

WHITE MAN WHITE SPACE TO WHITE MAN BLACK SPACE: A CRITICAL
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY BY A PRIVILEGED WHITE EDUCATIONAL LEADER

by

DAVID E. RABBIDEAU

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION:
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

2023

Oakland University
Rochester, Michigan

Doctoral Advisory Committee:

Julia B. Smith, Ed.D., Chair
Eileen Johnson, Ph.D.
Robert Martin, Ph.D.

©David E. Rabbideau, 2023
All Rights Reserved

To my family, Matthew, Joseph, Elizabeth, Sarah, Abigail, and Catherine, you are the most important people in the world to me. Lizzie, Sarah, and Abigail, I am eternally grateful for your deep albeit mostly silent contemplation as you helped me grapple with my research concepts in the car on the way to school. It seems that having earbuds in while we talk really does help you concentrate! You have all been patient and understanding as I have worked for countless hours on this dissertation. Even when I wasn't writing, the weight of my unfinished work took my mind away from our time together. I look forward to not thinking about my research and just being with you.

...and, yes, Matthew and Joseph, now we can toss the football around. I am done with my dissertation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My Father-in-Law, Brian Francis: You lead by example, always studying, always trying to improve, and always curious. You listened, inquired, cogitated, and, of course, we blathered together on this journey. If the world only knew how many of its problems we solved while enjoying a cigar and a beer... well, I'm guessing not much would change.

Mom and Dad, or as we say, "Yo, Mom and Dad!": I don't think I could ever find the right words to express my thanks for your support. I have rewritten this acknowledgement many times hoping to get it right. Had you not supported me in this process, this dissertation would not have happened. So the best thank I can think of is to say, "I finished." Thank you.

Dr. Eileen Johnson: I am so thankful for your honest feedback and encouragement. From the time you told me my writing was, "kind of a mess, and I don't know what to do with it," to the time you said, "I really think this is publishable," you always encouraged me. Thank you for being a part of this life changing process.

Dr. Robert Martin: Our Sunday meetings at Starbucks were life changing and lifesaving. While my professional life was at its lowest point, each time we met, you gave me hope that I could survive another week of insanity and come out a better person. You pushed, guided, and challenged my thinking with an amazing level of skill and compassion. I look forward to our next in person Starbucks session.

Dr. Julia Smith: You are amazing, and I could not have made it without you. Each time we met to discuss my research, you so quickly provided clarity to issues that were so cloudy in my thinking. You never seemed to tire from telling me, “Okay, now it’s time to write.” Thank you!

Andrae Hudson: My friend. I hope you read this and know that you planted the seeds of my transformation. We talked. Our families Slow Rolled together. You came to my church and literally danced in the aisles as my strait-laced worship band played in front of an even straighter-laced congregation. Our families broke bread together. I can still hear your voice when you said to me, “you got to reach out and *touch* them.” You don’t know it, but you helped me write this dissertation and change the way I view the world. Rest in peace, my friend.

DAVID E. RABBIDEAU

ABSTRACT

Adviser: Julia B. Smith, Ed.D.

The purpose of this critical autoethnographic study was to explore, (a) the role that race played in shaping my responses to demographic changes in the public school district that I served, (b) how I could use this new understanding to improve my practice as an educational leader, and (c) how my research and experience could serve as a model for other White leaders, who like me, represent most educational leaders serving all students and in particular, African American children.

This critical autoethnography analyzed data from personal writings generated over a two-year period: 194 Personal Journal Entries and 67 Emails to my parents. The results of this study showed that I, like most White people, chose to lead a segregated life. Leading a segregated life allows the common sense of White hegemony to thrive as there is no challenge to it in daily interactions. It was through forced integration that I experienced in my work environment that exposed me to the voice of color which provided the counter story to the common sense of White hegemony. Through this process, I learned how difficult it is for White people to recognize their race and the impact that race has on the lives of people of color. I learned that by becoming critically conscious, I have a new appreciation for the stories that all students, especially African American students bring to the classroom. This new understanding and appreciation of the lived racial experiences of others will help me improve my decision-making process

