DEVELOPING TRUST AND LEVERAGING PRIVILEGE: WHITE SCHOOL

COUNSELORS AS ASPIRING RACIAL JUSTICE ALLIES

by

LAUREN JEANNE MOSS

(Under the Direction of Anneliese A. Singh)

ABSTRACT

Students of color may encounter multiple barriers to education, which could include: negative academic experiences, feelings of isolation, power differences, increased discipline referrals, low retention rates, and graduation rates (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Losen, 2011). Current scholarship addresses the school counselors' role regarding strategies and suggestions to addressing inequities that exists in schools (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003; Cox & Lee, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010). The essence of how school counselors emerge as racial justice allies to students of color, however, is absent from the current scholarly conversation in the field of school counseling. A better understanding of this phenomenon may offer a poignant avenue through which White school counselors can take steps towards promoting a socially just world.

This study engages Critical Race and Relational Cultural theories to theoretically frame a phenomenological methodological approach to research the essence of how White school counselors experience racial justice ally identity (Groenewald, 2004; Hays & Singh, 2012). The findings of this exploratory study provide insight into the lived experiences of White school counselors as they develop in their ally identity and advocacy with and for the students of color

with whom they work. This study thoroughly explores the phenomenon of White school counselors as racial justice allies, points to recommendations for school counselors and counselor educators, and offers researcher reflection on the phenomenological qualitative research process.

INDEX WORDS: School Counseling, White School Counselors, Racial Justice Allies, Critical Race Theory, Relational Cultural Theory, Advocacy, Phenomenology

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DEDICATION

For students of color and their allies. The relationships you form liberate us all.

"There are no words to express the abyss between isolation and having one ally. It may be conceded to the mathematician that four is twice two. But two is not twice one; two is two thousand times one." – G.K. Chesterton

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INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

With social justice counseling underpinning current school counseling practice, a need exists for school counselors to develop as racial justice allies to students of color (Dixon & Clark, 2010; Griffin & Steen, 2010). Students of color face many barriers to education, which may include: negative academic experiences, feelings of isolation, power differences, increased discipline records, low retention rates, and graduation rates (Losen, 2011). Current scholarship indicates that students of color are consistently out-performed academically by their White peers (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). The reasons behind this disparity are complex and multifaceted. Existing research reveals that students of color meet with school counselors more often than White students, suggesting that White school counselors are point people for supporting the achievement of students of color (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, 2009; Zhang & Burkard, 2008). Levy and Plucker (2008) suggested that the attributes needed by White school counselors to effectively support students of color are, collectively, considered multicultural competence.

Although school counselors interact with numerous racial and ethnic populations, many school counselors have limited knowledge of the three domains of multicultural competence: skills, knowledge, and awareness (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Yet, multicultural competence is an important element of the White school counselor's job responsibilities. The American Counseling Association (ACA) Advocacy Competencies indicate one of the school counselors' responsibilities as supporting students of color in overcoming social, political or cultural factors

that impede their academic success (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2003). In order to appropriately respond to students of color with varied cultural backgrounds and worldviews, White school counselors must develop understanding of self in addition to knowledge and awareness of diverse racial and ethnic cultures (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004; Levy & Plucker, 2008).

Social Justice Counseling

Tenets of social justice counseling undergird the work done by culturally competent school counselors. Referenced throughout the existing literature, Crethar, Torres, Rivera & Nash defined social justice counseling as a "multifaceted approach to counseling in which practitioners strive to simultaneously promote human development and the common good through addressing challenges related to both individual and distributive justice" (2008, p. 269). Crethar, Torres, Rivera and Nash also addressed the significance of counselors' empowerment of individuals and of active confrontation of injustice and inequality in society in order to create systemic change. In attending to the cultural, contextual, and individual needs of those served, social justice counselors direct attention to the promotion of four critical principles that guide their work: equity, access, participation, and harmony (Crethar, Torres, Rivera and Nash, 2008, p. 269).

Ally Identity Development

When utilizing the ACA Advocacy competencies, White school counselors work as social justice counselors by eliminating barriers to students of color. Munin & Speight (2010) described allies as individuals who identify as part of the dominant population and advocate against oppression. Munin and Speight also explained that ally development is unique to each ally due to its complexity (2010). Edwards (2006) indicated that the complexity is created, in part, due to each ally relationship having its unique risks, parameters, responsibilities and

benefits. What all effective allies have in common, however, is that they bring attention to privilege, power, and prejudice that typically remains unaddressed (Reason & Davis, 2005). Broido (2000) explored factors associated with social justice ally development and found three common developmental markers of social justice allies: (a) they possessed knowledge around issues of social justice and diversity to increase their ally competence, (b) they yearn to discuss the information they amass in order to make meaning of it, and (c) they use acquired knowledge to propel them towards action in pursuit of social justice (2000).

Edwards (2006) proposed a model for conceptualizing Aspiring Ally Identity Development. Edwards included three-stages to delineate ally behaviors: Aspiring Ally for Self-Interest, Aspiring Ally for Altruism, and Ally for Social Justice. Aspiring Allies for Self-Interest are generally inspired to become an ally in order to protect those they care about and, subsequently, often forge alliances with individuals with whom they have a pre-existing personal connection (Edwards, 2006). Aspiring Allies for Altruism attempt to use ally relationships as a way to cope with guilt and emotional responses to their awareness of their privilege(s) (Edwards, 2006). Finally, Allies for Social Justice seek to create alliances with those from the oppressed group in order to collaboratively end systems of oppression. The collaborative and systemic aspects of how allies operate are congruent with the ASCA vision for comprehensive school counseling and ACA Advocacy Competencies. (ASCA, 2005; Lewis et al., 2002).

White School Counselors and Racial Privilege

Approximately 85% of teachers and 95% of school psychologists are Caucasian (Curtis, Grier, Abshier, Sutton, & Hunley, 2002).   Although the American School Counselor Association does not report on the demographics of school counselors, research indicates that the racial and ethnic demographics of the (approximately) 90,000 school counselors (who provide services for

47 million students in the United States) are similar to those of teachers and school psychologists (Mathai, 2002; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004). The personnel of school systems in the United States do not represent the racial and ethnic demographics of school-aged children. It is estimated that by 2050 almost 60% of all school-age children in the United States will be students of color (Yeh & Arora, 2003).

Racial identity development is a critical aspect of multicultural counseling competence, particularly for White counselors and counselor trainees (Leuwerke, 2005). Holcomb-McCoy (2007) stressed the importance of school counselors' and counselor trainees' understanding of the impact of racial identity development in the lives of their students. Similarly, scholars stress the importance of counselor and counselor educator use of racial identity models to identify the developmental stages of counselors' and counselor trainees' racial identity to successfully prepare for multicultural competence (Pack & Brown, 1999; Sue and Sue, 2008). Specifically, Sue and Sue (2008) underscored the significance of integrating the assumptions of White racial identity into practice by stating that the, "effectiveness of White therapists is related to their ability to overcome sociocultural conditioning and make the Whiteness visible" (p. 282).

Peggy McIntosh drew attention to the topic of White Privilege in the 1980's using the metaphor of the "invisible knapsack," which she suggested contains privileges ranging from issues in the school setting (such as the Eurocentric academic curriculum presented in most schools) to mundane privileges (like being able to purchase a bandage that matches one's skin tone) (McIntosh, 1988). While scholars such as McIntosh have examined White privilege in general terms, there is limited practitioner understanding regarding how it uniquely affects school counseling.

Many White school counselors may attempt to ignore their Whiteness because it is an ever-present trait they had no control over determining, because they are well-intentioned, or because they do not act in overtly racist ways (Kendall, 2006). Yet, institutions often grant privileges to individuals due to their race, not because they are earned or deserved, which remains a heavy social justice issue (Kendall). Therefore, White school counselors cannot avoid having White privilege, nor can they avoid the responsibility attached to it.

To this end, some scholars aim to understand how White counselors' understanding can be increased around White privilege within a society that does not generally support dialogue around racism and privilege (Brown & Perry, 2011; Mindrup, Spray, & Lamberghini-West, 2011). Hays et al. (2004), for example, studied how counselor educators and supervisors could facilitate discussions around cultural identity, stereotypes, and self-awareness and found that practitioners are better able to work with racially and ethnically diverse clients when they assign value and meaning to their privileged statuses. Similarly, Blitz (2006) indicated that mental health clinicians must go beyond cultural competenc in practice by analyzing their own identities and points of privilege in order to best understand their position in the world as it relates to the client or issue they wish to advocate for.

Generally, the intersection of White privilege and the field of school counseling is not widely explored. Yet, current scholarship indicates that awareness of White privilege and racism are paramount to those wishing to engage in effective connections with racially and ethnically diverse clients (Mindrup et al., 2011, Ancis & Sanchez-Hucles, 2000), and that a clear understanding of cultural and sociopolitical assumptions as embedded in theory and practice can help counselors reveal and address unintentional racism and cultural bias (Blitz, 2006).

Therefore, it remains critical to consider the role of White privilege with respect to the White school counselor.

White School Counselors as Advocates and Allies

Advocacy is not a new construct to the field of counseling (ASCA, 2005; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). Lewis et al. (2003) viewed advocacy counseling as equal parts philosophy and practice. In order to become a counselor-advocate, Green, McCollum & Hays (2008) indicated that counselors must maintain strong beliefs about equity and find voice to speak on behalf of those who identify as powerless. From this philosophy and practice, advocacy counseling has emerged as a form of counseling which is dual focused in that it addresses the immediate issues of oppressed clients in addition to working towards shifting the contextual, systemic sociopolitical environment (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Comstock et al., 2008; Crethar, 2010; Field & Baker, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Kiselica & Robinson, 2001; Green, McCollum & Hays, 2008). Tenets of advocacy in counseling lay the groundwork for teaching advocacy skills and utilizing a social justice paradigm to conceptualize counseling (Green, McCollum & Hays, 2008). For instance, multicultural competencies (Arredondo et al., 1996) complement advocacy-minded counselors' philosophies of: supporting oppressed clients who identify with diverse groups; providing a conceptual framework to formulate teaching goals; and effectively links multiculturalism with social justice.

Despite the shift towards social justice and advocacy counseling , many individuals who identify as part of culturally diverse groups remain marginalized –subsequently leading to vastly different educational experiences than their peers who identify as part of the dominant group (Sue & Sue, 2008). The American School Counselor Association published a position statement in 1998 calling for school counselors to fortify their skills with respect to how they support

student growth by developing multicultural competence (ASCA, 1998). This statement is paired with subsequent calls for counselors to direct their attention and efforts to the margin of school demographics (Baker & Gerler, 2004). Accordingly, key tenets of the ASCA National Model include the beliefs that effective school counseling programs: (a) reach all students, (b) are comprehensive and developmental in nature, and (c) are preventative in design across academic, career, and personal/ social domains of development (ASCA, 2005).

According to the ASCA National Model, school counselors' advocacy efforts are aimed at: (a) eliminating barriers to students' development; (b) creating learning opportunities for all students; (c) ensuring access to a quality school curriculum; (d) collaborating with others in the school and greater community to help address student needs, and (e) encouraging positive, systemic change in schools (ASCA, 2005). The fundamental principles of the American School Counselor Association outline a comprehensive, outcome-based service model for all students, which accounts for fluctuating needs and abilities; elements which align it with the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Crethar, 2010). Although the ASCA National Model aims for a comprehensive approach to school counseling and integrates multicultural competence, a void remains around White school counselors exploring their racial privilege and how they can leverage it on behalf of students of color (Hays, Chang & Dean, 2004).

The ACA Advocacy Competencies provide school counselors with six structured domains of service that provide school counselors with a framework they can utilize to help them visualize students within the wider systemic context (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2002). First, the ACA Advocacy Competencies organize advocacy into two dimensions: The first speaks to the extent the client/ student or community is engaged in the advocacy process and the second considers the level of intervention (individual, systems, or societal). Additionally, the

two dimensions break advocacy into six domains that counselors may be involved in depending on the situation (Client/ Student Empowerment, Client/ Student Advocacy, Community Collaboration, Systems Advocacy, Public Information, and Social/ Political Advocacy) (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2002). It may become necessary for counselors to utilize several forms of advocacy, however, cultural competence and awareness is essential regardless of the type of advocacy engaged (Comstock et al., 2008; Crethar, 2010; Reason & Davis, 2005). When school counselors conceptualize student challenges against the Advocacy Competencies they are able to intentionally target collaborative systemic change efforts most appropriate for student needs (Crethar, 2010).

Although scholars have explored the school counselor as social justice advocate, research in this area remains rather obtuse (Brown & Trusty, 2005; Bryan et al., 2009; Crethar, 2010; Field & Baker, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; House & Martin, 1998; Levy & Plucker, 2008). Trusty & Brown (2005) point to Friedler's (2000) work around special education advocacy as a tool to help direct the advocacy work of school counselors, which differs from the ACA Advocacy Competencies in that it clusters advocacy into three areas (rather than dimensions/ domains): 1) dispositions, 2) knowledge, and 3) skills. Relevant to this study, Trusty and Brown suggest that counselor dispositions are proximal to school counselors' selves, beliefs, and values – making them parallel to ally identity. Furthermore, advocacy dispositions are aligned to the current vision of school counseling (ASCA, 2005).

Despite the need for counselors to consider ACA Advocacy Competencies and operate from a social justice advocacy paradigm, the counseling profession has neglected to bring clarity on how to put social justice into practice – particularly in schools (Field & Baker, 2004; Trusty & Brown, 2005). House and Martin (1998) have attributed oppressive social, political and

economic conditions to poor academic achievement for students of color and students from low-income families in K – 12 schools. In contrast, social justice counseling supports professional school counselors' work to challenge the status quo as a means of empowering clients while also confronting inequities (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

White School Counselor Use of Relational-Cultural and Critical Race Tenets

Relational-Cultural Theory and Critical Race Theory were selected as the theoretical framework for this study. As the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2002) indicate, advocacy efforts of White school counselors who identify as racial justice allies to students of color occur in domains which often involve their direct contact and collaboration with students of color and their families. The relational element of these efforts requires White school counselors to consider how power differentials and growth fostering relationships affect this work – which is addressed by Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan, 2010). It is imperative for White school counselors to remain mindful of the sociopolitical and educational policies and practices of the past inform the current context in which they work, which is the foundation of Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Therefore, Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory theoretical tenets are interwoven to create the analytical framework for this study.

Early scholars in the field built Relational-Cultural Theory upon humanistic principles to expand them and provide space for intensified practitioner attention to the relational connections needed for individuals' psychological development and emotional well-being (Jordan, 2010). Relational Cultural Theory provides counselors with a theory that complements the current multicultural/ social justice movement in that it necessitates counselor consideration of how oppression encumbers the relational development of marginalized individuals across the life span

(Comstock et al., 2008; Miller, 1976; Jordan et al., 1991; Jordan, 2010). Since the role of the power differential between the privileged and oppressed creates an unmistakable barrier between the work White school counselors do with students of color, Relational Cultural Theory offers an alternative to traditional theories White school counselors may otherwise adopt to frame practice (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Ruiz, 2005; Walker, 2003). Relational Cultural Theory offers practitioners a theoretical framework to target obstacles to mutuality that individuals encounter in diverse relational contexts and networks and empowers them to work to deconstruct those barriers (Comstock, et al., 2008; Duffey, 2006).

Both Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory question the appropriateness of traditional (Eurocentric) theoretical frameworks (Jordan, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995; Miller, 1976; Morfin, Perez, Parker, Lynn, & Arrona, 2006; Parker, 2004; Ruiz, 2005; Taylor, 1985; Taylor, 2009). While Critical Race Theory challenges traditional theory and practice by honing in on the intricacies of relational elements (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976), Critical Race Theory specifically targets the sociopolitical implications of the majoritarian mindset (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Morfin, Parez, Parker, Lynn, & Arrona, 2006; Parker, 2004; Ruiz, 2005; Taylor, 2009). Specific to this study, Critical Race Theory challenges the generally accepted understanding of educational policy in light of the dominant educational functioning in Western societies (Henfield, Moore & Wood, 2008; Taylor, 2009).

Use of Critical Race Theory supports White school counselors conceptualization of the relationship between racial politics, legal studies, and the broader conversation about race and racism in the United States with respect to how it informs policy and practice in schools (Taylor, 2009). Also, it provides a theoretical framework from which the silenced voices of White racial justice allies to students of color can be given space to be heard and considered in the more

comprehensive discussion about race in education. In particular, adopting the Critical Race Theoretical tenets highlighted by Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) provides a helpful lens through which White school counselors can analyze work done in educational settings. Ladson-Billings and Tate indicate three core propositions: (1) race is significant in the United States; (2) societally, the United States is based on property, rather than human rights; and (3) property and race meet – creating an analytical tool for conceptualizing inequity.

By recognizing the core tenets of Critical Race Theory (Taylor, 2009; Ladson-Billings &) Tate, 1995) and Relational Cultural Theory (Miller, 1976; Jordan 2010), the role of White school counselors as racial justice allies can be effectively conceptualized. It provides space to consider White school counselors' privilege and how power differentials impact their daily work with students of color (Jordan, 2010). Additionally, this integrated theoretical framework offers structure to the way White school counselors interact with socio-political structures to advocate with and for students of color (Taylor, 2009). Finally, the theoretical framework presented for this study is a novel way to conceptualize White school counselors as aspiring racial justice allies to make meaning of their work in public school settings.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is written in manuscript format in order to facilitate the publication of research and further highlight the importance of the issues presented. By sharing the author's conceptualization of gaps in current literature, participant insight and study findings, and offering a space for researcher reflexivity, the author hopes to inform future practice, research, advocacy, and policy. To introduce readers to the topic of study, Chapter One provides a description and overview of the study and current issues surrounding the topic.

A Call to the Field of School Counseling

The second chapter of this dissertation presents a call to the field of school counseling around the topic studied (White school counselors as racial justice allies). The author pays particular attention to social justice counseling as a framework from which the need for White school counselors as racial justice allies is derived (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hays, 2003; Bemak & Chung, 2008; Comstock et al., 2008; Cox & Lee, 2007; Edwards, 2006; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007) . Specifically, Chapter 2 calls for scholars, school counselors, and counselor-educators to consider use of Critical Race and Relational Cultural theoretical tenets in practice, critically account for their racial justice ally development, take inventory of their privilege(s), and assess how they utilizes the ACA Advocacy Competencies to frame their work as racial justice allies (Jordan, 2010; Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2002; Taylor, 2009). Additionally, the author addresses the need for scholarship around the intersection of White school counselors' racial and ally identities with attention to the American School Counselor Association's National Model for school counseling (ASCA, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Hays & Chang, 2003; Helms, 1995; Kendall, 2006; Kwan, 2001). At the end of Chapter Two the author makes recommendations for White school counselors, scholars, and counselor educators to support the growth of White school counselors as racial justice allies and advocates. Specifically, use of Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory, mindfulness around ally and racial identity development, and awareness and use of American Counseling Association Advocacy Competencies to undergird practice are discussed in detail as recommendations to the field of school counseling.

Study and Findings

This study is structured around one central research question: How do White school counselors experience and conceptualize racial justice ally identity? Chapter Three contains a

phenomenological study that includes the findings from semi-structured interviews with White school counselors from the United States Southeast who self-identified as racial justice allies to students of color. In these interviews the informants discuss their experiences emerging and operating as racial justice allies to students of color. Since the researcher aimed to describe the phenomenon of the racial justice ally identity and development from the observations of those intimately acquainted with this experience, a phenomenological approach was utilized to structure this study (Creswell, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012). A phenomenological approach relies on individual experiences told in the participants' voices and, therefore, is subjective in nature. In this research tradition, by considering individual's subjective experiences scholars begin to make sense of the world (Hays & Singh, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005). Although there are a variety of qualitative research traditions, a phenomenological approach works best to explore the topic of this study because it provides a method of understanding the lived experiences of White school counselors (Creswell, 2007).

This process allowed the researcher to describe, as genuinely as possible, the phenomenon of White school counselors' experiences as racial justice allies to students of color while curtailing presumptions and remaining congruent with the realities held and communicated by participants (Groenewald, 2004). Finally, rigorous research design and methods encouraged the researcher's selection of a phenomenological research tradition as a comprehensive approach to examine the meaning White school counselors assign to their aspiration of forming alliances with students of color. Since the historical marginalization of students of color has been this subject of many research studies, this research specifically explored how some White school counselors may earn trust and leverage their privilege(s) to further engage advocacy efforts for and with students of color.

Researcher Reflexivity

Finally, Chapter Four contains the reflections of the primary researcher with regards to theoretical choices and methodological practices. Ellsworth's conceptualization of transitional space is used as a metaphor to structure the researcher's dissertation process (Ellsworth, 2005). Although this study is rooted in scholarly literature, the author acknowledges that qualitative research is a personal experience (Thomas & Gunter, 2010). The researcher bracketed personal biases during the research process and, therefore, recognized the need for a space to process her experiences as the primary researcher, including tensions around three central points: (a) color blindness, (b) school counselors' education, and (c) intersection of personal and professional identities. The researcher utilized Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory as the theoretical lens to analyze dissonance created by the course of study around who she views herself personally and professionally in relationship with the study, participants, and findings (Jordan, 2010; Taylor, 2009).

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CHAPTER 2

SCHOOL COUNSELORS AS ASPIRING RACIAL JUSTICE ALLIES: A CRITICAL

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND CALL TO THE FIELD OF SCHOOL COUNSELING[1]

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Abstract

While school counselor advocacy, ally behavior, and White identity have been fairly thoroughly studied (Baker & Gerler, 2004; Blitz, 2006; Comstock et al, 2008; Goodman et al., 2004; Jordan, 2010; Taylor, 2009) it is still not well known how the combination of professional identity, racial identity, and related behaviors may support White school counselors who seek alliance with their clients of color. White counselors, in particular, must consider how their racial identity (and Whiteness as a construct) may impact the work they do with clients of color and especially with vulnerable juvenile populations, such as youth of color (Hays, Chang & Dean, 2004; Helms, 1990; Kendall, 2006; McIntosh, 1989).

The following inquiry utilizes an integration of Critical Race and Relational Cultural theoretical tenets to address current blind spots in the field of school counseling with respect to how White school counselors become allies to students of color (Jordan, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Taylor, 2009). In particular, intersections of racial privilege and ally identity/ ally identity development within the field of school counseling are addressed (Kendall, 2006; Mindrup et al, 2011). Finally, recommendations to the field of school counseling are made in order to urge school counselors to move beyond cultural competence in order to support systemic change.

INDEX WORDS: School Counseling, White School Counselors, Racial Justice Allies, Critical Race Theory, Relational Cultural Theory, Advocacy, Phenomenology

Introduction

School counselors interact with numerous racial and ethnic populations, yet many school counselors have limited knowledge of multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007) or of Whiteness and White identity as constructs (Helms, 1990; Hays et al., 2008; Mindrup et al., 2011). Current scholarship suggests that mindfulness regarding White privilege and racism are important for White counselors to develop a positive connection with racially and ethnically diverse clients (Mindrup et al., 2011; Ancis & Sanchez-Hucles, 2000). Furthermore, there is an intimate connection between ally identity and advocacy work for White school counselors. Use of counseling theories which address the relational (Relational Cultural Theory) and racial (Critical Race Theory) aspects of practice may help White school counselors articulate and address intersections of racial privilege and advocacy in their daily interactions with students of color.

Research proposes that a thorough understanding of cultural and sociopolitical assumptions, as embedded in theory and practice, can help counselors acknowledge and attend to unintentional racism and cultural bias (Blitz, 2006). Accordingly, academics underscore the importance of mental health clinicians' efforts to go "beyond cultural competency" not only for the advantage of clients of color, but for the benefit of White clients as well in order to support systemic change (Blitz, 2006). While this and related concepts appear with increasing regularity in current literature, current scholarship remains shallow regarding implications White privilege may have on school counseling practices. Aside from advocacy and multicultural competence, researchers have not analyzed the specifics around how White school counselors can best work with clients of color. While power differentials between White school counselors and students of color are great in number, students of color meet with school counselors more often than

White students (Bryan et al.); necessitating further investigation around how White school counselors can support the achievement of students of color (Bryan et al., 2009; Zhang & Burkard, 2008).

