual basis). In both workshops, we completed a group activity where we named many of the institutions and then analyzed how they systematically affected People of Color and supported white supremacy in our country.

When participating in the two different workshops during the time I was collecting data for this study, a major part of both these programs was to review the history of race, racism, white privilege, white supremacy, and colonialism, all within the parameters of the institutional and cultural systems of our society. During one of the workshops I attended, Terry, one of the leaders of the workshop, used a particularly cogent analogy to describe the system of racism within our society. In discussing her ideas about active racists, passive racists, and antiracists, she began by describing how in general our societal systems and institutions are set up so that there is a built-in movement in our society toward racism and racist actions. She used the mechanism of a

conveyor belt or an airport moving sidewalk to illustrate racism. Terry described an active racist as one who is moving and walking in the direction that the sidewalk is moving, quickening the pace. A passive racist she explained as someone who is standing still, letting the moving sidewalk move her along, going with the movement and not slowing it down. She described an antiracist as someone who is going in the opposite direction, against the flow of the moving sidewalk. She reiterated the importance of having a large group of people, a collective, participating as antiracists; in that way it will change the direction of the moving sidewalk or at least stop it in its tracks.

In examining their understanding of racism, the participants frequently commented on how the systems of privilege and oppression were interlocking, supporting and upholding one another. The recognition of systems of privilege and oppression was both from a broad, societal standpoint in which there is recognition of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ability as connected to material resources and opportunities, as well as a more personal recognition of how privilege and oppression impact their own lives and the lives of those around them. Steven, a biology professor at a Southern university, clearly acknowledges the interlocking systems of privilege and oppression when he talks about the students who attend the university where he teaches:

I mean it's becoming clearer to me. When I see differences among students in terms of preparation and things like that for the academic stuff they have to deal with here; it has a lot to do with economic status, which is not inseparable from the issue of race. But if you divide people into groups, there's a difference between the Black students who have come up the hard way and the ones who have a middle or even upper-class background. Also, you see the same thing with White students. There just happens to be more of the White students who come from these more privileged backgrounds. That's again embedded in this whole race thing.

Several participants have used their understandings and growing awareness of sexism to help them understand racism. Alex talks about the lessons he has learned

related to gender that he is able to apply to whiteness. When talking about being dismissive or thinking that people need to listen to him because he is White, he says:

> I've actually come to learn that lesson a lot harder on the lines of gender, being in a relationship, my wife and I have kind of worked through and still work through things. It's very easy for some people to be non-sexist because they've never had to deal with, on an intimate level, all the stuff that comes out. So, for me understanding my internalized superiority became very acute where stuff that applies to whiteness can easily be applied to maleness and having to confront that in a relationship. But what I've found though in dealing with my whiteness when I got to a level where I could feel that stuff, when I started having more intimate relationships with People of Color, then it came out there, too.

Robert also discussed how people around him, one African American female friend in particular, frequently reminds him and calls him to account for both his whiteness and his maleness. He said:

> And because we're friends she's able to say "are you acting like a White person or a man or is this Robert?" And so it's got many categories. She gets on me about being a man as much as being a White person. And that's helpful to me to try to discern from her point of view as a Black woman what's going on in the struggles. So it's helpful to have folk like that who will say "well you just seem like a man on this rather than a White person."

The significance of interlocking privilege and oppression is also discussed in the documents, curricula, and books used and written by participants in this study. In the *Dismantling Racism* curricula, the authors list it as an assumption for their approach to challenging racism. They state:

> Racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and all the 'isms' are connected. While they are connected, they are not the same and cannot be compared one to the other. We may have more experience with one 'ism' than with the others; we may feel one is more

important than the others. But we will not be able to dismantle one without understanding the connection between them.

Importance of a Historical Perspective

Participants frequently described the necessity of understanding and presenting the history of racism in our country and for using that historical perspective to educate others. Understanding racism from a historical perspective also enabled these adult educators to come to terms with the time it will take for sustainable changes to occur in society. In addition, their memories and experiences during the Civil Rights movement were important aspects and precursors to their current analysis of racism. When relating the need to engage a historical perspective, Paul says:

And that's another piece of the work, the historical. It's important to do a historical context in terms of racism. DuBois has written about his study in southwest Georgia in the *Souls of Black Folks*. We actually give what we call a civil rights and wrongs tour to groups occasionally. We'll take them and revisit some of the Civil War and Civil Rights battlegrounds. We'll take them sometimes to a jail and places of historical significance where lynchings occurred.

The materials used in the workshops I attended as well as the activities during the workshops also emphasized the details and the legacy of the history of racism and racialization in the United States. Both curricula presented a detailed timeline of the history of racial oppression in this country. In addition, the books written by several participants devote chapters and discussion to explicating the history and the impacts of the history of racism in our country within their discussion of racism. In his book, Jim devotes an entire chapter titled "How did it all begin?" to a discussion of the history and legacy of racial oppression, as well as the historical beginnings of the "White" race. He uses many historical sources to do so.

Participants emphasized that we must examine and learn not just the history that we are usually taught in school but from other sources as well. As they noted, the history

taught throughout schools generally comes from a European or White perspective; several participants discussed the implications of this and the part it plays in perpetuating misinformation as well as in upholding racism and the status quo. Terry, a participant in this study and a leader of one of the workshops I attended, recommended a book titled *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* by James Loewen. The participants emphasized the importance of understanding racism from a historical perspective, but they did not underestimate the reactions from many who learn about this history, seemingly for the first time. Sara talked about how "it's a shock to people to really start to get a grasp on the way racism is embedded in everything, our history."

Steven, aware of the history of racism in the United States, is also aware of historical events within his local geographic area. When discussing a letter he wrote to the editor of his local newspaper to object to the Confederate flag being displayed by local businesses as well as during parades or festivals, he embeds his views within a historical perspective. Steven says:

> I don't care what happened between 1861 and 1865, that's a very short period in history, but since 1865 that flag has been used for very different purposes. And these people keep trying to portray it as being an issue about history and their ancestors, as being part of their legacy. So it's still an ongoing thing there in [town] and actually that part of [state] has a long history of a number of lynchings, and we're not that far away from Rosewood [site of White uprising against successful Blacks]. So there's a long history of bad racial relations in northern [state].

Paul also is aware of local history in relation to racism and lynchings. He tells about a lynching that occurred in the area right after World War II when he says "Southern Black soldiers started coming back and saying we want to participate fully in our community now'." He relates:

> There was this guy named Maceo Snipes who served a couple of years in the Pacific during World War II, came home and voted, dared to register and vote in the open primary that the Supreme Court just ruled had to happen when Eugene Talmadge was running and had the Klan at his political rallies all over the South. Anyway, Maceo Snipes voted in July during the primary and on that evening four White guys came and pulled him off his mother's porch and took him out and lynched him. And if you go to the [name of county] courthouse today there are two plaques on the wall lifting up veterans of World War II and on the plaque for Black veterans is Maceo Snipes' name.

Paul also explains that there is a movement now to create some type of commemoration to Maceo Snipes' and his heroism and courage by erecting some type of symbol on the courthouse lawn or at least by desegregating the plaque commemorating World War II veterans.

Robert also recognized the importance of a historical perspective when he said "history shows us that except for a short time in our country's history there has not been a serious and frank discussion about race or major paradigm shift in terms of the sharing of power." He adds:

> I guess the Civil Rights movement spoiled some of us who grew up in the midst of it because we thought things worked like that all the time, that you could get major paradigm shifts if you just worked hard. But that's not the way it usually is, and as I've gone back and looked really that time and Reconstruction were the only times when it was even contemplated, the sharing of Black and White power. So for most of human history it's always a struggle and that's a given.

The White adult educators in this study talked about their awareness of the Civil Rights movement and the impact of the movement on their understanding of what was going on in our country related to race and racism. Several participants recalled the visual images presented on television and the impact those images had on them. Jim remembers:

I tried to go back to my earliest understanding and as far as I can go back is looking at the Civil Rights struggle on television, and I must have been around eleven at the time. And seeing the cops and dogs and fire hoses and Black protesters being beaten and things like that. And understanding that the Black people were being beaten because they were Black and White people were doing it. Whereas on the one hand it's not anything I supported, on the other hand, I wouldn't be beaten. That was the first kind of really emotional connection I can recall.

Robert also recalls his memory of seeing Martin Luther King, Jr. make his famous speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial and talks about the impact watching it on television had on him. He says:

> That was in the middle of the Civil Rights movement and a lot was going on and I had sort of, I was not sure what was going on &but then I heard him speak and I saw all the people and I didn't change then but I had a sense that something was going on. I didn't know the whole story; I didn't know what the story was but I knew I didn't know the whole story. That's the first time I remember ever thinking anything like that.

Other participants had a different recollection of their relationship with the Civil Rights movement but still recall its impact on their lives. Sara, born to parents who were directly involved in Civil Rights recalls:

> My mom and dad were very much involved in the Civil Rights movement. I was born in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and my dad who's now a retired Lutheran pastor started a mission congregation in Ft. Lauderdale. It was all African American folks. So, we were the only White family in the church, and so my early childhood was only with African American folks outside my family.

Paul also recalls his relationship with the Civil Rights movement. He says:

> As so you know I just happened to grow up during that period in the history of our country where there was this tension, the Civil Rights tension, and the anti-

> Vietnam war tension. I was hidden from the Civil Rights movement by family or I was kept from it &it was going on all around me in south Louisiana and except for the little blurbs I would see about Martin Luther King doing this or that in certain parts of the South. And I'm just amazed at how much I've learned has happened in LaFayette, Baton Rouge, New Orleans, the rural part of Louisiana, that I just didn't know. It was all around me.

Steven's earliest memories of being aware of race was also "about the middle 60s and so there was a lot of stuff going on in the news. So you couldn't really avoid the issue." He also recalls when Martin Luther King was assassinated when he was eleven and explains:

> As captain of the security patrol at my school in Columbus, Georgia, I was in charge of putting the flag up and down at the beginning and end of the day at school, and as he recalls "I put the flag up at half staff, and I was called into the principal's office and just asked why I had done that." They let it stay, but you know they asked me about it. I had heard on the news that all flags were at half staff.

Growing up in the 1960s and recalling the times of unrest related to the Civil Rights movement and other societal changes like the Vietnam War provided a fertile ground for the participants. Most were raised in families and environments that were not explicitly racist but did not outwardly promote the values and goals of the Civil Rights movement. Several participants had supportive families, parents, and relatives who worked for or believed in the movement. However, all recalled the events of the Civil Rights movement and the social milieu of the 1960s when reflecting on their understanding of racism.

Colorblindness: Rhetoric of Denial

Every participant mentioned in one way or another the prevailing rhetoric of colorblindness that exists in our popular and even academic discussions of race, racial

relations, and racism. They were all able to "see" through the rhetoric and identify the inconsistencies in reality, as well as the harm that the rhetoric of colorblindness has.

Several participants connect the colorblind attitude to the resistance and denial that some Whites have for talking about and seriously addressing racism. Paul recalls how some people say things like "it wasn't me or we've got to get past that or I just want to live peaceably with other cultures and other people." Robert also says "now we have the rhetoric that it's [racism] gone and there's no issues about it." Sara discusses the colorblind rhetoric so prevalent in our present day society. She says:

I think our U. S. American culture now wants to deny that there's any racism and wants to say there's equality for everybody; wants to even believe that when you go to court that you're going to have your rights given to you; that we live in a free society. I think we want that even more now since September 11th [9-11-02 bombing of World Trade Center and Pentagon] than we've wanted it in the past. We really want to hold ourselves up as the place of freedom. We use that word "freedom" so freely now. To say, "well, why were we attacked? Because we're such an example of freedom, and people hate us because of the good things we have." So it would be pointing out, "hey, wait a minute, that American dream isn't had by everybody."

Jim also points out how he is uncomfortable and even feels unsafe in a setting where the colorblind attitude is expounded. He said:

> You know, so somebody says well we're all colorblind. To me, that sets off bells and whistles and buzzers, and I say I'm not sure how my family's going to fit in here, you know. I'm not sure how I'm going to fit in here, whereas that is a point of safety and self-congratulations for people in many White settings.

Two participants had especially cogent comments about the supposed system of equality in our country. The first one from Steven captures the motivation that many Whites have for believing in a colorblind society. He talked about a story he had heard

that morning on National Public Radio describing several books that have come out lately discussing the bias in news organizations:

> They were saying that one of the things that happens when you have these diversified newsrooms where you now have more women and more People of Color, that they tend to form a block, and if they are against something, if they raise an issue then the White people back down because they don't want to be identified as racist. Again, what struck a chord with me on that is that I think that's the worst thing. White people don't want to be identified as racists. They don't want to stop being racist. They just don't want to be identified as racist.

In his analysis of colorblindness, Jim discerns another level of analysis that is thought-provoking. Although he definitely does not believe that our society as it exists now offers equality without regard to race, he does believe that ultimately "we do want to be a colorblind society in the truest or ideal sense where race is no longer any kind of question or factor. And let's say that happens maybe 200 years from now. People in that day and age will have absolutely no comprehension of what this discussion was all about." He continues:

> In a sense the success leads to a total lack of understanding or appreciation of what the effort was to get there and that people will say "how silly that was that just because people were different skin colors they did all this stuff what was that about?"

Even though Jim acknowledges that the success will not be "for our generation" and the struggle is very different getting there, he does believe we need to acknowledge that an antiracist critique of our culture often characterizes colorblindness as purely bad. He laments that "we don't have a visible alternative to either white supremacy or colorblindness at the higher national level. The fact that there might be a third alternative to these kinds of things just hasn't made a dent." Jim describes,

> &a colorblind perspective can either see one or the other. In a sense it's very Eurocentric and it can't name it as white, but what it does name is white and that is very good. And at the same time, if you can't see race you can't see racism so we can't talk about the bad part; we can't really begin this kind of critical process of transformation that involves separating the bad from the good and saying let's keep with the good and discard the bad and become something better.

In his book, Jim also clearly describes how colorblindness works or rather, at this point in history, does not work. He says:

> &when colorblindness is espoused as a strategy in the here and now of our racially structured society, it masks a White perspective that has little hope of achieving the noble condition implied by its name. Colorblindness only makes sense from within the big white cocoon. Rather than packing and getting ready to make the long and arduous journey on the road to a multiracial society, a society no longer structured by race, colorblindness sits blindly in the middle of a racially structured society and tells itself it has already arrived. No journey is necessary.

Analysis of White Privilege

Another aspect of their understanding of racism was the White adult educators' analysis of their own whiteness and white privilege and what that means in our society and in their lives, especially in relation to their efforts to challenge racism. The participants in this study all had recognized their whiteness and white privilege and what that means, and even though they were at various points within that process there were some similarities among them, similarities which speak to the developing awareness of one's own white privilege and its use in challenging racism. These White adult educators not only have recognized their white privilege but explicitly connect it to the work they do within the various antiracist contexts in which they work. Each participant recalled and was able to describe specific experiences in which they began to first be aware of racial differences and then to recognize their white privilege, how the awareness of what

it means to be White in our society has developed over time, the awareness that they will always be undoing racism within themselves, and their growing awareness of the contradictions associated with being White and working to challenge racism. Part of what enables them to challenge racism are the understandings that have come from their recognition and struggle with their own and other Whites' privilege.

Whiteness revealed through difference.

The participants all had many specific experiences in which they became attuned to issues of race and whiteness, including their own white privilege. However, most frequently their awareness of whiteness and white privilege was mediated or came after experiences that revealed and made them more acutely aware of racial differences. They experienced themselves in relation to persons of color, followed at some point by the realization of their own whiteness and what it means in our society. Although the realization of what it meant to be White occurred at different times for each participant, it was mediated by the experience of racial difference. For the White adult educators in this study, they experienced racial difference in relation to Blacks.

Paul, who directs the prison activist organization, recalled many experiences that led to his dawning realization of his own whiteness. One of the foremost was the time he spent in the Navy and as he recalls:

> &the consequences of going AWOL and refusing to go to Vietnam and then winding up in prison after going AWOL and just seeing that there was this whole other part of the world that I had not been exposed to. And you know I didn't make that commitment in 1969, 1979 to devote the rest of my life to prison reform or criminal justice issues but it was certainly something that put me on this path to explore along with a series of other events along the way.

While he was in the Navy and in prison as a consequence of going AWOL, he saw for himself how people were treated differently because of the color of their skin, as well

as the numbers of People of Color who were in jail. He had an initial and abiding reaction that it was not right and should not be happening. He said,

Even in the Navy brig or prison to see so many People of Color, so many people without resources just being pushed into situations and then seeing the choices I had that they didn't, resources I had available to me that they didn't during that experience. You know it was sort of the beginning of you know kind of scraping away stuff that had build up around my eyes and to see that I did indeed have privilege and I had some learning to do.

During the time he was AWOL from the Navy, Paul caddied on the professional golf tour to make ends meet, and he traveled with Black caddies out of necessity. He explains:

> We all needed to kind of pool our resources. This was before the big money in the professional golf tour. But anyway, these Black guys asked if &they had the car and I was hitchhiking from tournament to tournament and they needed a White face to help them check out restaurants, check out motels, drive the car through certain parts of the country, and I mean it was just so eye-opening to me. I mean I could walk into a country club and go right to the pro shop or the bar or the restaurant, and these guys I had been traveling with and sleeping with and eating with and drinking with had to go around back and sit and wait for their golfer to come out and tell them it was time to work. And I could just walk around anywhere I wanted to. I would go to a motel and get the room and we'd sneak into the rooms for fear of their being caught and not knowing if there were segregation laws in effect or if they would get in trouble. This was in the late 1960s.

Shortly after his experience of watching Martin Luther King, Jr. on television deliver his famous speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial, Robert returned to high school after the summer. He remembers a Jewish English teacher having the class read

*Cry, the Beloved Country* about South Africa. He recalls the book and the experience of reading and discussing the book in class as very powerful and says:

> I still was not sure what was going on but I knew that what I had been taught was not the whole story. I wasn't prepared to see it. I think the thing that really began to change me was after my sophomore year in college I worked in a church in Brooklyn. I wanted to get out of the South and live in a huge city, so I did. A friend of mine and I did. And I had Black folk as my bosses, and which I didn't realize when I went up there. That really began to change things; in fact the way I dealt with it to try and hold onto what I had been taught was when I came back to my little town in Arkansas, I tried to say that the Black folk I knew in Brooklyn were not like the Black folk in Arkansas, that there was a fundamental difference. And that didn't last very long. So that opened things up with the world view that I had received was not the whole story.