Scholars indicate self-awareness regarding White privilege and racism as a critical aspect of developing an empathic therapeutic alliance with racially and ethnically diverse clients (Mindrup et al., 2011). Hays et al. (2004) suggested that, since people cannot separate from their race, White individuals may observe racial discrimination with disinterest and or lack accountability for changing the status quo. In the context of school counseling, scholars often explain the status quo as a silence which maintains White privilege in societies that deliberately minimize discussion around racism and privilege in the school setting (Johnson, 2006).

Kendall (2006) indicated that White school counselors may disregard their privilege because they see their Whiteness as an arbitrary element of their identity, rather than a critical piece of their positionality in the profession of school counseling and the global community. Current literature does not address the essence of how White privilege informs the work of White school counselors; never mind how it could be addressed in practice. Privilege, however, has been a topic of conversation among academics. At their core, Kendall explained, privileges are often not granted based on earned qualities, but rather based of our race by the systems in which we interact. Therefore, White school counselors cannot simply ignore that their White privilege exists, nor can they reject the professional and personal implications attached to it.

In order to demystify the development of race in White people and call them to anti-racist action, Helms introduced a White Racial Identity Theory (1990) which is designed as two phases (*abandonment of race* and *defining a nonracist White identity*) which are sectioned into six

sequential stages, which are: a) contact; b) disintegration; c) reintegration; d) pseudo-independent; e) immersion/emersion; and f) autonomy.

Brown and Perry (2011) developed thought on White privilege and suggested that some practitioners address their White privilege by working towards social justice. Kendall (2006) further developed this idea by explaining that by becoming an ally progress towards social justice is made. Allies can be defined as, "members of the dominant social groups (e.g. men, Whites, heterosexuals) who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based upon their social group membership" (Briodo, 2000, p. 3).

There are many intersections of ally identity and advocacy work for White school counselors. The concept of social justice stands out as a connector of the two. Social justice school counseling is embedded in the conviction that all people in the world are equally valuable, have human rights worth honoring, and deserve to live in a just society that provides equitable opportunities for all citizens (Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). School counselors who are social justice change agents possess the professional skills to recognize and take charge of reducing or eliminating barriers to the students they serve. Moreover, school counselors who stand for social justice address obstacles that exist at the systemic level by first recognizing the educational inequalities that are present for students (Ratts et al., 2007). Furthermore, social justice change agents take account of and attend to their own worldviews and biases, have an aspiration to increase their cultural competence, and wish to become knowledgeable about relevant topics when advocating on behalf of and promoting the empowerment of students and their families (Arredondo et al., 1996; Ratts et al., 2007).

In order for White school counselors to most effectively stand for social justice and address systemic barriers to students of color, a shift from traditional Eurocentric counseling

theories (which often drive professional school counseling practice) to those with increased

emphasis on the importance of race and relational practices may prove useful (Jordan, 2010;

Taylor et al., 2009). Accordingly, this research utilizes an integrated theoretical framework

which highlights tenets of Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory as an integrated

perspective from which the role of work of White school counselors with students of color is

viewed. More specifically, Relational Cultural Theory theoretical elements are used to draw

attention to the importance of the dynamics of dominance and oppression in the work White

school counselors carry out (Jordan, 2010). Critical Race Theory addresses ways in which

historical truths affect the current sociopolitical and educational structures in the United States in

addition to theoretically framing the issue of White awareness of Whiteness as a construct

(Gillborn in Edwards, 2009 p. 55).

Finally, this document will suggest recommendations for school counselors and related

professionals who wish to support the increase of White school counselors who identify as allies

to students of color. Recommendations in terms of theory, concept, and practice are indicated.

Specifically, recommendations for White school counselor practice, counselor educators, and

future research can be found within the final section of this manuscript.

<div align="center">**Comprehensive Examination of the Literature**</div>

White School Counselors and Racial Privilege

Historically, race has provided a platform to address human diversity, validate human

exploitation, and advance the interests and privileges of the dominant (White) group (Cameron &

Wycoff, 1998). Carter (1997) explains racial identity as the development psychologically

towards membership of a particular racial group, which determines how counselors view their

race and other racial groups. Racial privileges include: easily spending time with others of the

same race, avoiding time with people one is trained to mistrust, the ability to shop at leisurely

without fear of being followed or harassed by store staff, seeing others of the same race on the

television or the paper clearly represented, and knowing that one will be exposed to academic

curriculum that features and addresses others of the same race (McIntosh, 1988). Peggy

McIntosh's scholarship addresses power differentials and points of privilege.   In her well-known

text, *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See*

Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies, McIntosh (1988) outlined advantages she

(and all White people) have based on the context of power and privilege in the United States and

color of their skin which, she proposed, White people carry around as, "an invisible package of

unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I am meant to remain

oblivious" (p. 1).

As McIntosh (1988) illustrated, race is a social construct by which individuals are

classified, and assigned power and privilege, based on physical characteristics.   Due to the

privilege of identifying as part of the majority, racial identity often remains invisible to Whites

(Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Carter, 1997; Hays et al., 2004; Katz, 1978). Yet, race influences

everyone (Frankenberg, 1993). Therefore, deeper investigation of White racial identity and its

connection to White privilege awareness is needed within the field of school counseling.

While scholars such as McIntosh have examined the general terms of White privilege,

there is limited practitioner understanding regarding how it affects school counseling.

Researchers have recorded in the current literature, however, that awareness with respect to

White privilege and racism are vital in developing an effective connection with racially and

ethnically diverse clients (Mindrup et al., 2011; Ancis & Sanchez-Hucles, 2000) and that a solid

understanding of cultural and sociopolitical assumptions as embedded in theory and practice can

help counselors reveal and address unintentional racism and cultural bias (Blitz, 2006). Yet, not all school counselors receive training with the depth and scope necessary to appropriately prepare them for practice as an effective school counselor (Black & Stone, 2005). Researchers have indicated that failing to address privilege in graduate training programs may negatively influence the psychological development of mental health providers (Black & Stone, 2005; Hays & Chang, 2003). Furthermore, Brown and Perry (2011) highlighted that numerous counselors who are new to the field struggle with acknowledging that oppression remains a chronic problem, which makes addressing and working through power differentials all the more difficult once students become practicing professionals.

Helms introduced a White Racial Identity Theory in 1990 to increase the awareness of White's about their importance and responsibility in creating and maintaining a racist society and the need dismantling it (1990). Helms's White Racial Identity Model involves six sequential stages, which are divided into two phases (1990). The first phase, *abandonment of race*, consists of three stages: a) *contact*, obliviousness to one's racial identity; 2) *disintegration*, premier acknowledgment of White identity; and 3) *reintegration*, acceptance of White superiority to non-Whites and questions own racial identity (1990). The second phase, *defining a nonracist White identity*, contains stages 4-6: 4) *pseudo-independent*, intellectualized acceptance of race; 5) *immersion/emersion*, genuine appraisal of racism and significance of Whiteness; and 6) *autonomy*, internalizes a multi-cultural identity with non-racist Whiteness as its core. White school counselors could fall anywhere within Helms's White Racial Identity Model.

One barrier to White school counselor's positioning on the later stages of Helms's model is that White school counselors may ignore their Whiteness because it is not an elected privilege. Additionally, they may feel that since they are a kind person or do not act in overtly racist ways

that they are addressing racism (Kendall, 2006). Privileges, however, are given to those in the majority because of their race by the organizations within which they interact, not because they have earned them as individuals (Kendall, 2006). Therefore, White school counselors cannot avoid having White privilege, nor can they avoid the huge responsibility attached to it. 'Liberal' or 'Progressive' White school counselors, or people in general, often have the most difficultly sorting out the implications of White privilege. Perhaps bell hook's explained this concept best in her book *Talking Back* when she said:

> When liberal whites fail to understand how they can and/or do embody white-supremacist values and beliefs even though they may not embrace racism as prejudice or domination (especially domination that involves coercive control) they cannot recognize the ways their actions support and affirm the very structure of racist domination and oppression that they profess to wish to see eradicated. (p. 113)

To this end, select scholars have worked to understand how the consciousness of White counselors can be raised around White privilege (Hays et al., 2004; Mindrup, Spray, & Lamberghini-West, 2011). Academics, such as Hays et al., 2004, have studied the power differential of domination and oppression as it relates to counseling. Many participants in the Hays et al. (2004) study generally had difficulty conceptualizing privilege and oppression. Nonetheless, based on findings around the conceptualization process for counselors, Hays et al. (2004) found that if participants were able to categorize observable cultural variables, such as race, as either privileged or oppressed and they were able to develop differential levels of awareness throughout life experience. Since counselors may have difficulty unpacking awareness of their own racial identity and privilege continuously "in a society that actively suppresses conversation about racism and privilege" it is important for practitioners to note that

as they work on assigning value and meaning to their privileged statuses, they must remain cautious about becoming complacent about the extent of their internal examination (Mindrup, Spray, & Lamberghini-West, 2011). Complacency with self typically mirrors how the practitioner interacts with the system (Kendall, 2006).

Scholars such as Blitz (2006) indicated that mental health clinicians must go "beyond cultural competency" in practice by studying their own identities and points of privilege in order to best understand their position in the world as it relates to the client or issue they wish to advocate for. Blitz cautioned that professionals studying white identity should *only* do so for the purposes of undoing the "ideology of color-blindness that provides legitimacy to the persistence of racism" and urged White practitioners not to get consumed by the personal exploration piece that often accompanies this inquiry (p. 260). This delicate balance can be a difficult one for counselors to strike. To address this issue, some scholars have broken down the process into discrete suggestions for practice in order to help counselors make sense of their racial identity and how it intersects with practice.

Brown and Perry (2011), for instance, suggested that for counselors to address issues of race, class, gender, patriarch, homophobia, and white privilege, it is important that they (a) work toward raising their own awareness around these issues, (b) accept responsibility for their part in status quo conservation; (c) set an example of challenging systems of oppression; and (d) seek social justice. These steps are important, according to the authors, because they are precursors to becoming effective counselors. Furthermore, Brown and Perry (2011) indicated that these steps can help counselors directly affect their clients' potential for change and transformation. Also, without following these steps, mental health clinicians risk falling into traditional therapeutic

stances which value neutral positions and engage techniques which support the oppressive and marginalizing practices (Brown & Perry, 2011).

White School Counselors as Racial Justice Allies and Advocates

Advocacy is not a new construct to the field of counseling (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). Recently, the specific roles school counselors contribute to advocacy have received increased attention (Baker & Gerler, 2004). Notably, The Education Trust, with support from the Dewitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, aimed to understand how school counselors should professionally operate to help all students succeed academically. The Transforming School Counseling Initiative resulted in challenging school counselors to commit taking critical roles in closing the opportunity and achievement gaps. Initially the Transforming School Counseling Initiative existed primarily in the structure and curriculum of counselor education programs, but ultimately the efforts of this initiative led to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2005), which dedicates particular attention to advocacy (Education Trust, 1997).

The ASCA National Model (2005) stated that "Advocating for the academic success of every student is a key role of school counselors and places them as leaders in promoting school reform" (p. 24). According to the ASCA National Model, school counselors' advocacy efforts are aimed at (a) removing barriers which obstruct students' development; (b) creating occasions to learn for all students; (c) guaranteeing access to a quality school curriculum; (d) joining forces with others within and outside the school to help address student needs, and (e) promoting positive, systemic change in schools. Therefore, advocacy involves White school counselors working to eliminate barriers to students of color.

The reorganization of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) through creation and implementation of the ASCA National Model has helped the school counseling profession make strides towards focusing school counselors' efforts into activities which affect systems rather than working with one child at a time to create change (Brown & Trusty, 2005). Yet, some criticism remains around the manner in which ASCA has structured the efforts of school counselors (Dahir & Stone, 2007). ASCA and the Education Trust have called for an additional shift in the role of the professional school counselor from that of service provider to a role responsible for promoting ideal achievement for all students. School counselors play a pro-active role in identifying and responding to complex academic, social, and personal issues on a daily basis and have an ethical obligation to ensure equity in educational access. With pressure on schools to raise academic performance, school counselors are charged with identifying and rectifying barriers that inhibit closing achievement and opportunity gaps (Brown & Trusty, 2005).

One way White school counselors can work to remove barriers that prohibit students of color from achieving to their greatest ability is to design their interventions towards a more socially just society. Kendall (2006) commented working towards social justice is one way to make strides towards becoming an ally. Allies can be defined as "members of the dominant social groups (e.g. men, Whites, heterosexuals) who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based upon their social group membership" (Broido, 2000, p. 3).

Some critics of ally behavior question why members of privileged groups would voluntarily commit themselves to challenge their own privilege (Curry-Stevens, 2007). Yet, this

mentality is, in and of itself, a privilege. In his book *Undoing Privilege*, Bob Pease (2010) explained with the statement:

> One form of privilege is the ability to ignore calls for involvement in social justice campaigns. Those who do make commitment still have the privilege at any point of changing their mind and allowing their commitment to wane. Awareness of privilege can be reversed, but my experience in campaigns tells me that there comes a point of no return for allies. Significant reconstruction of subjunctives can occur to the point where turning away from activist involvement is no longer viable. (p. 184)

Therefore, ally aspiration is formed distinctly through improved awareness and "Increased awareness of the injustice of our privilege will hopefully lead to members of privileged groups becoming allies with oppressed groups" (Pease, 2010, p. 180).

The power of mutuality in relationships, in the form of equally distributed power within the counselor-client relationship, may be the key to both relieving the aforementioned feelings among counselors and in providing a means to reduce oppression and move towards a socially just society (Jordan, 2011). This type of mutuality exists among allies, but the ways in which individuals choose to act as allies differ and scholars have not studied the nuances of how White school counselor ally identities evolve. Researchers, however, indicated that one element is consistent: ally identity transpires from acting as an agent for change (Kendall, 2006). The fact that one aspires to be an ally, then, becomes extremely personal and can, at times, bring up many different feelings about power and privilege, such as anger, grief, disappointment, and resistance (Boeler & Zembylas, 2003).

Some White counselors may have difficulty working through the consequential feelings of increased awareness as certain ideals they held as truths are challenged (Kendall, 2006).

However, "Doing the personal work required to understand what it means to be white is the foundation for (…) striving to build a just world" (Kendall, 2006, p. 143). Those who are truly committed to racial justice, therefore, will work through their own discomfort.

Furthermore, Kendall (2006) indicated that an ally with privilege does not work simply to help another. In contrast, Kendall suggested that working to improve the greater good for all occurs by leveraging White privilege to promote change within the systems that keep people of color oppressed. In this vein, Kendall indicated that allies must "work continuously to develop an understanding of the personal and institutional experiences of the person or people with whom they are allying themselves" and further emphasized the personal element of alliance by stating that, "If the ally is a member of a privileged group, it is essential that she or he also strives for clarity about the impact of privileges on her or his life" (p. 144).

Ally Identity Development

Munin and Speight (2010) described allies as members of the dominant population who advocate against oppression, and site allies as an important element in the search to end oppression. Yet, as Munin and Speight suggested, ally development is complex because the role of the ally is pursuant of justice for those oppressed by privileges that the ally holds (2010). Edwards (2006) indicated that ultimately systems of oppression from which a dominant group appears to benefit may actually damage the privileged group in addition to the oppressed because of the systemic dysfunction oppression creates. In this sense, allies are produced from work they take towards their own liberation from an oppressive, limiting social structure. After all, social justice can be defined in terms of "full and equal participation for all groups, where resources are equitably distributed and everyone is physically and psychologically safe" (Reason & Davis, 2005, p.7).

Broido explored factors associated with social justice ally development and found that participants all held three common developmental markers of social justice allies (2000). First of all, social justice allies amassed information around social justice and diversity issues to increase their competence as allies. Secondly, participants in Broido's study indicated that they yearned to make-meaning of the information they acquired by discussing it with others and reflecting on it. Finally, social justice ally participants in Broido's study indicated that they used the aforementioned acquired knowledge to push them towards action in pursuit of social justice . While Broido offered some ways for aspiring allies to work towards social justice, use of a stage model of aspiring ally identity development may also prove beneficial in the ally development of White school counselors.

A Racial Justice Ally Identity Model

Edwards (2006) addressed Aspiring Ally Identity Development in a model that defines developmental stages of Aspiring Ally behavior: Aspiring Ally for Self-Interest, Aspiring Ally for Altruism, and Ally for Social Justice. Aspiring Allies for Self-Interest are motivated and largely inspired to protect those they care about from being hurt. An ally in this developmental stage may wish to create an alliance with an individual with whom they have a personal connection, as opposed to a group or an issue (Edwards, 2006). Also, an ally in this stage tends to view themselves as protectors who intervene on behalf of a specific individual who identifies as part of an oppressed social group, and may frequently do so without consulting him/her. Finally, Aspiring Allies for Self-Interest may or may not identify with the term "ally" but instead will see their behavior in relational terms, such as being a "good friend or counselor" (Edwards, 2006).

Aspiring Allies for Altruism have an increased awareness of privilege and, therefore, seek to engage in ally behavior as a means of coping with guilt and emotion attached to knowing points of their privilege were unearned and gained in an immoral way (Edwards, 2006). For members of dominant groups, recognition of the systemic nature of their privilege may create a range of powerful emotional responses (Edwards, 2006). While Edwards (2006) indicated that the emotion of guilt can be helpful to raise the consciousness of aspiring allies in the dominant group, guilt cannot be the sole motivator because it does nothing to change the system granting privilege to some and oppressing others.

Finally, Edwards (2006) explained that individuals who are Allies for Social Justice work with those from the oppressed group in collaboration and partnership to end systems of oppression. The collaborative and systemic aspects of how these allies view their role is congruent with definitions of social justice and recognize that members of dominant groups are also harmed by the system of oppression even though the way they are affected is not the same or comparable to the harm done to oppressed groups. Edwards explained that this final group of allies seeks to free the oppressed but also to liberate themselves and reconnect to their own full humanity.

Furthermore, Edwards (2006) specified application of the aforementioned concepts, indicating that the model is neither linear nor chronological, but rather fluid in nature and, consequently, the goal of development is to foster a more complex and sophisticated consciousness that is more stable and less likely to regress to earlier stages . Edwards also indicated that issues involving the "distinctions between intent and outcome, consistent anti-oppressive action, and the problematic nature of self-identifying as an ally" need to be addressed in order to prevent aspiring allies from doing harm (p. 52). In this light, Edwards suggested (as

indicated across the literature) that "the most credible naming of social justice allies is done by members of the oppressed group" (p. 54) but that the tools, such as this model, could still help aspiring allies more consistently engage in the type of anti-oppressive action that would result in members of the oppressed group identifying them as allies. Lastly, Edwards cautioned aspiring allies not to 'over-intellectualize' the process because that may cause them to chastise other aspiring allies for their faults or become paralyzed into inaction by fear of making mistakes and not being the 'ideal ally' – a paradox that can be common in the helping professions.

The Intersection of Ally Identity and Advocacy Work for White School Counselors

Oppression manifests itself at the individual (e.g., stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination), social/cultural (e.g., societal norms and values), and institutional levels (e.g., rules and policies), which begs for attention from the counseling profession (Hardiman & Jackson, 1982). House and Martin (1998) have attributed oppressive social, political, and economic conditions to poor academic achievement for students of color and students from low-income families in K – 12 schools. These kinds of inequities signify the need for counseling professionals to make a more concerted effort to address environmental factors that serve as barriers to academic, career, and personal/social development. To address this need, the American Counseling Association (ACA) has developed Advocacy Competencies to help structure counseling practice and encourage interventions and strategies that take place on multiple dimensions and levels (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002).

ACA Advocacy Competencies. The ACA Advocacy Competencies are grounded in multicultural counseling (e.g., Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) and community counseling (e.g., Lewis, Lewis, Daniels, & D'Andrea, 1998) literature to provide a structure for counselors to identify levels of intervention that might be appropriate based on a client's case. The ACA

Advocacy Competencies model organizes advocacy into two dimensions: the first speaks to the extent the client/ student or community is engaged in the advocacy process and the second considers the level of intervention (individual, systems, or societal level). Additionally, the two dimensions break advocacy into six domains that counselors may be involved in depending on the situation: Client/ Student Empowerment, Client/ Student Advocacy, Community Collaboration, Systems Advocacy, Public Information, and Social/ Political Advocacy (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002). Often, several forms of advocacy may be necessary and cultural competence and awareness is essential regardless of the type of advocacy.

Social Justice Counseling. Social justice counseling supports professional school counselors' work to challenge the status quo as a means of empowering clients while also confronting inequities. Specifically, Crethar, Torres, Rivera & Nash are cited across the literature as defining social justice counseling as a "multifaceted approach to counseling in which practitioners strive to simultaneously promote human development and the common good through addressing challenges related to both individual and distributive justice" (2008, p. 269). Coupled with this definition of social justice counseling, Crethar, Torres, Rivera and Nash include the importance of counselors' empowerment of the individual as well as active confrontation of injustice and inequality in society in order to impact the individuals with whom they work in addition to the systems which serve as the backdrop to the work they do. In attending to the cultural, contextual, and individual needs of those served, social justice counselors direct attention to the promotion of four critical principles that guide their work; equity, access, participation, and harmony (Crethar, Torres, Rivera and Nash, 2008).

Scholars have explored the school counselor as social justice advocate. Still, the current work remains rather obtuse. Trusty & Brown (2005) point to Friedler's (2000) work around

special education advocacy as a tool to help direct the advocacy work of school counselors. This guide differs from the ACA Advocacy Competencies in that their list organizes advocacy into the three following broad areas (rather than dimensions/domains): 1) dispositions, 2) knowledge, and 3) skills. Most relevant to this study, Trusty and Brown suggested that 'dispositions' is the area most intimately integrated with school counselors' personal beliefs, values, and selves and to their beliefs and values, making them axiomatic with ally identity (2005). Furthermore, advocacy dispositions are aligned to the current vision of school counseling (ASCA, 2005).

White School Counselor Use of Relational-Cultural and Critical Race Tenets

At its most fundamental level, Relational-Cultural Theory builds upon and expands humanistic principles to allow practitioners increased focus on the relational connections vital to individuals' psychological development and emotional well-being (Jordan, 2010). Meanwhile, Critical Race Theory and critical white studies reject the generally accepted understanding of educational policy in light of educational functioning in Western societies. Together, these theoretical perspectives offer White school counselors an alternative to traditionally accepted understanding of the construct of education and their role within the educational structure with respect to implementing the ACA Advocacy Competencies and comprehensive school counseling programs aligned with the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005; Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002). A graphic representation of this conceptualization visually captures the relationship between these elements (figure 1).

Relational Cultural Theory provides counselors with a theory that complements the current multicultural/social justice movement in that it provides room for counselors to consider and value how oppression hinders the relational development of marginalized people across the life span (Comstock et al., 2008). Since the role of the power differential between the privileged

and oppressed creates an unmistakable barrier between the work White school counselors do with students of color, Relational Cultural Theory offers an alternative to traditional theories White school counselors may otherwise adopt to frame practice (Walker, 2003). Specifically, Relational Cultural Theory offers practitioners an extensive model of relational development across the life span which can be utilized to identify and deconstruct obstacles to mutuality that individuals encounter in diverse relational contexts (Comstock, et al., 2008).

While Relational Cultural Theory addresses relational components that school counselors face when working with students, it does not comprehensively consider how race, specifically, influences the work that school counselors complete with students of color (figure 1). Therefore, it may be helpful to integrate Critical Race Theory with Relational Cultural Theory in order to analyze the implications that race and relationships have on the work done by White school counselors and their clients of color. Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory have some tenets which set them apart from one another, but they also overlap. For instance, both question the usefulness of traditional (Eurocentric) theoretical frameworks. As stated by Delgado (1995), "Most critical race theorists consider the majoritarian mindset – the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdom, and shared cultural understandings of persons in in the dominant group – to be a principled obstacle to racial reform" (p. 17).

Critical Race Theory considers the historical context regarding how Whites acquired land (from American Indians) and labor (from slavery of Africans and immigrant laborers) (Taylor, 2009). Upon this foundation political, legal, and educational systems evolved in which White people have certain unalienable rights to property and capital, which are incongruent with that of individuals of color (Taylor, 2009, p. 63). Subsequently, Relational Cultural Theory also addresses the issue of social implications of this historical truth (Jordan, 2010). Relational

Cultural Theory challenges systemic, societal, and cultural traditions which create barriers to individuals' abilities to produce, maintain, and engage in growth-fostering relationships (Comstock, 2008).

School counselors may find that an integration of Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory offer an appropriate theoretical lens through which they can conceptualize their work as racial justice allies with students of color. White school counselors may find that by recognizing the core tenets of Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory they are better able to analyze their points of privilege and the role of power differentials in their daily work with students of color (figure 1). Additionally, it may provide a framework for the way they view the socio-political structures they must navigate with students of color as if they are to aspire to be an ally to this client group (figure 1). Finally, White school counselors may find Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory refreshing alternatives to traditional, Eurocentric, theoretical models of counseling when searching for ways to make meaning of their work in public school settings.
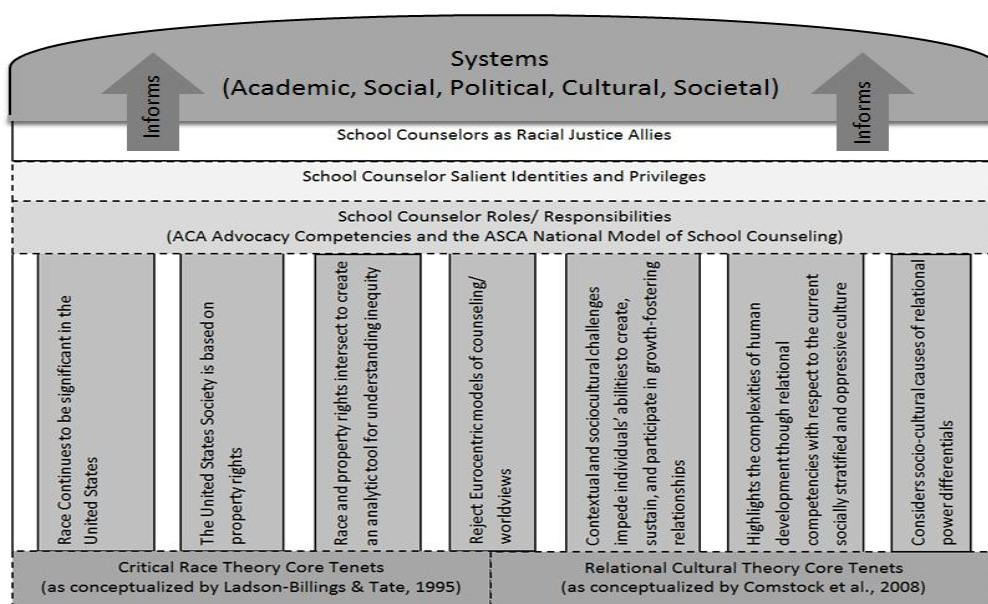

Figure 1. Visual representation of theoretical considerations for school counselors.

Recommendations for White School Counselors and Counselor Educators

Public school counselors are uniquely situated to work with diverse populations. In fact, school counselors may often find that they are the first point of contact a child has to identify any number of additional resources. School counselors must remain mindful of the historical sociopolitical structure of American schools and culture offers a complex racial backdrop it creates to the work they carry out. Subsequently, the power differentials between White school counselors and students of color can potentially create barriers to students of color accessing a variety of supports. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for White school counselors to strive to better comprehend Whiteness as a construct and work to form alliances with the students of color with whom they interact. There are a number of strategies White school counselors may find helpful when working to become racial justice allies with students of color.

First of all, utilizing a Critical Race theoretical lens may aid school counselors in effectively conceptualizing their ally identity. Since Critical Race Theory comes from a long tradition of resistance to the unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and gender lines in America (and around the world), its powerful tenets are ones which White school counselors should earnestly ponder. Specifically, White school counselors should use Critical Race Theory tenets to help them understand the interplay of racial politics, legal proceedings, and the broader conversation about race and racism in the United States – particularly as it relates to power and privilege in schooling. In particular, adopting the Critical Race Theoretical tents highlighted by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) will provide a helpful lens through which White school counselors can analyze work done in educational settings. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) indicated three core propositions: "(1) race continues to be significant in the United States; (2) U.S. society is based on property rights

rather than human rights; and (3) the intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool for understanding inequity" (p. 47).

Additionally, White school counselors may find it helpful to consider integrating relational components (such as Relational Cultural Theory) into their theoretical framework in order to raise their own consciousness, as well as that of the students with whom they work. Specifically, adopting the primary Relational Cultural Theory assumptions into school counseling practice may prove helpful because: (a) individuals innately seek relationships through the life span and they grow as a result of involvement in relationships; (b) advancement towards shared realities rather than individualism represents mature functioning; (c) engagement in complex and fluid relational systems indicates psychological growth; (d) elements of mutuality are essential to growth- fostering relationships; (e) honest engagement requires authenticity in growth-fostering relationships; (f) individual growth is a by-product of contributing to the development of a growth-fostering relationship; and (g) development is represented by an increase in relational competence across the lifespan (Jordan, 2010).

Additionally, White school counselors who wish to become racial justice allies must look critically at their ally identity development. For example, they may consider how they collect, analyze, make meaning of, and apply information around social justice and diversity issues to increase their ally competence (Broido, 2000). It may prove helpful for aspiring allies to work from a model of ally development to frame their progress, strengths, and growing edges in order to make effective choices in their ally thought processes and behaviors. For example, use of Edwards (2006) Aspiring Ally Identity Development model may support aspiring allies in delineating their ally identity in and among three dynamic stages: Aspiring Ally for Self-Interest, Aspiring Ally for Altruism, and Ally for Social Justice.

Closely related to their ally identity work, White school counselors should attend to their racial identity; including the consideration of how it may impact the work they do with clients of color. In particular, White school counselors may find it helpful to seek ways to: (a) begin to raise their own critical consciousness around issues of race; (b) accept accountability for their roles in maintaining the status quo; (c) empower themselves and others to challenge systems of oppression; and (d) seek social justice (Brown & Perry, 2011). Likewise, since these steps are important precursors to becoming effective counselors, counselor educators and counselor education programs may find them useful to integrate these elements into curriculum and/or goals (Brown & Perry, 2011).

Also, White school counselors may find that honing their advocacy skills by utilizing the ACA Advocacy Competencies to frame their work may improve their racial justice ally behavior and identity (ASCA, 2005). Finally, further research is greatly needed to address how, if at all, the aforementioned recommendations impact the racial justice ally identity of White school counselors as it relates to their work with students of color. While scholars have endorsed each of the recommendations above, it is not known how each might specifically impact White school counselors' work as racial justice allies with students of color.

<div align="center">**Conclusion**</div>

While school counselor advocacy, relationally focused counseling practice, ally behavior, and White identity have been fairly thoroughly studied, it is still not well known how the combination of professional and personal identities and related behaviors may support White school counselors who seek alliance with their clients of color (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Jordan, 2010; Kendall, 2006). One can, however, suppose that elements of each may increase the

professional impact of White school counselors – specifically on their interactions with students of color.

White counselors, in particular, must consider how their racial identity may impact the work they do with clients of color. While scholars have begun to unpack this topic within the field of counseling in general, but have not thoroughly considered implications for school counselors (Ancis & Sanchez-Hucles, 2000; Black & Stone, 2005; Brown & Perry, 2011; Hays & Chang, 2003 Mindrup, Spray, & Lamberghini-West, 2011). White school counselors may wish to take deliberate steps towards improving their practice by raising personal awareness around their own racial identity, consider how it impacts relational interactions they have with students, deliberate upon the complex sociopolitical contexts in which they work, and find reason to work towards advocacy to change the status quo when appropriate. Through further analysis, scholars may begin to piece together more structured recommendations for White school counselors who aspire to change the world for the better as racial justice allies with clients of color.

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CHAPTER 3

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS AS ASPIRING

RACIAL JUSTICE ALLIES[2]

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[2] Moss, L. To be submitted to *Journal of Professional School Counseling*.

Abstract

Existing scholarship speaks to school counselor roles with respect to addressing inequities that exists in schools (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003; Cox & Lee, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010). The current body of school counseling literature does not address the essence of how school counselors emerge as racial justice allies to students of color. A better understanding of this phenomenon may offer a poignant avenue through which White school counselors can take steps towards promoting a socially just world.

Therefore, this study engaged a phenomenological approach to research as a method to describe the essence of how White school counselors experience the identity of 'racial justice ally' with students of color (Hays & Singh, 2012). Critical Race and Relational Cultural theories frame this study in order to offer a theoretical foundation which is aligned with movement towards social justice counseling. This approach provided the primary researcher with a clearer understanding of the phenomena of racial justice ally identity as experienced by White school counselors (Groenewald, 2004). The findings of this exploratory study provide insight into the lived experiences of White school counselors as they grow and develop in their alliance with the families and students of color with whom they work. Finally, the primary researcher suggests implications for future research, school counseling practice and advocacy.

INDEX WORDS: School Counseling, White School Counselors, Racial Justice Allies, Critical Race Theory, Relational Cultural Theory, Advocacy, Phenomenology

Introduction and Rationale for Study

Current literature indicates the importance of school counselors in addressing inequities that exists in schools (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003; Cox & Lee, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010). Additionally, scholarship increasingly maintains the ideology that the field of school counseling requires a shift from traditional methods of counseling (focused on interpersonal or intrapersonal concerns) to social justice counseling (focused on external forces such as oppression, discrimination, prejudice, sexism, socioeconomic factors, etc. as they impact clients) (Goodman et al., 2004; Lee, 1998). Yet, contemporary scholarship does little to address how school counselors can bring attention to inequities and emerge from traditional methods of school counseling as racial justice allies. Action as a racial justice ally may offer a poignant avenue through which White school counselors can take steps towards promoting a socially just world.

Therefore, the researcher of this study employed a phenomenological approach to research as a method to describe the essence of how White school counselors experience the identity of 'racial justice ally' with students of color. This approach provided the primary researcher with a clearer understanding of the phenomena of racial justice ally identity as experienced by White school counselors (Groenewald, 2004).

Finally, the primary researcher used Relational-Cultural Theory and Critical Race Theory as theoretical frameworks for this study. Relational Cultural Theory was selected as a critical theoretical element of this study due to the emphasis it places on the dynamic nature of the counselor-client relationship. Critical Race Theory complements Relational Cultural Theory by addressing the issue of normalized racism in the United States. Together, Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory create a theoretical lens which supposes that the assumptions of

White superiority are so ingrained in political, legal, and educational structures that they are almost unrecognizable, and that the way to work towards exposing and deconstructing this reality is by raising the consciousness of the majority through authentic relationships.

Literature Review

Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory as a Blended Theoretical Framework

Relational Cultural Theory "proposes that all people grow through and toward relationship throughout their lifespan" (Jordan, 2010, p. 2). Relational Cultural Theory suggests increased and varied connection with others, through growth-fostering relationships, as the fundamental driver of human maturity, which manifests as what Miller (1986) termed the 'five good things:' a sense of vitality and zest; increased clarity about self and others; augmented creativity and ability to take action; an experience of worth and empowerment; and a desire for increased connectedness with others (p. 2). A graphic of this blended theoretical framework helps to illustrate its functionality and highlights its core tenets (figure 1).
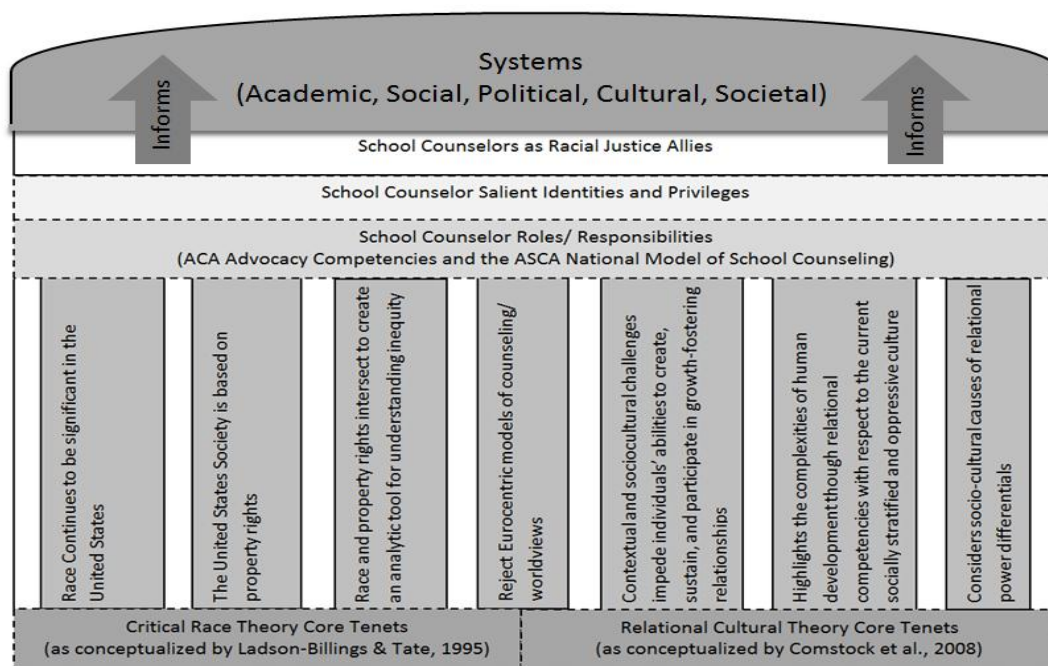

Figure 1. Visual representation of theoretical considerations for school counselors.

Relational Cultural Theory highlights the importance of tension and conflict in relationships as a fundamental stepping stone to growth (figure 1). Specifically, Relational Cultural Theory stresses the importance of cultural and societal forces in triggering and breaking down relational connections. In this light, Relational Cultural Theory provides counselors with a theory that pairs with the contemporary multicultural/ social justice movement in that it provides a framework for counselors to analyze how oppression obstructs the relational development of marginalized people across the life span (Comstock et al., 2008).   Relevant to this phenomenological study, many White school counselors may note institutional barriers as blocking the achievement of students of color.

Critical Race Theory is also used to undergird the research presented in this study to more specifically explain the role that race and racism play in American culture and to give voice to allies to students of color. Critical Race Theory explicitly maintains that, "racism is a normal fact of daily life in U.S. society that is neither aberrant nor rare" (Taylor et al., 2009, p. 4). Critical Race Theory constructs have given birth to the current political and legal structures of the United States which, subsequently, inform policy in the wheelhouse of educational reform (Taylor et al., 2009).

Theoretical Tenets Around Power Structures. When 'personality traits' are ascribed to a subordinate group (women, racial minority groups, those in the sexual orientation minority, those facing economic disadvantage, etc.) and pathologized, traditional psychological theories often assist in justifying and conserving the culture's existing power distribution (Jordan, 2010). Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory offer alternatives to traditional theoretical counseling models and ways of conceptualizing the work of school counselors (figure 1). From a Critical Race perspective, Delgado (1995) pointed out an important distinction between the

viewpoints of Whites and people of color: Whites don't see their perspective as one way of experiencing the world, but as the sole reality. Miller (2002) discussed this concept from a Relational Cultural perspective as controlling images (CI's). Miller indicated that dominant groups create controlling images about themselves and subordinate groups. Essentially, CI's create a fear for those in power and those who are oppressed around losing status if one does not behave as the CI indicates (Miller, 2002). For instance, those in power may risk association with others not in power and even groups who lack sociocultural power risk affiliation with even lesser desirability (Miller, 2002).

In order to work towards an increased common understanding of reality, Relational Cultural Theory places a strong emphasis on how power is distributed relationally in both intimate interactions and on a broader, societal scale (figure 1). Likewise, Critical Race Theory specifically addresses how the political, legal, and educational systems in the United States are built upon the inequitable platform of Whites having rights to property and capital which were provided to them by force in the form of land (by native people) and labor (in the form of slave and immigrant labor) (Taylor et al., 2009, p. 7). Jonathan Kozol (1991), a social activist and education critic, described the way these inequities are manifested in the current American education system as "savage inequities" when speaking to the clear imbalances that exist between the academic experiences of White, middle-class students and those of poor, African-American and Latino students. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) further explored these inequities in their article, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education" and explained that, "these inequalities are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussion of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" (p. 47).

Relational Cultural Theory maintains that the counselor undoubtedly holds a level of expert power in the therapeutic relationship and should attend to this by leveling power between the therapist and client through a variety of growth-fostering techniques. Both Relational Cultural Theory and Critical Race Theory maintain that growth through connection lives far beyond the confines of therapy. In fact, sociocultural context is of utmost importance when considering implications of power structures (Jordan, 2010; Taylor et al., 2009). By placing culture at the theoretical epicenter, this framework shifts the power, illuminating the complex systems of connection – countering the idea of separation (Miller & Stiver, 1997). In this way, Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory provide a theoretical framework from which practitioners can begin to challenge the cycle of oppression through relational connection and movement towards a common understanding of reality (figure 1).

Critical Race and Relational Cultural Theories in School Counseling/ Education. Critical Race thought suggests that "Adopting and adapting Critical Race Theory as a framework for educational equity means that we will have to expose racism in education and propose radical solutions for addressing it" (Taylor et al. 2009, p. 33). Critical Race Theory provides scholars a practical lens through which they may examine and critique school services, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school funding in education (figure 1). Critical race studies in education focus on the impact of these on the lives of marginalized students, and potentially support and give voice to students who would otherwise remain nameless and voiceless (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race theorists share the ideology that racism is not an individual pathology, but rather a structural problem at the systemic level that is created and preserved by the collective acts of many individuals which, in turn, create an oppressive system that is far more powerful than any one person's efforts could ever create (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995;

Parker & Lynn 2002; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Vaught and Castagno (2008) analyzed these

principles in the school setting by examining attitudes of teachers around race and privilege as

they applied to the academic milieu.

By looking at the attitudes of teachers regarding the structural problems in two school

districts, Vaught and Castagno (2008) noted problematic systemic issues, but also proposed that

a general plan regarding what can be done to make progress towards closing the racialized

achievement gap. While Vaught and Castagno agreed with other scholars that awareness of

White privilege is important in producing movement towards equality in academia, they also

cautioned that if consciousness is limited to individual awareness, it may cause stress and

pressure for the White faculty who do have mindfulness around racial inequities, but will likely

not create the systemic changes desired. By shifting efforts towards the topic of distributive

justice, both individuals and groups can make claim to the privileges or advantages they would

have earned or received in an equitable context (figure 1).

Harris (1993) discussed the idea of distributive justice as "not focus[ing] primarily on

guilt and innocence, but rather on entitlement and fairness" (p. 1783). Therefore, distributive

justice speaks to the tension between equality as it relates to racial privilege (and subsequent

power) as individual or collective. This structure is created by interactions on the individual

level which, when duplicated by others in a system, creates an institution. In this way, the idea

of distributive justice moves White privilege beyond individual blame to address structural

understandings that that necessitates individual and collective accountability to move systems of

education towards equity (Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

Relational Cultural theory supports the points above highlighted by Critical Race Theory.

Miller (2002) suggested that because mental health practitioners live in a culture that operates

based on a system that values power, yet obfuscates the use of power which positions counselors to act in therapy as they see in society at large (2002). Walker referred to this idea as the default position (2002). Therefore, Miller (2002) suggested that therapists must constantly check themselves to seek ways they are acting that are not mutually empowering through self-assessment and supervisory opportunities, whereas Taylor et al. (2009) explained that taking bold, and sometimes unpopular, positions on topics involving race in schools and education is the primary way to facilitate change.

School counselors may find difficulty promoting Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory-supported interactions in school settings that operate with a 'hierarchical culture' value, which uses forms of management, control, and directing to function. Hartling and Sparks (in Jordan, 2010) discussed the challenge presented by work places that "rest on traditional theories of psychological development that suggest that healthy development follows from an evolving process of separation from relationships" (p. 159).

There are healthy and unhealthy ways for relationally-minded practitioners to effectively oppose the status quo of a work place (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976; Ward, 2000; Fletcher, 1999). Scholars agree that while healthy opposition can lead to constructive movement and change, unhealthy opposition often results in pernicious disconnection, alienation, isolation, and harm to clinicians, clients and the workplace as a whole (Miller, 1976; Ward, 2000; Fletcher, 1999). Specifically, Miller (1976) proposed that healthy opposition can be defined as "waging good conflict," meaning that it is "respectful and empathic to those with whom we disagree, resisting the temptation to separate ourselves by degrading, dismissing, or objectifying them as human beings" (Hartling & Sparks, in Jordan, 2010. p. 167). This 'good conflict' allows relationally-minded clinicians to keep the ideal relational goal at the forefront of their work while creating

conditions in which relational shifts, albeit micro-movements, can begin to occur at the organizational level.

Relevant to this study, many school counselors may note institutional barriers, or unhealthy opposition, as blocking the achievement of students of color. School counselors who operate from the Relational Cultural and Critical Race blended theoretical framework presented for this work would likely look to several avenues when analyzing their efforts. First, school counselors operating from this framework understand the connection between race, law, and education. Specifically, they understand how movements such as desegregation/civil rights have affected the current curriculum, instruction assessment, and funding of schools (Taylor et al., 2009, p. 28-33). Furthermore, while school counselors operating from this theoretical perspective aim to help the students with whom they work, they also expect their own personal growth and development as an outgrowth from their interactions with their student-clients. For instance, they may see the world differently from hearing about the lived experiences of their students of color. Additionally, White school counselors who utilize a blended Critical Race-Relational Cultural theoretical framework must also consider how professional relationships in the school and greater community contexts may act as conduits to consciousness-raising around sociopolitical realities or as elements which perpetuate the current, oppressive status quo.

White Privilege

Current scholars indicate that mindfulness regarding white privilege and racism are necessary for counselors to develop a meaningful connection with racially and ethnically diverse clients (Mindrup et al., 2011; Ancis & Sanchez-Hucles, 2000). Also, acquiring a thorough understanding of cultural and sociopolitical assumptions as embedded in theory and practice can help counselors acknowledge and attend to unintentional racism and cultural bias (Blitz, 2006).

Self-awareness regarding White privilege and racism are essential ingredients to create an empathic therapeutic alliance between White school counselors and the racially and ethnically diverse clients with whom they work (Mindrup et al., 2011). Mindrup et al. (2011) suggested that traditionally White European-Americans tend to maintain the status quo with respect to their interactions with students of color. In context of this study, the status quo can, simply, be described as the silence which maintains White privilege in societies that deliberately minimize discussion around racism and privilege in the school setting (Johnson, 2006).

Many White school counselors may disregard their racial privilege because it is something they cannot regulate (Kendall, 2006). They may feel that since they do not identify as racist and make a sincere effort to demonstrate kindness to others that they are doing enough to address racism. To this end, it is important to address that institutions bestow privileges based on race, not only because of earned status based on performance (Kendall). Therefore, White school counselors cannot avoid their White privilege, nor can they forsake the responsibility that unquestionably comes attached to it.

Implications for Work in School Counseling. While it is not thoroughly documented, a few scholars have worked to understand how the consciousness of school counselors can begin to shift around race-related topics. For instance, Hays et al. (2004) studied the power differential of domination and oppression as it relates to counseling. Participants in the aforementioned study recognized the existence of an internalization process of privilege and oppression – indicating that counselors can conceptualize the connection among social status, external influences, and perception.

Practitioners must note that, "No matter how much work we have done on our privileged status, any time we become complacent about the extent of our internal examination, we move

quickly to greater complicity with the system of oppression," so school counselors must make attending to their privilege an ongoing priority (Kendall, 2006, p. xiii). Additionally, mental health clinicians must make a conscientious effort to go "beyond cultural competency" in practice for the benefit of White clients as well as for clients of color in order to support systemic change (Blitz, 2006).

Racial Justice Ally Identity

      Social Justice School Counseling. Social justice school counseling is embedded in the conviction that all people in the world are equally valuable, have human rights worth recognizing and respecting, and deserve to live in a just and democratic society of equal opportunity (Ratts, DeKruyf, & Chen-Hayes, 2007). School counselors who are social justice change agents have the beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and skills to identify and take responsibility for eradicating systemic barriers by first recognizing the educational inequalities that exist for students of color and those from low-income environments (Ratts et al., 2007). Further, social justice change agents have an awareness of their own worldviews and biases as well as the desire to become more culturally skilled and knowledgeable at advocating on behalf of and promoting the empowerment of the students and families of color with whom they work (Arredondo et al., 1996; Ratts et al., 2007). School counselors infusing social justice ideals into their work must also be culturally competent and willing to learn a variety of components (e.g. values, history, beliefs) of cultural groups representative of the students whom they work.