Several participants remember events in childhood where they began to become more aware of racial differences. Steven remembers going to a school in the South that was all White. He relates:

> Every now and then we would have Black kids come around and they would sell tomatoes. They always had the best tomatoes. They just sort of appeared like on a Saturday. One day I was wandering the woods on the outskirts of our neighborhood and I kind of popped through into this clearing, and there was this school that looked just like the school that I went to. And I guess I finally realized, "oh, that's the Black kids' school."

Steven's father was in the Army and he also remembers a time when he and his family went to dinner at one of the other officer's houses and they were Black. He was around eleven at the time. He remembers his parents making a big deal about it and said, "I just sort of remember that being a big deal. I still remember the guy's name."

Alex also remembers several incidents from his early middle school and high school years when he became aware of racial differences. He began the fifth grade in a city in Florida shortly after desegregation and said that "by the time I was in middle school, and all the identity issues came up, there were problems in the schools with people fighting each other." Although he was not a part of those incidents, he does remember "when the first Black person moved into our subdivision. Everyone raised hell about it. These are ten year old kids talking like that." He also talked about an African American teacher in high school and several students whose names and situations still stand out for him. Even though in high school Alex was able to speak out in several situations when students made prejudiced remarks, he said "I never really had a consciousness about white privilege. That did not come until later."

An interesting twist on the theme of experiencing whiteness in relation to the racial difference of others was had by Sara whose parents were actively involved in the Civil Rights movement. As she recalls:

> So we were the only White family in the church, and so my early childhood was only with African American folks outside my family. So, when I went away to kindergarten, it was an all-White kindergarten, and we were coloring people, and I used the brown crayon to color people. My teacher later laughed with my Mom about me using the brown crayon to color people. You know, as the only kid in the school who had the image of people as being brown. So, it was sometime after that when I came to understand that I was White and that at least the dominant view of people was not that they were brown.

Interestingly, Steven also recounts a story of his own daughter who is now five years old and attends a daycare owned by African Americans and where most of the other kids are African Americans. Steven recounts:

> So our kids, most of the time, are the only White kids there. Sometimes there are other ones that kind of come and go on an irregular basis. But anyway, we've

> never made any issue about it and never say anything about it. And all of a sudden one day my daughter came home, and she's almost five now, and she came home and said, "Well, I'm White." And so it's like, "where is she getting this from?" They don't watch commercial television or anything like that at home, so they're not getting any exposure to it. So, they must have gotten it there.

Steven continues by describing how his daughter came home a couple of weeks earlier talking about marrying a friend from daycare, Jordan, saying "Jordan's got brown skin, and I've got white skin, but they can marry can't they?" Steven and his wife were astounded that these issues were coming up so early and as he said, "I don't have any memory of being aware like that at that age, but maybe that's because I was never exposed to a diversity of kids at that age."

Development over time.

Most participants had experiences that moved them along in their knowledge of white privilege and its ramifications, including workshops, most specifically the People's Institute's *Undoing Racism* workshop as well as interactions with others. All agree that the understanding related to whiteness, white privilege, and racism develops and changes over time. Although Robert noted that he knew he was White as he "grew up in the South where it was fundamental," he also said "it was only as I got to be an adult and think back on it that I realized fully the kind of privileges that came with it." Terry also relates:

> My understanding of it [racism, white privilege] has gotten better over time. It's that phenomenon of standing in front of a workshop and saying something and going, "Oh, now I understand this!" I think our analysis is always developing. I want to be really clear about that. This is not static. This is a very dynamic analysis that we're learning all the time.

Steven also reiterates this aspect of development over time. He says:

> It took a long time to get to the point where you realized, and I'm not saying that I'm perfect at this yet, but you realize there's a lot of things you do that are just

> really whiteness issues. It took a long time, I think. I think after the workshop you recognize it in society a lot more easily, but recognizing it in yourself is something that takes a lot more time and introspection.

The insidious, invisibility and norm of whiteness has been revealed at various times and in various ways for participants. Terry when discussing how White people "tend to generalize that our experience is everybody's experience," tells about an experience when working for a multiracial yet White-led organization and how she did not realize that her experience was very different from an African American colleague working in the same organization. She relates,

> I remember when [name] said, an African American colleague, made the comment once about how hard it was for him to explain to his community why he was working for [name], this White organization. And it never occurred to me, I'd always assumed that everybody was having a good time at [name] the same way I was. Nobody was giving me any trouble. All of my family and friends thought it was great that I was working in this biracial environment. I think it just never occurred to me that [name] would have people in his community who were saying, "What are you doing? And why are you there? Are you selling out?" Questions I would never have to face.

When discussing his youth and how being White was the norm, Robert said:

> So for me it was &to be White was to be normal; everything else was kind of exotic like alligators are exotic but not in your realm of existence. So it was very weird. I mean, looking back on it, it's amazing that you were able to grow up with that kind of sense of distortion. So it was only as I got to be an adult and think back on it that I realized the kind of privileges that came with it.

The White adult educators also talked about the various phases of White racial identity development they have navigated over time. Although some participants talked explicitly about the stages of White identity and development often used in their

curriculum or workshops to educate other Whites, others spoke only in general about the different levels of awareness they have experienced over time. They also talked about their emotions and feelings in relation to their developing awareness, as well as the existence of ongoing learning experiences. Terry relates:

> And then once I really started to understand my first thing that I wanted to do was to hang out with People of Color and to just go to the workshops and do my part, even meet with the White caucus, but all my focus was whether the People of Color thought I was doing a good job and you know, talking to me. And again, that's another thing I see White people go through is this need to separate from the White group and identify with People of Color and I think it's well I don't know it it's inevitable but I've seen it a lot. And then I went through my sort of self-righteous phase where I understood I was supposed to be paying more attention to the White people but I felt like well I've figured this out and I've got my shit together and you don't, so I was very angry at other White people but also responsible for facilitating them through this process.

Jim says, "in terms of personally what it means to be White, my understanding of that is much richer and so it's hard to answer in a simple way." He continues by talking about his knowledge of the stages of White racial identity:

> Not that there's an exact one-to-one correspondence but certainly it has changed over time from being pretty much unaware and fully versed in a colorblind point of view in a very uncritical way to having that challenged and seeing it be totally inadequate to explain what's going on to having feelings of shame and distance from being White. You know, trying to find ways in which to say or infer that I'm not White to then realizing that in fact there was a sort of consciousness or subconscious cultural element to being White which I hadn't been seeing but that factor was a world view that was different from that of People of Color but was shared by White people.

Sara, when asked how her beliefs about racism or white privilege have changed over time, says:

> I think part of it is just coming to a deeper awareness of it. So, I look at myself and my background and how I'm an over-educated person and how all of that was just kind of a natural given in my life, that I would go to college, that I would go on to graduate school and get a Master's degree, and even that I would become a partner at the [name of previous organization where she worked], that I would assume a role of leadership wherever I went. All that is just part, I think, of the system of racism, that White people are going to be leaders.
>
> "Always undoing racism".

The White adult educators in this study talked about when they first realized they were White and how that realization emerged but more emphatically about the need and the difficulty of always having to confront and challenge the privilege, as well as the gains, they obtain just by being White in our society. They are always undoing racism through conflict and struggle within themselves and with others. They conscientiously examine their own lives and talk with other people about the impact of racism and white privilege. Paul says:

> I identify myself as a recovering racist and it's not a unique term; others have planted that too or claimed that too. I realize, maybe not daily, but I certainly realize very very frequently no matter how hard I try to maintain an antiracist position, that I am still undoing racism within myself.

Paul adds:

> You know I've come a long way in 25 years, to be in relationship with folk and to just work on this trust, to hopefully have folks see me as someone who may still have some racist bones in his body but someone who's working at it, at undoing it, at getting rid of those bones, or polishing off those bones as much as I can.

Robert reiterates this theme when he says:

> You always have to keep that in mind and recognize that I am going to display racism. It's just a given. Just like I'm going to display sexism and I have to be open to those who let me know where I've displayed it or used its influence.

The constancy of having to always "be on your toes and vigilant" as Paul described can sometimes be trying and painful, as is coming to the realization that no matter how hard one tries one will still collude with the system of racism in some ways. Jim also talked about the never-ending struggle to be acutely aware of what one is doing and saying, "so, you know I slip into that unconscious sort of living within privilege and not seeing it that is characteristic of it as well." And Robert adds:

> This church has been a great educating tool for me; we've been here 19 years and I've discovered kind of layers of racism that I just thought I was over and I didn't realize how deeply they permeated my perceptual apparatuses. It's not a question of will; I mean part of it is the will, but it's more a question of even the way you perceive the world and it shows how deep the realities are. It just pops up. It just comes out of your perceptual apparatus so it's like how you perceive the world, how your brain is set up to receive. It's a very powerful perceptive tool and it takes a lot of work to change your perceptual apparatus and probably never will end.

After telling what she characterized as a particularly painful story where she "became real aware of the power I have as a White person," Sara adds:

> I had to be really careful how I used the power I had because I was always in danger of acting within the white racist system. So, even now, I'm not living in that same environment but I always have to be about struggling for the awareness of how my white skin gives me privilege and benefits even if I don't want them.

Aware of contradictions.

While many contradictions surfaced for these White adult educators when reflecting on their experiences of being a White person who is challenging racism, the

two most salient and most frequently identified were the ways they are viewed by other Whites and the ongoing awareness of the fact that they will always be privileged as White, at least within their lifetimes, along with the impact of that white privilege on the work they do.

Being White and working to challenge racism were seen as both a contradiction and an obstacle by most participants. They frequently encounter appeals by other Whites to in some way join in the system of whiteness. As Paul says it is "sort of this good old boy, maybe we can find some commonality in our whiteness where we can agree, even though we disagree, we can agree and talk as White men or White people together." He continues to describe this phenomenon:

> For me being a White person, a White man, challenging for the most part what is essentially a White-dominated system. I either get pigeonholed or labeled as this crazy man, this radical, this troublemaker, he doesn't understand &he's not from here &another one of those outsiders that are back here causing trouble & it's sometimes hard.

Paul also described an experience that occurred early in his career when he was caddying on the professional golf tour and traveling with Black caddies and was subsequently confronted by officials of the golf association. He says:

> This was in the late 60s. The laws were on the books. Some members or officials of the Professional Golfer's Association came to me one evening, I think it was St. Louis or Louisville where one of the tournaments was being held. They actually called me into one of their motel rooms to say that many of the golfers were uncomfortable with the fact that Black caddies were staying in the same motel room. They implied that I was welcome to stay over here but those guys were going to have to move over to the other side of town.

Paul reiterates several times how being a White person "becomes an obstacle in terms of forming trusting relationships with folks we are walking with" who are

justifiably afraid of how the "White establishment might respond if they invite a White man into their lives," as well as the ongoing problems of how "it's very very difficult to convince those in positions of authority, particular the White folks that we're not gonna back away from where we are." Robert adds, from his perspective and experiences,"I think most White people are gonna dismiss you as being a troublemaker, irrelevant, as angry, as hostile, got some personality disorders that you're working out on them." And finally Steven says:

> And I have to say in criticism of myself, the thing I find hardest is to try and talk to White people about this. You can go, and it's much more comfortable to be around People of Color if you're going to talk about this. And you know, when people come out with things it's very hard to be as confrontational about it as you need to be. I guess the thing that bothers me most about it is that you can be confrontational but then they turn you off.

In his work as a biologist whose specialty is medical entomology, Steven also recounts how he encountered the phenomenon of being dismissed by other Whites when he was involved in efforts to combat the West Nile virus that showed up last summer. When Steven remarked to the other health officials that the local African American minister did have a point in recognizing that when things happen the "mayor's neighborhood is the one who is going to get the spray truck coming through there first rather than, say south of the railroad tracks," the other officials said in Steven's words, "and then it's like, okay, he's one of those liberals. We won't talk to him about that anymore'." Even though Steven noted that they actually did survey the entire city and go to the places where the birds had first been reported, the officials knew that the local minister and his activist group would make it an issue, so they had a prepared response. Steven's point was that they responded the way they did out of their awareness that the minister would bring it up rather than out of an understanding that this is how things usually do occur and need to be changed.

The participants understood how they will always be privileged by their whiteness, even as they work and remain committed to working for social justice and challenging systemic inequality. They also understand the impact their whiteness has on others. Terry says:

> I see some White people talk about how we have to give up our privilege, give up our power and privilege. I don't think it's possible to give up privilege. I don't believe that. Operating as a White person in a racist society gives me more credibility, and I can talk all I want about being an antiracist White person. Also, I get to sit around and think about what I'm supposed to do while other people don't have those choices. I think we need to understand how we can use the privilege and power that we do have.

Robert cogently describes how no matter his level of involvement and commitment in racial justice issues, he is still White and will be seen as White by those with whom he comes into contact. He states:

> And I have to remember that when I go into another Black context I'm just a White guy. I just have to remember that and sometimes I forget but usually that's how they live, how they survive so I don't get any points for doing this work if I go into a Black context where folk don't know me at all. And I have to remember that that dynamic is always there and that's what we're working to break down but until it's broken down they'd be foolish not to live that way because I am a White guy and I'm not the White guy they think I am but I'm still a White guy. So that contradiction's always there and I have to remember it and be informed by it and by those who remind me that I'm still a White guy.

When talking about how important it is for his organization to be invited into a community, Paul says:

> I mean I can ride my horse back to [hometown] or I can decide to leave the region altogether and go find another job somewhere else. I have the privilege of choice

> and it's the White thing, the class thing, I can just pick up and move on if it gets a little too uncomfortable or I feel like we're not seeing any results.

He continues:

> I mean it has happened to me occasionally where they have come after me, but I still have that ability and the resources if they come after me to negotiate my way through the system in ways these folk we work with don't often have.

Several participants recognized not only how they will always be privileged but also profess an awareness of how their whiteness and the white privilege in our society impacts those who are not seen as White. Robert says: There are really human beings out there that have been impacted by me, and I have gained privilege at their expense and I'd rather change that.

Paul related how he frequently notices differential treatment accorded him by other Whites when he says:

> It happens a lot where I'll sit in a meeting where the African Americans are clearly the spokespeople who are in charge but because I'm with them, the White person or persons we're meeting with will direct all of their questions or their attention or their comments to me rather than to the leader of the group or the person identified as the one who has brought us together.

In summary, common or shared meanings of racism and white privilege among these White adult educators are not surprising as all the participants are involved in organizations that work to foreground and challenge aspects of racism in one way or another. In addition, many participants have been to the same trainings over the years. In fact, it would be safe to say that they belong to an unofficial community of antiracist organizers. It is what their understandings and analyses allow them to do to challenge racism that is equally as important and to which topic we now turn our attention.

## How Understandings Guide Actions to Challenge Racism

Understanding and focusing on an analysis of racism that includes institutional, systemic, and cultural factors, along with understanding the importance of the historical and current context of racism is important for several reasons. The institutionalization of racism presents itself as an obstacle but also directly leads to actions, strategic actions that can be taken to challenge racism. The efforts are not always successful, yet the level at which efforts need to be directed is very clear. As Terry says about her understanding of the system of racism:

> Why would I be surprised, why would any of us be surprised, to encounter so many of us [White people] who are clueless about what is going on, in the best case scenario, and in the worst case scenario really actively trying to push racism.

In analyzing the data collected during this study, I found that the participants' analyses of racism in our society guided them to take particular actions to challenge and change the system of racism within our society. As Jim notes, "until we realize that there's a cultural component to it, we're not able to really act on the problem." Their analysis of white privilege, how they came to their understandings as well as their recognition of the time it takes to develop an understanding, is also reflected in the actions they take. Their understandings are manifested in the work they do in three primary ways. They are able to maintain commitment in their struggles to challenge racism and work for a more just society, to better understand their own and others' actions, and to develop particular educational approaches and strategies to more effectively educate others about racism.

### Helps Maintain Commitment

The White adult educators in this study have been able to maintain their commitment to the work they do over periods of time from ten to almost thirty years. Their understanding and analysis of racism and their own white privilege, as well as their knowledge of the history of racism and the realization of the complexity and contradictions embodied in racism have enabled them to stay in this work for the long

term. Most of the participants describe the impact of their work on their professional and personal lives and explain repeatedly how they will "never not see race" or how "once anyone starts to do this work you never stop." Their understandings allow them to continue to work and to continue to believe that social transformation is possible, even though as many of them said it will not be in their lifetimes. Their understandings have guided them to acknowledge the importance of building a community of support, to gain a fuller appreciation of the time needed for change, and to draw consistently on their beliefs/faith. All of these factors help them to maintain commitment to their work to challenge racism.

The participants spoke often of the importance and indeed the necessity of building and maintaining a community of support when doing this type of work. Most participants spoke of the benefits they have obtained from having this support, while several described their inattention to this aspect of their work and the negative impacts it has had. Alex talks about the importance of his support system:

> One is just the relationships that I maintain with people like Mark who will stay there with me. You know I need him when I get to a point when I feel like "I just can't do this right now." He'll say, "you just need to take a break." I think it's really crucial that you have people in your community who will support you. If it means that you just need to stop for a while, because you're not just a means to the end of the movement; you're actually a person.

Although Sara discusses the loneliness that can come with doing this type of work she still feels she gets "affirmation for what I'm doing." She adds:

> I would say the impact is that it's a lonely life on the one hand. On the other hand it's a life filled with folk who really have a joyful sense about life even though they are faced with oppression everyday and who are very welcoming. I've never felt like an outsider here, even though I am. I've never been made to feel like an outsider. I've been welcomed in, welcomed in to the family. So that's the other

> side of it then; I don't have a whole lot of time to sit around feeling lonely because I'm surrounded by folks who are welcoming me and who are leading me to do good things with my life.

Robert also discusses the need for a community:

> Being part of a community where you can continue this kind of work is pretty vital to doing it long term. Because if you don't you won't. You burn out, burn up. We have such a strong community here so that's very helpful to know that you can come back and talk about how terrible the experience was or how that one person shifted.