      Despite a vast body of literature that stresses the importance of school counselors in addressing inequities that exists in schools (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003; Cox & Lee, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010), few articles provide concrete strategies that school counselors can implement in their practice (Singh et al., 2010).

Singh et al. (2010) implemented a study to explore strategies that school counselors who self-identified as social justice agents used to advocate for systemic change within their school communities. The purpose of this study was to analyze how school counselors manifest advocacy practice. Findings included seven overarching themes: (1) using political savvy to navigate power structures; (b) consciousness raising; (c) initiating difficult dialogues; (d) building intentional relationships; (e) teaching students self-advocacy skills; (f) using data for marketing, and (g) educating others about the school counselor role of advocate (Singh et al., 2010).

Consequently, school counselors who are truly committed to racial justice work through their own discomfort knowing it is a means to an end. Furthermore, school counselors who work to challenge the status quo as a way of empowering clients while also confronting inequities are counselors who operate from a social justice counseling framework. Crethar, Torres, Rivera and Nash (2008) are cited across the literature as defining social justice counseling as "a multifaceted approach to counseling in which practitioners strive to simultaneously promote human development and the common good through addressing challenges related to both individual and distributive justice" (p. 269). Social justice counselors direct their attention to the promotion of four critical principles that guide their work; equity, access, participation, and harmony. Using this framework, social justice counselors empower individuals and actively confront injustice and inequality in society (Crethar, Torres, Rivera & Nash, 2008).

Current literature increasingly suggests a required shift from traditional methods of counseling to one which considers the importance of social justice competence (Goodman et al., 2004; Lee, 1998). Accordingly, professional school counselors must identify ways to take strides towards creating an increasingly equitable world society in which resources and

opportunities are accessible to students. Because of this focus, many counselors may begin to take inventory of their advocacy abilities, social justice competence, and ally identity.

School Counselor Ally Behaviors. Kendall (2006) indicated that allies emerge from working as a change agent, but that this is done for the greater collective good, not from a place of doing something for someone else. Each alliance manifests uniquely, with its own limits, responsibilities, and type of risk (Kendal). Therefore, ally development is an extremely personal process and can expose many different feelings about power and privilege in the hearts and minds of aspiring allies.

In fact, "The cognitive dissonance created by shifting perspectives on knowing can be threatening" (Reason et al., 2005). Boler and Zembylas (2003) suggested that "to engage in critical inquiry often means (…) radically reevaluat(ing) (…) world views. This process can incur feelings of anger, grief, disappointment and resistance" (p. 111).   Therefore, some school counselors may have difficulty working through uncomfortable feelings as certain traditional ideals are challenged. Yet, "Doing the personal work required to understand what it means to be white is the foundation for (…) striving to build a just world" (Kendall, p. 18, 2006).

Scholars have not widely explored school counselor racial ally behavior. While scholarship increasingly points out that school counselors have a professional duty to consider, the barriers students face and often actively work to improve it, at present this type of work is categorized as advocacy (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). However, since school counselors work with all students and have the education and training to give voice to groups of students who are marginalized and oppressed, many school counselors do aspire to ally with marginalized students, which is work that takes on personal meaning.

Kendall (2006) indicated that an ally with privilege does not work simply to help another. In contrast, Kendall suggested that working to improve the greater good for all by working with people of color and "using our privilege, power and access to influence and resources to change the systems that keep people of color oppressed" (p. 148). In this vein, Kendall (2006) indicated that allies must, "work continuously to develop an understanding of the personal and institutional experiences of the person or people with whom they are allying themselves" and further emphasized the personal element of alliance by stating that "If the ally is a member of a privileged group, it is essential that she or he also strives for clarity about the impact of privileges on her or his life" (p. 148).

Professional school counselors can address their White privilege through action-based practice in the form of social justice work (Brown & Perry, 2011). Kendall (2006) clearly indicated that an avenue for counselors to work for social justice is through aspiring ally behavior. Allies can be defined as "members of the dominant social groups (e.g. men, Whites, heterosexuals) who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based upon their social group membership" (Briodo, 2000, p. 3). Therefore, ally aspiration is formed distinctly through improved consciousness and "Increased awareness of the injustice of our privilege will hopefully lead to members of privileged groups becoming allies with oppressed groups" (Pease, 2010, p. 180). This type of collaborative relationship reduces oppression and supports societal growth towards social justice.

The Current Study

The researcher of this study employed a phenomenological approach as she aimed to describe the essence of how White school counselors come to take on the identity of 'racial justice ally' to students of color. The specific research question that guided this study was: How

do White school counselors experience and conceptualize racial justice ally identity? Generally, researchers utilize a phenomenological approach because of a concern with understanding social and/ or psychological phenomena from the viewpoints of those most closely involved (Groenewald, 2004) – such is the case in this exploration. Furthermore, as in all phenomenological studies, the researcher acknowledged her inability to maintain total separation from her biases and life experience and, therefore, indicated how interpretations of meaning were placed on findings (Wertz, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

Phenomenological investigation attempts to gain in-depth meaning or understanding of common experiences by those living through them. Specifically, the value of phenomenological research does not rest in identifying the concrete points of an experience, but rather in the ability to "discover and describe the meaning or essence of participants' lived experiences, or knowledge as it appears to consciousness" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 50). This vantage point is particularly helpful when gleaning information from White school counselors whose worldviews are molded by the unique and delicate intersection of their professional role as counselor, their personal racial identity, and the alliances they choose to forge. Finally, phenomenology is an appropriate research design to pair with an integrated Relational Cultural and Critical Race Theoretical framework in that it emphasizes the importance of relational connection and the significance of sociopolitical implications of race in the school setting (Miller, 1988; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Taylor et al., 2009). The design of this study highlighted the lived voices of participants, which is consistent with Critical Race Theory and phenomenological research design (Taylor et al., 200; Hays & Singh, 2012).

Scholar-practitioners built Relational Cultural-Theory on the Feminist and Multicultural movements of psychology. Specifically, Relational Cultural Theory embraces many social justice aspects of the aforementioned paradigms – highlighting the impact of power differentials within personal and societal growth and development. Roles of domination and subordination are underscored by the Central Relational Paradox (CRP) which assumes that all people possess a tendency towards relationships that validate acceptance by others. Many individuals evolve to hold a false belief that there are elements about them which are unacceptable or unlovable and thus, they develop barriers to creating authentic relationships – the fundamental factor for growth of self and society. These tenets are evident in the school counselor – student relationship. A power differential exists between students and the school counselor. As reinforced by societal norms, adults have power over students – particularly in the academic setting. While many school counselors seek alliance with and advocate for students, these efforts can be further inhibited by power differentials imposed by racial difference.

Critical Race Theory addresses ways in which historical truths affect the current sociopolitical and educational structures in the United States in addition to theoretically frame the issue of White awareness of Whiteness as a construct (Gillborn, 2005). White school counselors who seek to deeply understand their relationship with students of color and the social, educational, and political context in which they operate must attend to the historical and current interplay between politics, law, and educational policy since those elements provide the framework within which school counselors and their students operate (Taylor et al, 2009). In particular, White school counselors who wish to obtain ally relationships with students of color and their families must focus deliberate attention upon Critical Race Theory tenets.

This study seeks to explore how White school counselors come to identify, or be identified as allies to students of color. Literature exploring White identity and ally development suggests that ally behavior and identity is congruent with developing relational competence across race and ethnicities which, in turn, allows all individuals involved to grow into increasingly productive and conscious members of society. The intersections of White identity and racial justice ally aspiration have not been explored with respect to how they may impact the work of school counselors. Therefore, the primary researcher of this study aims to better understand the essence of this phenomenon.

Method

At the center of qualitative research exists the concept that only by considering individual's subjective experiences can scholars begin to make sense of the world (Hays & Singh, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005). While there are a variety of qualitative research traditions, a phenomenological approach works best to explore the topic of this study because it provides a method of understanding the lived experiences of a phenomenon among a particular group of people or individual (Creswell, 2007). Researchers have developed an assortment of research traditions appropriate to phenomenological-based research including: interviews, conversations, participant observation, action research, focus meetings, and analysis of personal texts. Regardless of the particular data collection method used, all phenomenological researchers aim to understand what meaning those who have experienced a particular phenomenon assign to their experience in order to present a more comprehensive understanding of the particular phenomenon.

Hayes and Singh (2012) indicated that, "According to phenomenologists, human experience can be understood only by ignoring or setting aside prior explanations of phenomena

found in literature" (p. 50) (Hays & Singh, 2012). Similarly, phenomenological researchers do not judge the data, but rather bracket off personal values and assumptions when gathering participant data through an extensive interview process (Hays & Singh, 2012). This process, referred to as *epoche*, ultimately helps shift the focus onto participants, who are viewed in the process as co-researchers because of their intimate interaction with a phenomenon due to firsthand experience (Hays & Singh, 2012). In this fashion, the primary researcher of this study identified the shared experiences of several interviewees and ultimately presented a comprehensive description of it (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). This process allowed the researcher to describe, as genuinely as possible, the phenomenon of study, curtail any presumptions and remain sincere to the facts as held and communicated by participants (Groenewald, 2004). Finally, the primary researcher selected a phenomenological research tradition because it is considered a rigorous research design and comprehensive approach to examine the meaning White school counselors attach to their aspiration of forming alliances with students of color.

Participants

The primary researcher considered current scholarship to determine participants for this study. Creswell (2009) suggested that five to 25 participants constituted an effective sample size for phenomenological research. Therefore, the researcher utilized purposive sampling and selected 10 White professional public school counselors from which data was collected. Specifically, six White female participants and four White male participants constituted the participant group for this study. All participants who were selected worked in public schools in the Southeastern region of the United States (U.S.). The researcher purposively selected participants who self-identified as racially White and as aspiring racial justice allies to students of color. The original participants were contacted through a professional networking website

hosted by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA Scene). ASCA Scene is a professional meeting place for school counseling professionals to share and learn from each other. Professionals can create individual discussions for others to join. The primary researcher created a group explaining this study, related terminology, and the need for participants who identify as White school counselors who also aspire to become racial justice allies to their clients of color in the Southeastern United States.

Procedure

The participants of this study were selected using purposive sampling. This approach has come to exemplify building rigor into a research study and allows the researcher to select participants according to criteria pertinent to the central research question (Hays & Singh, 2012). Participants self-identified as being interested in participating in this study by responding to a post made on a professional networking website. Additionally, snowball sampling was used as a technique for gathering research subjects through initial subjects providing the researcher with the other additional participant contact information. In this case, snowball sampling was placed within a wider set of methodologies to utilize the social networks of identified respondents, which were used to provide a researcher with an escalating set of potential contacts. The sampling methods utilized allowed the researcher to summarize and explain the themes or the "essence" of the participants' experiences regarding how they experience aspiring racial justice ally identity development.

Participants targeted for this study met the following criteria: (a) work as a professional school counselor in the Southeastern United States (U.S.); (b) racially identify as White; and (c) identify as an aspiring ally to students of color. Prior to recruitment, the primary researcher requested approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on Studies Involving Human

subjects at the University of Georgia. Upon approval, the researcher activated the aforementioned protocol to seek individuals who meet predetermined participant descriptors.

During the participant recruitment process, a thorough description of the purpose and design of the study was explained to participants. The researcher also informed each participant about potential benefits and possible risks of participating in the study verbally through the consent for participation sheet (Appendix A). Ultimately, 10 White school counselors (four male and six female) participated in individual interviews which lasted approximately 30-60 minutes each. The researcher maintained that the small sample size allowed for rich, deep data collection regarding personal experiences of participants with respect to their racial ally development to students of color. To validate accuracy, participants examined interview data after the research team transcribed and coded it. The purpose of this review was to help the primary researcher, and her research team, determine whether they correctly reflected the meaning of participants' experiences. This process, known as member checking, was utilized to strengthen standards and verify the results of the study of the study (Creswell, 2009).

Throughout the study, the primary researcher and the research team maintained confidentiality to the utmost in order to adhere to legal and ethical expectations. Specifically, the primary researcher considered participants' rights to privacy and anonymity. In accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (1991) all data (transcriptions, code books, interview recordings, etc.) utilized pseudonyms to protect the privacy and identity of each participant.

Researcher as an Instrument

Before conducting research, it was necessary to describe the positionality of the primary researcher to consider how it may intersect with research conducted (Creswell, 2007). At the time of study, the primary researcher identified as a White, heterosexual female who worked as a

middle school counselor in a suburban school system positioned outside a large metropolitan city in the Southeast United States. The researcher acknowledged that her prior experiences and beliefs may have influenced the research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Specifically, because of her racial identity and professional position, at times she identified closely with the participants in the study. Furthermore, because of her experiences as an aspiring racial justice ally to students of color, she had proximity to the topic that could affect her interpretation of data. Since she identified as an insider to the culture studied, she was aware of and sensitive to her personal position throughout the research process to ensure that data truthfully mirrored the reality of the participants rather than the viewpoint she personally held (Yeh & Inman, 2007).

The researcher's experiences as a professional school counselor, as they intersect with White identity and racial justice ally behavior, enabled genuine rapport to be established and increased between herself and participants. This common thread offered participants a sense of security while sharing their lived experiences. To address the researcher's closeness to the topic, member checking was used to strengthen the study. Hays & Singh (2012) suggested that researchers use member checking as a key strategy for creating trustworthiness (Hays & Singh, 2012). Member checking involved participants in the research process by making sure the researcher accurately interpreted their intended meaning when identifying overall themes and helped the researcher test her "goodness of fit" when developing findings (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Another important step the researcher took during the phenomenological research process was bracketing, which entailed the researcher setting aside her personal views of the phenomenon and focusing on those views of the participants (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). In this study the researcher bracketed her views by suspending preconceived assumptions of the phenomena while each individual interview took place. In addition, the researcher consistently

reflected on the experiences of the participants in order to keep the understandings they communicated at the forefront of the study to increase reflexivity (Hays & Singh, 2012).

In an effort to remain continuously reflexive and mindful of the potential effects of researcher biases concerning the study, the primary researcher also kept a reflexive journal and kept memos throughout the research process. This documentation prompted the researcher to disclose researcher bias and helped the primary researcher examine how she and subjective elements could possibly impinge on, and even transform, research. This increased the overall trustworthiness of the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). This process was implemented after each interview and/or interaction with each participant. The primary researcher noted details of her thoughts, feelings, and assumptions throughout the research process. The primary researcher also analyzed and discussed reflexive journal entries with the research team during research team meetings.

The primary researcher employed a research team throughout the course of the study. Establishing a research team enhanced trustworthiness. Research team discussions addressed topics such as biases – specifically those related to race, privilege, and professional identity and how the aforementioned topics could possibly influence the researcher's explanation or response to sensitive issues presented by participants. Since the primary researcher was a White school counselor who desires to become a racial justice ally to the students of color, it is possible that without the support of a research team to frequently monitoring for biases and personal interpretation that her positionality could have resulted in biased writing and interpretations.

Research Team

The research team consisted of the primary researcher and two other research assistants. One research assistant was an African American female who had extensive experience as a

teacher and professional school counselor in public school settings. The other research assistant was an African American male who had professional experience as the director of disability services at a large southeastern university and also experience working with youth diagnosed with behavior disorders. Both, like the primary researcher, were doctoral students in counseling and personnel services with an emphasis on social justice.

Prior to beginning the study, the research team met to discuss possible biases and bracket as appropriate. A few topics the primary researcher focused on in the initial meeting were: racial identity, ally development/ identity, and the professional role of the school counselor. Furthermore, they met bi-weekly throughout the research process and additionally as needed in order to code and find themes within the data (Creswell, 2007).

Higher-order codes were identified and clustered together to more comprehensively describe the phenomenon focused upon in this study. Specifically, the researchers created a codebook using constant comparison to provide structure for the research team when identifying and expounding upon themes. In this way the codebook became evolutionary in nature, offering a continuous process in which early code systems offered structure for future data (Hays & Singh, 2012). This codebook also provided a manner for systematic analysis of data (Hays & Singh, 2012). Each team member individually reviewed the participants' transcripts and independently developed a codebook from the transcripts. The codebooks were then discussed during bi-weekly research team meetings and common themes were reviewed by the team. Then, clarification and description of the phenomenon continued using comparative pattern analysis, which involved researchers shifting back and forth through sorted data to comprehend how clusters of data are similar and dissimilar, all the while expanding on the organization of data collected through the interview processes (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Data Collection

Solorzano and Yosso (2009) explained that tenets of Critical Race methodology include that which a) highlights race and racism throughout the research process, b) challenges traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color, c) offers a liberatory or transformative solutions to racial, gender and class power-over structures, d) focuses on the experiences around race, gender and class of people of color, and e) utilizes the knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history humanities, and law to better understand the experiences of students of color. Along the same lines, Jordan (2010) suggested that depth and detail of research must become increasingly rigorous to better understand relational practices and cultural circumstances of counseling practice.

In accordance with the research style that Solorzano and Yosso (2009) and Jordan (2010) spoke to and the theoretical perspective for this study (an integrated Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory framework), the primary researcher used interactive interviewing as a framework, from which she built the interview process. Interactive interviewing allowed the researcher and participants to participate in transparent conversational dialogue through narrative exchange (Hays & Singh, 2012). Furthermore, this type of interviewing allowed for value to be placed on both the content of the interview and the experience the interview itself had on the interviewee and interviewer, including social and historical context.

Moreover, the interviews were given a semi-structured format as the way the primary researcher gleaned data from participants in the interactive interviewing style. The researcher designed each interview prompt to facilitate the development of ideas as they related to the phenomena studied: How do White school counselors experience and conceptualize racial justice ally identity? These prompts provided a structure for the interview sessions, which allowed the

participants to reconstruct details of their experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012) It was important for

the primary research to bracket her own experiences and emotional connections to the topic of

study in order to successfully collect interview data (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Prior to asking any probing questions the researcher began by asking each participant to

answer several demographic questions (Appendix B). The background questions established

foundational information about each participant (Hays & Singh, 2012).   The bulk of the

interview, however, was clustered into three phases: a) life history of the participant; b) details

of the participant's lived professional experience; and c) assigning value and meaning to

experience (Appendix C).

Data Analysis

As described, a semi-structured approach to individual interviewing was the initial means

of data collection in this study (Creswell, 2007). Ten participants were interviewed for around

30-60 minutes each. Then, a follow-up connection was used to member check and review

transcripts from the initial interviews with each participant. The participants were invited to

clarify their answers and enhance and/or delete content to ensure accuracy of their experiences.

Since open-ended questions concerning White school counselor racial justice ally aspirations

were used during the interviews, the researcher requested that participants use their expert

knowledge on this topic while reviewing data in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

The data collection and analysis process was recursive in nature in order to strengthen

verification procedures in the study. As touched upon previously, this research and data analysis

process included five steps: (a) address and bracket researcher biases; (b) analyze individual

interview transcripts; (c) maintenance of a reflexive journal by the primary researcher to monitor

biases and assumptions throughout the data collection process; (d) data analysis (including

summary statement table to represent the experiences of participants) and (e) cluster statements of participants (Creswell, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012). Once the primary researcher attended to the preliminary tasks, she also completed the following in order to triangulate data and add to trustworthiness: (a) listened to individual interview tapes; (b) listened to interview tapes while reading coordinating transcripts to determine truthfulness; (c) reviewed transcripts numerous times to highlight comments the participants made which described their experiences; (d) clustered highlighted phrases into a summary statement table (e) produced a codebook based on domains of meaning from the clustered summary statements; (f) verified content and meaning with each participant to ensure accuracy of experiences; and (g) recursively reevaluated findings as necessary through research group meetings and readdressing transcripts and recordings.

Throughout this process, the primary researcher maintained an audit trail to ensure rigor and comprehension of the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). After the data was collected and examined, the primary researcher presented it to the auditor, who reviewed the results and conclusions to guarantee confirmation by the data. The auditor was a White female, professional school counselor with training and experience in conducting qualitative research. Furthermore, the auditor had training on social justice principles, including White privilege and racial justice.

Trustworthiness

This study utilized rich, thick descriptions as a way to enhance trustworthiness, but also as a way to frame data interpretation and reporting (Hays & Singh, 2012; Maxwell, 2005).   This description was evidenced in the final study report and also included in the audit trail. Furthermore, this study employed several verification processes to increase trustworthiness. For instance, the researcher clarified her biases, utilized member checks, and worked with an external auditor (Creswell, 2007).

Specifically, the researcher exercised reflexivity to acknowledge the primary researcher's co-construction of knowledge as it appears in the study. Additionally, she tempered life experiences and their invariable implications with member checking (Hays & Singh, 2012). Also, recorded interviews, researcher notes and memos (from interviews), transcriptions, codebooks, research group dialog, reflexive journal, and an auditor's report provide the multiple forms of evidence at various parts of the study needed to supports and better describe findings. This multi-layered method provided evidence of trustworthiness – known as triangulation (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The research team came to consensual validation through lengthy discussions regarding the research findings and process (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, the primary researcher made a genuine attempt to be open and honest with the participants with respect to the goals of the study to find out more about the insights and experiences of White school counselors who aspire to be racial justice allies with students of color. The primary researcher also informed participants that their contributions may ultimately help to isolate ways in which more White school counselors can work to become racial justice allies with students of color.

Findings

This study explored the essence of how White school counselors develop to take on the identity of 'racial justice ally' to students of color. The individuals who participated in this study self-identified as professional school counselors in the Southeastern United States. Participants also identified as White aspiring racial justice allies to students of color.

Purposive sampling was used to provide the researcher with a set of participants who could speak specifically to the phenomena of White school counselors as racial justice allies to students of color given the qualifications above. Furthermore, snowball sampling was used as a

means to escalate the set of potential contacts allowed the researcher to summarize and explain the themes or the "essence" of the participants' experiences regarding how they experienced aspiring racial justice ally development. The call for participants was designed to attract participants from the Southeast United States, however, ultimately participants' geographic location was largely represented by White professional school counselors who work and reside in the states of Virginia and Georgia – likely a result of the snowball sampling for gathering research subjects. School counselors who responded to the initial call for participants tended to recommend additional White professional school counselors who also identified as racial justice allies to students of color in close geographic proximity due to their professional interactions with those recommended participants.

Additional specifics regarding study participants can be found in table form as an appendix (Appendix D). Participants varied in terms of years of school counseling experience (two – 20 years), school level (elementary, middle, and high), and school setting (urban, suburban, and rural). Also, participants' location of origin and family of origin structure/belief system(s) were diverse in nature.

Themes

Seven overarching themes were developed from analysis of data through coding, organizing, and discussing the data. The researcher named themes from analyzing coded data and positioning it against the relational cultural and critical race theoretical framework and considering core tenets of each. Specifically, the researcher organized data by themes of: (a) significance of race; (b) property rights; (c) understanding inequity; (d) rejection of Eurocentrism; (e) growth-fostering relationships; (f) relational competence; and (g) power differentials. Additionally, several sub-themes were identified through the data analysis process.

In the theme of significance of race, color blindness was identified as a subtheme. Under the overarching theme of understanding inequity, White guilt was identified as a sub-theme. Also, the researcher used the emic code "they're like me" as a subtheme under growth-fostering relationships to organize data participants shared about their experiences in youth sports with students of color.

      Significance of Race. Largely, participants agreed that school counselors should recognize the significance of race and saw this recognition as a professional responsibility. Recognizing the significance of race is a supposition of Critical Race Theory. Many informants communicated the importance of awareness of racial and cultural differences between themselves and the students and families with whom they work. Furthermore, several participants discussed how they felt that awareness of their own racial identity helped them increase their ally and advocacy behaviors. One participant, Christine, described advocating on behalf of students as part of her professional responsibilities, but also indicated that it affected her racial and ally identities as well:

> I feel like I was just doing my job as a counselor and I would do that for any student. But I feel like that, um, experience kind of shed some light on, you know, students of color are going to have other challenges than maybe students who are not of color.

Another informant, Kevin, shared his poignant perspective regarding how his White identity influenced his professional identity early on without his awareness and how he is currently working to illuminate his blind spots with respect to his privileges, so that he can become an effective ally:

> I think that early on when I was coming into the profession I thought that, and this is probably wrong, but I thought that I would be able to save everyone, that I would always

see a positive outcome, and that everything I would do I would just save the world's problems and I think, too, that race may have played into that because I think that maybe the way I was trying to connect and where I was coming from really made it tough for me to make a connection. Even though I tried not to come off as better and what-not, I wasn't aware of my privilege and I think that as I have grown in my profession I have come to understand those things better and, hopefully, it has helped me to make a better connection to those of another race.