Several participants discussed their own difficulty in building a community of support and the impacts it has had on them. Terry, who is currently feeling "burned out" says:

> I never created a group of people to ask for help. I mean, certainly Kevin [co-trainer] has been an incredible mentor and I've learned an amazing amount from him but the issues we face are a little different. It's not like I don't have other people. I do consult with other people but not systematically, not in the way that I think would have helped to keep me from burning out.

Although Jim understands the importance of a support system, especially one where he could "go in and sit down and hear about what other people are doing," he currently is not "embedded in a working community." He is involved in a local support group for multiracial families and does some work within his church. However, he still understands the benefit that would come from developing support from a community of people who are doing similar work.

As participants spoke about their understanding of racism and how that understanding has developed throughout their lives, they invariably talked about the time it will take to make significant changes in the institutions and in society, although they do not ignore or minimize the progress that has been made. Understanding racism as

institutional, cultural, and systemic, as well as understanding the historical knowledge enables participants to stay in the work; many discuss the fact that social transformation will "take more time than we've ever allowed ourselves to admit." Terry says:

> I grew up in the 60s and I think most of my career, my political career, my work life, I've operated under the assumption that we were really going to create massive social transformation. I think I still operate under that assumption. I just have a much slower time line and a lot more questions.

Paul echoes that sentiment when he says:

> It is deeper more powerful and requires a long-term approach and you're in it for the long haul. We're not talking about let's have a little workshop on racism and that'll do it. We're talking about converting the way one perceives the world and oneself so it's a whole different approach. It's helped to be in it for the long term too because we may not see any short-term miraculous changes but we're trying to sow seeds for the long term so that the perceptual apparatus of people will change and that's a major shift.

Their understandings of the institutionalization and the history of racism counters the tendency to only see the present and helps them develop a sense of justice and hope that enables them to continue to work. They also have a sense of others who "have struggled throughout history" as Jim says which helps them to continue to struggle themselves, as well as the importance of "being strategic and intentional" about the work they do.

The participants all state in many ways their beliefs in what they are doing, as well as their beliefs that there will be a social transformation. Many of them talk about the effects they feel their work is having and draw consistently on their beliefs to help maintain a commitment to their work. Some of the participants describe beliefs in a particular religious faith that support their efforts, while others talk generally about their beliefs in people and the possibility of social transformations. Alex says:

> There's a need to see that there's something greater than yourself there. Even though I'm not particularly religious, as I've done the work I've realized that driving all of this there is a sense of "we could be in a better place," that there is something greater than ourselves. I won't use the word "God" necessarily, but I really think that at the bottom there's something as metamorphous as "a greater power." But you've got to believe there's a meaning for all of this. If you don't think there's a point to our lives in the world, then why are we involved in a movement for such a change? And people articulate it in different ways. There are people who are atheistic; they have a sense of justice. I think though that there is a kind of a faith that some people come with and you need to have. If you're just doing it out of despair &I'm not sure how the spiritual piece keeps me going.

Some of the participants were very clear about the spiritual and religious part of their work and definitely connect it to their ability to continue to work to challenge racism. As Paul says, "part of my commitment to my work comes from my faith, recognizing the humanity in everybody," even though he admits that it is difficult sometimes "when folks are saying things that are abominable." Sara, who works in the same organization, an organization with roots in a Christian community, also attributes her steadfastness in part to her faith. She also professes a belief in "the vision of justice for all people" and talks about the need "just to remain faithful in the struggle." Robert says "I think for us coming out of a spiritual or religious background is helpful in that we see ourselves as instruments, and we get in the way often but we count on God moving through us in ways that we have no idea."

Other participants talked about their sense of justice as well as their abiding belief in the goodness of people, as Terry says "the belief that most people want to do the right thing." They often spoke of their work as "a conversion experience" or as "doing missionary work in a secular sense that pushes the current envelope." Their belief and

commitment in their work engendered an overwhelming sense of hope, in themselves and in others.

Helps Understand Own and Others' Actions

An institutional, systemic analysis of racism and an understanding of white privilege enable the adult educators in this study to understand and confront their own and others' behavior in a way that does not condone racism in any way but also relays compassion and hope. In addition, understanding the power that institutions have and especially the impetus to maintain the status quo helps them to understand how hard it is for some Whites to break away and confront the racism in their own lives and the lives of those around them. They have learned some of these lessons the hard way, through painful personal experiences and what they would describe as their own failings. Paul says:

> You know, I didn't have the guts to tell my White lawyer brothers and my White committee member, now wait a minute I'm not going to go along with this. And I think you know that is what we see going on around us with the institutions. No one, none of us White folks want, and some Black folks who are part of the institution and decision-making don't want to ruffle the White folks' feathers.

Paul describes another experience related to a former policeman that he and his group helped "chased off the force after he beat up a woman coming out of a bar one night." He had since learned about the man's background and his participation in the Ku Klux Klan and later saw him in court after he had taken a job as a salesman, no longer in the field of law enforcement. He recounts:

> And we've seen each other a time or two since and we're starting to just kind of talk, feel each other you, and I mean, I know his family background now and I know where he gets his racist behavior, the same background I come from in a lot of ways. I guess I have this hope that he'll move a little bit and maybe I'm moving a little bit, not to adopt his attitude or his political position or whatever but just

> that I'll be able to less &I'll see him a little less of the enemy because really it's the institutions that control our behavior, and he's a product of many institutions as a White man, 30, 35 years old.

Sara also recounts her experiences in court recently when a judge treated a White defendant differently than the African Americans who usually appear before him. Although the judge took "the word of the police over the word of the defendant like he does everybody," Sara noted that afterward the judge showed deference to the defendant thanking him for coming to court to tell his side of the story, something Sara said he never says to an African American defendant. She remembers thinking:

> Is he even aware how differently he's treating people here in this court? Probably not. I really do believe that judge is ignorant; the racism in our society is so powerful. I just think he doesn't have any self-awareness.

Terry talks explicitly about the understandings that come from seeing our society and its institutions as racist but also continues to struggle with where to draw the line between understanding and responsibility, especially "when White people are messing up." She says:

> I'm really struggling with, I think my issue now is how, you know, where is the line between understanding that we're all brought up in a society that really teachers us to be ignorant about racism, that reinforces the idea that White people are better, that rewards us for that kind of thinking, that doesn't give us any alternative way to look at it. And on the other hand, where's the line where people have to take responsibility for themselves.

Realizing that change occurs over time and using their own experiences as a foundation and guide, the White adult educators are able to better understand what other Whites are going through in their attempts to challenge and transform their own thinking. They also develop an awareness of how difficult it is for those Whites who do not seem to understand at all and develop a level of compassion where they do not approve of the

attitudes yet begin to have some understanding and compassion for how hard it is to change, especially in a society where many things work against us even seeing the need to change. As they grow and learn more about themselves and others, they become more effective in their efforts to challenge racism, as well as more patient with others. Terry states:

> And the worst or the hardest cases I think for me is that people are surrounded, it took me a long time to understand that there are a lot of White people who are surrounded by other White people who don't want them to change particularly around racism, and they realize that if they are to change, if they are going to change around racism it means losing family and friends. So there's not a whole lot I can do in a situation like that except to honor that that's what the person is facing, to be really clear, which they can tell by looking at me that that's not my problem. And then just hope that this would be a place that will then eventually move them, that they'll have a series of events that will help them move to where I think is a more fun place to be in the world.

Paul also uses his understanding of himself and the awareness he has gained from his own journey to understand others and exhibit more patience and compassion for others. He relates:

> &and sometimes even having other White folks get very confessional in terms of I know what I've done is wrong and you know here's where I am and here are the people or things that are guiding me that I'm having a hard time confronting or breaking away from. And being able to say I've been there, or I'm still there in a way and this is a process that we have to deal with.

The understanding of how their own attempts at challenging racism within themselves develop over time enables the participants to understand and adjust their expectations to what they believe should be happening in their work settings. Terry says:

> Understanding that people change over time, so as before I used to believe that I had to witness some kind of change in the workshop which is completely unrealistic. And again, it's like I didn't even learn from looking at myself. Look how long it's taken me to go through this process of understanding and learning that I needed to just start seeing our workshop as just a point and time for people in their development.

Alex also identifies how particular ramifications of cultural and institutional racism impact the work he tries to do when he says:

> It's really hard to build community among White people because we're so used to not having to have it. Part of white privilege means I don't need to be dependent upon any one person. And part of White culture is if I share my secrets with you and you get mad at me, you're going to use that against me.

Several participants also talked about Whites being well-defended against examining and dealing with their own and others' racism. They learned this through their own experiences as well as a continuous reflection on their experiences but even more importantly are able to use this knowledge when working with others. Terry, who has over fifteen years experience conducting antiracism workshops talks about common reactions when White people begin to learn about racism. She says:

> And so I feel like what I've been doing is witnessing my own development and how slow and difficult that has been and then watching the development of other people and how challenging it is for us because we grew up in a culture that has absolutely, does nothing to teach us about this in any kind of meaningful way. So I think it's always a shock to people, it's a shock to me, it's a shock to people to really start to get a grasp on the way racism is embedded in everything. And it's not only a shock, but it also makes White people defensive because we feel like once we understand it we feel guilty, we feel bad, we feel something's a responsibility, and we don't want to, so we try to defend against it.

Terry returns several times to again describe the defensiveness of Whites and how she learned about herself and others in relation to this defensiveness. She states:

> &the White people, I think we're all very afraid of looking at ourselves because if we do we're gong to find stuff we don't really like and we're so afraid of that and again have so few tools for what it means to look at stuff we don't like and get through it that we will do pretty much anything to not be uncomfortable. And I think White people as a group, we're very defensive. We're very self-righteous, and we're very, we assume we know a lot more than we do.

Jim also recognizes how many "White people come to a workshop defended against being blamed." When he describes some of the activities they use in the workshops his organization conducts, he says:

> You know they walk in the door with that feeling and if we try to even speak to that feeling that would just raise the same feelings of blame that are problematic. So we don't do anything that invokes that. We just simply have a straightforward, not really clinical, but "we're going to look at White culture" approach.

Others agree and find it difficult to get Whites to "understand what the issue is without personalizing it" as Steven says or without thinking "well I'm a bad person because of this and there's something I should feel guilty about."

The White adult educators in this study use their understandings in the work they do, in the types of responses they make when conducting workshops or talking with other Whites, and in ongoing efforts to work more effectively and uncover more effective ways to educate and interact informally with others.

Offers Educational Approaches and Strategies

The White adult educators in this study use their understanding and analyses of racism and white privilege to elicit various educational approaches and strategies they find effective in teaching others about racism in our society. In general, they all work to increase others' awareness and consciousness of racism, as well as to develop the impetus

for others' to begin to deal with their own and society's racism. They emphasize the importance of relationships, a variety of experiential approaches, and the importance of holding self and others accountable.

Importance of relationships.

The participants repeatedly talked about how important it is to develop relationships with People of Color, with other Whites, and with other organizations. They emphasize the importance and quality of relationships that are not superficial and exploitive but rather respectful, sincere, and deep. What these relationships should look like is described in detail below; however, the participants did emphasize the significance of being mindful of racism's impact on all of us, as well as the internal and external manifestations of racism for Whites and People of Color. The participants repeatedly returned to a discussion of relationships in the service of challenging racism and transforming society.

As one participant said, it is important "to listen to the issues from the folks that are most directly affected by those issues and really getting at the root causes of what's going on in those communities." The organization Paul directs is purposefully a grassroots, local organization in order to "stay very connected to the folk we are walking with and not become yet another agency that would get caught up in its own bureaucracy." In doing the work they do to monitor the courtrooms, jails, and prisons in the area and in meeting with defendants or prisoners and their families, Paul says "more often than not we are invited in and especially in the last few years since we've become more recognized in our work and have had some successes, we're invited in." He continues to describe their working relationships with people and other groups in the area:

> And then almost always before we act or before we decide on a plan to challenge wrongdoing or to organize in the community, we find out who exists in the community or what exists in the community that will invite us in or will at least

> know that we're gonna be there. And so we don't surprise anybody or we're not going in and saying to people this is what's right, this is what's wrong. And we learn from mistakes as well, our own mistakes, but so often social justice agencies and individuals involved in any kind of reform or social welfare work, tend to say "we know what's best for you."

Sara, who also works in the same organization as Paul, reiterates this point from her perspective:

> That's what's really important about the work here in [town], that I'm not controlling the vision for this group; that I'm listening to the people of this town and what they envision and what they hope for.

Robert adds:

> You always have to be listening to folk about where racism is impacting you now most directly, where it may not have been doing that as much ten years ago, now where is it going. It's sort of like water seeking the lowest level and race is like that. It if gets blocked off some way it will seep around somewhere else. So you have to continue a dialogue with people of different races so you can keep the issues and where the slippery slope of racism is going. If you want to know the realities of the impact of race you should ask those who are impacted by it and so the dialogue with Black and Hispanic folk, especially those are the two areas I think where white racism comes out the most, is very important. We should be in dialogue and say "where is race impacting you?" and "where do you expect it to impact you?"

All of the participants discussed relationships they have had with People of Color, relationships in which they have learned many lessons and undergone transformations in their ability to understand how race impacts us all. These were some of the most powerful stories the White adult educators related. Terry recounts:

> One of the things that makes a huge difference is having a relationship with a person or People of Color who take the time to talk things through with me. At my first job there was a group of six of us working and I was partnered with [name], an African American man, and he and I spent hours in the car traveling places. And so that was one of the ways that I started to make my changes was just to start to hear from him what his reality was like. And so it was just a mind blower for me to start hearing from him, and then once I started hearing from him to be open to hearing from other people. You know, my experience is very different from yours; it was very different from yours because of race. If we have a relationship with a person or people in a community of color that helps us White people to see how race really affects our realities.

Robert describes:

> We don't have any practice at being frank about race and still by far we're not. And for Black folk it's been survival; you don't talk with White folk about race and live. And so this is the first generation where folks can venture out and say "well this is really race here." He continues:
>
> So I think that's been very helpful for me, for people to come in. I remember the first funeral we had here was for a Black person, a relative of a member and so the family asked me to do it. And one of the Black elders came, one of the women, and said "I bet you've never done a Black funeral before." I said no.

The woman sat down with Robert and told him details about how to conduct the funeral, and even though he admits "it was still very White" he said he was able to shift some things and that "it was very helpful to begin to be guided or allow myself to be guided."

Paul also describes several relationships over the years that have been important for his understanding of how to be in relationship with the communities and people with whom he works:

> I'm fortunate to have some African American friends, like Dr. [name] here, who over nine or ten years now we've developed a relationship where he can come to me and say, "Paul, this is what you're doing that some folks are uncomfortable with," and Pastor [name] when he was at the church could tell me or I could go to him and say "Is this okay?" or "am I okay in pursuing this in the way we're doing it?"

Alex also articulates the importance of having deep relationships for several different reasons:

> What I've found in dealing with my whiteness when I got to a level where I could feel that stuff was when I started having more intimate relationships with People of Color. So, it's really easy to be nonracist or nonsexist if your relationships are not deep or they are just on a superficial level. You know, I can get along with you and tolerate you, but it's when you're actually working closely together that this stuff comes out. Then you have conflict. When you have conflict is when your internalized superiority emerges. For some people it's just there and they exude it, chauvinists or bigots. But for those of us who are the middle of the line, it's something that's all in your head, and it doesn't come out until you're getting into really deep conversations where you're trying to do something together, and you realize there's difference with how to do it. That's funny, I haven't really articulated it that way before to myself. I knew it with respect to the gender piece, but now that I reflect it is the same with the hard lessons I've learned with race and issues of race.

The importance of relationships also emerges when participants talk about maintaining relationships with other Whites and with the work they do to find more effective ways to relate to other Whites, especially those who have never acknowledged or reflected on their own privilege. Paul says:

> I mean I like to think and this is one of those slow-going processes but not only are we in relationship or want to be in relationship with prisoners and their families and defendants and their families, but we end up being in relationship with folk who we start out not being &I mean being at total loggerheads with. You just wouldn't think it would be possible sometimes and this is sort of an evolutionary learning experience for me, too, but there have been times where a relationship with a bad judge or a bad police office or a bad sheriff has moved into a place where we cannot start talking about what's going on in this community or in the jail or what's driving this individual to behave the way he or she has behaved.

As Paul notes, the relationship building that occurs with some of the Whites in the surrounding communities takes years to develop, but he and Sara both are able to use the understandings they have gained from their own journeys to confront their white privilege to be able to approach the topic of possibly educating and impacting some of the other White people. Paul says:

> Probably the biggest work we have to do, Sara and I, and the hardest work is to be face-to-face with our White brothers and sisters to hopefully teach them, maybe learn a little bit from them too but to teach and force them, twist their arms to do better. When that happens it's wonderful. It's wonderful to find someone who, another White person who's part of the world who's willing to come sit down and actually listen, be in dialogue, and come to a place where they can be open to change or to at least thinking about change.

When talking about his shift from seeing racism as systemic rather than solely individual actions, Robert says:

> So I think I've shifted from saying it was mean White people to understanding that it was really basically good White people, really good folk that taught me racism

and many other things. And so that's been helpful as a way to approach other White people, and also to see that we're really talking about conversions here.

In general, the tone of the participants and the words some of them actually used when describing the importance of relationships connote words like "transformation," "conversion," and "miraculous." The significance of relationships in learning, teaching, and understanding racism was accentuated by all. As the participants talked they described the nature of the relationships to which they frequently referred. The characteristics of significant relationships included being respectful of communities and the people in the communities with whom they come into contact and with whom they work, as well as valuing each person's perspective on issues being discussed or problems being addressed. They emphasized the need to be frank and honest about matters that concern race after developing the deep, intimate relationships that make such honesty possible and fruitful. Several participants talked about painful experiences that came after they had developed close relationships with People of Color, experiences in which the White adult educators' admitted their internalized superiority had prompted them to act in less than respectful ways. They credited the significance and importance of the relationship as the primary reason they were able to stay with the difficult experiences and, more importantly, learn from them.

Experiential approaches.

The White adult educators in this study described a variety of approaches and specific strategies used to educate others about racism and white privilege. Many of the approaches are particularly useful in the varying contexts within which these adult educators practice; however, there were some common approaches and strategies across the group, approaches and strategies which take into account the analyses of racism and white privilege that the adult educators have. All of the adult educators emphasize experiential approaches that actively engage learners and take their own experiences into account. They also emphasize the power of personal stories. Finally, they recognize the

importance of using many approaches, in order to find a way that will touch particular individuals' lives. Robert says:

> There are many methods that antiracist trainers use and all of them in the end come down to the White person saying, this has an impact on my life and I want to change, so you combine both a kind of history and group dynamics and personal testimony to get that impetus for the person to say "there might be something here I need to listen to." And you don't know what will cause that movement in each person.

Most of the participants agree that it is important to start where people are and approach them in a non-threatening way, partly in order to minimize the defensiveness and discomfort many people have when talking about race. Terry believes that "what needs to happen is people just need to be heard." She recalls many workshops where some White people in a group are so committed to having the antiracism training work that "they will push other people in their group in a way that doesn't allow people to say why they're scared to do it." She continues:

> That doesn't work. So one of the things I try to do even though I don't know if I'm always successful at doing this, but I believe in making space for people to say where they really are about anything. Because I think when people can really say what's on their minds and know that they're not going to be rejected because of it, that's what makes any possible reconsideration possible. If I can't even speak I'm going to get more and more entrenched in my position because I'm not being heard.

Even though Terry feels it is important to listen to where people are, she also knows the importance of "knowing when is the time to hold and when are the times to really push, to try to choose moments of what to respond to and what not to respond to, and how to respond to it." Jim also understands the importance of starting where people

are and of entering into the educational process in a way that does not immediately raise the feelings of blame, guilt, and other defensive behaviors. He says:

> White people come to a workshop defended against being blamed. They walk into the door with that feeling and so if we try to even speak to that feeling at first it would just raise more feelings of blame that are problematic. We just simply have a straightforward approach to look at White culture and how it is centered in our society. It's a matter of using some triggers, tools, and experience and approaches in making that point.

Jim also emphasizes an experiential approach in which participants are actively engaged and actually get to move around and talk with others. He describes one activity:

> We start out with something called the chair exercise. I briefly talk about culture and how it is learned, using stories from my personal experience. Then I have a list of definitions of White culture that I run down very quickly and then we ask people to stand up. When we do the training it's experiential so we generally have free-standing chairs in a circle. And then we put a chair in the middle of the room and we say the room is American culture, and the chair is White American culture. We ask people to position themselves around the chair in terms of how closely connected they feel to White American culture. And then we ask people why they chose the position they chose. On newsprint, we write down two things, emotional responses and social statuses. So by the time we're done we have a list of they ways in which White culture impacts social statuses, gender, ethnicity, geographic locations, things like that. We also have a list of how people feel about it.

As Jim relates, this activity and others like it encourage people to talk about issues and feelings that may be uncomfortable to discuss if presented in a different way. Robert also uses this approach in workshops. He describes:

> I think what we try to do is do kind of an analysis, start in a very non-threatening way. One of the ways we start is what we call "naming the races" where we just have people call out racial classifications in the U.S. and have them go down the list just saying where did that name come from? Who does it designate? Why did it come &it very quickly becomes clear how arbitrary it is and so then we try to move into a deeper discussion of the categories that have come about over the years and the reasons behind them.

Alex also uses many different experiential approaches and activities in his work to encourage his students to acknowledge and understand the system of racism. His involvement with the campus and community antiracist group actually began when another educator brought a filmmaker, Francis Reed, with a film, *Skin Deep*, to campus. Several students and faculty members were prompted to continue their dialogue about the film and its impact on their lives, and out of those experiences the antiracist organization was created. In his own classes with many first generation college students as well as older, nontraditional-aged students, Alex uses a variety of experiential approaches, including role-playing, drama, and weekend retreats to infuse topics related to racism and sexism into his classes. He has used role-playing where he has the class depict problem situations and then "a way of resolving those problems where everyone's dignity is maintained or upheld." Instead of term papers in some of his philosophy classes, Alex requires the class to work collaboratively on a project, often a class-produced play where they have to "organize the labor for various things like promotion, acting, writing, and they have to be accountable to each other." They create and perform a public event to which people are invited. He says:

> I knew from my reading of Dewey's educational theory and aesthetics that drama really the best way to teach moral values. If you force someone to take the role of the "other," they are going to learn a lot more than if you have them just read about someone's perspective. So I try to do both. In the Race/Class/Gender class I

> had them read all kinds of perspectives. But then to play act it was just a different learning experience and brings it on a different level. You feel it.

Although Alex teaches classes directly related to the issue of racism within the philosophy department, he also "incorporates issues of race and gender in my other classes." When asked how he is able to educate students to see the power of institutions, he says:

> One of the things I try to do as an educator is constantly have the students reflect on their institution. So when we're reading Socrates I have them do a skit where Socrates come to campus and asks people questions. What I do as an educator is create exercises where they have to see themselves as part of an institution. I make them visit local businesses and do things like look at their codes of ethics and look at their institutional structure and the relationship between how it's structured and how it behaves. So how do you get people to see themselves as part of an institution? Well, you make them get into it.

Sara believes that one of the best ways to educate people about racism is to take them to court and have them sit in on a court session and then review with them afterward what happened and what one can learn from the experience. She says:

> They can experience for themselves that they are the only White people in court, for instance. Some folks aren't even aware. I'm aware because I've been doing this for so long. It's possible that you could sit in court and not be aware. You see the exact same thing I see, but you don't experience it in the same way because you haven't had the years of experience I've had watching that kind of thing play out. But, then we always have a time of reflecting with the groups that come so we can point out from that kind of experience how racism is at work.

The participants also emphasized the power of personal stories for helping people to understand the impact of racism on their own and other people's lives. When asked

about how they approach their work or effective ways to educate others, they frequently spoke of the impact of stories. Terry says:

> I would say we have a participatory learning and teaching method where we try to build, in everything that we do, we try to start by building relationships. We just get people to tell stories to ground people in their own experience before we start to do anything else.

Sara also relates how important it is for people to be able to tell their stories and how others can learn from them. She says:

> And the other thing is to have somebody like Linda to tell her story. That's one of the other really powerful parts of the Freedom Walk is that we stop at places at lunch time, for instance, and have people from the town tell us their story. So you experience from the voice of the oppressed what is really happening, because I think it's so hard for White people to &it just doesn't happen to us, so we really often times don't see it.

She continues:

> Going back to the time in [town]. We stopped for lunch here in town. Linda and several other people had organized a lunch for us, and they had some young men come and speak to us about their experiences. I remember vividly the story of one young man who was on probation, and at three in the morning, his probation officer came into his home and took a urine sample. And another Black person told of walking on the street and being stopped by the police and being told that he couldn't walk on the street after dark. This was actually a city council person who was told that by a White policeman. So we heard all these stories about what the police were doing in this town.

The participants also promoted approaches that call for a combination of strategies, as well as those that teach or develop a shared analysis of racism. They believe approaches that allow one to combine an analysis of racism with the history and legacy of

racism is more effective than a one-dimensional approach, especially with regard to countering the current colorblind beliefs and rhetoric. Using small group discussions to engage group members who may not be comfortable discussing topics with the entire group can also be helpful. They also suggested having multiple instructors, specifically having workshops or courses team taught with instructors who are persons of color and White as effective and essential. Several participants believe they have learned and absorbed the information related to racism by teaching it themselves and use that strategy in their own teaching. Alex says:

> Just presenting the material, you learn it. And that's what I find in my teaching. That the way the students learn the material is actually to present it. I use adaptations of that technique in my classes.

Terry also mentioned several times how she had learned so much over the fifteen years she has been conducting workshops from her own efforts to teach the material in many different ways and to constantly adapt and develop the material and methods she uses.

Hold self and others accountable.

The participants repeatedly talked about the need to continue to speak out and challenge the systems with which they come into contact, as well as continuing to hold themselves responsible for their own behavior, in the ongoing efforts to challenge racism. They offer several examples that illuminate the importance of doing so and particular ways of meeting the challenge. Robert says:

> You just have to pick your battles and continue to work, continue to kind of throw seeds, do workshops, put seeds wherever you can. You also continue to pound on them, continue to gnaw away at them. Sometimes you have opportunities where you can just kind of blatantly go at it. I remember when OJ's verdict came down we were right in the middle of a White group and a Black group. Well, you didn't

> have to raise the subject of race then because it came up automatically. It was a very helpful discussion. I think you have to pick your battles.

Paul emphasizes the need to continue to speak out and speak up when people around him are not attending to the particulars of their behaviors. When talking about the White law officers who will talk with him even when the African Americans he should be speaking with are in the room, he says:

> I'm much better than I was maybe even 8 or 9 years ago at saying "wait a minute Sheriff, you need to be dialoguing with the folk in your community before I sit down with you. Sometimes I just refuse to talk and say "I'm sorry you are speaking to the wrong person. I'm a resource to these folk and we're going to be a part of any movement to make things right but this is neither the place or the person or the time for you and I to be talking."

Paul and Sara also continue to make formal challenges when they encounter officials who are engaging in racist behavior. Paul says:

> When we make a formal challenge to some individual or entity's behavior, at least it gets them to sit up and have to respond to our allegations or the community's allegations whether it's a racist police officer or a filthy, unsanitary jailhouse or a judge who is routinely putting Black folks in prison without benefit of any due process. That at least gets folks to sit up and if nothing else be embarrassed in front of others and to say "I guess we have to do better because the law says we must do better." Or "I don't have a judgeship anymore so the next person in line for that position says I've got to do better because the [name of organization] or the local NAACP or the concerned citizens of the county are watching me.

Paul also relates that when he and others have been able to begin a dialogue with people whom they started out being at total odds with, it has "almost always come after a challenge, not before the challenge is made," thus demonstrating the effectiveness of continuing to challenge and challenge publicly. The importance of "calling people to

task" and also using the media to challenge them publicly was demonstrated in several more examples. Robert discussed an incident when someone from another church, one in which he and his church elder had conducted an antiracism workshop, called to tell him that the particular church had allowed the Sons of the Confederate Veterans to meet there and have a Confederate flag in the sanctuary. Robert says:

> So we called them to task and I guess it was made doubly painful for them because we had worked with that church and they were partnering with another huge, Black Baptist church and so we said "what are you doing here? You're partnering with this church and you've got the Confederacy here. You've got to make a decision." It was easier because of the work we had done and I said, "well, we're really gonna get after you and so they pled with us to give them a little time and I trusted the guy and said we'll give you about a month but you need to do something." So they did something, which I was surprised and they did catch some flak. We've done that on several church fronts.

Alex also recounts the importance of continuing to speak out and challenge people publicly, to hold them accountable. Alex describes efforts he and his group used to call attention to an incident that occurred in his area when an inmate died of suspicious causes in prison. He says:

> The local paper would not discuss the incident on its cover. We boycotted that. We had demonstrations in front of the newspaper office. The local news wouldn't come cover our first couple of marches. Then they came. I was told by a friend of one of the cameramen he was told to lay off the story. So it's very important to get the media's involvement. So, you've got the inside. You've got the outside. The inside and the outside need to make use of their publicity. I don't mean in the sense of publicity stunts. But you've got to let people know and hope they see for themselves. You know, just lay it out there.

Alex continues to describe the necessity of getting people and institutions to hold themselves accountable. He offers a prescription for effective organizing:

> Well, there's a hope that once people look at institutions and they understand what racism is in an institution, they would put two and two together and say, "hey, this is wrong." It's pretty clear. Once you start looking you see it. It's only veiled. So there's that piece of it. But I also think you need external pressure. When people come to campus to do a demonstration and the TV news shows up, then now the institution is accountable to the larger community. So, you've got to have it working from the inside and the outside. You've got to have people who are in it seeing what it is and trying to change it. You've got to have people on the outside bringing up certain issues.

## People of Color as Antiracist Adult Educators

In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the themes and categories that emerged to describe the understandings of racism and how those understandings guide the People of Color to take action to challenge racism. Table 4 provides an overview of those themes.

### Understandings of Racism

The People of Color's understandings and analyses of racism were demonstrated by their understanding of racism as institutional, cultural, societal, and systemic, by their particular emphasis on the power embodied within our system of racism, by their understanding of the importance of a historical perspective, and by their analysis of the workings of whiteness and white privilege, in relation to themselves and White people. I will now discuss each of these major themes as well as the categories related to the themes in order to explicate how these participants view racism in our society.

Table 4

People of Color's Understandings of Racism and Impact on Practice

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Understandings of Racism

Racism as Institutional, Cultural, Societal, and Systemic

Power embodied

- Impact on People of Color
- Impact on Whites

Importance of Historical Perspective

Analysis of Whiteness/White Privilege

- Understand attributes of whiteness
- See impact on self
- Understand significance of emotions/pain for Whites

How Understandings Guide Actions to Challenge Racism

Attain Clarity

- Maintain commitment
- See through the system
- Recognize urgency
- Work with young people

Mutual respect and accountability

- Importance of relationships
- Impetus for educational strategies

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Racism as Institutional, Cultural, Systemic, and Societal

The People of Color in this study had an analysis of racism as institutional, cultural, systemic, and societal. The many examples and descriptions they provided to

explain this characteristic present a multidimensional picture of racism from educators who are positioned as "other" by the dominant culture in the United States. Kevin, who works as trainer to build antiracist organizations offered several descriptions of racism as institutional. In order to meet the goals of his organizational consulting group he views racism as systemic and highlights the impact of this analysis:

> We want to see models develop that actually challenge the racist system, internally and externally. We want to see People of Color understand how oppression operates and become more empowered and learn how People of Color are oppressed, and we want White people to understand white privilege and white superiority and we want White people to understand how to both function in society in general and in organizations in an antiracist way.

Kevin and his colleagues believe that "organizational change leads to institutional change and institutional change leads to social change." And he advocates the development of an antiracist existence in order to combat the overwhelming power of the system. He says:

> Racism is like a river and the river has a very strong current, and as an individual after you swim against that current for a while you get tired. Our arms just get tired. Sometimes people try to go to the shore. Sometimes they say, "okay I'm going to go with the current for a while then I'm gonna pick it up later."

When discussing the institution of higher education where he is employed Hernando, a Romance Languages professor, speaks forthrightly about the connections between our educational system, economics, and racism in our society. He says:

> Look at this institution for example. How many People of Color or women of color do you have in an important position in this place? But if you talk to the people who are running the institution, they will tell you no, no, no we are fair but at the same time it doesn't show. Show me the facts, show me the facts is what I say. Don't tell me you are not a racist. Show me facts. And look at the funding, the

> funding by the lottery. Now, who as a general rule plays the lottery in [state] and how is that money reflected in the population? How many African Americans percentage are receiving lottery money?

Linda describes the ubiquitous nature of the racist system as she talks about the town where she lives, its White mayor, majority Black city council, and White policeman. She describes:

> We go on Fridays to see the court, to see how people are being treated. The judge knows we are there. We go to the City Council once a month. We try to keep up with what's happening in the community because a lot of stuff is being done that we don't know anything about. There's a lot to be kept under the rug. Just like our mayor. We have about 800 people here, and it's about 85% African American. We have a mayor that don't care how the city is run as long as he gets his. We have so many kids with nothing to do. They don't try to do anything to help the kids.

Christine, who is the co-founder of an organization that works to decenter White culture and a college professor, says:

> I try to focus more on the systemic, looking at institutions and this is so much a part of all of us living within the United States. It's been very good socialization. That's what socialization is when folks aren't even aware that they are being told those kinds of things. We need to get them to understand and see it's part of culture as opposed to some of the other stuff that deals just with prejudice, the focus on individuals and if we can change individuals, society will change.

She also noticed in her classes that when she discussed racism, "everybody would be talking about their racialized selves but my White students couldn't." She attributed that in part to how our society focuses on the individual and not the systems. She continues:

> We live in a society from the time the seeds drop, you're racialized and so what does that mean. I'm glad people are looking at what it means to be racialized as a White person.

The adult educators recognized the interlocking aspects of oppression and privilege that characterize the system of racism in our country. Their insights were both professional and personal. Christine, who describes herself as a feminist and brings a feminist analysis to the work she does around race, talked about reactions from her male counterparts at the university where she teaches. She said:

> I guess in the professional field I see how they respond to me as a Black female. I used to say "they respond to me differently because I'm a woman," but no, they respond to me the way they do because I'm a Black woman. So the interaction of race and gender has been another crucial thing for me as well. I can't get passionate about something. Instead, I am emotional, you know.

Christine also spoke about her understanding of white privilege as dynamic and unstable and how for a "person who is experiencing that privilege, it will probably change over a period of time." She uses the example of Hispanics in this country who even though they may be classified or "racialized as White they do not have that white privilege." She also noted that "being White is a life of race privilege and it's contradicted somewhat if you happened to be poor and White because you don't see as many of those privileges." She continued to provide examples of the importance of "being aware of how this white privilege gets played out when one has other kinds of statuses." She says:

> What does it mean to say that I'm a White lesbian? You do get some kind of privilege for being White that your Black lesbian counterpart won't get. But how is this privilege undermined by the larger society? How do they diminish your privilege when you fly in the face of what this white privilege is supposed to be about? That's where I am now in terms of a Black and White thing.

As Christine pondered the future of our country with its changing demographics, she also reflected on the importance of interlocking statuses and how they would be played out:

> I think what I see has a lot to do with new people coming into our society that we will either let them be White or not let them be White. That's going to have an impact in terms of who becomes White and then how does this white privilege get played out. Will class become more important than race? I think for certain groups it might but for others, well they're Black and your parents have been middle class ever since you hit foot on these shores and you're still stopped because your skin is black.

Kevin spoke about how his understanding of sexism has helped him to understand the system of racism and the difficulty Whites have for accepting or admitting it exists. In fact, he said that he almost stopped doing the work because of how frustrated he would get when White people in the workshops would cry or get angry. He relates:

> I had to use my analysis to understand myself in terms of sexism. I have to understand that I'm a sexist and an anti-sexist at the same moment. And that helps me now reflect on white racism. I went to a sexism workshop at Peace Development Fund and I did the exact same things White people do. You know when they said "men have all the power," I started doing the "yes, but &" thing. Yes but this, yes but that, yes I'm a Black man, yes but, yes but, yes but. And then I realized, there was a moment that I realized that I was doing the exact same thing that most White people do. And that helped me understand White people better because there are a bunch of buts. I mean there are real buts. Yes, but I'm a poor White person. Yes, but I've never had power. Yes, but I live on this mountain in Appalachia. Yes, but I'm old and people talk and laugh about me. There are all these yes, buts. But there's a moment at which I had to say, is this true and it is. Is this true about sexism? Yes, it is. Do men repeat the same exact thing a woman

> just said and do they get credit for it? Yes. Do I get male privilege? The fact that most medical research is done on men doesn't mean I asked for it but it is given to me. And you know it was hard for me, but what that meant was now it's better because I'm able more to struggle with White people and understand White people because I know when we say that this is the system of power and that White people have power and I'm talking to a White person who has been dirt poor all their life, has been exploited all their life, this idea of power becomes hard to swallow. And what that tells me is I've got to be able to explain power relationships better and what would happen to a Black person of your same level and what you could do if certain class things were dealt with.