One participant, Ruthie, whose work experience has been in high schools in an urban setting with predominantly African American populations, explained how she perceives a lack of awareness around the significance of race as detrimental:

I've had other colleagues … that just, you know, feel as if there's just … no differences, or, or, or, or working as if there is an equal playing field. Um, when in fact, you know, a number of African-American students or the number of the first time high school diplomas, or the number of dropouts, you know, are, are still, you know, high in the African-American settings. So I feel like we have to make, you know, some adjustments to insure that those students are given the type of support that they need.

Furthermore, Ruthie expounded upon her professional experience(s) as working in a setting in which she was not a part of the racial majority, and shared how she felt that shifted her perspective with respect to race:

I mean, you look different, you know, uh, it's like oh, there's the one white girl … that's how you're identified, you know … it's been a different experience, it's been really interesting actually for me to kind of take in.

Several additional participants shared that they felt that increased experience(s) working with students of color offered them a more comprehensive view of the academic systems in which students are educated. One participant, Christina, expressed how she felt her experience working in an elementary school in Virginia consisting of an entirely Hispanic population helped her better serve students of color after she relocated to a middle school in Georgia that consisted predominantly of White students. She explained:

> In my current setting, I mean it's definitely different and I feel like as someone who has the background that, that I have, like I, I maybe see things differently from maybe professionals who've strictly worked in that more affluent, um, non-diverse setting. So I feel like, you know, a lot of times, teachers are not looking at the whole child, they're not taking cultural or racial factors into consideration. Um, and they have their own set of assumptions, you know, about a certain, certain group of students. So I think sometimes as a counselor in that environment, you really have to challenge those assumptions, um, and really, um, use your advocacy and tools, you know, to be an ally for those, those students.

Furthermore, Ruthie had worked in high schools in urban settings consisting of students who predominantly identified as African American prior to her most recent school setting, which is an elementary school consisting of predominantly White students. She expressed that she feels that the administrators at her current setting do not have a comprehensive understanding of barriers student may face due to the way they reacted during her interview when she communicated that she worked with students at the high school level who were struggling to graduate. She reflected on her experience interviewing for the most recent position:

"[I]t was a complete unaware – like, it, it was as if they didn't understand that this was

one student out of several that would not be walking across the stage [to graduate]. And

for several different reasons, you know, whether it was, you know, grew up with a family

that were, you know, drug dealers, or parents were in prison or grew up in foster care, or

got pregnant, or you know, uh, born addicted to cocaine, whatever the issue might be, I

was immediately just able to tell the person really had no clue

Color Blindness. For some, color blindness has become a 'strategy' for coping with

racism. In this view, individuals claim not to see the color of people's skin because they feel it

should not matter. This notion was social constructed as a way to encourage people to ignore

ethnicity and race when they form impressions of others because they believe having a

consciousness around skin color indicates racism (Hitchcock, 2003). This idea was a sub-theme

under the major theme 'significance of race,' since the research team agreed that the data

indicated that a color blind modus operandi grew from racial majority (White) identity.

Jeffery, a participant who spent his early years in Pennsylvania before moving to South

Carolina for middle school, talked about how race was handled in his family:

[I]t really wasn't a thing within the family where race wasn't talked about much – it was

kind of just understood that you treat people the way you would want to be treated and

you treat others fairly

Christine, who grew up in an area in Virginia populated almost entirely with White people,

talked about her similar familial experience growing up:

I don't remember like growing up, my family specifically talking about issues of race.

Um, but I feel like just off of the way I was raised, is that we were kind of accepting of

all people and that race necessarily wasn't a factor .

Francis had a similar experience growing up in Florida, but upon discussing her childhood as it intersected with race she was able to recall that there was one Black student at her school:

> I don't really have a strong memory of, oh, I'm white and somebody else looks different. Um, and I mean, I guess it was obvious when I was in private school, because there was like a black child in our school [but] he was – he was friends with everyone [so] it never really stuck out.

One participant, Kevin, indicated that he attended a very White-dominated school in elementary school and then was sent to a private middle school for the first year of middle school. It was not until he attended the public middle school that he had exposure to people of races other than his own:

> I realized that other students were different from me racially and culturally and um, they had different ways of going about doing things and so that was an eye opening experience for me to realize that I had almost lived in like a bubble or my parents kind of shielded me from that … In fact, thinking back, I remember that my parents actually, for 6th grade my parents actually sent me to a private school before going to the public school, you know, kind of down town. So in that way you could say that although they weren't saying, 'we don't want you exposed to other races', but that sending me to that private school was kind of their way of keeping me away from that.

Another participant, Karen, also discussed a time in adolescence where she began to develop a deeper awareness of race. She talked about how she lived in a homogenous, White neighborhood but attended a more diverse school population. She indicated that the school increased its diversity by bussing African American students into the district from another part of town:

When I was in school in Florida, um, there was a significant number of … African-American students, um, in my school but, um, none in my neighborhood, at all. I think all the African-American students that I can remember were bussed.

Karen went on to discuss how her paradigm shifted when she moved from Florida to Virginia:

I was in seventh grade when we moved to Virginia and when I found out I was going to be riding a school bus, I was a little bit shocked. Because to me, that the implication was that was we were in a very different kind of neighborhood

In addition to sharing personal experiences that emerged under the sub-theme of color blindness, the researcher and her team also noted several professional experiences that also evidenced this sub-theme. For instance, Sandy explained her thoughts about how race impacts the work of school counselors:

I think a lot of the kids, um, are able to, just find someone that's caring or that they can relate to and I don't think that race plays a big role in it. I think maybe initially sometimes, maybe if I just meet someone or if I go, you know, and they don't know me yet, I'm not sure if that's a race thing or if that's a, um, you know, just trying and, and, and someone that they don't know yet, um, like teenagers do.

Another participant, Crystal, had a similar outlook on race in schools:

Well, I just feel like it doesn't matter, um, it doesn't really matter what color skin they are – I just look at them as students and I want every student to be successful, to fulfill their potential and reach their goals.

Property Rights. A core tenet of Critical Race Theory, recognition of property rights rather than human rights as a foundation for societal structure remains a fatal flaw in the current United States culture. In this vein, the theme of property rights was identified during data

analysis. Participants consistently communicated that they noticed property rights as creating barriers to human rights, and often formed access problems for students of color – creating conditions for which alliances and advocacy were needed in order to work to work within and around the system(s) that oppressed students. Francis discussed how her worldview has shifted based on her role as an ally in that it has caused her to see the societal emphasis on property rights more clearly:

> I think [my work as an ally] made me realize that the world is not as fair as we all like to think that it is, you know like that in America, even though we say there is no segregation and there – and everyone is treated equally, that it's not – it's not really like that, um, you know, that people are really struggling and they are really treated differently, um, a lot of times, like even to the way that they look or where they come from or what they have or don't have.

Ruthie also explained what she has experienced in practice when working with students of color with respect to the attitudes and beliefs of some of her coworkers who place emphasis (willingly or unwittingly) on property rights rather than civil rights:

> I've found some of the counselors that I've worked with just catering to the students … that have the most parental support, they're going to have the higher incomes, they're living in the nicer areas of town. And then you have this huge subset of these other students that are not being serviced, in my opinion, as well by other counselors because there is not a notion or expectation that they're – that they should go to college.

Christine further explained her sentiments around the same concept when she explained the inequities that she noted in her work setting(s) and surrounding context, and how that made her feel:

I remember … feeling very frustrated and, and sad that things were, you know, seemed to be unfair … feeling like you know that's, it was just, you know, like a saddening, uh, uh, you know a sad feeling to think how are things so different, just because this little community is primarily Hispanic and you know, I felt like, okay, I think that the county needs to put like all the PTA money in, like a big pile and distribute it equally throughout the school.

Jeffery also elaborated about how his shift in consciousness around property and human rights prompted a change in his political suppositions. In particular, he shared how differently he began to view the world once he was part of a school counseling doctoral program:

I started my PhD program at [a university in the Southeastern United States] during the first Obama presidential race, so by that time I was a big supporter of democrats and the democratic cause. But, taking the political affiliation away from it, I think what happened was that I really realized what it meant to be disadvantaged and how important it is for a society to understand that and acknowledge it and support those who have less and need it. So, that was a huge transition for me in my thinking and it really, it *really* goes back to having the opportunity to really being able to look at my values and my place in the world and what it means to have White privilege and how that effects my place in the world and what I thought about it.

Christine passionately described a situation involving property rights at the middle school (which is predominantly populated by White students) where she currently works. In this anecdote Christine explained how African American students who did not live in the affluent, predominantly White school district area were treated (and how she intervened on their behalf) when her school became a 'choice' school:

I remember my first year at my current school, I knew it was called a choice school [to

mean that if] their [home] school did not meet adequate yearly progress, parents could …

bring them to, to our school, which was performing, you know, to the academic

standards. And I remember just being just really appalled at the response of the staff to

the choice students. It was kind of like, oh, here comes, you know, the riff-raff, and, um,

a lot of those students were students of color. There was just a whole negative feeling,

um, you know, around that group of students. And I just, I, I really could not believe it

because [the students'] parents are taking the initiative, they're taking the steps, like to do

what's going to be best for their children, get them in this positive, um, environment.

And I remember that, you know, going to administration and talking about [it].

Christine also discussed how she took action on behalf of students in other ways:

[O]ne of the things that I ended up doing as a counselor, you know, is offering, um, a

support group for those students to help them acclimate to the school, as well as, know …

they had someone there that was on their side, and, and trying to, um, you know, help

them build those relationships between the teachers and, and be part of, uh, you know,

the school environment.

Understanding Inequity. Critical Race Theory also lays the foundation for this theme

as it draws practitioner attention to considering and analyzing racial inequities. Throughout the

interview process, many participants spoke to their own awareness of racial inequities and

privileges as they experienced them. During his interview, Bobby also spoke about the benefits

of being aware of race. In his experience it at the high school where he works, which is also a

predominantly White institution, he felt that his awareness of race allowed him to recognize

inequities:

I saw a pretty big [racial and socioeconomic] divide between students in regular classes and students in the more rigorous classes and, in my opinion, I always felt like the kids who could really use my help weren't in the most advanced classes, a lot of the times because they were placed in lower classes by teachers because they didn't have the best relationships with their teachers or didn't have strong support systems at home.

Another participant, Christine, also elaborated on her experiences as a school counselor and how they have increased her awareness about inequities and empowered her to become more engaged in addressing racism:

[B]efore I was a counselor and … I heard a racial comment, I probably would have just – it would have disturbed me … but now, I mean I will say something back to that. Because … I take it personally now because I feel like these are kids and families, um, you know, that I have worked with and know and love them and … I stand up for prejudice and injustices because of my experiences.

Another participant, Kevin suggested how the doctoral program of which he is currently a student has supported his understanding of inequities due to it being structured around social justice principles:

I think that becoming more educated and going through the doctoral program I am going through right now has allowed me to see more of the impact race has and, in particular to see the impact my own race has and how I have maybe taken things for granted and it's made me consider the privilege and everything else that goes with it, you know, being a White male. That has helped me be more understanding and not so quick to judge or assume or just to be able to kind of understand, I mean, I can't *understand* what they are going through, but I can, I can, I am able to understand my privilege and what I have.

Another participant, Jeffery, discussed the journey towards more clearly understanding inequities, and his contribution to them, stating:

It's really difficult to look at yourself and realize that you may be playing a role or a part in continuing oppression and holding someone down. It's difficult to look at yourself and realize that all of the things that you have could be impacting why you really are not making a connection or making a difference. It's easier to just say, 'well, I'm gonna try to help, but I'm not really going to try as much as I could because I don't want to confront and dig deep because it could be kind of ugly, so I don't want to see what's there so I'm just going to keep doing what I'm doing', but I'm not really making the impact I could be making.

Francis, another participant also shared her understanding of inequities affected her and caused her to reflect on the various identities and privileges she holds:

It's all just a very, um, very kind of eye-opening and … has made me realize, um, the – the – the many things that I've been fortunate to have in my life, you know, with being a white and middle class, woman who was raised, you know, in that kind of – a white neighborhood where everybody had and nobody ever didn't have and – and so working with families that are not in that same situation, it's been just very eye opening how very easy my life has been compared to some of the others.

Christine also discussed this element at length, indicating how she seeks to be intentional about integrating conversations around awareness of inequities in her day-to-day dialog with her young son:

Now having my own son, I mean I feel like I want to educate him and, um, on the importance of, you know, compassion and kindness to all people, not that you know I

was not educated to be compassionate and kind, but … we didn't have discussions around

racial issues. Um, so I mean that's definitely something that I am intentional about,

speaking with, with him about. I mean even went kind of the choices, you know, and

where we would purchase our home, I wanted him to be in an environment that was a

little more diverse and representative, um, you know of actually what is out there in the

real world.

White Guilt. Some participants discussed a range of emotions around their awareness of

inequities that have emerged from racially charged events and actions embedded in the history of

the United States. From these stories, the researcher identified a sub-theme of 'White guilt'

within the understanding inequities theme. Participants processed and communicated this guilt in

a variety of ways and through a range of emotions. One participant, Sandy, communicated

similar feelings and further elaborated on how her hearing stories of oppression from her

students affected her ally development:

> If you keep all that inside, it's not good for anybody and I think, I think at first it was
>
> hard hearing all the stories, and now I've kind of shifted where, it's not that I'm
>
> desensitized, but, and it's not that I heard it all because I haven't, but I think you just
>
> learn to focus your energy differently. Like you learn to focus on how you can help … if
>
> you don't learn to do that early on, I don't – I think you'll end up getting burned out.

Another participant, Bobby, also shared his feelings of sympathy and discomfort when he

first studied slavery in fourth grade:

> [W]e began to discuss the civil war and enslavement. And, through that discussion, I
>
> remember feeling very uncomfortable because I began to understand why there was this
>
> divide of power between White and Black people … I was embarrassed for White people

and that was the first time where I really did see what it means to be a White person and historically what it means to be a White person and thinking about the White students around me and how [African Americans] might feel about those issues.

Jeffery also reflected on his experiences as a young person growing up and moving from the Northeastern United States to the Southeastern United States and how that experience evoked emotions from him in regards to people of color:

I remember, in the North they didn't share the same attitudes and biases and prejudices that they did in the South, so I remember as a kid feeling a pain within myself knowing that people of color were suffering, you know? And I fully got that and I remember not liking it, but at the same time I'm not saying I was advocating for any kind of change or anything like that because if anything I also felt isolated when I moved to the south.

Rejection of Eurocentrism. Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory both reject Eurocentric ideologies that some traditional counseling theories assume. Several participants spoke about how they integrate this tenet into their theoretical world view and counseling practice. Additionally, participants discussed how they have worked to shift their own through processes and behaviors in ways which address their privileges and reject Eurocentric patterns. Bobby, who is quite new to the field, explained:

I need to be an advocate … for me it's been as much personal as it has spiritual. And so the spiritual I think guides me to be compassionate and the love for people. That love and compassion is what has me consistently check my White privilege and my socioeconomic privilege, my privilege as a male, and just all those things … but I'm still learning about myself as a White male and the privilege that I have and the, um, some of the subconscious prejudices I hold. I mean, there for a while when I first started learning

what White privilege is, it was like a daily thing of 'wow, I need to check that'. I became

aware of the privileges and advantages I have and the way I may have been promoting or

adding to the oppression of people of color.

Paul communicated a similar earnest eagerness to more fully understand structures of

oppression and issues of race, particularly as they intersect with the school counseling

profession:

I was over at Georgia State for my EDS, and … learned about what defines neighborhood

and, and about, uh, privilege and what's, you know, racial privilege and … it's part

learning about the world and, and learning about different cultures … but so much of it

has to do with … me working on myself as a person.

Jeffery spoke to how he felt his doctoral program helped to shift his Eurocentric model of

thinking:

The [University in the United States Southeast] program, their counseling program, is

very focused and based on, um, diversity and the inclusion of diversity issues into the

counseling program and, in fact, it's the basis of the program. I think that a program,

especially at the doctoral level, has to have a major component that addresses diversity

and so, that was a great help to me to really explore the meaning of inclusiveness and

understanding prejudices, bias, and how that effects the counseling field and how we can

work as social justice advocates and, you know, the importance of having that

consideration in all the work we do.

Christine also elaborated on this topic regarding predominantly White middle school where she

currently works:

I work in a school right now where the staff is primarily white, and for whatever reason, … I feel like they are not as at open or, um, to different races, you know, I mean I think our school is primarily white and the teachers are used to teaching to, you know, the white culture … I think a lot of times I have to challenge those with the beliefs of my co-workers … you have to be comfortable with challenging other people

Another participant, Kevin, also spoke about how he experienced 'acting for' as a racial justice ally to students of color:

I think that by being aware and willing to step out of your comfort zone as a White male to be able to say something or advocate by working on different levels – when you go back to the micro- and macro- levels. To consider looking at the whole system and not just one student. I think that's important, but we need to start at the level we're at. If you don't take up the torch and take a stand for what you believe in then you aren't being an ally – you are back to where you were before; acting like your helping. But you're not because you are not completely involved. In theory you might be 'helping' but you aren't doing all you can do.

Francis had a different impression of how she believes school counselors should consider race:

[Y]ou can't put your upper middle [class] white … worldview on a family that's not [the same as race or class]. They don't think the way that you do. You have to stop … you have to examine where you're coming from and try not to put all of your baggage onto somebody else.

Growth-Fostering Relationships. Relational Cultural Theory indicates that both the counselor and client grow through engagement in honest, authentic relationships. Informants who participated in this study echoed the necessity for growth-fostering relationships for school

counselors. One participant, Ruthie, agreed that the more she formed quality relationships with students of color, the more she experienced success as a school counselor:

> I mean, especially working with students of color, as a white counselor, has, you know, defined me and who I am and my skill set to myself and my colleagues and my friends … I enjoy it, I've loved it, I love the relationships I've built with students, with my colleagues, you know, we're friends for life … I've learned that it defines me and I've loved that it's defined me.

Some participants communicated that growth fostering relationships went beyond the realm of professional. Many informants discussed how personal relationships with friends of color created some of the most profound changes in the way they viewed the world. Paul, for example, shared how an adolescent experience with race still helps inform how he thinks about race currently as a school counselor:

> I'm pretty sure we must have been in ninth grade, I think, and we were like talking like cowboys and Indians and I was, I went into like this John Wayne drawl and I said, um, "We don't want your kind around here no –" like and I was just, I didn't even think about what I was saying, I just thought the sense of like this is what they say in the movies and they kind of like walk around like cowboys. And [the African American friend he was talking to] hopped off the bus, and I remember he banged on the, the window of the bus and he flipped me off. And he was like really, really mad. I had no idea what I said. And, um, when we got [home]… he had called me and he was like what did you mean by what you said? And I was like, I don't know what – I don't know what you're talking about. So, um, it was, in hindsight, like he talked about it, he told me how I had hurt him,

and I heard how, heard how he felt. And that was like a really big kind of moment for
me.

In addition to friends, several participants discussed how their family relationships
became growth fostering relationships with respect to their ally identity development. For
example, Sandy felt like her personal choice of who she chose as a husband helped her see the
world differently, and also may have created a scope through which her students viewed her
differently as well. She explained:

Now that I'm married … the Hispanic students are like, well where is your husband

from? … I'm pretty open about stuff if they ask me questions. And I'll tell them, he's

Colombian …I'm open about stuff … it just goes back to being, just being genuine and

being authentic in, in who you are and knowing, you know, who you are and I think the

kids can see that immediately.

Francis also shared about how she handles issues of race in her own family and offered her
perspective as a White woman married to a Hispanic man:

[M]y husband is Hispanic. Um, and that has kind of changed things for me, too, you

know, um, especially with having a child, that kind of changed things, because now I

have a child who was kind of, you know, in between two cultures and I – it does make

me also reflect on … – how are we going to do this ?

"They're Like Me." Participants communicated that many of their first interactions with
peers who identified as a race other than White was through athletics. Therefore, the emic code,
'they're like me', which was used by one participant to describe how he experienced his
involvement with peers of color on his soccer team, was used by the researcher to create a sub-
theme to address the multitude of thoughts informants shared about how youth experiences in

athletics helped them engage in some of their earliest growth fostering relationships with peers of color. For example, one participant, Sandy, indicated that she was always very athletic and suggested that her involvement in sports created many opportunities for her to interact with non-White peers:

> I played all sports and I mean, every sport, at least for a small period of time. So I was always on teams, like basketball, volleyball, track team, um, you know, so I always had interaction [with non-White peers] that way.

Participants widely agreed that their athletic involvement offered them an opportunity to feel like they were part of a closely-knit group which consisted of individuals who did not identify as White. In this sense, participants communicated that they felt that elements of 'us' and 'them' were no longer along color lines, but rather based on the team they played. Paul, for instance, was very involved in soccer and felt that this was an unpopular sport at his school. He indicated that the team created a common interest and passion around which all team-members, regardless of race, were interested in rallying around:

> I was interacting with kids of other races on the soccer field, because, uh, there was guys in my team from Colombia and, um, let's see, there was, um, Guyana, and Latin America as well as we had a couple, um, African-American kids on, on our team, so there was, um, two who their family was African. And so they kind of grew up playing soccer, too … this notion of like I'm also interacting with people who are other races. But they're like me because we play the same sport.

Kevin agreed that his athletic interests helped him become more connected to his non-White peers:

I was fairly active in several sports, so I would say that I had many experiences with people of different races though my involvement with sports and different groups, so that's where I would say most of my experiences with diverse populations came from.

Another participant, Christine, who grew up in a very homogeneous (White) neighborhood and school explained:

I think the earliest relationship I had with a person of color would have been like on my swim team. I swam for the Y, and there was an African-American male. Um, I mean, I think I was around 7th grade, um, like when he, when he joined our, our swim team.

Relational Competence. Participants talked consistently about how they felt their competence with respect to building relationships with their students helped them become more effective allies. This is a core tenet of Relational Cultural Theory. One participant, Bobby, suggested that acting as an ally was very rewarding for him because he experienced his role as an ally as giving much-needed attention to topics that are otherwise dismissed in his setting:

I can tell you that some of the best feelings I have had in my profession in teaching and counseling have been when students of color have come and I have helped validate what they are feeling and I can just sense the appreciation that they have because it's the first time that someone in the school has actually validated what they are saying.

Paul shared about how he has found importance in understanding himself and his White privilege in order to better his professional practice:

I want to, I want to be as knowledgeable about who I'm interacting with … it's part learning about the world and, and learning about different cultures and not being afraid to ask those things, but so much of it has to do with like working on you, like working on you, or like me working on myself as a person.

Many participants agreed that demonstrating elements of authenticity and trust helped them emerge as racial justice allies to students of color. Sandy pointedly about how she felt authenticity helped her develop relationships with the students of color with whom she works:

Just treat them with respect, uh, be authentic… I'm not fake to them. I, you know, I try to compliment people and I try to build people up, but it's never something that's not sincere. So I think just being genuine, authentic, um, and really caring and I think they can tell when people really care and they ask about how you're doing and, you know, you remember things they told you, follow up, following up with them.

Ruthie also relayed that a genuine demeanor and approach is necessary for school counselors to own in order to truly connect with students of color. She warned that in her experience, interactions between White school counselors and students of color can fall flat without a level of authenticity:

There is a push to relate so much to the student and where they're coming from, that it doesn't seem genuine, because [White school counselors] end up losing actually who they are as people. And the students are the best at figuring out, you know, in a heartbeat, whether or not you're coming off as somebody who you really are, or whether you're just trying to relate to them. And so I, I feel like that and especially in school counselors, you know, this will make or break you. So I can't, as a white middle class blonde girl, come into this school, and pretend that I just know anything necessarily about [a student of color's] life.

Ruthie explained further that, in her estimation, White school counselors should be sure to keep their objectives clearly on the students and not self-interest:

You really feel like you just really have to make sure that you're being genuine, your genuine interest is, is the student and not your own personal mission to feel good about how helping poor black kids, really.