Power Embodied

Although the participants saw racism as institutional, cultural, and systemic, it was more tellingly the power of racism that was revealed and described explicitly by these adult educators. Many of them work to challenge racism within their organizations and communities and so are challenging the power directly and professionally; however, their personal experiences also provided many cogent examples of the power of racism in our society. While they obviously understood the institutionalization of racism in our country, it was the destructive power of the system that was the focus of their analyses. They clearly understood the impacts of racism on both People of Color and Whites.

Impact on People of Color.

The participants described the impact of the powerful system of racism on People of Color, and especially Blacks, in many different ways. Many of them used the term internalized racist oppression to name the effects on People of Color, and they also discuss effects in terms of the silence the power of racism calls forth in many People of Color, silence which at many times has been necessary for survival.

Marie, on her entry into what she thought was a multicultural church setting, saw for the most part "actually Black folks following the White models." She related that she

did not see or feel a strong sense of blackness and began "to sense that part of it was the Blacks feeling the need to follow the White model in order to be accepted." As she began to speak up, she also noticed the silence of many of the other Black church members:

> Silence gives permission when it comes to a lot of issues. And that silence was giving permission. But I tried to understand it also. Also, coming from our history because too often you had to be silent in order to survive.

When she began to speak up and challenge others in the church to do so because as she said "silence, I don't believe in being silent," she was labeled as a troublemaker at first by other Blacks in the church. Marie says:

> Whenever there were workshops especially if you had Blacks and Whites together, Blacks would always feel the need to protect the Whites. So if they would protect the Whites then the Blacks would attack me because they felt I was attacking the White folks. I would be &it was painful, painful. I would get angry. And I knew that was not going to work. I was not going to be angry with my folks. So I started seeking some type of understanding and beginning to ask myself, beginning to realize how our lives are affected and how internalized that racism, especially that oppression that we internalize, and I began to see all of this craziness as just a manifestation of that internalized racial oppression. And really more or less trying to take it to another level and begin to understand not just who White folks are but who we are and why we do what we do. And once I began that struggle, it began to ease the pain. It actually began to make sense. It really did. I began to understand.

When discussing some of the reasons he does what he does, Kevin talks about his goal of "building strong, healthy organizations," as well as his quest "to help empower People of Color and liberate White people." He describes a heartfelt response of a participant in one of his workshops and says when he was listening to him:

> It just hit me how bad some People of Color have it because they're in a system that doesn't value and appreciate them and they're feeling all this weight on a daily basis, and one way we talk about internalized racist oppression is like a pecking. It takes a little bit out of you everyday, every moment sometimes. And it's not a big sore, it's just a little thing that most times people can't see.

When describing ways he had thought the world had changed since the 1960s, Hernando makes a connection between the lynchings that occurred in the past and the death penalty today. He states:

> For example, in the 30s and 40s, they would lynch here. Now the lynch is an official thing. Look at who is on the death penalty rolls. At the same time it's covert. You see what I am saying, but it has not changed according to some White people what the position of a Black person in this society is. It's not like Blacks have to sit in the back of the bus or are not allowed to go in the restaurant, but the power system is still in place.

In addition, Hernando associates power with many of the systems in our country, including religion where he marvels at the fact that "we have a Black Jesus and a White Jesus and how it's going to be amazing in the other world" as well as the education, criminal justice, and economic systems. He ends by saying "the power of racism is that you get used to things. You don't question things that you know for generations and generations."

The power of the racist system and the impact on Blacks and other People of Color was tellingly portrayed by Linda who along with community members and others in her organization have worked to establish a community center in their town. Although the town is 85% Black and there are Blacks on the city council, it is controlled by the White mayor. She works in many ways to challenge the system but still knows its power. When talking about a man who was stopped in the town and taken to jail, she says:

> And so it's always our word against theirs. We already know that. So when I talk to people around here and when I talk to the young people that's what I tell them. We already know. You still try to do the best you can here because it's always going to be your word against theirs; 9 out of 10 they're going to come out on top.

Linda and her fellow organizers invite everyone in the community to their regularly held community meetings. When asked if any Whites attend the meetings, she said "no" other than Paul and Sara, the two White people she works with in the prison organization and who were also participants in this study. She also says:

> We even have African Americans who don't attend because they are still afraid. It's hard to get support from a lot of them because a lot of them have gotten set in their ways, you know, "why would anybody bother me? I'm inside." Then we say, "yes, but if you are Black here, then you are being bothered. You've got trouble."

Marie also provides a revealing look at the power of racism and the racist system and the impact on all of our lives:

> In the 60s my concern was more about what you guys were doing, Whites, you know, and you all kicking my butt. Now I have people that look like me kicking my butt. I'm not as worried about you guys as much anymore, or just you, it's both now when it comes to it. You know there are different reasons for it, but my butt was kicked the worse when it was kicked by a Black person because it was so unexpected. But that's part of the programming, that's part of the programming with institutionalized racism.

<u>Impact on Whites.</u>

The participants also addressed the impact of the system of racism on Whites. They focused on the ways that the power of racism harms us all, and spoke specifically about what they saw as Whites' fear, loss of humanity, and isolation. Christine begins:

> I do believe that now White people have to see that the problem of racism affects them too on a very disastrous level if we don't change it. I'm hoping they'll get a

> vested interest of their own, not because it's the right thing to do it is the only thing to do.

She continues by describing more specifically how racism harms us all:

> We are being hurt, I mean we're all being hurt and we need to get people to see that. Even if it's not a direct thing where one may not feel the pain is that you are hurt if it's nothing more than you're not getting the best doctor for your care because the best doctor may be a woman or the best doctor may be African American. We still have to overcome a hurdle because I think the majority of White Americans still believe that everybody has this equal chance of getting the same thing.

Marie talks about the sense of isolation that she feels is common among many Whites she encounters:

> From where I sit I don't see too many White folks feeling good no matter about themselves. I just don't see it and I'm going "what's wrong with you? You should be on top of the world." But I'm beginning to understand there doesn't seem to be a deep sense of humanity there, there's just not a deep sense of humanity there. You have to seek your humanity.

In his work with assisting organizations that want to develop an antiracist culture, Kevin encounters many ramifications of the power of the racist system for Whites. He says:

> We're trying to create something that's very unnatural we see the system going against. First of all, White people thinking of themselves as a collective is an unnatural process. What's even more unnatural is White people building up an antiracist collective. That's very unnatural. White people are supposed to think of themselves as individuals and not part of a group. The work that White people do is really difficult because it's totally going against what the system says. When

> people get together they get together to be more racist and not to be antiracist. So that's one of the things that we're working on. As you can see, that's a lot of work.

Linda also senses the isolation and destructiveness the system creates for Whites and Blacks alike:

> The people in this community are isolated. White is isolated on this side, and Black is isolated on that side. The kids are growing up, and that's the way it's going to be on and on. We are isolated from each other, and the times should be changing by now.

Importance of Historical Perspective

The participants also expressed an understanding of the importance of a historical perspective for understanding what racism is and for developing ways to challenge and educate others. Their understanding of the history and legacy of racism also helps them realize the time it will take for society to change; as Marie says, "racism has been around a long time and it will take a long time to get rid of it." When talking about her understanding of the history of racism, Christine relates:

> We do this whole thing about how one becomes racialized and who decides what one is. We do the whole history of the descent rule, which says when you've got a Black person who had a great grandmother who's Black and haven't had a Black person since still in the United States they should be considered Black.

She also uses the understanding of history when she talks with her students about the standards and norms of whiteness:

> We don't need to measure everything against whiteness. Those standards may not be correct ones in all cases. In a lot of cases, they're not. A sense of history is very important. And I tell my students "okay, look at the requirements they had to have to be in the company before the physical requirements were struck down. And so why we're those requirements there? Obviously to keep certain kinds of people

> out." And so they [students] can see it because we're not talking about race or gender.

Kevin has worked for years in several different social justice organizations, including the peace movement, international issues, and organizational development groups. His experience has enabled him to gain a historical perspective on the development of social justice organizations and to see many of the problems specifically related to race throughout the years. He recalls some of this history:

> Originally our model was developed to work with white peace groups so our workshops were primarily geared to White people, and you'd have maybe one or two People of Color in those workshops. The goals were more about trying to figure out how we could open up the peace movement to People of Color. Because way back then, this idea of White culture was something that not a lot of people had talked or written about. So, what we were trying to do was crack it open and break open these groups, these White groups for People of Color. Which was very difficult. And that's why the issue of movement building in this work is so critical because we can look at the history of movements and see how movements have broken and split based on racism. Look at the peace movement. Look at the environmental movement. I mean, environmental justice actually is a movement created because the white environmental groups did not want to deal with environmental racism. In other words, a lot of things were dumped in People of Color's communities, and they were still talking about the air and the wind and not talking about all these cancers that are developing.

His understanding of the history of social movements in the U.S. that have been primarily White or torn apart by racism enables Ken and his colleagues to "try to make sure that doesn't happen again by making sure that groups are open to everybody and open to all these different issues" and do not "split because folks don't realize the work that needs to be done."

Hernando also brings a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of history to his analysis of racism. In addition, as he was born in Cuba, he also brings his understanding of the differences in the racist system in two different societies. He has lived in the United States since 1965. He talked about the impact of the Civil Rights movement on the laws of this country and the impact on him personally:

> At the same time the Civil Rights has affected my life as well. I would not be a professor at this college if it was not for that man (pointing to a picture of Martin Luther King, Jr. in his office). If it were not for Martin Luther King, I would not ever have the chance to work at a university. And I am very aware of that. As a matter of fact, there are some Hispanics that now don't have the rights, don't have the opportunity I had twenty years ago.

Analysis of Whiteness/White Privilege

The People of Color in this study also had an encompassing picture of white privilege and whiteness that contributed significantly to their understanding of racism in our society. They expressed their understandings of white privilege in several ways, some of which reflected their analysis of White culture from an outsider's perspective and some which reflected the impact it has on them. They understood and described the attributes of whiteness and white privilege, explained the impact that white privilege has on them as People of Color, and understood the significance of emotions/pain for Whites

as they encounter and attempt to deal with facts of their own white privilege and their complicity with the system of racism.

Understand attributes of whiteness.

The participants identified many of the characteristics that have been attributed to Whites, attributes discussed in the literature by African Americans for decades and in the more recent attention to the subject by Whites in the academy. The individualistic nature of Whites and White culture was recognized by all participants, as was the tendency for

Whites to generalize from their own situations. As Kevin said, "If Whites don't realize that how they're feeling and what they're thinking at a given moment cannot be generalized then White people always make a mistake." They also described the privilege and entitlement that most White people unquestionably accept. Several participants hinted at the egocentrism and self-absorption of some White people, which contributes to their inability to "see" or admit to their white privilege. Most of the participants spoke about the individualistic nature of White culture, from Kevin's admonition that "White people are supposed to think of themselves as individuals and not a part of a group" to Christine's understanding from a sociological view that "Max Weber, the Protestant Ethic, the sociological thesis, are all about pushing individualism." They also understand how Whites' focus on individualism and the individual explanations for societal problems have affected the progress we have made to counter racism and change our society. Marie expresses concern about how some Blacks have begun to buy into the cult of individualism. She says:

> So there's more of that programming now and what we began to do is we have the nerve to try to move toward individualism, we emulate the White establishment. But our communities cannot survive, we cannot, our survival is totally proportionate to the way we build the community. We cannot move toward individualism.

The participants also comprehended and described the system of white privilege and its characteristics as well as the difficulty most Whites have in comprehending it. Christine said:

> It's a certain way of thinking, the thinking that what you got you deserved even though it's not earned. I think being White is not being aware of the unearned, the word people are using today "privilege" that you have. The other thing, it's the entitlement. There are some White people who really believe that they are entitled

> to certain things, like a kid will say, "well my dad didn't get this job because they had to give it to the Pakistani."

Other participants described "how subtle white privilege is in society" and the ubiquitous nature of white privilege in our society, both which contribute to Whites inability to see it, as well as the necessity of them doing so. Kevin said:

> The fish don't notice the water and we're asking White people to do something that's totally unnatural which is notice the water and so I might be drowning and you might be feeling pretty good and if you're not paying attention you many not even notice that I'm drowning. So White people, my feeling is White people have to really understand white privilege, how white privilege operates, how sometimes white privilege can translate itself into white superiority.

Marie also expressed a clear understanding of the nature and characteristics of white privilege and also what needs to be done. She related:

> I stopped blaming. And beginning to know that you had nothing to do with the situation, the environment you were born into and neither did I. And beginning to understand that you have no other choice than to participate; you are a participant just by the mere fact that you are White. You were born White and I was born Black. And with that you gained certain privileges. I'm sure you understand that. But I begin to blame you if you can't hear that I say you have privileges. I'm not going to blame you for having them. I look more at what you do with your privileges as long as you know it's there.

The participants saw whiteness and white privilege as dynamic and always changing, dependent on social and historical constructions of who is considered White throughout the years. Neither did they see it as monolithic or experienced the same by every White person. Christine said she believes that "being White is a life of contradictions and that there are folks who are not aware of their privileges and those who

believe that race no longer matters." There are others who "are beginning to understand they do have privileges because they are White."

See impact on self.

The participants expressed both positive and negative ramifications that have come from the system of white privilege during their lifetimes. They frequently talked about how an understanding of the system of white privilege brings a sense of empowerment. One of the most emotional parts of the interviews for me was when I asked Marie about how racism and white privilege has affected her life. After pausing for twenty seconds, she said:

> Sometimes I really fear of being crazy. It has a way of turning things around. Engaging that white privilege you get to understand how it operates and how it works. It has really made me a &it really made me stronger because what is has done for me is &I used to wear the blinders. I used to wear the blinders. See what begins to happen is if you've been in one situation for so long you don't know anything other than. Your life has been impacted by white privilege all our life. You don't know anything else because you don't have anything to really compare it to. What has happened is beginning to understand that white privilege is that it has made me feel &I really feel more empowered because when you can't explain you blame, and that doesn't help the situation. So, now I can begin to explain, so what it has done is to help me to stop blaming which has been good for me interacting not just with Whites but with my own.

Christine also expressed the impact that white privilege has had on her life in a way that frames it as positive. She said:

> In some ways it has affected me for the positive. I got my Ph.D. at Rutgers out of spite. I tell everybody that and that's true. It really was. When I went to Rutgers, I had no Black professors. There were no Black people in the classroom. There were maybe a few, but none in my class. And then I found out that Rutgers had

> never ever graduated, at that time, an African American period. And then they graduated a male and then I was the first African American female to graduate in sociology. In 1981. Just twenty years ago. But I think there was also some internalized oppression there. I felt I had to do this because if I didn't every Black person who came after me would not have a chance to do it. And that's a heavy burden to have to carry to feel you have to carry the whole race on your back. And I'm not the first person who's had to do that.

And even though she went to a school system in the South during the segregated era, Christine feels that it "clearly was systemic racism but I think that was one of the best things for me. Because it was there that I saw people like me. Though it was a system of racism, it to me had a lot to do with who I became and what I was."

The participants also expressed some of the negative impacts from growing up and living in the system of white privilege. Hernando, who physically looks White, says "as fast as I open my mouth, when I open my mouth I am already labeled as not White. My color is in my tongue. So when I speak here everybody defines me. And I have been discriminated against, not only in the South but also in the North." Christine relates how she gets tired of interpreting for White people when discussing issues related to racism and privilege or even just when interacting with some White people. When discussing her friendship and support from a group of women she met at Rutgers and with whom she still interacts she says:

> We can talk about things that we don't have to interpret. Because most times when I'm hyped up around White people I have to interpret a lot of stuff because I want to let them know what it is I'm saying to them but they have no idea what I'm talking about. And you know you get tired of that. I do, you know, I've been doing this for 30 years. I'm tired of telling you White people how to do things. Get out there and do it yourself.

When I asked Linda, who lives and works in a small, rural area about the impact of white privilege on her life, she related:

> Okay, I'm just going to tell you what I say. And I say it all the time. And I'm not afraid or ashamed to say it. When I pass by these big pretty houses, you know what I say? "They always had the best of everything." That what I always say. "They always had the best of everything. I'm 53 years old and I'm living in a mobile home. I struggled all my life. Where am I? Where am I?

The participants definitely understood and continue to feel the impact of many of the attributes associated with whiteness and white privilege. They experience negation in their professional and personal lives and deal daily with the ramifications of the system of white privilege and racism that exists in our society. Christine says:

> One thing has to do with the feeling I get that people believe I can't be objective and that I have a vested interest in saying this is so, so it doesn't necessarily have to be true. In other words, a feeling that people can de-legitimate what I'm saying because I am Black, a Black female so I have a vested interest in what I'm saying. Sometimes in my work as a professor I get the feeling that students don't believe what I'm saying has any validity, that it's basically my own personal opinion.

She goes on to analyze how this reaction and the system is upheld by our society, as well as the fact that People of Color have been "saying this for years." She says, "That's the other thing, too. Information doesn't really become valuable or acknowledgeable until the White person puts their stamp on it and it's okay."

Understand significance of emotions/pain for Whites.