Participants generally accepted that by acting authentically, they were able to build trust between themselves and students of color and their families. One White school counselor, Sandy indicated that, for her, building trust had a ripple effect. Once she was trusted by some key stakeholders in the school community (which was largely populated by Latino/a and Hispanic students), others followed:

I think most people [at my school] know that, um, they can trust me … a lot of students I've had their brothers and cousins and so, they kind of already know me when they get her sometimes, or like oh, you – you know my brother, you know my sister, so I guess they had told them about me, or so I had –- I do get a lot of that.

Sandy also talked about her experiences with building trust among the students and families with which she worked in order to provide students with access, resources, and opportunities they may not otherwise consider:

We took a field trip to Washington, D.C., and [a Mexican student's] mom wasn't going to let her go, because a lot of our parents here feel like if you're undocumented, [government officials] can just rip you and take you away at any time … so I was able to talk to mom and take full responsibility for her going and sort of, her mom trusted me, and went on a five day trip to D.C.

Bobby also noticed that it was important for him to consider and speak to the level of trust that exists between him and the students of color with whom he works:

I am working on that and seem to have more and more students who come to me about

issues of race and I have more this year than last year, and it seems like after I work with

one student and they trust me then more seemed to come to me with the same types of

issues.

Power Differentials. Relational Cultural Theory places emphasis on the distribution of

power on systemic and intimate levels. Relational Cultural Theory ascertains that it is important

for counselors to consider their privileges and how they may place them in a position of power in

comparison to their clients. Informants in this study discussed how they should consider and

leverage their power and privileges on behalf of the students with whom they work. Francis

explained this phenomenon:

I just remember when I was in [graduate] school … that's what someone told me. That

my job as a school counselor was … to advocate for [all students] and, you know, the

harder the case they were, the tougher their situation, the more you had to do for them

and I always kind of, I don't know what – when someone said that to me, it just kind of

clicked for me. Like, you know what, that's right, like that is my job.

Francis explained that having a language barrier between herself and her student's parents helped

level the power differential in some ways. While she has specific expert power regarding the

educational system, she has to rely on others in the community to help her disseminate that

information:

I think a lot of it just came from having to feel comfortable with the people around you,

who do speak the language … we have a really great parent liaison at our school, who has

a great connection with our families and I – I found that working with her and just kind of

treating everyone with respect and, um, as much kindness and understanding as I can has

gotten me pretty far with the families.

Bobby commented broadly about his desire to improve his understanding of his own privileges

in order to become a better ally:

I'm still learning about myself as a White male and the privilege that I have and the, um,

some of the subconscious prejudices I hold. I mean, there for a while when I first started

learning what White privilege is, it was like a daily thing of 'wow, I need to check that'.

I became aware of the privileges and advantages I have and the way I may have been

promoting or adding to the oppression of people of color.

Karen also discussed the importance of building trust between herself and the students and

parents of color with whom she works:

Depending on the building I was in and – and the demographics and the, uh, racial

background, sometimes it would – it took, um, more time to – to earn trust … Sometimes

there was a sense of distrust in – in helping the parents to understand that we were all

there to advocate for their – for their student.

Christine echoed Karen's feelings about how privilege and power impact her work:

I think they looked to me as a person who kind of had information and resources that they

needed. And I think I came from a place, instead of trying to use that, that type of

privilege to intimidate, or, or, or make them feel that they were less-than I was, because

you know, I, I was white, or you know, I have citizenship, I kind of took it as a point of

really, you know, I'm here to support you, you can trust me. And I think once I had those

relationships established, then they, they would see kind of the outcome of the support I

was able to give them and it was a really close-knit community and then other parents would say, oh, call the counselor.

Discussion

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to explore how White school counselors experience racial justice ally identity. The primary researcher designed this study to describe the experiences and perceptions of White school counselors who identify as racial justice allies to students of color. The findings of this exploratory study may provide insight to the lived experiences of White school counselors as they grow and develop in their alliance with students of color.

Through data analysis, the primary researcher and her team isolated seven overarching themes (significance of race, property rights, understanding inequity, rejection of Eurocentrism, growth-fostering relationships, relational competence, and power differentials) which intersected with preexisting literature at multiple points as contrasting or supporting. Themes of this study generally meet with current literature around professional counselor identity (Ancis, 2004; ASCA, 2005; Chang, Hays, & Shoffner, 2003; Constantine, 2002; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Sue, 2001; Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002; Vinson & Neimeyer, 2000), White racial identity (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Hays & Chang, 2003; Hays, Dean & Chang, 2007; Helms, 1984, 1990, 1995; Kwan, 2001; McIntosh, 1988), ally identity (Edwards, 2006; Kivel, 2002; O'Brien, 2001; Roades & Moi, 2000) and leisure studies (Braddock, 1981; Brown et al., 1993; La Greca et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2003).

Participants largely agreed that all school counselors should identify, and be qualified based on relationships and actions, as allies to students of color. Concern around counselor cultural self-awareness and its impact on practice is documented in the current literature (Ancis

& Szymanski, 2001; Hays & Chang, 2003; Hays, Chang, & Dean, 2004). While scholars have begun to explore White racial identity and privilege awareness in the field of counseling (Hays et al., 2008) this study reveals particulars around White school counselor racial ally behavior, which is aligned with professional expectations currently held by the American Counseling Association (ACA) through the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002).

Participants discussed acting with and/or on behalf of students of color. This idea has been examined across current counseling literature and is evidenced and made practical through the American Counseling Association's (ACA) Advocacy Competencies, which help structure counseling practice and encourage interventions and strategies that take place on multiple dimensions and levels (Lewis, Arnold, House & Toporek, 2002). The primary researcher noted that language participants used (we/they) was telling regarding how they address their interactions with students; either as something they do collectively or something they do for someone. The participants in this study shared that they act with students and their families of color often within the context of the school setting. Several participants expressed their discomfort in acting with or on behalf of students of color in the public arena – indicating that this may be an area which requires further investigation.

Participants widely communicated that they valued professional development opportunities and graduate school courses of study which focused on issues of diversity and/ or social justice in order to increase their understanding of the population(s) with which they work and their role as an advocate and ally more comprehensively. This is consistent with existing, albeit limited, current research around social justice school counseling (Griffin & Steen, 2010). Participants also shared consistently that aforementioned professional development and graduate

school options often helped them explore their White identity in order to more comprehensively and meaningfully understand their White privilege and how to use it as an ally. Current research around White privilege supports these findings (Edwards, 2006; Hays et al., 2008; Kendall, 2006), but future research in this area will help to more completely understand what type of training and graduate school curriculum could be most helpful.

Participants spoke often about the reason(s) behind why they or other White school counselors they know continue to maintain the status quo even if they know it is counterproductive with respect to impact on students of color. Participant results echoed what is documented in the current literature regarding status quo maintenance in the context of school counseling: scholars often explain the status quo as a silence which maintains White privilege in societies that deliberately minimize discussion around racism and privilege in the school setting (Johnson, 2006). Despite a vast body of literature that stresses the importance of school counselors in addressing inequities that exists in schools (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003; Cox & Lee, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010), few articles provide concrete strategies that school counselors can infuse in their practice (Singh et al., 2010).

Participants were generally aware to some level of their White privilege and the fact that it could be leveraged to change the status quo, however, the researcher(s) used the term *color blindness* to label a collection of comments and anecdotes expressed by participants regarding personal experiences, actions or verbalized feelings representative of them or of their colleagues which lacked a comprehensive understanding about why race is important to consider when working with young people in an academic setting. Scholars address color blindness in the current literature around topics of privilege and oppression (Neville et al., 2000; Pease, 2010).

Researchers have reported that color-blindness is negatively correlated with multicultural knowledge and awareness (Neville et al., 2006; Spanierman et al., 2008).

Existing literature does not address how color blindness differs in school counselors based on the setting in which they work. Participants in this study did discuss how the setting(s) in which they had acquired school counseling experience in terms of level (elementary, middle and high), geographic location (urban, suburban and rural) and racial demographic (predominantly White, Predominantly non-White, or heterogeneous). Overall, participants who had experienced working in a school populated predominantly non-White students communicated a confidence as an ally whether they remained in that setting or transitioned to a predominantly White institution. Furthermore, informants largely indicated that they experienced increased resistance as a racial justice ally to students of color in a predominantly White institution as compared with schools consisting of a heterogeneous or minority-dominated population. The aforementioned points of interest are not addressed in the current body of literature, but further study may further illuminate this phenomenon.

Regardless of the setting(s) in which they worked, many participants shared that demonstrating authenticity and building trust helped them connect better with students of color. This statement is supported by Relational Cultural Theory literature (Jordan, 2010) and the current literature written on the topic of White privilege (Kendall, 2006; Neville et al., 2006). Participants revealed their authentic selves to the students of color with whom they work in a variety of ways, but perhaps most noted by participants was their personal decisions (i.e.: deciding where to purchase a home based on a diverse population, choosing to work in a diverse school, and having a spouse of a different race than their own). This phenomena appears to be a gap in current scholarship at the present time.

The role of athletics was also present as a subtheme below the main theme of growth fostering relationships. This topic stood apart from other themes identified from interviews in that it is more appropriately categorized within the discipline of leisure studies than counseling. At least four of the 10 total participants discussed the role that athletics had during their youth with respect to creating a meaningful and functional context from which they were able to develop relationships with their non-White peers. In fact, most participants communicated that many of their first interactions with peers who identified as a race other than White was through athletics. Researchers in the field of leisure studies (Braddock, 1981; Brown et al., 1993; Hartman, 2000; La Greca et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2003) have explored the role of race in athletics and various intersections of student achievement and athletics.

Hartmann (2000) explained how the athletic showground has the potential to resist or reinforce inequalities in a dynamic environment and, therefore, may act as a point of cultural interconnection for societies. Hoylton (2010) recognized that this racialized processes necessitated the need for a look through a Critical Race theoretical lens which considers structural inequalities as they exist in athletics. Through this analysis, Hoylton called on the research of Gilroy (2002) to acknowledge that organized anti-racism efforts in sports may trivialize the politics of anti-racism and suggests, therefore, that for individuals to truly become allies against racism requires comprehensive attitudinal and behavioral change, not simply participating in an ethically or racially diverse sports team (2010).

Limitations of Study

The results of this study provide important insight regarding the perceptions White school counselors who identify as racial justice allies to students of color. Yet, there are limitations of this study that may have influenced the interpretation of findings. First of all, the primary

researcher who conducted this research identified as a White school counselor and, although she recognized epoche and bracketed biases, the level of influence those biases may have had cannot be deduced. Also, participants shared two (racial and professional) or more identities with the primary researcher who conducted all interviews. Although similarities may have helped participants feel comfortable, shared identities and differences may have affected the way or depth to which the semi-structured interview questions were answered by informants.

Additionally, upon reviewing the primary researcher's memos, it is evident that the primary researcher became increasingly comfortable with the interview protocol and the interview process in general as she got deeper into the research process. The research team noted that the last several interviews of this study were the 'strongest' due to the fact that participants seemed to feel more comfortable and go deeper into the constructed responses they offered during the interview process. Also, the nature of phenomenological research provided the researcher space to minimally alter the way in which she asked questions and/or the order in which she asked questions in order to elicit unadulterated responses from participants, which may have subsequently increased the importance of the final interviews.

Finally, the diversity in geographic location of the participant pool was a limitation. The researcher originally planned to focus on a participant pool from the Southeastern region of the United States. Partly due to chance and partly due to snowball sampling, all participants currently work as school counselors in either Georgia or Virginia. Some participants do, however, have professional counseling experience in other areas of the Southeastern United States from which they drew insight.

Implications for Future Research, Practice and Advocacy

The primary goal of this study was to obtain a deeper understanding around the how White school counselors experience growth towards identifying as an ally with students of color. Findings indicate that this study did, in fact, provide much needed insight into the experiences and perceptions of White school counselors who identify as aspiring racial justice allies through hearing, organizing and analyzing the experiences of participants. In order to obtain increased understanding of how White school counselors can increasingly move towards becoming racial justice allies, more research is needed to explore explicit factors that participants in this study touched on. Such research may better inform future research, practice, and advocacy within the field of school counseling.

Research. Although this study explored the experiences of White school counselors who identify as racial justice allies to students of color, it only generally explored the understanding school counselor racial ally behaviors. Furthermore, it illuminated subthemes of this topic – the understanding of which has the potential to greatly enhance the school counseling profession. Through the insight provided by this study, it is evident that additional research is needed to more comprehensively understand individual factors contributing to racial justice ally development of White school counselors.

For example, participants in this study communicated that they valued professional development opportunities and graduate school courses of study which focused on issues of diversity and/ or social justice in order to increase their understanding of the population(s) with which they work and their role as an advocate and ally more comprehensively. Current literature supports the importance of professional development and graduate school focus on multicultural competence and advocacy (Ancis, 2004; ASCA, 2005; Chang, Hays, & Shoffner, 2003;

Constantine, 2002; Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Sue, 2001; Vinson & Neimeyer, 2000). Individual elements within professional development and graduate school programming that may increase White school counselor's desire to strive toward ally relationships with students of color has not been thoroughly studied.

Also, stories and anecdotes that informants shared suggested that their White, ally, and professional identities are inextricably intertwined, but also that one may become more salient at any given point. Although scholars have studied elements of White, ally, and school counselor professional identity, the exact relationship between the three identities are not known or explored in current literature (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Hays & Chang, 2003; Hays, Dean & Chang, 2007; Helms, 1984, 1990, 1995; Kwan, 2001; McIntosh, 1988). Clearer understanding of the relationship between these identities and their salience may further help scholars and practitioners understand White school counselors as racial justice allies.

Although a comprehensive body of literature emphasizes the importance of school counselors in addressing inequities that exists in schools (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003; Cox & Lee, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010) little literature offers concrete strategies that school counselors can infuse in their practice (Singh et al., 2010). A lack of scholarship around this topic may point to why participants of this study communicated feelings of isolation within academic institutions. Therefore, a need for further exploration around the concrete strategies school counselors can employ to act as social justice advocates continues to exist.

The role that athletics play with respect to interracial relationships among youth was also identified as a subtheme in this study. Specifically, participants discussed the role that athletics

had during their in relationship to creating a meaningful and functional context from which they were able to develop connections to with their non-White peers which they otherwise may not have forged. A review of leisure studies literature exposed literature that explores the nuances of this phenomenon (Braddock, 1981; Brown et al., 1993; Gilroy, 2002; Hartmann, 2000; Hylton, 2010; La Greca et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2003). Therefore, this may be an area of study that could enhance the current body of knowledge.

When prompted during interviews to discuss their ally identity, many participants shared that demonstrating authenticity helped them build trust with students of color and their families; an ideology supported by Relational Cultural Theory literature (Jordan, 2010) and the currently literature written on the topic of White privilege (Kendall, 2006). Participants also suggested that they revealed their authentic selves to the students of color with whom they work in a variety of ways. Several communicated that they made family choices (i.e.: deciding where to purchase a home based on a diverse population, choosing to work in a diverse school or a school in which the White school counselor is in the racial minority, and having a spouse of a different race than their own). Upon reviewing current literature, this phenomena appears to be a gap at present.

When discussing advocacy, some participants in this study referenced the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002) and shared that they are comfortable acting with students and their families often within the context of the school setting. Several participants expressed anxiety around acting with or on behalf of students in the public arena. This finding indicates that the school counseling profession would benefit from further study around how White school counselors can most effectively and professionally advocate for students of color in the public arena.

Finally, a subtheme was identified from the data about the variety of settings in which they have worked in terms of level (elementary, middle and high), geographic location (urban, suburban and rural) and racial demographic (predominantly White, Predominantly non-White, or heterogeneous). Interestingly, participants who had professional experience in a school populated by predominantly non-White students, generally shared increased confidence as an ally whether they remained in that setting or transitioned to a predominantly White institution. Furthermore, informants largely indicated that they experienced increased resistance as a racial justice ally to students of color in a predominantly White institution as compared with schools consisting of a heterogeneous or minority-dominated population. The aforementioned points of interest are not addressed in the current body of literature, but further study may further illuminate this phenomenon.

Practice and Advocacy. This study proposes several implications for practicing White school counselors who aspire to build alliance between themselves and students of color. First of all, findings from this study suggest that White school counselors should be intentional about selecting graduate school and professional development programming that will encourage their ally identity development, including an increased understanding of their points of privilege and how to utilize them for social justice advocacy.

Also, findings produced from this study reinforce extensive research around the need for school counselors to regularly engage the ACA Advocacy Competencies in practice (Ancis, 2004; ASCA, 2005; Chang, Hays, & Shoffner, 2003; Constantine, 2002; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Sue, 2001; Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002; Vinson & Neimeyer, 2000). Findings suggest that graduate programs and professional

development trainings that are focused around social justice tenets and ACA Advocacy

Competencies may best prepare counselors for practice as aspiring racial justice allies.

Additionally, participants in this study who had experience(s) working at schools in

which they were the racial minority communicated a strong sense of empowerment behind their

ally identity and advocacy work, whether they continued working in the same setting or

transferred to another school which consisted of a White racial majority student body.

Therefore, school counselors may want to consider varying the school context(s) in which they

work in order to integrate settings with a variety of racial demographics. Similarly, counselor

preparation programs may find value in exposing students to internship and practicum programs

in which school counseling students are able to glean experience working in a variety of settings

and with students of a myriad of races.

Furthermore, findings from this study suggest that participant's ally behaviors and

identities were strengthened by taking inventory of the various privileges and identities they

hold, mirroring current research in the field (Hays, Chang, Havice, 2008). They expressed that

this exercise allowed them to more objectively situate their role as a professional school

counselor and ally within their school context. Therefore, use of a racial identity model (i.e.

Edwards, 2006) may be helpful to guide White counselors' growth towards understanding and

embracing their racial identity to consider its intersection with professional and ally identities.

Additionally, findings from this study suggest that authenticity in interactions between White

school counselors and the students of color with whom they work helped participants build

positive rapport and trust within their relationships with students of color. Participants in this

study found that by offering genuine feedback to students, showing a sincere interest in their

lives, integrating themselves in diverse communities, and expressing that they are part of a

diverse or interracial family group helped build authenticity and, subsequently, trust in their relationship with students of color. Therefore, White school counselors who wish to make strides toward becoming an ally to the students of color with whom they work may also find these strategies successful.

Conclusion

Participants in this study exposed that identifying as a racial justice ally to students of color is as personal a pursuit as much as it is a professional. Therefore, White school counselors may wish to integrate professional development opportunities that focus on topics related to professional, racial, and ally identify development. Also, this study revealed that participants (White school counselors) who work to build trust through relationships with students of color by expressing these identities in an authentic way identified strongly as racial justice allies to the students of color with whom they work.

White school counselors must remain mindful that their work as allies to students of color and their families contains great meaning, potential, and responsibility. Participant statements in this study highlighted experiences of practicing White school counselors who identify as racial justice allies to students of color. In this way, strides were made towards understanding the essence of what it means to be a White school counselor who is also an aspiring racial justice ally to students of color.

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CHAPTER 4

"IT AIN'T ALL BOOK LEARNED": TRANSITIONAL SPACES EXPERIENCED

FROM PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY OF WHITE SCHOOL COUNSELORS

THROUGH A CRITICAL RACE AND RELATIONAL CULTURAL THEORETICAL LENS[3]

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Abstract

This piece chronicles a personal dissertation process and relates it to the wider world of qualitative research. The researcher reflects on internal tensions created through the research process and utilizes Elizabeth Ellsworth's (2005) explanation of transitional space as a metaphor to analyze researcher dilemmas which occurred during the research process as perceived through a Relational Cultural and Critical Race theoretical lens. The researcher describes her experience as funneling through transitional space while researcher dilemmas actively encountered her throughout the data analysis and reflexivity processes. In particular, the researcher discusses three such dilemmas: color blindness, counselor education, and personal and professional identity intersections.

INDEX WORDS: School Counseling, White School Counselors, Racial Justice Allies,
                         Critical Race Theory, Relational Cultural Theory, Advocacy,
                         Phenomenology, Transitional Space

Introduction

Qualitative research is a deeply personal experience (Thomas & Gunter, 2010). Although rooted in scholarly literature, the research question explored in this study (How do White school counselors experience and conceptualize racial justice ally identity?) ultimately emerged through personal interests. In some ways my individual efforts parallel those of other scholars, yet in other ways remain unique. Thus, I, seek to effectively narrate my dissertation research process as I have experienced and conceptualized it as related to topic studied, theoretical selections, study findings, methodology, and three qualitative researcher tensions: school counselor education, professional and personal intersectionality, and color blindness (Thomas & Gunter, 2010). I intellectualize the triadic researcher tensions as existing within a transitional space which I, as the researcher, actively funneled through in order to arrive at my final conceptualization of the research experience (Ellsworth, 2005).

Ellsworth, a material feminist, pedagogy expert, artist, and social justice scholar, wrote about transitional space in her text, *Places of Learning: Media, Architecture, Pedagogy,* in a way that spoke to me due to how Ellsworth explained transitional space as three dimensional and respectful of time and space interaction. Ellsworth (2005) wrote that transitional space is an "an address to a self who is in the process of withdrawing from that self, someone who is in a dissolve out of what she or he is just ceasing to be and into what she or he will already have become by the time she or he registers something has happened" (p. 34). I experienced my dissertation process in a transitional space as I interacted with the theoretical and methodology choices, data analysis, and research team deliberations involved in my course of study. Ellsworth's discussion of transitional space helped me to conceptualize, visualize (figure 2) and readdress the component pieces of my dissertation research as an interactive process.
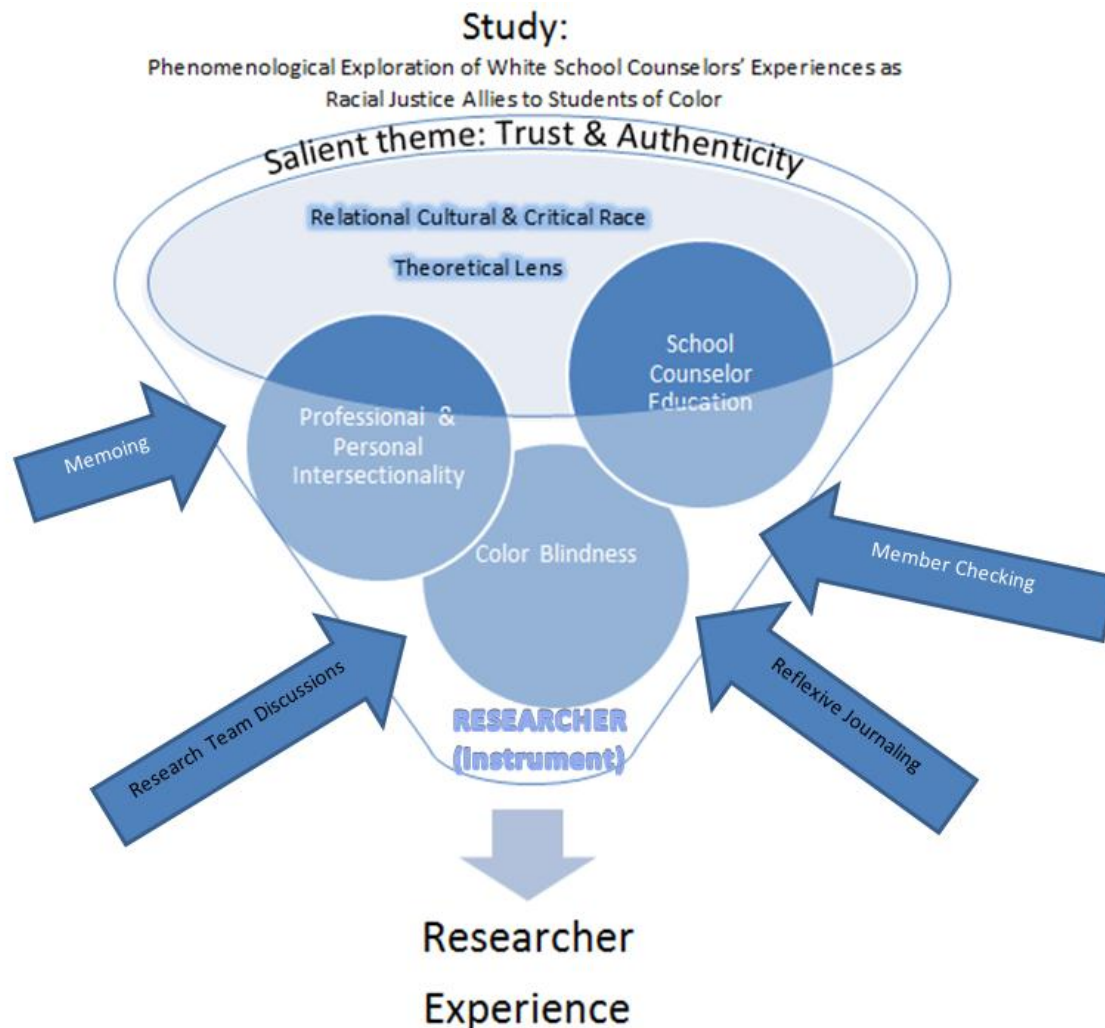
Figure 2. Conceptualization of research as a occurring within a transitional space.