When the People of Color in my study talked about educating and talking with White people or mixed racial groups about racism and its history, as well as its impact on American society, they consistently talked about the emotions that Whites usually displayed. They all mentioned crying, anger, denial, and guilt as those that usually occur. And many of them understand and attribute these emotions to being a defense

mechanism, as a way to not feel the pain or the feelings associated with racism or as a way to "not have to do anything about it." However, they also understand the necessity of going through the emotions and pain as a way "to get to the other side." Although they all understand from whence these emotions come, they were each more or less willing to let these emotions ride without challenging and calling those who express them to account for themselves. Even though they had various responses to the emotions many Whites feel when they learn or are confronted with their white privilege, they all recognized and described the pain Whites will need to deal with to be able to confront the system of racism. In addition, they were all able and did separate the individual White person from the system of racism, in a way that enabled them to not see White people "as bad." Or as Marie says, "Trying to get especially White folks to hear that I'm not saying that you are bad you see, that's not what I'm saying, and I'm not saying that we are so good." There were many examples of Whites' emotional responses when these adult educators were conducting workshops or presenting information related to racism and white privilege. Marie said:

> The White females, most of them were crying. They would be emotional &the guilt. And they would feel the need to apologize. It seemed as though they were overwhelmed with a sense of guilt. And that didn't help any of us. Many White males get super angry and they want to get into all this intellectual garbage. I would say come back, don't try to take me over there. Let's stay here.' Because this is an escape mechanism.

Christine also understands that many of the emotions and pain Whites feel about their white privilege and she related them to defense mechanisms and denial. She noted that "people have defense mechanisms to deal with those things that are very painful for them. So rather than using that guilt trip of what White people have done, you try to look at it societally." She continues:

> It's a struggle and White people have to realize that just as if you can talk about a Black group or Black people or Black values we have to be able to do the same thing for White people. And so, I think what I'm saying is that a large number of White people still live in denial, still live in denial. I also think our White allies aren't willing to struggle when we need to make changes and it's not going to be an easy ride. It's going to be very painful. And that's got to be very painful for someone who has lived a life where they didn't see any privileges at all.

When expressing the understanding of what it will take for White people to work through the emotions and pain the participants that "it's a process and the process is emotional," as Kevin says. Marie and Christine also offer some advice on how to confront the pain. Marie says to just "find the strength to engage a strong Black person and just listen. If you just start there you will be amazed. Be prepared to feel some pain, knowing you won't feel comfortable, being able to feel uncomfortable." And Christine says:

> I mean it's hard, it's painful, very painful, and White people at different levels have different kinds of pain that I have not experienced, but I have experienced pain, and I think one way is talking through that pain and not denying people's reality. I try to do that when I teach my class. I don't wipe that kid off by saying "well you know your Dad shouldn't have that job because he's a white racist." I try to walk them through it to see what's happening.

In summary, the People of Color in this study expressed an understanding of racism and white privilege that views it as more than an individual problem but also an institutional, cultural, and systemic dilemma. They understand the impact of racism on all our lives, and have developed ways to cope with the inequities that stem from racism in their personal and professional lives. Their understandings are manifested in the actions they take.

## How Understandings Guide Actions to Challenge Racism

The People of Color shared perceptions of racism as institutional and systemic. Their understandings related to the power of racism, the attributes of white privilege, and the importance of a historical perspective have guided them to take actions against racism and to live their lives in specific ways. They have attained clarity about the system of racism and have developed a sense of the importance of mutual respect and accountability that informs the work they do.

### Attain Clarity

The adult educators in this study have attained an unparalleled clarity about the system of racism, the power that constitutes and upholds that system, and ways to challenge that power. Their understanding and analyses of racism and white privilege provide a strong foundation for what they see as the problems and some of the ways to solve the problems caused by racism in our society. They have attained a clarity that allows them to maintain their commitment to their work, to see through the system and read situations, to recognize the urgency of challenging the system of racism, and to see the importance of starting the work with children

#### Maintain commitment.

The participants have been working for years to challenge the system of racism and differential treatment of People of Color in this country. The clarity they have attained has helped them to understand how long a process it will be to change the system and create a more just society but has also given them the strength to persevere. As Marie says, "The reality of it is we still have a lot, we have a lot of work to do." Many of them talk about "continuing the struggle" for future generations and of the necessity of doing what it takes to be able to continue the work. They also underscore the importance of supporting each other, as Marie says because "we have to realize we are all in this together." Most of the participants have seen some of the fruits of their labor during their lifetime, although they emphasize there is a long way to go. Linda talked about the first

time she joined the Freedom Walk as it came through her town and the impact it had on her continued commitment. Even though she said "at first I had this fear," she took a chance and has not looked back since. Linda relates:

> And it was just like God sent them through here that day. And when I came up here that day, I just came to get a loaf of bread. I didn't really know they were here. I saw them. People said, "The Freedom Walk is here." I said, "You've got to be kidding." I put the bread back on the counter and said I'd come pick it up later. "I've got to go." And that's what I did. I came and I listened to what they had to say. And that just gave me hope that day. I said, "I know if I can get out there and walk and I live here, that should give me hope. That should give me strength." And that's what it did. I was afraid when we came through. There's the mayor. There's the state patrol. You know they were watching us. Everybody called me later that night and said, "Girl, all of them were watching you go through the town." So what's the deal. You know, they saw me. I live here, and I can't walk through? And so it kind of boosted me up a little bit. And I said, "Well, I'm going to go through here." If I did that &hey, what else can I do?

Linda is adamant that she will continue to do the work to challenge racism and is always thinking about what else she can do. She says "it is time somebody speaks out" and you can't sit by on your hands forever. The more you sit on your hands, the farther back in time you go." She recalls a time when she felt particularly challenged and relates it to what she does now:

> We don't have a swimming pool here to give the kids some type of recreation. When I was a child growing up, there was a city pool. The Whites paid to use the pool. We never got to learn to swim. Some of my own kids went into [city] when they came along and learned to swim. But the pool out here in our town, when the Black kids started getting in, they closed it in. Yes they closed it in. They put all kind of trash in it because I heard at one time that it was cemented up. But Sara

> and I went by there one day to take pictures to make sure. And what they really did was they took old refrigerators and this and that and just dumped them in. They just said "no way. They will never swim in this pool." And now some nights I lay awake, and I try to figure out a strategy, "What can I do now? Where can I go? What is the next step?" I will keep working.

The successes that do come help these adult educators maintain their commitment to the struggle to challenge racism. Kevin, who has worked as an antiracist trainer for twenty years says:

> I think there are a lot more groups of all kinds that are more sensitive to racism because of the work that the People's Institute does, because of our work, because of Crossroads' work, because of all the work that happens in early childhood. I think there's a lot more sensitivity and I think there are a lot more groups trying, I mean what we say, is that an antiracist analysis will help you do your work better and that's coming true. I think that's proven true.

Kevin offered another example of the progress that has been made and the fruits he has seen of his and others' work. He was amazed that he and his co-trainers are currently working with a county health department to create an antiracist organization. He said six months ago, he would not have thought that was possible. He would also love to work with a school system or one school within a system and believes that a ripple effect would take place, that the positive effects would reverberate throughout the system.

Although these adult educators have experienced setbacks and frustration in addition to many victories, they all continue to believe that racism can be changed, that we can "prepare a cadre of change agents to go out and change this thing," and they all assert that they would not have lived their lives any differently. Marie says, "I tell you my life has really, really, I feel been blessed with all of this and if I had it to do all over again, I would do it. I really would."

Their beliefs in what they do and their powerful commitment to their work carry them through the tougher times. They all envision a different world. Linda sums it up evocatively:

> It's 2002. I realized a long time ago your feet were on my back. Why are you gonna keep them there now? Just let me rise just a little bit. So that's what I work for. I might not be here to see it, but I work for future generations to be able to rise and stand just a little bit, you know. You don't have to get to the top. You don't have to try and be above anybody. Just rise and say, "Hey, we are equal here in this world." And that's why I work so hard.

<u>See through the system.</u>

The participants showed an acute ability to understand how and for whom the system of racism works. They are able to use this understanding in their daily lives as well as in their attempts to educate others, both Whites and People of Color, about the system of racism. They read situations and act accordingly. When discussing the motivations of some people for conducing workshops against racism, Marie says:

> I told Robert that the purpose of this workshop is demeaning to me. I mean I put this on the table, what it actually means to me. There's no way you'll get a true sense of what we are doing and how to really encounter racism in a two or three hour workshop. Because there are individuals who are setting up these workshops to pacify themselves or somebody and to make themselves look good, and say we did this. I will not participate because if I participate I'm enabling them in that process.

Linda also displays insights into how the system works in her small town, as well as in the larger society. She says when some things come on television, she thinks, "Why did they play it that way? Why do they do it that way? Who do they think they're fooling?" She goes on to say "they are fooling some people. Or maybe deep down they know, but they just don't want to buck the system. White and Black. She discerns how

some Whites and Blacks collude with the racist system. When discussing the political system in her town she says:

> I can see through it all. And the older I get, the wiser I get with it. I can see through all of it. And it is an obstacle. We have some African Americans here and when it's time to vote the mayor goes out and buys bicycles for the kids or buys a ham and cooks it for the some of the men. People around here are poor. And he knows that. So he's taking them. He's got them in his pocket.

Marie describes an experience she had when participating in a workshop that took place at a community for homeless men in a major metropolitan area. She noticed that the homeless men who lived in the community were at the conference being held on their premises but they were not "at the table." As Marie explains:

> They were present but not speaking. They were silent and were sitting away from the workshop participants who were powerful, upper and upper-middle class people with prominent positions in the community all who were talking about what was best for the homeless.

Marie saw this as "ironic" and "absurd" and as a further manifestation of the system and of how Whites need to be in control. She decided to challenge this situation and "explicitly put my observations on the table." She told the group that "we need to be asking these men what their experiences are." Marie continues with her story:

> Everything got really quiet. No one supported me. One homeless man from Africa spoke up and echoed what I was saying. The meeting was adjourned soon after and the adjournment was not done the way it usually was done in this community. Usually people go to a community room after meetings to continue the discussion and fellowship. I went to the community room and I was the only one there.

Marie explained that the White people at the workshop were supposedly all versed in how the system is maintained by racist behavior and said "they still didn't get it and didn't know what to do." She also said the "Black, homeless men also seemed to need to

disassociate themselves from her" and in her interpretation "to maintain the system, the status quo."

Recognize the urgency.

The participants in this study recognized the impact the system of racism has on them, their loved ones, and People of Color in general. The urgency for challenging the racism in our society comes through loud and clear in many ways when they talk. Hernando expressed the urgency for us to address the problem of racism when he said, "If we don't solve this problem, I'm afraid it's going to end this society as we know it."

Recognition of the urgency of challenging racism also leads to actions the adult educators take, including the necessity of "speaking up and not being silent," of "keeping racism on the table," and "making choices about which side you are own." Linda talks about her disappointment that we have not yet honestly dealt with racism in this country. She says:

> Right now it's 2002. The times should be changing. And growing up as a child I thought that by now this stuff should be way past. But instead it's getting worse in some areas. And when I have a talk with White people about it, I kind of shiver on the inside about it sometimes. Because I don't know how this person is going to feel if I say this. But then I go ahead and say it.

In a rural town where there is little economic development and a system of isolation and segregation for Blacks and Whites, Linda definitely understands the need to "accomplish a safe community for everybody here" and talks emotionally about the price everyone pays for maintaining the system. She understands the need for all of us to "come together" but also continues to see many obstacles. She expresses the urgency and the necessity of being clear about goals when she says:

> And we still have what I call Uncle Tomming. I guess that never dies. It's just like a guy here with us now in the community group. I don't like to accuse anyone but I do feel this. He wants to work both sides of the fence. He's been here with us all

> this time. In January, he said "they asked me to be on the Development Authority here." And I said "How can you do that? We are a different organization." I found out later that he volunteered. And you can't work this side of the fence and that one too. And that's what he wants to do.

Marie talks about the importance of challenging racism as being connected with survival for many people. She described a time that she was being interviewed by an NBC news correspondent:

> He said I made it sound so bleak, it's just like you're treading water, you just make it sound so bleak. And what I tried to get him to understand, and I think it went right past him, I said what you've got to understand, while you may sense that I'm just treading water, I'm not drowning. So many of us have drowned. So while you may see treading water as one way, treading water is damn good to me. Do you understand? I'm afloat. I'm surviving.

Work with young people.

Each adult educator spoke about the impact that the changing demographics in our country will have on our efforts to challenge racism; they primarily expressed the ramifications of these changes as they spoke about how different it must be to grow up in our country today and the need to begin working with young people to challenge and educate about racism. In discussing the work he does to create antiracist organizations, Kevin describes his belief:

> It's a developmental process. That's why the early childhood people are so important to this movement. Because what they've brought to us is this developmental approach, and understanding that these things are developmental. Early childhood is so important because the beginning of racist beliefs hits at four or five for Whites and children of color. So if we have a clear understanding we can begin to create an educational environment that will counteract that.

Hernando, Christine, and Linda also talked about the importance of working and talking with young people. Hernando says, "You have to start from the beginning, in the pre-kindergarten years. We have to make preschoolers aware through education. That's the only way." Christine articulates the importance of educating young people since "the media and mass culture tends to propel our society" and will educate them anyway. She also articulated the impact of our changing society on some White young people:

> I think today being White is very confusing to a lot of young kids because they do live much more integrated lives than my generation. And to be a White kid in a situation for most of your life where you are one of the few Whites is something that a lot of White people have not had to deal with. On the other hand, a lot of Black people have to deal with that. So, it's getting very confusing for young White kids today in terms of some of the things they're thinking.

And finally, Marie, who is not participating in as many antiracist workshops with adults, has begun to work more closely with the children and young people's programs in her church. She says, "because I only have so much energy to expend, I'm going to determine where I want it to go, and right now I will work with the children, trying to make a difference there. That's where I'll be putting my time and energy. And that's okay."

Mutual Respect and Accountability

The participants' understandings of racism and white privilege have led to the development of an attitude of mutual respect and accountability for Whites and People of Color which significantly impacts how they do the work they do, as well as how they live their lives. These qualities infuse and guide their efforts to challenge racism by establishing the importance of relationships and by providing the impetus for educational approaches and strategies.

Importance of relationships.

The importance and the quality of relationships with others were emphasized as these adult educators talked about how they go about doing their work to challenge

racism. They repeatedly talked about the need for "forthrightness, honesty, and trust." In addition the relationships are characterized as ones that encourage the parties to hold each other accountable and to talk about their feelings. Kevin describes the types of relationships he and his co-trainers try to build as they work to create antiracist organizations:

> We have to surround ourselves with people we're accountable to. And that's why we do the organizational work, because if we can create a strong white caucus then we can create a level of accountability between you and other White people and you as a group and People of Color. And we understand that all accountability is is saying that we have to call on each other to account for what we do. So you have two things. You have a group of people you can share your innermost thoughts with and they won't be judgmental and two, you have people calling you to account for what you do even if you don't say it. You have other people that can say well, I saw you speak and it sounded like you were just talking to White people. That doesn't mean that the person is wrong or right. That means you have to say let me go back through my speech and tell you what I was thinking. So again, accountability doesn't mean that one person is wrong and one person is right. It just means that we call on each other to account for what we do and say.

Kevin also discusses what he means by "organizing" in part by talking about relationships. He says:

> Organizing means a couple of things. One, it means building relationships. It means bringing people together to realize their collective power. And when you organize in an antiracist way you're bringing issues of race and doing a power analysis. We have to get People of Color and the White people together as groupsof power within the organization to struggle. So organizing has two meanings for me. It talks about building relationships, and it talks about power and power relationships all the time.

Other participants expressed the necessity of developing relationships that are built on mutual respect and the impact that can have on each person's or a group's existence. When talking about Robert, her minister, Marie says:

> Just that respect that he gives me and others and not being as quick to determine who we are. But beginning to really see us as humans, really, because you know other people say it. It's easy to say, but he's walking that walk and that's his choice and he's spent a lot of time in the Black community. I invite him in. And he says okay and he enjoys himself. He's not afraid to be himself.

Developing relationships also can be a place where People of Color and Whites can start to break down some of the barriers that have existed to separate them and start to build a place to deal honestly and effectively with the painful emotions related to racism. Several participants talked about a "belief in a common humanity" that can emerge from the ability to engage in authentic relationships with others, both between and among People of Color and Whites. Marie stridently related:

> We would often have it out which is good, very good. We worked through it, mutual respect. And I would challenge him with that paternalistic attitude that he'd put out toward me. I said "look you come at me straight up. It's not a time for you to be silent if you need to say something to me. Don't feel sorry for me. You put it on the table and we'll talk about it. I can carry my own. You carry yours. I don't need you carrying mine for me."

Impetus for educational strategies.

An attitude of mutual respect and accountability also provided an impetus for the types of educational approaches and strategies these adult educators chose when working with People of Color and Whites. They emphasized the importance of "working with people where they are" and of understanding that "people, all people, bring experiences into the classroom or into the session and you have to develop anything you do based on the experiences." They also described how "you've got to use a variety of ways to educate

because people learn in different ways" and how "for each person in the room there's probably something different that's going to move them from where they are to where they need to be or in terms of where we are thinking they need to be." Kevin describes how he and the trainers in his organization develop their educational strategies:

> We use educational techniques like small groups and role-plays. We give people personal time, sometimes we say "write a note to yourself, what you are thinking now." We use small group time, you know check in with one person or two people and do a go around and let everybody know what you're thinking and feeling. We do a lot of experiential activities. We use to use an exercise called "I remember" to try to get people to think back about race and racism as they were growing up. We use other exercises to get people to open up and to think back. Another thing we've discovered is you've got to get adults to talk early on in the process because if you don't they many never start talking.

The adult educators emphasize that we all have lived in a racialized society and have been affected by it. The key, they believe, is to get people to begin thinking and talking about their experiences around racism in a way that "maintains dignity and respect for everyone." Again, Kevin talks about the importance of "allowing people to be where they are" even if that means they may not be comfortable:

> There is a growing edge and being uncomfortable is really important in that growing edge. And so many people want to be in a workshop and sit there very comfortably and they have to understand that they are going to be uncomfortable. So it's like a push and pull. There are times when you have to back off people and give them space to grow. And there are other times you've got to push people because they're not going to move past a certain point. The other thing we do is really talk about feelings a lot because as feelings can block education, they can also help education move forward. They're going to help people's perspectives

> move forward. And so we talk about feelings a lot to try to get people to respect their feelings.