The purpose of my dissertation research was to explore the experiences of White school counselors as racial justice allies to students of color. I gravitated toward the topic of White school counselor racial justice ally identity due to my own experiences as a White educator and school counselor who identifies as a racial justice ally to students of color. Believing that research should lead to transformation, and that Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory could appropriately frame new stories about how White school counselors move towards

alliance with student of color and their families, I devised a phenomenological study to capture the experiences of ten White school counselors' who identify as racial justice allies in the Southeastern area of the United States.

In a time where great emphasis is placed on professional standards, ethics, and competencies, the development of this study emerged from contemplation around my internal thought and dialog with friends and classmates around where personal characteristics (such as race and ally identity) fit within in the field of school counseling among professional expectations imposed by professional organizations, district level officials, and school-based administrators (ASCA, 2003; Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Galassi & Akos, 2004; House & Martin, 1998; Littrell & Peterson; 2004). This draw towards the topic also created a fundamental tension: emotional dissonance was created around who I am, how I present myself professionally and personally, values I hold, and how I interacted with my findings and led me to view my process as occurring within a transitional space (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Ellsworth, 2005).

Throughout the course of study, I was intrigued by the way in which participants balanced professional and personal identities. In particular, two salient topics framed the way I conceptualized the ally identity of participants. The key topics which were most representative of this study were trust and authenticity. I conceptualize these key topics with Relational Cultural Theory. My analysis of these key topics created tension around 3 central points: (a) color blindness, (b) school counselor education, and (c) intersection of personal and professional identities. Both Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory function as theoretical lenses through which I analyze the tension around these elements.

Theoretical Considerations and Researcher Positionality

I have had a long standing interest in exploring the intimate nuances of how racial justice allies to students of color are created. When I first contemplated what theoretical framework would best facilitate such an inquiry I imagined Relational Cultural Theory would be a strong fit. As a White school counselor, my experiences led me to believe that the relational aspect of the work counselors do with students of color was an important element of ally development. Yet, upon further discussion and analysis with my research team and dissertation committee, I realized that this original selection was a manifestation of my positionality with the topic and, therefore, I agreed with my research team and dissertation committee that there was a need to theoretically address the historical elements and current cultural context which create the need for racial justice allies. In this vein, I chose to also utilize Critical Race Theory as a foundational theoretical framework for the study.

Overall, I employed an integrated theoretical framework which highlighted tenets of Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory as a cohesive perspective from which the work of White school counselors with students of color can be conceptualized. There are some overlapping tenets among the two theoretical approaches, for instance, both question the usefulness traditional (Eurocentric) theoretical frameworks. I particularly and intentionally chose Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory to theoretically structure this study due to each theories unique tenets.

Relational-Cultural Theory. I utilized Relational-Cultural Theoretical tenets in this study to highlight power differentials as they related to forces of dominance and oppression in the work White school counselors carry out – particularly in their interactions with students of color. At its most fundamental level, Relational-Cultural Theory builds upon and expands

humanistic principles to allow counselors' acute focus on relational connections vital to clients'

psychological development and emotional well-being (Jordan, 2010). Because of this structure, I

believe Relational Cultural Theory helped to provide a theoretical foundation for this study

which complements the multicultural/ social justice movement in the sense that it provides

grounds for counselors to consider and value how oppression hinders the relational development

of marginalized people across the life span (Comstock et al., 2008). Moreover, since the role of

power differentials between the privileged and oppressed creates an unmistakable barrier

between the work White school counselors do with students of color, I saw Relational Cultural

Theory as an alternative to traditional theories White school counselors may otherwise adopt to

frame practice as they strive towards building racial justice alliances with students of color

(Walker, 2003).

As seen in figure 2, Relational Cultural Theory also theoretically underpins the topic of

trust and authenticity. A respected Critical Race theorist, Maureen Walker, suggested that

creating growth fostering relationships "is a journey of courage and faith: the courage to be

mindful and to grieve, to risk letting go of old relational images that function to contain our

anxieties, in hopes of discovering and enlarging our capacity for richer authenticity. The path to

relational healing invites us to enter into conflict with faith in our human possibilities and with

desire for the emergence of something new." (2010, p. 83). This excerpt from Walker's work

summarizes how I conceptualize the trust and authenticity I have built with students of color

during my time as a teacher and school counselor. When, as a student teacher, I participated in an

urban study experience. It was the first time I began to hear the stories of students of color – an

experience that gave me a glimpse into their world. While I did not experience a dramatic

paradigm shift in my thinking processes at that time, it did micro movements toward creating

new relational images which had the potential to help me develop into a more culturally competent practitioner.

   Critical Race Theory. Through collaboration with my research team and dissertation committee, I came to recognize that there were some gaps in isolating Relational Cultural Theory as the sole theoretical structure for this study. I originally was not drawn to Critical Race Theory which, through time in transitional space with this notion, I believe was due to my own color blindness. By delving deeper into Critical Race Theory literature, I was able to more thoroughly understand that American history and events have always been told from the dominant (White) viewpoint, which has had undeniable affect the current sociopolitical and educational structures in the United States (Gillborn, 2009). While I had received exposure to Critical Race Theory in the past, the process of applying Critical Race Theory to this study increased my perspective regarding the deep hold Eurocentrism has on the United States and, subsequently, the work of school counselors.

   The process of identifying Critical Race Theory as a theoretical foundation for this study also prompted me to reflect on its essence and consider personal implications. For example, because I identify as part of the dominant (White) group which has written the historical social narrative of other groups of people, I must recognize and process the implications of the White privilege that my participants and I hold**.** After all, this privilege is what has constructed racial divides and misallocations of power in the United States. Furthermore it is this imbalance of power and privilege that has created the frame of reference for me and the White school counselors who participated in this study.

   It was by delving deep into the Critical Race Theory literature that I was able to continue to deconstruct viewpoints that have been engrained in me societally, educationally and socially.

As a grade school student I had a very limited perspective and understanding around the existence of racial inequities. I attended a small rural school which consisted predominantly of working class White families. The curriculum used in my school highlighted successes of White men in history and successfully retained me complacently ignorant around sociopolitical inequities.

As I continued to acquire lived experiences with peers of different races than myself, I slowly began to understand that every student does not begin on a proverbial level playing field in the realm of education. The original experience I had with pre-service teaching in an urban setting sparked something in me. As much as I hated to recognize that all school systems are not created (or maintained) equally, I also felt as if I finally knew a truth that had been kept from me. It was as if once I acknowledged that there was a problem, I was able to work as part of the solution. Upon graduating college I decided to seek a job in a setting that served marginalized youth. I ended up accepting a middle school special education teaching position in a large, urban school district which predominantly served an economically disadvantaged African American student body.

After my teaching tenure in the urban setting, I relocated twice; once to a school in the suburban Northeast which consisted of a predominantly White working class population and then again to the Southeast to an affluent, predominantly White school when I became a school counselor. I feel that my time at the first school, in which I was the racial minority as a White person among staff and students, offered me the most authentic experiences with students and staff of color. It was through that experience that I began to consider myself an ally (without having the words to articulate it as such) and began to experience the world in a different way than I had in my youth. Through that experience I became increasingly interested in privilege

and oppression and the impact race has on one's development and within the greater societal context.

Research Methodology and Reflexivity

Qualitative research, at its core, presupposes that by acknowledging individual's subjective experiences, scholars begin to make sense of the world (Hays & Singh, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005). Specifically, phenomenological approaches, like that which I designed for this study, work best as a method of understanding the lived experiences of a phenomenon among a particular group of people or individual (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, I chose a phenomenological approach to research as a method to describe the essence of how White school counselors experience the identity of 'racial justice ally' with students of color because I felt it would provide me with a clearer understanding of the phenomena of racial justice ally identity as experienced by White school counselors (Groenewald, 2004).

Since phenomenological researchers do not judge the data, but rather bracket off personal values and assumptions when gathering participant data through an extensive interview process, I utilized four primary strategies, which are referenced in this analysis, to assist in the bracketing process: a consistently used, detailed reflexive journal and thorough, regular research team meetings, memos, and member checking (Hays & Singh, 2012). While in transitional space with these processes, they pressed against me – often times determining which core tension would enter my consciousness most (figure 2). The experience of participating in this interaction has offered me a significantly deeper understanding of how White school counselors arrive at identifying as aspiring racial justice allies to students of color. As a White school counselor who identifies as an aspiring racial justice ally to the students of color with whom I work, I have regarded the process and findings of this study with an array of thoughts and emotions. In some

instances, I felt surprised by comments from participants which seemed strikingly as if they had little awareness of their own privileges, nevertheless how to utilize them as agency for change around racial equity in the school systems in which they worked. Yet, I was overall struck by the strong topic of authenticity and trust that emerged from the data collection and analysis process.

Since a participant characteristic requirement was self-identification as a racial justice ally to students of color, I originally anticipated that informants who chose to participate would speak to concrete ways in which they structured their professional roles in order to best support students of color in academic settings. What I discovered, however, suggested action on a much more personal level. Since several of the study participants have obtained or are currently working towards a terminal degree in counseling (or a related field) it was not surprising that they sometimes used scholarly terms to describe the structure of their advocacy work and ally relationships with students of color. When reviewing transcripts independently and with my research team, I was rapt when I recognized that some of the most poignant insight occurred when informants did not use technical jargon to describe their experiences, but rather segued into sharing personal ways they experience the world. Subsequently, many participants explained how they choose to live and, most relevant to this study, how they integrate lifestyle and worldviews into their work with young people of color in the school setting. Generally, these sentiments emerged to me as ways in which participants built trust and authenticity with students. By conceptualizing research as a occurring within a transitional space (figure 2) I demonstrate how these topics mitigated my interaction with the topic of study and helped to create the transitional space within which I interacted with key researcher tensions.

Trust

Trust moderated my relationship with key tensions within the transitional space (figure 2). White school counselors who participated in this study shared that trust was a necessary ingredient to create ally relationships with students of color. I view this key topic through a Relational Cultural Theory lens. Relational Cultural Theory indicates that counselors must take risks and opens up to new experiences through interaction with clients in order to grow in connection with one another (Jordan, 2010). My experience has been that with this vulnerability I am able to build trust with the students of color with whom I work.

As Jordan (2010) indicated, when I welcomed opportunities to become the racial minority in a setting or try a cultural activity with which I was previously unfamiliar, it allowed my students to hold more power and also afforded me the opportunity to experience a culture other than that of the dominant White culture. Also, use of creative movements in counseling helped to level the power differential and build trust between me and the students of color with whom I worked (Jordan, 2010). As an example, I can recall talking with an African American student one day who talked about how she thought my hair would look nice in braids. When I told her I had never had braids before, her eyes lit up. She asked if she could stay after school one day and braid my hair like hers. I obliged – taking a risk to let the student and a few of her friends into my personal space, but allowing her an immense amount of power at that moment in time. This small interaction forever changed our relationship – shifting it from counselor-student to person-person.

Later in the year when this student had a problem where she felt discriminated against by a teacher because of her race she felt comfortable sharing that with me. I was able to validate her concerns, take action around the issue she shared with me, and consider that instance for future

planning/ systemic intervention. This prior instance (and similar experiences) filtered which tension(s) entered the transitional space of my study and how I interacted with the tensions of color blindness, school counselors' education, and personal and professional intersectionality.

Authenticity

The key topic of authenticity is also bolstered by Relational Cultural Theory (figure 2). Relational Cultural Theory scholars (Miller, Jordan, Stiver, Walker, Surrey & Eldridge) indicated that the more a therapist allows herself to be more open and authentic, the more she is able to generate growth fostering relationships with clients (1999). Many of the White school counselors who participated in this study communicated that by remaining authentic in their interactions with students they were able to form bonds with them that were long-lasting and meaningful. In my own practice as an educator and counselor I have experienced the power of authenticity. By remaining open and honest with students about my White identity and my family background – without touting it – has provided space for discussion related to race with the students of color with whom I work. Having this type of experience informed my choice of theory and also the subconscious filtering that determined what tensions I would experience during the research process. Ultimately, color blindness, school counselor education, and personal and professional intersectionality emerged as 3 tensions with which I interacted most within the transitional space created by the dissertation process (figure 2).

Color Blindness

Color blindness refers to the rejection of the sociopolitical significance of race and the current reality of racism (Neville et al., 2006). Color blindness is a racially biased construct explaining that individuals, groups, and systems use (consciously or subconsciously) in one of two ways: to justify the racial status quo or to minimize racial inequalities in the United States

(Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000). Researchers have reported that color-blindness is negatively correlated with multicultural knowledge and awareness (Neville et al., 2006; Spanierman, Poteat, Wang, & Oh, 2008). Within the transitional space created by conducting interviews and sorting through data during this study, I collided with my own tension around color blindness.

As I recorded my reactions to the research process in my reflexive journal, I noted some instances where, although they indicated they wanted to become allies with students of color, participants seemed to have some obstruction to acknowledging how integrally race impacts the role of the school counselor. For example, one informant, Crystal, explained her desire to support students of color:

Well, I just feel like it doesn't matter, um, it doesn't really matter what color skin they are – I just look at them as students and I want every student to be successful.

Another participant, Karen, commented:

I just see kids, I don't think about (…) their – their racial and ethnic – ethnic backgrounds at all.

Upon reflecting on pieces of the aforementioned interviews, I pondered about my frustration of school counselors who self-identified as racial justice allies to students of color would articulate themselves and their work in this way. Because of my personal experience in a doctoral program which is firmly rooted in social justice principles, I had a much different opinion. I noted in my reflexive journal after conducting the first several interviews and beginning the coding process:

A few participants seem to lack awareness around the topic of race and why it is important to acknowledge the race of students when coordinating your work and efforts

as a school counselor … maybe this is due to their own White privilege and the blind spots it creates?

Upon processing through my biases with my research team I began to understand more completely that we all have blind spots due to our individual experiences and privileges. Discussion with my research team also helped me process my own insecurity around my blind spots around issues of race. I also came to the realization that, as a White person, I will always have some level of color blindness simply because I will never experience the world as a race other than White. Moreover, my research team helped me realize this is what makes me an ally: a willingness to address and discuss my blind spots. Drawing from these experiences can potentially help me build strengths professionally as a school counselor. Furthermore, this process may allow me to exist authentically as an ally with a unique skill set based on my exclusive experiences.

School Counselor Education

Problems students present with often have roots in complex social, political, and economic conditions (Ratts et al., 2010). Scholars indicate that White school counselors must comprehend self-awareness around race in addition to an understanding of diverse racial and ethnic cultures in order to appropriately respond to students of color with varied cultural backgrounds and worldview, (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Moore-Thomas et al., 2009; Levy & Plucker, 2008). Many counselor education programs have begun to organize to respond to this need by integrating a social justice framework into academic curriculum (Toporek, Lewis, & Crethar, 2009). As a doctoral student of a counselor preparation program which focuses on social justice tenets, I am acutely aware of the positive affects this type of program can have on a

student personally and professionally and, therefore, found myself interacting with this topic within the transitional space created by this study.

When the research process began to unfold, I noted a tension within myself as participants either discussed, or did not discuss, the level or type education which undergirded their ally identity. Although many participants did speak to the value they found in professional development and graduate programs that focused on social justice and related topics, others did not mention it at all. I considered my own journey through academia – was I placing too much emphasis on scholarship and not enough on practice? The more I struggled with how I allocate my energy, the more I wondered: are my efforts best spent in graduate school or would I make more of a systemic impact in another way? In some ways I feared that through my journey in education I have over intellectualized race and the system in which race exists.

A preconception I had prior to this study, due to my own experiences, was that graduate school programs designed around social justice tenets help to develop White school counselors as racial justice allies to students of color. In some ways this presupposition was reinforced; during interviews many participants did speak to the impact that professional development opportunities and/ or graduate school programs had on their ability to reflect upon their work as allies. I was also reminded of a quote by my maternal grandfather who my family affectionately referred to as 'Popsie'. When he was in conversation with someone in our family who began to over-intellectualize something he would retort, "You know, it ain't all book learned!" in a way that could only be spoken by a kind-hearted man who was forced to leave formal schooling in the fifth grade in order to help make ends meet at home. From talking with the participants of this study I realized how true his words were. While some participants were able to speak the intellectual lingo of theory, race, White privilege, and power differentials, other were not. Yet, I

could not isolate patterns that clustered data into themes based on those participants who had postsecondary coursework in social justice. It appeared that salience of their ally identity was more relevant to their lived personal and professional experiences than a type of professional training.

Personal and Professional Intersectionality

Participants placed the value on daily lived personal and professional experiences and, in the end, my participation in this study helped me consider the implications of this finding on my own life and practice. In particular, participants discussed particular realizations and interactions as facilitating growth towards functional ally relationships with the students and families of color with whom they work. For example, one participant, Karen shared her professional experiences and reflection on them:

> [T]he world is not as fair as we all like to think that it is, you know like that in America, even though we say … everyone is treated equally… it's not really like that, um, you know, people are really struggling and they are really treated differently, um, a lot of times … I work right outside Washington, D.C. … with children who sleep on the floor and don't have any food. And you know, whose parents don't speak English and have lived in the United States for some years and still are struggling. And so it's mind boggling to me that down the road, there are people living in these big huge giant mansions, you know, and – and here are my kids, and they're like just getting by.

Karen also shared that being married to a man who identifies as Hispanic heightens her sensitivity to the population with whom she works. Also, she shared her perspective as a new parent to a child who she identified as sharing two different cultures (White and Hispanic), which highlighted the intersection of personal meeting professional:

I know definitely as a younger person, I wasn't as aware of it, I just was kind of oblivious

and (…) the parents that we work with and that we try to help support, as they support

their children, you know, for the most part, these parents all – they all – we all have a

common goal. They want their children to succeed and – and, um, have happy

productive lives seeing that commonality … I think that that's a – a great avenue to

develop sensitivity that carries over just into your everyday life, you know. I hope that

I'm imparting that to my own children.

Another informant, Christine, also discussed how her work as a counselor helped her make

strides towards ally aspiring ally identity:

 Before I was a counselor and worked where I work and you know, outside of D.C. and I

heard a racial comment [it] – would have disturbed me [but now] I will say something

back to that. Because it, yeah, I, I take it personally now because I feel like if these are

kids and families, um, you know, that I have worked with and know and love and, um, I

feel like I just you know, um, kind of stand up for prejudice and injustices, um, because

of my experiences .

When asked about how she conceptualizes her racial ally identity one informant, Ruthie,

shared how her professional and personal identities have collided:

I mean, especially working with students of color, as a White counselor, has, you know,

defined me and who I am and my skill set to myself and my colleagues and my friends …

I enjoy it, I've loved it, I love the relationships I've built with students, with my

colleagues, you know, we're friends for life, that I've worked with and you know,

students that I keep in touch with, so I've just loved it, I mean, that's what I've learned.

I've learned that it defines me and I've loved that it's defined me.

I processed and pondered the aforementioned comments, and others that were similar, during the research process to help me recognize my own positionality as an ally.

In some ways this process was encouraging and in other ways extremely humbling. It unexpectedly allowed me to reflect on time at the start of my career. I had not given much critical thought to how experiences during my early years in education may inform my current goals and curiosity around the racial justice ally development of White school counselors. I had an early interest in urban and international education. Therefore, much of my pre-service and early teaching experience was spent in school settings in which I, as a White person, was in the racial minority. As my life unfolded and personal circumstances changed, I was employed as a special education teacher and, most recently as a school counselor, in schools which are racially dominated by White students and staff. Designing and executing this study gave me pause to consider how my formative years in education may have affected me in more ways that I realized prior to my engagement with the research presented in this paper. I commented in my reflexive journal on this topic after my ninth interview:

> This is the third interviewee who has talked about how the connections with her students and community early on [in schools in which she was the racial minority] really impacted how she thinks about her work now [in schools where she identifies as part of the racial majority]. It really got me thinking about my work at The Fresh Air Fund, Project Forward Leap, student teaching and my time teaching in Philadelphia. I normally think about those experiences as so separate (and often more meaningful) than the work I do now. But my recent discussions with participants are causing me to rethink that. Is it that my work in settings where I identified as part of the racial minority has help inform my day-to-day interactions with students of color in more ways than I realized?

I can now more fully appreciate that working as racial minority in settings with allowed me to form meaning relationships with students of color and their families has had a profound impact upon shaping the school counselor I am currently. I also experienced a tension around the meaning behind the work I do now in a predominantly White institution.

Throughout this research process I was able to use the transitional space created return to my pre-service and early professional experiences where I worked with student populations which were much more diverse than the one in which I currently serve as a school counselor. In my current setting I am able to better relate to diverse groups of students and am more skilled at identifying systemic issues to address in order to help establish a more effective learning environment for students of color. I mused on this realization in my reflexive journal after I interviewed the final informant (who echoed other participants' statements about her experiences as a White counselor in a school which had a predominantly Hispanic population):

> Perhaps professional development and graduate school programs are only effective to the level in which they can undergird the practical experience(s) school counselors acquire. By being surrounded by students and families who have a racial identity different from your own for a period of time it seems like participants were able to develop authentic relationships with staff, students and families who had different cultural, racial and ethnic identities from their own. I doubt there is a way for this to be 'taught' through a lecture or a text book. I realize now how much my early experiences opened my eyes to seeking out a doctoral program that focused on social justice. In fact, although unbeknownst to me at the time, I now believe it was those early experiences – hearing first-hand stories, meeting students, befriending staff – that may have catapulted my curiosity in around issues of social justice.

Although I am aware that all of my personal and professional experiences are inextricably linked to situate me as an individual, I believe that I am a stronger counselor, and a stronger ally, due to my early professional experiences when I was regularly situating myself in circumstances which I was out of my comfort zone culturally or racially. In a way I feel that I at present some of my personal development has been stagnated by working in a building in which I largely identify as part of the racial, ethnic and cultural majority. Mulling over this sentiment left me with a dis-ease. In many ways I feel that I am still lingering in a transitional space with this tension and imagine that my dissertation process will be a distant memory before I am able to reconcile it. I am grateful for the dissonance this tension has created. The interaction I experienced with this tension has stirred a longing and interest in my soul that had been set aside, but which I realize is part of who I am and likely why I ended up engaging in a dissertation process at all: a fierce passion to become a more powerful change agent.

Conclusions and Implications

In considering my current practice and perceptions as a school counselor, work on this study has given me room to contemplate how the theoretical perspectives I utilize in practice inform my day-to-day decisions as a school counselor. The theoretical framework of this study – Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory – encouraged my deep analysis of Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory. The time spent with Critical Race Theory reminded me of the ever present historical sociopolitical context that continues to inform the educational system in which I work. I am also awakened to the idea that life is a series of transitional spaces which are shaped by the theories I choose to guide my perceptions and actions.

Through this inquiry I have learned that I , and all White school counselors, ought to remain mindful of historical contexts when considering how to advocate for students of color – particularly on how it relates to the advocacy work we do on the systemic level. On a more intimate level, exploring Relational Cultural Theory tenets through this study has helped critically consider how power differentials may affect the work done between me and the students of color with whom I work.   I have an increased awareness about remaining cognizant of the impact privilege and power differentials can have on my interactions with the families and colleagues with whom I interact. Considering the topics of trust and authenticity through a Critical Race and Relational Cultural theoretical lens enabled me to conceptualize tensions within myself, as the primary researcher, around color blindness, school counselor education, and the intersection of personal and professional identities. Work on this study helped me situate my own color blindness, consider how I situate a terminal degree in my ally toolbox, and broaden my scope of where all of my identities collide to create a uniquely-created ally.