And finally Kevin reiterates the importance of providing many ways to encourage people to confront and challenge their beliefs and behaviors. He says:

> There's not one best way. I have this tape here by Myles Horton and he says "what in this person's past has prepared them for this moment?" And you know when he said that about adult education, to me that's what it is all about. What in this person's past has prepared them for this moment? And if I can find that in that person's past, I can help them make that leap or you know move gradually from the position they're at. We have to figure that out. And our job is to vary our methods so much that we touch everybody in their way of learning. And get everybody involved in some way. Make everybody feel something. And hopefully everybody in the room is at least open to learn. Sometimes you get people who are resistant but the worst thing is when they're not open to learn. Those are the hardest people. You see the thing about resistance is you're engaged. There is some energy around it. If you resist that means "okay I have something to work with." All I've got to do is figure out during this time we have together is what in your past has prepared you for this moment. Again, going right back to Myles Horton. What in your past has prepared you for this moment? And my bet is everybody living in this country has something that will click.

The power of stories was also emphasized by these adult educators as they discussed ways to enhance education about racism in ways that maintained people's respect. Linda spoke frequently about the impact she feels when she is able to tell her story and talk about her and others efforts to build a better community and challenge the racist system that exists. She says, "I attend these workshops and talk to people and also get a chance to tell my story. It's great. I guess I've attended maybe thirty or so workshops since I got into this." She describes how she rarely turns down an opportunity to talk with

groups and tell her story and says "no matter where she starts, it will come out talking about racism. So then that fits right in." Others also discussed the power of personal stories as "testimonies against racism" and some, like Marie and Kevin, have developed the ability to listen with a critical ear and then talk about the inconsistencies they hear.

## Similarities and Differences Among Adult Educators Differently Positioned

In the third part of chapter four, I will describe the similarities and differences in how the two groups of adult educators in this study understand racism and how their understandings are manifested in the actions they take to challenge racism. As discussed in chapter three, the racial positionality of the adult educators who work within the various organizations sampled in the study became an important aspect of the study. The organizations are all clearly committed to challenging the system of racism within our society, and although their specific goals and areas of influence may vary, there are many similarities in their goals and objectives, their approaches to education, and their general understanding of what needs to be done to challenge the racist system. Therefore, looking at each set of experiences and examining the similarities and differences allowed me to learn from the perspectives of each group of adult educators, educators who are positioned differently within our society. Although there were other aspects of positionality present in this study, including gender and class, the area I addressed was the participant's racial position, of course understanding that in actuality it cannot be separated or differentiated from other aspects of their social position. Examining the commonalities and differences between the two groups of adult educators enabled me to understand more fully how White adult educators challenge racism, and look at how the findings related to the two groups of adult educators can speak to that issue as a whole.

I first discuss the similarities and differences in the adult educators' understandings of racism and white privilege and then do the same for how their understandings guide their actions to challenge racism. I provide Table 5 as a rubric to assist in the examination of the commonalities and the differences between the two

groups in relation to their understandings of racism and white privilege. The focus is on the meanings behind the themes and categories and not the specific words used to describe them.

Table 5

Understandings of Racism and White Privilege

| Commonalities | Differences |
|---|---|
| Institutional, cultural, systemic | Power of system (People of Color) |
| Importance of historical perspective | Colorblindness as Denial (White) |
| Some aspects of white privilege | Emotion/pain for Whites (People of Color) |

There were many areas of commonalities between the two groups of adult educators in this study. Again, this is not unexpected as they work in the same or similar organizations whose purposes are in some way to address and challenge racism in our society. In addition, as noted earlier they have all been to many of the same trainings throughout the years and bring a similar analysis to their work. They share an understanding of racism as more than individual, as also institutional, cultural, and systemic. They understand the interlocking aspects of oppression and privilege and speak to the importance of a historical perspective in their attempts to understand racism and its legacy. In addition, they see race as present and operating within their everyday lives, and understand the time it will take to change the system and build a more just society.

One of the primary areas of difference in the understanding of racism between the two groups of adult educators in this study was in the People of Color's greater recognition of the power of the system of racism. This finding was not unexpected as they are positioned differently within our society and thus experience racism and its power more acutely and directly. To paraphrase one participant, "we are talking about people's survival." The many quotes and the discussion offered in part two of this chapter strongly support how

acutely and directly these adult educators and other People of Color experience the power of the racist system.

Another area of difference with regard to the understanding of racism was in the White adult educators' emphasis on the colorblindness that is so prevalent in our society today. Although it was not absent from the People of Color's discussion, this descriptor did not have the salience for the People of Color that it did for the White adult educators in this study.

We would of course expect differences in the adult educators' analyses and understanding of white privilege as the impact of their positionality is evident. They did share many understandings related to White culture and its attributes, including the individualism of most Whites, the understanding of the difficulties Whites usually have in seeing themselves as a collective, and the general privileges and entitlements that are given to those who are White. In addition, neither group of educators saw Whites as a monolithic group without differences related to other aspects of oppression or privilege, including gender, class, ability, or sexual orientation. The differences I expected came in relation to the understandings of how society impacts each group. The White adult educators have a clear sense of their privilege, even though they know that they will always be privileged and will always be undoing their own racism because of who they are. The People of Color can clearly describe the impact that white privilege and racism has on their lives and the lives of others. This was not surprising as they both see and experience the system from different vantage points. However, the People of Color more openly understood and expressed the intensity and pain that Whites will need to go through to challenge their own racism and what it will take to do so. Although the White adult educators did speak about their feelings related to their own white privilege and the journeys they are taking to challenge their white privilege, the People of Color more strongly recognized and described the pain it will take for Whites to deal with their own racism. This difference was illustrated by the different ways they talked about the feelings

and emotions. For the White adult educators, the characterization of the feelings was usually phrased in milder words and was not often characterized as outright "pain" as it was by the People of Color. The People of Color followed their understanding of the pain associated with Whites' engagement with changing themselves and society with feelings of compassion and empathy.

I believe that the respective positionality of the two groups of adult educators in this study did impact how they understand racism and white privilege. The People of Color's greater recognition of the power of the system of racism shows the differential impact that it has on people, even among those who have worked for years to challenge racism. The People of Color have no choice in our society but to engage racism in their lives as it impacts them powerfully in so many ways. The White adult educators, although they recognize racism as a system and have come up against the power of the system, will always have a choice to engage or disengage the negative impacts of the system to some extent. Even though they all believe that racism impacts us all, it is not the White educators or those of us who are White in our society who experience it daily and directly. There is a blindspot in our vision due to our positionality.

The next section addresses the commonalities and differences between the two groups of adult educators in relation to how their understandings of racism and white privilege guide them to take actions to challenge racism. Table 6 provides a rubric to assist in the discussion of the commonalities and differences between the two groups. Again, the emphasis for the discussion is on the meanings of the themes and categories and not the exact words used to label the themes and categories.

There were also many similarities related to educational approaches and strategies used by both groups of educators, including the approaches of starting where people are and using people's experiences as a point from which to begin an analysis of racism.

Table 6

How Understandings Guide Actions to Challenge Racism

| Commonalities | Differences |
|---|---|
| Commitment | Greater Sense of Urgency (People of Color) |
| Importance of Relationships | See Through the System (People of Color) |
| Educational Strategies | Work with Young People (People of Color) |

Although the participants talked about the importance of starting where people are, they also emphasized working with people to develop their abilities to think critically about race and its impact on people in our society. The goal to extend people's thinking and enable them to understand the perspectives of people who may not see the issue the same way they do, due to many circumstances such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, was foremost in the adult educators' minds as they undertook their work. Both groups professed the importance of listening to and taking account of many perspectives when educating others' about racism and when challenging the racist system. Both groups of adult educators also understand the importance of taking the defensive reactions of Whites who have been privileged into account when attempting to educate and extend thinking about race, as well as the importance of using various methods and approaches. They understand that the same approach will not work with everyone. The participants in this study emphasized the importance of talking, sharing feelings, honesty, and listening to others' experiences and others' stories as powerful means to educate each other. All of them were adamant about the importance of developing relationships in order to learn about self and others. This is played out in many ways within both groups. They emphasize the importance of relationships with People of Color, other Whites, other organizations and communities as well as the quality and type of relationships that can help people to see and understand the system of race and its impact on us all.

Even though the adult educators in this study understand how being racialized in our society has affected us all and why some may hold racist beliefs or not see the system of race, they do not in any way advocate remaining silent. They all stressed the importance of continuing to speak up, speak out, and to keep holding oneself and others accountable. They agree that it is important to work both inside and outside our institutions, to be strategic, and to choose strategies and tactics wisely.

Of all the commonalities these adult educators share, I find their strong and continued beliefs and commitment to social justice to be the most inspirational. Although some of them share frustration with the pace of change in our society and understand that major social change may not occur in their lifetime, they all continue to believe in people and their abilities to change as well as in the possibility, no probability, that we will achieve social change. I was especially inspired by the leader of the *Undoing Racism* workshop I attended when she said and I knew she really believed, "There will be a cultural transformation, and it will be both an inside and an outside job."

There were three primary areas of difference between the two groups of adult educators in relation to how their understandings guided their actions to challenge racism. The first area of difference was the People of Color's acknowledgment and insistence of the urgency of challenging racism in our society. They provided many examples in which the lives of People of Color are threatened and powerfully affected by racism. One participant characterized both the urgency and the need to have clear goals when she said, "you can't work this side of the fence and that one, too." Neither group of participants represented racism or the ways to solve our problems related to racism in essential or static terms, but the People of Color clearly expressed the urgency needed and the necessity of taking a stand, looking at means and ends, and being strategic to challenge the system of race.

The People of Color in this study also showed a greater ability to see through the system of race than did the White adult educators. This does not mean the White adult

educators did not see the system of race or their own privilege within that system, as the findings demonstrated they certainly did. However, the People of Color more often expressed views that demonstrated how they do so, perhaps related to their position within the system. They look from a different vantage point which allows them to see the system of racism and how it impacts us all more fully than those who are part of the system due to their white privilege.

The third and final area of difference related to how their understandings guide them to take actions to challenge racism was in the People of Color's recommendation to begin the work with young people and children. They related the necessity of beginning the work to educate young children to the fact that a person's racial identity begins to develop around the age of three or four. Although all of the People of Color talked about the importance of educating children, one participant, Marie, had begun to work more directly with young people than with adults. She found it a way to continue to her work to challenge racism, yet to "take a break" from some of the frustration she had been feeling when working directly with adults.

## Summary

In this chapter, I presented findings related to the understandings of racism and white privilege and how those understandings guide actions to challenge racism for two groups of antiracist adult educators, both White and People of Color. These adult educators work within organizations that address racism and white privilege in our society in some capacity. Therefore, the findings show they share many commonalities in their understandings and in their approaches to challenge racism and create a more just society. The differences that did emerge were examined within the context of the participants' racial positionality, explicating how their social position in our society has affected some of their understandings of racism, as well as their efforts to find and implement effective ways to educate others about racism and white privilege. Above all,

the findings demonstrated these adult educators' continued commitment and belief in the importance of the work they do.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand how White antiracist adult educators challenge racism. This was accomplished by examining the experiences of both People of Color and White antiracist adult educators. The research questions guiding this study were: 1) What understandings of racism and white privilege do the adult educators in the study bring to their work; 2) How do their understandings of racism and white privilege guide them to take action to challenge racism? This chapter presents a summary, the major conclusions from the study, a discussion of the conclusions, and implications for practice and research.

## Summary

In order to provide a background for the study and to locate it within relevant social, historical, political, and theoretical contexts, I reviewed relevant literature from three major areas. First, I examined the historical perspectives on race and whiteness within the American context. Next, I examined literature on the current theoretical perspectives on whiteness, white privilege, and racism. In the last section of the literature review, I examined research and theoretical work from the broader educational literature, including critical multiculturalism and antiracist education and adult education literature on white privilege and race.

I used a qualitative research design for the study, and more specifically a critical qualitative research design in which meaning was assembled from the data collected in the study but was also informed by examining theoretical constructs of the social construction of race, including whiteness, and the impacts on our lives in this country. I collected data over a five month period using interviews, documents, and participant

observations as the methods of data collection. The twelve study participants belonged to five different organizations with an antiracist emphasis; at least two participants, one White and one a person of color were interviewed from each organization. Data analysis was completed using the constant comparative method.

Analysis of data from the White adult educators revealed the following themes related to the first research question, the participants' understandings of racism and white privilege: 1) racism as institutional, cultural, systemic, and societal; 2) importance of historical perspective; 3) colorblindness as a rhetoric of denial; and 4) an analysis of white privilege that included whiteness revealed first through difference, development over time, "always undoing racism," and awareness of contradictions related to being White and working to challenge racism. The ways the adult educators' understandings guided their actions to challenge racism revolved around three main themes: 1) helps them to maintain commitment; 2) helps them to understand their own and others actions; and 3) offers particular educational approaches and strategies.

Analysis of the data related to the People of Color revealed four primary themes related to their understandings of racism and white privilege: 1) racism as institutional, cultural, systemic, and societal; 2) recognition of the power embodied in the system of racism; 3) the importance of a historical perspective; and 4) an analysis of white privilege that included an understanding of the attributes of whiteness, the ability to see the impact of white privilege on their lives, and an understanding of the significance of emotions/pain on Whites who are challenging their own racism. The adult educators' understandings guided their actions by helping them to maintain commitment and by pushing them to attain clarity and develop mutual respect and accountability.

An examination of the similarities and differences between the two groups of adult educators who worked within similar organizations but who are differentially positioned by race revealed commonalities and differences. The commonalities included their understanding of racism as institutional and systemic, the importance of a historical

perspective, and their understanding of the privileges that accrue for Whites, in relation to other signifiers of difference. The differences in their understandings of racism included the salience of colorblindness as a rhetoric of denial for the White adult educators, the greater recognition of the power of the system of race by the People of Color, as well as their understanding of the pain that it will take for Whites to truly undo their racism and challenge the system of race. The two groups also shared many educational approaches and strategies, emphasized the importance of relationships based on respect, trust, and accountability, and professed a deep and abiding commitment to the work they do. The People of Color in the study expressed a more acute recognition of the urgency of challenging racism and were also better able to see through the system of race that impacts them.

## Conclusions and Discussion

Four major conclusions were drawn from the findings of this study. First, the system of racism continues to impact our society and the lives of all people in our society, albeit in different ways and with different ramifications. Second, there are White adult educators who are struggling with their own privilege and racism in their continuing efforts to challenge racism, who indeed are rearticulating their White identity. Third, the positionality of White adult educators both enables and constrains their ability to challenge racism. Finally, the findings emphasize the significance of commitment, hope, and the educational process for challenging the system of racism that significantly impacts all our lives. In the next four sections, I will present a discussion of these conclusions in relation to the existing body of literature in adult education on race, white privilege, and positionality. I will also draw on the body of literature in the broader social sciences to extend or support the conclusions and discussion.

### Power of Racism

This study has shown that the system of racism continues to significantly impact all our lives, albeit in different ways and with varying consequences. The fact that we are

all racialized comes through loud and clear when talking with the participants in this study. The adult educators shared an analysis of racism that emphasized the institutional and systemic factors, and they understood the history of the racist system in our country and how the system functions to racialize us all. While "White" as a racialized identity may be invisible to some, it has come into full view for both groups of adult educators in this study. These adult educators express a powerful comprehension of the consequences that flow from this racialization and from the system of racism.

Racism continues to impact us all. The negative ramifications of the racist system differentially impact the life chances, educational opportunities, employment, housing, and access to financial resources of People of Color in this country (Feagin, 2000; Feagin, Vera, & Batur, 2001; Hacker, 1995). And yet, there are popular and political discourses that deny the impact of race and proclaim that we are a colorblind, meritorious society with equal chances for all. Seen against the lives of the participants in this study that seems like a ludicrous statement that few would believe. Unfortunately, there are those who do believe it. The findings of this study support the research that tells us that indeed race continues to impact our society, that it is a part of our society, and that we will have to work to dismantle it (Feagin, 2000; Feagin, Vera, & Batur, 2001; Hacker, 1995). Within adult education, we can see the system of race's impact when we examine the differential makeup of various types of programs, including literacy programs, higher education, and prison education, among many others. In addition, an examination of the curricula used in programs also reveals the unspoken norm that most frequently guides it (Colin, 1994; Guy, 1999; Johnson-Bailey, Tisdell, & Cervero, 1994). Adult educators have called for an examination of how race and the norm of whiteness are implicated in our practices and research in adult education (Colin & Preciphs, 1991, 1994; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2002; Shore, 1997, 2000, 2001).

One of the major strands of the research on whiteness and white privilege within the broader social science literature talks about the importance of naming and marking

whiteness as a racialized identity (Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Giroux, 1997; Rodriguez, 2000). Although not an end all in itself, most believe naming is the first step in confronting the power of whiteness. The adult educators in this study would agree and would also move to the next step, working with others to help them understand the historical entrenchment of racism in our society and how it is implicated in the construction of racism. Connecting whiteness, white privilege, and racism has been a priority for several researchers in the social sciences including Wellman (1977, 1993) and Feagin and Vera (1995). In addition, Rodriguez (1998) notes that without naming whiteness as a racial identity and connecting it to the system of white supremacy "the place of whiteness within history and the role of history in the production of whiteness enable the category White to have no history, to mean nothing" (p. 45). He goes on to extol the importance and necessity of keeping a memory of critique and resistance alive by understanding the role of history in the production and meaning of whiteness. If not, he says "an understanding of present inequities along lines of the unequal distribution of resources and power is lost to a politics of forgetting" (Rodriguez, 1998, p. 45).

None of the participants in this study, adult educators who actively work in their professional and personal lives to challenge the system of racism, even hinted at the possibility of rejecting or abdicating their whiteness as discussed by some researchers and writers (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1997). They understand how entrenched racism is within our history as a nation, our culture, and the institutions within our nation. The fabric of their lives and their work to challenge racism give them the understanding of the time it will take for us to change the system of racism. Instead, they advocate spending the time necessary to build relationships, collaborate with others, and do the work needed to get us to where we need to be. These findings are supported by many writers and researchers within critical multiculturalism, teacher education, and the social sciences who agree that it is not possible to just opt out of the white privilege we as Whites have (Levine-Rasky, 2002; McLaren, 1997; Rodriguez, 2000; Scheruich, 2002; Sleeter, 1995, 1996). As

Rodriguez (2000) asserts, "Any theoretical and political efforts aimed at the abolishment of race run the risk of downplaying and not seeing just how deeply lodged race is at all levels of American life" (p. 11). The findings of this study and the beliefs and experiences of the adult educators in the study support the efforts to name whiteness, reworking the meaning of race, and not denying that it exists. The People of Color's acute understanding of the power of the system of racism, as well as their expression of the sense of urgency and responsibility to challenge the system only reinforces the need to do so and to do so soon.

Certainly, the findings of this study are reflected in the literature in adult education that has examined the system of white racism. We can go back to Colin and Preciphs (1991) to see many of the same tenets addressed, including the recognition of the historical legacy of racism in America, the institutionalization of racism, and what can happen in educational settings when white racist attitudes and assumptions are not examined but function as the norm. Shore (2000, 2001) also reiterates the importance of naming and dealing with race and whiteness in order to uncover and foreground the hidden assumptions behind our educational practices that continue to construct "White" practices as the norm and everything else as different, read deficient. In addition, Shore (2001) analyzes how constructions of the White norm underlie practices within adult education including the idea of the neutral facilitator and adult learning principles. She advocates staying with our efforts to understand the oppressive practices of whiteness and says "this particular quality, the oppressiveness of whiteness must not be ignored in the potential rush to render whiteness more tangible" (Shore, 2001, p. 52) and to develop a productive White identity. In other words, the aspects of deconstructing whiteness and rearticulating a more progressive White identity will take some time, an idea definitely supported by the findings of this study.

There has been an abundance of academic work on how to discuss race and whiteness without essentializing either one and thus leading to further entrenchment of

the system of race in our society (Bonnett, 1996; Keating, 1995). The findings of this study revealed no evidence that the participants in this study see race and whiteness as rigid and stable. When talking about the institutional and systemic aspects of racism, their own lives, and each other, they expressed sentiments that demonstrated they did see race and whiteness as fluid, unstable and with the possibility of change. These are educators who are working with Whites and People of Color to challenge the racist system and are able to keep it in flux so as not to further solidify. They are able to "keep it on the table" and work to transform it at the same time. They can provide exemplars for those who endeavor to understand how to engage race and whiteness without further reifying either one (Levine-Rasky, 2002).

## Becoming/Being an Antiracist White Adult Educator

The White adult educators in this study provide examples of Whites who are examining their whiteness and white privilege and have been doing so for some time. They provide a means to look at how one can rearticulate a White identity, one that is progressive yet aware of the ramifications of being part of the system that dominates and controls. The White adult educators recognized their own whiteness and privilege at some point in their lives. However, they did not stop with that recognition but continued to work and challenge themselves and others, and indeed continue to do so. They are mindful of their own privilege as they work to challenge racism and are always working to examine and reexamine their own lives, often through struggle, conflict, and much humility. That they all first experienced their whiteness in relation to Blacks in this country is not surprising, as many believe Whites cannot know who they are without Blacks in America (Dyer, 1997; Morrison, 1992). Although it may not be clear from the findings of this study exactly what happened to propel these White adult educators to continue to question, challenge, hold themselves accountable and indeed work in an area where they will come into contact with their own racism on a daily basis, what is clear is their lives do show a progression, from the recognition of their difference from Blacks to

their knowledge and reflection on how they have developed throughout their lives to the recognition that they will always have to work at undoing their own racism and to an understanding of the contradictions they face every day.

The paths their lives have taken reflect many of the common themes and experiences from the work that has been done with other White antiracists. Research that has investigated and extended the White racial identity theories (Helms, 1992; Tatum, 1997) show a progression that generally occurs when Whites advance to understand their own white privilege and the impact of racism. Helms (1990) recounts the major developmental tasks in the process as the abandonment of the idea of individual racism, the recognition of and the active opposition to institutional and cultural racism, and the development of a positive, antiracist, and authentic connection to White racial identity. While each particular White identity theory varies some on its phases or stages that individual's encounter, they all agree that the content of the theories are a general guide or approximation of experience and not accurate or appropriate for everyone (Howard, 1999). We can certainly see aspects of the developmental tasks and phases in the lives of the White antiracist educators in this study. Several participants talked explicitly about their understanding of the theories and the stages, and others inferred a developmental process they are still undergoing to understand their whiteness and their identity in relation to others. In general, it appears that understanding the complexity of institutional racism in our society makes it less likely that a person will resort to explanations for injustices that blames the victim (Tatum, 1997).

In addition, there have been several recent works that have examined the lives of White antiracists, some biographical or autobiographical, and others the results of qualitative investigations (Clark & O'Donnell, 1999; Cuomo & Hall, 1999; Thompson, 2001). Feagin and Vera (2002) have investigated the lives and actions of many White antiracists and find several common themes, including the development of relationships and real friendships with People of Color and an awareness of their own racism and the

racism of others. In addition, they have also found that for many antiracist Whites, a critical incident or experience seems to initiate a confrontation with racism, leading them to continue their explorations. The critical incidents often occurred when the participants had to face the fact that they themselves were racist in thought and action, leading to an understanding of the impact of the racist system on their lives as well as the lives of People of Color (Feagin & Vera, 2002). Although most of the participants in my study did not recall a particular incident that spurred them to examine racism, they all have come to an understanding of their own racism and continue to struggle with it. Their understanding of racism as systemic has led them to see themselves as both racist and antiracist at the same time. This understanding has helped these White adult educators move past the guilt and shame that can immobilize many who see racism as purely a psychological manifestation. They know the power of the system yet do not deny their own responsibility for working to change the system, all the time knowing they will they will continue to benefit from the system in many ways. As one participant noted, "I am racist and will always be racist but I am also so much more." These powerful words propel these White adult educators to continue to examine their own lives and actions.

Within adult education, Barlas and her colleagues have undertaken several studies to investigate how a cooperative inquiry group process can enable "people with the power and privilege conferred by White skin" (Barlas et al., 2000) to examine and change their consciousness and behavior related to their own racism. Barlas et al. found that one of the key elements of their process was that it allowed White participants to get past the barrier of the belief that racism is solely a product of individual behavior. They also found the group context, one that fostered trust, mutual vulnerability, and community, important for the participant's ability to confront and challenge their own ideas about race and whiteness. Many of the participants had previously advocated a colorblind attitude toward American society and race, believing that if one talked about race one somehow contributed to entrenching it even further. They identified several other themes that

emerged from their study that are relevant to my study, including the roles of vulnerability and trust among group members, the emergence of compassion for self and others, an increased awareness of White norms and privileges, and shifts from passivity to an emerging activism (Barlas et al., 2000). Other important factors included the presence of People of Color in the group members' lives and their increasing ability to deal with the elements of pain and emotions that evolve when uncovering and challenging one's own implication in racism. The findings of my study definitely support the factors discussed above. To be honest, during my review of the literature before I conducted this study, I interpreted these studies differently, believing that they were primarily another example of the focus on racism as individual and also of some White people's needs to center everything around them and their own lives. Now, I read the studies differently and recognize there are many ways to confront racism, all of which are important and necessary if we are to change society.

Positionality and Impact on White Adult Educators

The positionality of White adult educators both enables and constrains their ability to challenge racism. Once the educators recognized and examined their own white privilege, they made the choice to use their privilege in ways to challenge racism and build a more equitable society. Their positionality enables them to choose whether or not to use their privilege, and they are further enabled by their understanding that their perspectives are limited because of who they are and where they exist in the racialized system. This is central to what positionality is, attention to the location of the knower when judging any knowledge claim. They understand they do have a choice whether or not to act on their beliefs, and they have chosen to act. Therefore, what they do is intentional. Their positionality as White adult educators also enables them to call other Whites to task while also understanding what obstacles Whites who challenge racism or even venture to admit their own privilege may face in terms of pain, loss of family support, or loss of position. I would also say that the positionality of *antiracist* White

adult educators enable them to develop and maintain empathy for People of Color and other Whites due to their understanding that their existence as White is primarily what gives them privilege. Some of the adult educators in this study have been challenged by authorities and law enforcement; yet they still know and lament the fact that they have choices others do not have.

The positionality of White adult educators constrains their ability to challenge racism in several ways. They will always be seen and judged as White which will impact the amount of trust they can build with communities and People of Color. Even though they may understand this phenomenon, they will not always be able to change it, even after repeated efforts. Their whiteness also may limit their effectiveness with other Whites. As the findings of this study revealed, they will be enjoined to join in the system of whiteness and people may also assume they are complicit with the system. This results in opportunities for education but also in time spent in reaction to a system they are trying to dismantle. Although their positionality may change or vary due to other aspects of oppression or privilege, they, as Whites, will always be to some extent inside the system. This constrains their ability to "see" the system in order to develop effective strategies, while also giving them an "out" if things become too difficult. Their perspective will always be limited in relation to the system they are within. They can understand the system of race and its impact on others through relationships, empathy, or other parts of their own subjectivity, but will always have blindspots related to their own whiteness. This was seen most clearly in this study by examining the commonalities and differences between the two groups of adult educators. That the People of Color more clearly saw the power of the system of racism, the urgency of challenging the system, and the pain involved in doing so can be attributed to their different positionalities within the system. It points to the necessity for White adult educators to continuously reassess their own assumptions and biases and regroup in order to mitigate the blindspots they do have as much as is possible. It also reiterates the importance of developing genuine and respectful

relationships with People of Color, relationships where one can truly listen and dialogue about the impact of racism on the lives of those who experience it most directly and acutely. Several participants in this study talked about the importance of both/and thinking for Whites who are challenging racism, thinking that allows one to see oneself as racist and antiracist at the same time. This ability counters the tendency to think about racism in either/or terms and simultaneously takes into account the impact of our social system of power and our agency to challenge it.

Within the field of adult education, research and writing are being done that examine the different social positions of adult educators and learners and the impact of positionality on their practices and research (Brown, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2000; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998; Shore, 1997; Tisdell, 1998, 2001). These studies have investigated how power relations based on gender but including other interlocking systems of privilege and oppression are manifested in adult education classrooms (Tisdell, 1993, 2001) and have emphasized the need to deal with how the positionality of class participants operates in the teaching and learning environment. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1998) also examined how the power relations that exist in the wider social context play out in the teaching and learning dynamics of adult education classrooms. Among the factors that comprised positionality, they found that race, and more specifically whiteness, emerged as the most important element impacting the dynamics of the classroom (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1998). The authors recognized positionality as a viable lens for interpreting classroom experiences and suggested further efforts are needed to understand how power relations and positionality affect teaching and learning and what response can be made to negotiate them. The findings of this study support these efforts to examine how position and power impact our lives as educators. The White adult educators in this study recognized their power and positionality and its ramifications and are working out *in practice* ways to use their power to challenge racism.

## Power of Hope, Commitment, and Education

This study emphasizes the significance of commitment, hope, and the educational process for challenging the system of racism that significantly impacts all our lives. To say that the courage, determination, and sustained commitment of the adult educators in this study was inspiring is definitely an understatement. They have worked consistently for many years, some almost thirty years, to educate themselves and others about the system of race, as well as to challenge it in many ways. Although some have felt frustration at some time or another, they all continue to believe in people and the possibility of cultural transformation. They believe what they do will have an impact and indeed already see some fruits of their labors. Understanding the time it will take to change a system that has been long established and used enables them to continue to work and continue to believe in the possibility of change, even though some of them say that massive social transformation will likely not occur in their lifetimes. The participants' analysis of racism and white privilege guides them to take specific, intentional actions and to understand their respective roles in challenging racism. They use their understandings to educate others and to continue to learn better and better ways to educate others. They have an awareness of the reciprocity of the structural and institutional components of racism and their own agency and use this awareness to develop better and more effective ways to educate. As they noted, their analyses and the ways they use them are dynamic and always evolving.

The findings of this study reveal the importance of taking action and of taking a stand against inequities and injustices. This supports the research and writing of many critical theorists, critical multiculturalists and antiracist educators, and adult educators. One of the participants in Thompson's (2001) study of White antiracist activism said that "fighting racism is about living life and having relationships with people. I don't think you can be antiracst without entering into real-life struggles where people reflect the diversity of the community that works toward something." According to others, taking action can

alleviate some of the guilt that seems to plague and immobilize many Whites who recognize the power of racism yet do not know where to start to fight it (Thompson, 1999).

The importance of acknowledging and framing our actions and the ends we pursue according to our values and beliefs have been advocated by adult educators in more than one area, including program planning theory (Cervero & Wilson, 1994), curriculum and instruction (Colin, 1994; Tisdell, 2000); literacy education (Sparks & Peterson, 2000), public policy (Quigley, 2000), and research among many others. Wilson and Hayes (2000) assert that until we can describe what we feel is worth striving for, until we can describe the world we are trying to make and locate ourselves within it, we probably do not have a chance to achieve it. This is a powerful call for adult educators to take a stand and to take action against racism.

This study emphasizes the interconnectedness of all the institutions in our country, with education being only one of them. As many of the participants noted, the economic, political, legal, employment and other institutions are a part of the system of racism that we have to challenge. Therefore, it is important for those of us who work in education to understand the limits as well as the possibilities inherent in our work. This understanding may enable us to collaborate more effectively with others and to also maintain the commitment we need in order to work over the long haul, as many of the participants in this study have done.

## Implications for Theory, Practice, and Research

In terms of theoretical contributions, this study adds to the growing body of literature within adult education being done on how the positionality of the educator and learner, always in relation to the broader social and historical context, contributes to the practices and knowledge constructed and implemented. The connection between people's lives, social location, and education are crucial to make in a world where resources are finite, or at least where the popular imaginary constructs them as finite, and where

marginalized people are increasingly being constructed as somehow less than and not worthy of dignity, equality, and a share in the resources.

This study can also contribute to the growing body of work looking at the development of White antiracist activists and educators. It will be important to begin examining the progression of an antiracist identity in relation to the particular positionalities and local social contexts as our demographics change in this country. While White subjectivities in this country have most often been constructed in relation to Blacks, this may change within particular locales as the composition of the population changes. We need to theorize in a way that allows for critical, relational, and contextual factors (Levine-Rasky, 2002), all of which can help us to continue to add to the body of work that has ramifications for how Whites can take responsibility for changing the system of race in this country but without further reifying and essentializing it.

This study also has implications for critical educational practice within adult education. We need to clearly connect personal experiences, political goals, and educational practice. The findings reiterate all the work done which states that no education is neutral. We can begin to fashion more effective ways to teach our classes, construct our curriculum, and take action to challenge racism and our own white privilege. The adult educators in this study have developed over time a repertoire of instructional strategies that fit with who they are and the goals they are trying to achieve, as well as strategies they have examined within the context of the various educational arenas in which they practice. This enables them to constantly reexamine and align their practice with the political context and their own beliefs about what racism is and what should be done to challenge and transform it. One implication of the study reiterates the importance of acting collectively to mitigate and counter the individualism so entrenched within our educational system and our society. As one participant said, "you cannot be an individual antiracist;" the implications of this statement should direct us to find ways to build coalitions, engage and challenge each other publicly in a way that maintains dignity,

and build a movement to support each other in our efforts. That this endeavor will take paramount courage is evident. That adult educators are willing to do it should serve as an inspiration. If we work together, we can make inroads on the injustices that ensue from the system of racism.

This study points to several directions for future research. It was only a beginning in examining positionality between two groups of adult educators within the same organization. These efforts should continue; the research methods should be examined and extended, and further implications for practice and policy developed. We also need to examine critical educators who are attempting to become antiracist and follow their progress through narrative or other methods of qualitative research. We need other studies with antiracist Whites who are attempting to use their privilege to dismantle systems of inequity, including racism, and foreground and advance their methods. Their efforts should be made visible for more adult educators; it is important that we know about these adult educators, their efforts and courage. We can begin to build a body of work to counter the status quo in adult education. As this study and the participants have shown and others have advocated, it is important to work with and for something and not just against something (Thompson, 1999). In addition, I believe that participatory research designs in which adult educators and researchers engage with marginalized communities to investigate and take action in relation to problems the community defines would advance the field of adult educational research and further contribute to the dismantling of racism and the development of a more socially just society.

## A Concluding Note

The adult educators in this study demonstrate that it is possible to consistently confront and challenge a racist system and that it is possible to rearticulate a progressive White identity. I found their stories and their lives awe-inspiring and motivating to say the least. Their abilities to continue their work over long periods of time while enduring the frustrations, setbacks, and often daily affronts that occur are testimonies to the abiding

presence of the human spirit. Their proclamation of the joy they also experience as they go about their work is equally as inspiring. Most of them feel they are just ordinary people who have taken the challenge to work for social justice; they do not see themselves as extraordinary but powerfully committed to the causes in which they believe. What they have done is to connect their lives, their daily lived experiences, with their passions to contribute to the creation of a better world for all. Their values are a touchstone for the actions they take. In today's world, I cannot help but to find that extraordinary. I have discovered renewed hope.

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# APPENDIX A

## Researcher's Interview Guide

Preliminary/Background Information:

1. Tell me about your position and responsibilities in the organization in which you work?

2. Tell me how your involvement in this work began.

3. When you began, what did you hope to accomplish? Has this changed over time? If so, how have your goals and motivations for doing this work changed?

4. What are your inspirations?

General Questions:

5. When did you first realize that you were white?

6. What does it mean to be white in society?

   What does it mean for you to be white?

7. How has this affected your life?

Programmatic and Specific Information

8. Describe the specific nature of the work you do.

9. What are the major obstacles you encounter in your work to confront white racism?

10. How do you respond to the obstacles and difficulties you encounter?

11. How does the work you do impact your personal life?

12. How have your beliefs about white racism, white privilege changed overtime?

13. Describe any contradictions between being white and working to confront white privilege and white racism.

14. How do you deal with those contradictions?

# APPENDIX B

## Researcher's Interview Guide

Preliminary/Background Information:

1. Tell me about your position and responsibilities in the organization in which you work?

2. How did you get involved in this work?

3. When did you begin?

4. What did you hope to accomplish?

5.How has this changed over time?

6. How have your goals and motivations for doing this work changed?

7. What or who are your inspirations?

General Questions:

8. What does it mean to be white (in society)?

9. How has white racism, white privilege affected your life?

Programmatic and Specific Information

10. Describe the specific nature of your work.

11. What are the major obstacles you encounter in your work to confront white racism?

12. How do you respond to the obstacles and difficulties you encounter?

13. How does the work you do impact your personal life?

14. How have your beliefs about white racism, white privilege changed over time?

15. What makes a good white ally?