Furthermore, conceptualizing color blindness, school counselors' education, and personal and professional intersections within a transitional space conceptual framework has allowed me to reflect on the lively dynamic between these three tensions and myself. Yet, I recognize that research, and life, are but a string of transitional spaces linked together in an uninterrupted series. Conceptualizing research in this way feels a bit obtuse. In fact, as I finalized this reflective piece, I am able to enter a new transitional space to consider additional ways I could conceptualize aspect of this work.

I now have a renewed desire to continue researching the pocket of academia I have carved out with this study. I believe that we become overwhelmed by dominant viewpoints in many areas of life. By persevering through research, such as that presented with this study, I am

able to hear and document the reality of many living voices who, although soft, are making a positive difference every day in their professional and personal pursuits as allies. While the research process is rigorous, that rigor is what helps me to amplify these voices so that they can be assigned value by a broader audience. I see my doctoral process and this research as a privilege. My privilege and ability to conduct research comes with a great responsibility: one by one liberating the voices that have been silenced by the forces of oppression.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

As social justice counseling increasingly informs school counseling practice, a need

exists for school counselors to develop as racial justice allies to students of color (Dixon &

Clark, 2010; Griffin & Steen, 2010). This dissertation aimed to understand the phenomenon of

White school counselors' racial justice ally behaviors and identities by positing the research

question: How do White school counselors experience and conceptualize racial justice ally

identity? The researcher utilized a Critical Race and Relational Cultural theoretical framework to

form, implement, and analyze the study presented in this dissertation. Through the research that

was planned, conducted, and reflected upon in this dissertation, the identity and behavior of

White school counselors who self-identify as racial justice allies became more completely

illuminated.

Theoretical Framework

Relational-Cultural and Critical Race theory created the theoretical framework for all

aspects of this dissertation. The researcher utilized Relational Cultural Theoretical tenets in to

draw attention to power differentials as they related to forces of dominance and oppression in the

work White school counselors carry out – particularly in their interactions with students of color.

At its most fundamental level, Relational Cultural Theory builds upon and expands humanistic

principles to allow counselors acute focus on relational connections vital to clients'

psychological development and emotional well-being (Jordan, 2010). Because of this structure,

the Relational Cultural theoretical focus of this study complements the multicultural/ social

justice movement in the sense that it provides grounds for counselors to consider and value how

oppression hinders the relational development of marginalized people across the life span (Comstock et al., 2008).

Critical Race thought requires awareness and exposure of racism in education (Taylor et al. 2009). Furthermore, Critical Race Theory provides this study with a critical lens through which school services, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and funding in education is conceptualized. In this way, this study considers racism in the United States as a structural problem built upon property rights rather than human rights (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). At the systemic level, Critical Race Theory conceptualizes racism as created and preserved by the collective acts of many individuals which, in turn, create an oppressive system that is far more powerful than any one person's efforts could ever create (Guinier & Torres 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995; Parker & Lynn 2002; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). This study integrated these core tenets of Critical Race and Relational Cultural theories to create the theoretical framework for this study's structure, process, and reflection.

Summary of Study

The research presented in this dissertation is designed to explore the phenomenon of the racial justice ally identity and development of White school counselors through those intimately acquainted with this experience. Therefore, a phenomenological approach was utilized to structure this study (Creswell, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012). A phenomenological approach relies on individual experiences told in the participants' voices and, therefore, is subjective in nature (Hays & Singh, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005). Although there are a variety of qualitative research traditions, a phenomenological approach works best to explore the topic of this study because it provides a method of understanding the lived experiences of White school counselors (Creswell, 2007).

Through consideration of current scholarship around qualitative research, the researcher utilized purposive sampling to select participants from whom data was collected (Creswell, 2009). Specifically, 10 White professional public school counselors (four male and six female) participated in this study. The original participants were contacted through a professional networking website hosted by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA Scene) and snowball sampling was used to identify subsequent participants. Informants each participated in individual interviews which lasted approximately 30-60 minutes each. This process allowed the researcher to acquire rich, deep data collection regarding personal experiences of participants with respect to their racial justice ally identity and development. To increase trustworthiness, the primary researcher utilized multiple strategies, including: member checking, memoing, research team discussions and meetings, and reflexive journaling, (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Significant Findings

The researcher identified seven overarching themes through data analysis which consisted of coding, organizing, and discussing the data. The researcher clustered data into themes from analyzing coded data against the Relational Cultural and Critical Race theoretical framework and considering core tenets of each. Specifically, the researcher organized data by themes of: (a) significance of race; (b) property rights; (c) understanding inequity; (d) rejection of Eurocentrism; (e) growth-fostering relationships; (f) relational competence; and (g) power differentials. Furthermore, a few sub-themes were identified through the data analysis process. In the theme of significance of race, color blindness was identified as a subtheme. Under the overarching theme of understanding inequity, White guilt was identified as a sub-theme. Also, the researcher used the emic code "they're like me" as a subtheme under growth-fostering relationships to organize data participants shared about their experiences in youth sports with students of color.

Implications and Recommendations

Findings of the research presented in this study indicated that this study did, in fact, provide much needed insight into the experiences and perceptions of White school counselors who identify as aspiring racial justice allies through hearing, organizing and analyzing the experiences of participants. In order to obtain increased understanding of how White school counselors can increasingly move towards becoming racial justice allies, more research is needed to explore explicit factors that participants in this study touched on. Such research may better inform future research, practice, and advocacy within the field of school counseling.

The field of school counseling would benefit from further exploring the aspects of professional development and graduate school programming that may increase White school counselor's desire to strive toward ally relationships with students of color. Also, clearer understanding of the relationship between the White, ally, and professional identities of school counselors may further help scholars and practitioners understand White school counselors as racial justice allies.

Also, participants discussed the role that athletics had during their youth with respect to creating a meaningful and functional context from which they were able to develop relationships with their non-White peers which they otherwise may not have forged. Leisure studies literature maintains a limited body of literature regarding this topic (Braddock, 1981; Brown et al., 1993; Gilroy, 2002; Hartmann, 2000; Hylton, 2010; La Greca et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2003). Therefore, this may be an area of study that could enhance the current body of knowledge.

While there is currently a full body of literature emphasizes the importance of school counselors in addressing inequities that exists in schools (Bailey, Getch, & Chen-Hayes, 2003; Cox & Lee, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010) little literature concrete strategies that school counselors can infuse in their practice (Singh et al.,

2010), indicating a need for further exploration around the concrete strategies school counselors can employ to act as social justice change agents. Findings generated by this study support extensive research around the need for school counselors to regularly engage the ACA Advocacy Competencies in practice (Ancis, 2004; ASCA, 2005; Chang, Hays, & Shoffner, 2003; Constantine, 2002; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Sue, 2001; Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002; Vinson & Neimeyer, 2000). When discussing advocacy, some participants in this study referenced the ACA Advocacy Competencies (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002) and shared that they are comfortable acting with students and their families often within the context of the school setting. Several participants expressed their anxiety around acting with or on behalf of students in the public arena. This finding indicates that the school counseling profession would benefit from further study around how White school counselors can most effectively and professionally advocate for students of color in the public arena.

Furthermore, findings from this study suggest that participants in this study's ally behaviors and identity were strengthened by taking inventory of the privileges and various identities they hold, mirroring current research in the field (Hays, Chang, Havice, 2008). Therefore, use of a racial identity model (i.e. Edwards, 2006) may be helpful to guide White counselors' growth towards understanding and embracing their racial identity to consider its intersection with professional and ally identities. Additionally, findings from this study suggest that authenticity in interactions between White school counselors and the students of color with whom they work helped participants build positive rapport and trust within their relationships with students of color. Subsequently, White school counselors who wish to make strides toward

becoming an ally to the students of color with whom they work may also find these strategies successful.

Limitations of Study

The results of this study provide important insight regarding the perceptions White school counselors who identify as racial justice allies to students of color. Yet, there are limitations of this study that may have influenced the interpretation of findings. First of all, the primary researcher identified as a White school counselor and, although she recognized epoche and bracketed biases, the level of influence those biases may have had cannot be deduced. Also, participants shared professional, racial, and possibly other identities with the primary researcher who conducted all interviews. Although similarities may have helped participants feel comfortable, shared identities and differences may have affected the way or depth to which the semi-structured interview questions were answered by informants.

Upon reviewing the primary researcher's memos, it is evident that the primary researcher became increasingly comfortable with the interview protocol and the interview process in general as she worked through the research process. The research team noted that the last several interviews of this study were the 'strongest' due to the fact that participants seemed to feel more comfortable, and going deeper into the constructed responses they offered during the interview process. Also, the nature of phenomenological research provided the researcher space to alter the way in which she asked questions and/or the order in which she asked questions to elicit unadulterated responses from participants, which may have subsequently increased the importance of the final interviews.

Finally, the diversity in geographic location of the participant pool was a limitation. The researcher originally planned to focus on a participant pool from the Southeastern region of the United States. Partly due to chance and partly due to snowball sampling, all participants

currently work as school counselors in either Georgia or Virginia. Some participants do, however, have professional counseling experience in other areas of the Southeastern United States from which they could draw insight.

Researcher Reflexivity

Chapter Four of this dissertation contains the reflections of the primary researcher with regards to theoretical choices and methodological practices. The researcher utilizes Ellsworth's (2005) conceptualization of transitional space as a metaphor for the researcher process and related researcher growth, development, and reflection. Although this study is rooted in scholarly literature, the author acknowledges that qualitative research is a personal experience (Thomas & Gunter, 2010). The researcher bracketed personal biases during the research process and, therefore, recognized the need for a space to process her experiences as the primary researcher, including tensions around three central points: (a) color blindness, (b) school counselors' education, and (c) intersection of personal and professional identities. The researcher utilized Critical Race Theory and Relational Cultural Theory as the theoretical lens to analyze dissonance created by the course of study around who she views herself personally and professionally in relationship with the study, participants, and findings (Jordan, 2010; Taylor, 2009).

Conclusion

Participants in this study exposed that identifying as a racial justice ally to students of color is as much a personal a pursuit as much as it is a professional because of multiple identity intersections (i.e.: racial and professional). Therefore, White school counselors may wish to integrate professional development opportunities that focus on topics related to professional, racial, and ally identify development. Also, this study revealed that participants (White school

counselors) who work to build trust through relationships with students of color by expressing these identities in an authentic way identified strongly as racial justice allies to the students of color with whom they work.

White school counselors must remain mindful that their work as allies to students of color and their families contains great meaning, potential, and responsibility. Participant statements in this study highlighted experiences of practicing White school counselors who identify as racial justice allies to students of color. In this way, strides were made towards understanding the essence of what it means to be a White school counselor who is also an aspiring racial justice ally to students of color.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Title of study: White School Counselors as Aspiring Racial Justice Allies

Primary Researcher: Lauren Moss – to fulfill Ph. D. requirements for the University of Georgia

Purpose of this research study: Explore the essence of how White school counselors come to identify/ be identified as racial justice allies to students of color.

Procedures:

This research project is a phenomenological study which is aimed to explore how White school couselors develop as racial justice allies. Participants will be asked several demographic questions followed by a 3-phased interview consisting of questions geared at a) live history, b) details of lived professional experience and c) the value and meaning assigned to experiences. After the interviews, the researcher and her team will create themes and codes from all participant data. Finally, the primary researcher will meet with participants once more for them each to check over findings to approve or correct interpretations.

Possible risks or benefits:

There is minimal risk involved in this study. Potentially, participants could feel as though their privacy was sacrificed. Additionally, participants may be sensitive to some of the material discussed in the interview process – specifically discussion of racial identity and professional growth.

Furthermore, there is no direct benefit to participants of this study. However, the results of the study may help participants solidify their identity as a racial justice ally to students of color and/ or help them feel increasingly inspired and supported in their work as racial justice allies.

Right of refusal to participate and withdrawal

Participants are free to choose to participate in the study. Participants may refuse to participate or withdraw any time from the study without any prejudice or adverse effect.

Confidentiality

All information participants supply during the research process will be held in confidence to the extent provided ethically and legally. No participant names will appear in any report or publication of research.

Participant information will be assigned a code pseudonym. The list connecting participant names to a pseudonym and this informed consent form will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analysed, the list will be destroyed.

Available Sources of Information

If you have further questions you may contact me (Lauren Moss):

Tel: 484.889.6505

Email: mlj14690@uga.edu

Furthermore, should you have any questions with regard to your rights of participation; you may contact the IRB office:
629 Boyd GSRC
Athens, GA 30602-7411
Tel: 706.542.3199
Email: irb@uga.edu

Participant's Consent Declaration

I understand that participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without notice.

I declare that I am at least 18 years of age.

Participant's Signature:_____

Participant's Name:_____

Date: _____

Researcher Declaration

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedures in which the participant has consented to participate.

Primary Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONAIRRE

Background Questionnaire (fill in the blanks):

What gender to you identify as?_____

What is your racial identity?_____

What is your experience level as a school counselor? _____

Briefly describe the setting in which you serve as a school counselor: _____

_____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Phase 1: Life History & Experiences with White identity

1. Tell me about how you define 'White'.
2. Explain a bit about the context in which you grew up, specifically regarding intersections with race.
3. Share with me how you remember first realizing your race.
4. Discuss any early experiences you had with people of color.
5. Describe any emotional responses you remember from your early encounters with race-related experiences.

Interview Phase 2: Lived Professional Experiences

1. Offer a brief history of your professional experiences.
2. How has your race affected your professional work?
3. Discuss how you have come to consider yourself an aspiring ally with students of color.
4. Describe the barriers, if any, you see existing for White school counselors who aspire to be allies to students of color.
5. Describe the emotions and/or feelings you have experienced throughout your journey towards alliance with students of color.
6. Where do you see yourself developmentally in your growth towards ally identity?

Interview Phase 3: Assigning Value and Meaning

1. Given what you have said about White identity and racial ally identity previously, why do you believe some White school counselors continue to maintain the status quo – ignoring the specific needs of the students of color with whom they work?
2. Describe the impact of your aspiring racial ally work in your life.
3. Summarize what you have learned about yourself and the world as a result of your experiences as a White school counselor who identifies as an aspiring racial justice ally to students of color.

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTIONS

Participant Pseudonym	Description
Crystal	A White female who was born in south Florida and spent her childhood there. She has worked for over 10 years in education – at first as a coordinator of a student success program and for students labeled 'at risk' at a southwestern Georgia college and then as an elementary school counselor at what she categorized as a 'racially diverse Title 1 school' in Northern Virginia. Recently, she moved back to Georgia and is currently working in the metro-Atlanta area at an elementary school which consists of a White majority.
Bobby	A White male who was raised in a fairly rural area in Georgia, this school counselor now works in the same school community where he grew up. He is a second-year high school counselor who is currently in a doctoral program for counseling. Prior to becoming a school counselor he was a high school teacher at the school where he currently serves as a school counselor.
Jeffery	A White male who was born in Pennsylvania and spent his early childhood there until moving to South Carolina after his parents relocated there when he was in middle school. He finished high school and attended college and graduate school in South Carolina. He is a fair bit older than other participants (59). Prior to school counseling, this participant had a career in "IT" (information technology). He is currently a second year school counselor in a United States Department of Defense school in Virginia, which he indicated was very racially diverse. He recently completed a doctoral program in school counseling.

Kevin	A White male who grew up in a predominantly White suburban area in the United States Southeast. He is currently in his 6th year as a school counselor at the elementary level. His first 5 years as a school counselor were at a very diverse school, but he recently transferred to another, predominantly White, school in the same district. He is currently in a doctoral program for school counseling.
Karen	A White female from southern Florida who moved to Virginia with her parents when she was starting middle school. She is currently in her 22nd year of school counseling. She works in Northern Virginia in a suburb of the District of Columbia in an elementary school with a student population that is heavily Asian (predominantly Korean).
Francis	A White female in her 7th year school counselor. She grew up in New Jersey but currently lives and works in the District of Columbia metropolitan area of Virginia. She works at an elementary school which consists largely of a Hispanic population.
Paul	A White male who spent his early formative years growing up in Ohio amongst a largely Italian American and Jewish population. He identifies as White, but also strongly identifies as an Italian American. He moved to Georgia as an adolescent. He describes the community he moved into as lacking cultural identity (predominantly White). He has worked as an elementary school counselor in a suburban Atlanta school with a fairly diverse school makeup (predominantly white) for the last 10 years.
Sandy	A White female who was born and raised in the Tampa, Florida area. She describes her neighborhood there as very diverse. She went to college in Kentucky and graduate school in Florida before accepting a school counseling job at a middle school in the metro-Atlanta area where she has been for the last 12 years. She describes her current school as diverse – consisting of mostly Black, Hispanic, and Latino/a students.

|	
Christine	A White female who grew up in central Virginia. She began her school counseling career in a Title 1 elementary school in Virginia which consisted of a largely Hispanic population. After 5 years of school counseling in Virginia, she relocated to the metro-Atlanta area and became a middle school counselor in an affluent suburban Atlanta school with a predominantly White population.
Ruthie	A White female who grew up in the Atlanta, Georgia area in a neighborhood and school system which was very diverse. She placed emphasis on the fact that her father was a preacher and both parents stressed the importance of service. She originally studied social work (at a small, predominantly White private college) and then took a job as a graduation coach in an urban district at the high school level. She served in two separate urban high schools in this role over the last 5 years and described both settings as having low Socio Economic Status. She recently transferred to an elementary school in the same district as a school counselor. She describes the demographic of her current setting to be very high achieving and much less racial diverse (predominantly White), but still consisting of a variety of different races.
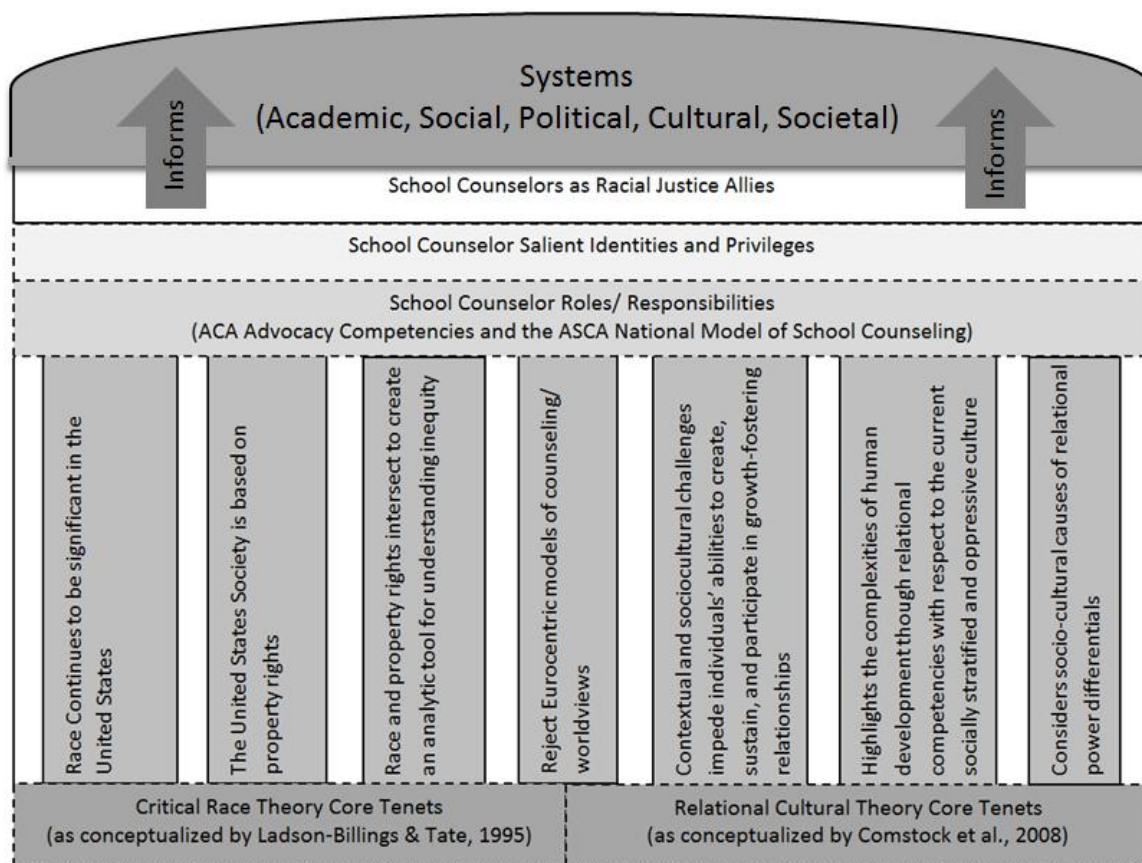
Figure 1. Visual representation of theoretical considerations for school counselors.
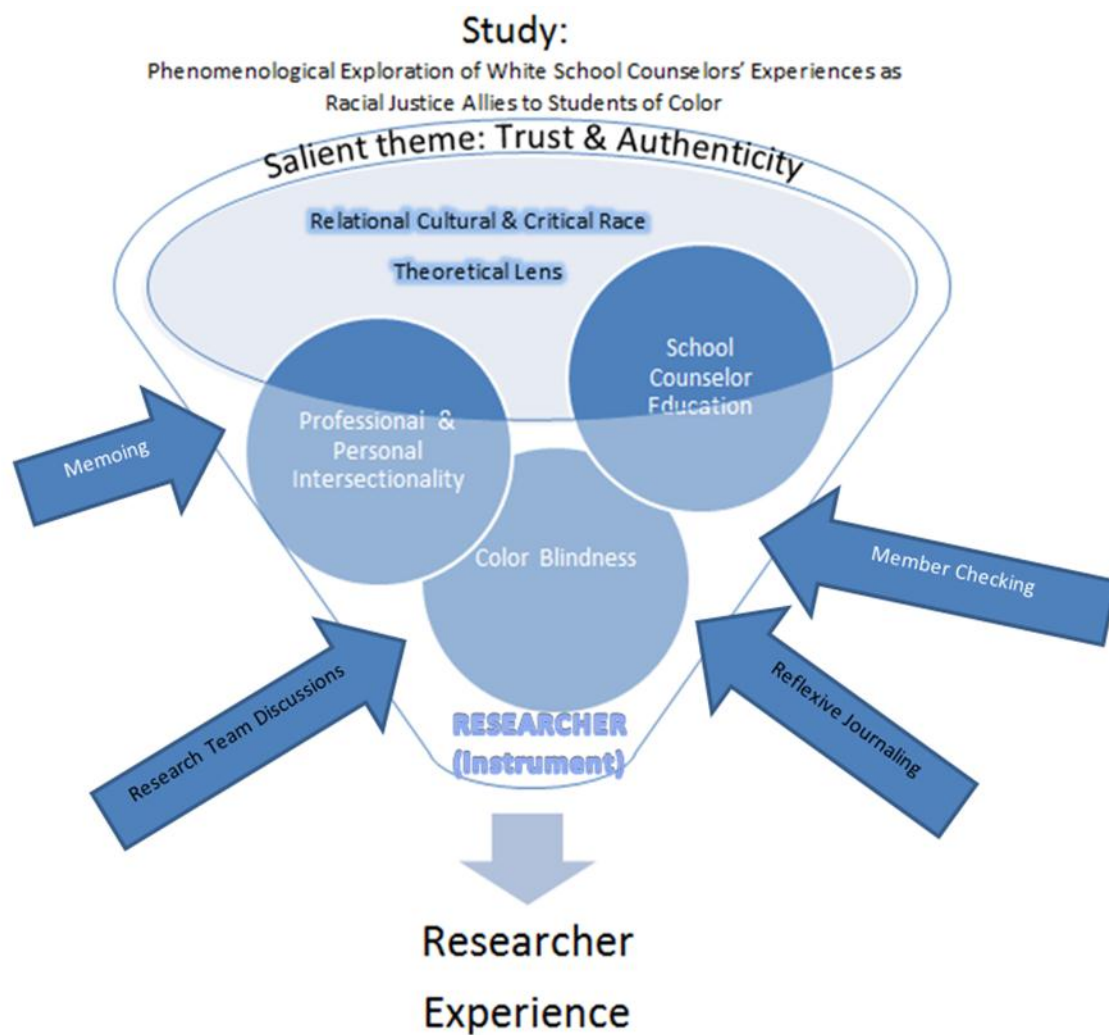
Figure 2. Conceptualization of research occurring within a transitional space.