when leading in school districts. This study, its process, and its results, should serve as a model of self-reflection and critical self-assessment for educational leaders.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
CHAPTER ONE	
INTRODUCTION	1
Background to the issue	4
Conceptual Framework	11
Context	14
Michigan Suburban Districts Demographics	15
Teacher Demographics	16
Administrator Demographics	17
Superintendent Demographics	17
Teacher Preparation Program Demographics	19
Problem Statement and Research Questions	20
Significance of the Research	22
CHAPTER TWO	
LITERATURE REVIEW	23
Unconscious Racism	23
Belief Systems	24
White Flight	26
School to Prison Pipeline	28
Disproportionate Referral to Special Education	29
Disproportionate Discipline of Black Students	31
Achievement Gap	35

TABLE OF CONTENTS - CONTINUED

Educational Leadership and the Issue of Racism	39
The Role of a Leader	39
Vision	40
CHAPTER THREE	
OVERVIEW AND METHODS	42
Introduction	42
Setting	44
Subject	47
Data Sources	49
Black Journal	49
Personal Journal	50
Emails to Mom and Dad	50
Organization of Data	51
Data Analysis Strategies	52
CHAPTER FOUR	
RESULTS	56
Stress	56
Truth and Trust	58
Contradictions	62
Two Worlds	63
Their Contradictions Trumped <i>My</i> Contradictions	66
Key Events	70
Conversations	73

TABLE OF CONTENTS - CONTINUED

\$400 Per Seat in a Privilege Free Zone	74
We Tried Bussing, it Didn't Work	79
Chapter Four Synopsis	83
CHAPTER FIVE	
CONCLUSIONS	84
Discussion and Conclusion	84
Overview	84
Summary and Implications of Findings	85
Segregated Life	86
White Hegemony Lessons Reinforced Unchallenged	87
Stuck Between Two Worlds Forced Integration	88
Transformative Learning Experience	90
Black Students Have Negative Experiences in the Public School Setting	92
Limitations	93
Future Research	95
Conclusions	95
REFERENCES	97

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The educational experiences and outcomes for Black students enrolled in public K-12 school districts are disproportionately negative as compared to students of other races and ethnicities and disproportionately based on their percentage of total enrollment in a school or district. Some negative outcomes for Black students include low high school graduation rates, high suspension and/or expulsion rates (Townsend, 2000; Ayscue, 2016), limited access to Advanced Placement (Kettler & Hurst, 2017) and college preparatory courses. Black students are more likely to sit in overcrowded classrooms, have a teacher who is not certified, or be referred to special education programs (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002; Salend & Garrick Duhany, 2005). For those Black students who do reach graduation, many are not prepared for success after high school. The negative outcomes are so pervasive that some describe the phenomenon as the school-to-prison pipeline (cf. Barnes & Motz, 2018; Dancy 2014), thus accusing the public school system of being an institution that prepares Black students for a life in the prison system rather than post K-12 success.

When confronted with these pervasive and negative outcomes, it is prudent to turn our attention to the adults charged with caring for Black students in the educational system. Some researchers (cf. Ayscue, 2016; Hunter & Donahoo, 2003; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009) have found that Black students perform better, with fewer behavior problems and higher academic achievement when they are with a Black teacher. However, most Black students will not encounter a Black teacher in their public-school experience; teachers and administrators in the K-12 public school are overwhelming

White. Data from 2019 shows that while 17.9% of Michigan public students were Black, 90% of the state's teachers and 82% of administrators were White and about 6% of teachers and nearly 15% of administrators were Black (Mischooldata.org, 2020). While White teachers and administrators can be successful in meeting the needs of their Black students, the negative experiences, and outcomes for a disproportionate number of Black students suggests that such success remains largely elusive. It is reasonable then to consider that race, which has been shown to impact every aspect of our society, plays a significant role in the disparate outcomes for our children in the public education system.

For my research I used the theoretical lenses of Critical Race Theory and White hegemony to expose and understand how race contributes to this problem of institutional failure for Black students. These theories suggest that widely held deficit thinking views of Black students and their families inform the actions of White teachers and administrators. These deficit views influence ostensibly 'objective' decisions made by White teachers and administrators in all areas of education such as discipline, special education, access to advanced learning opportunities, and so on. The research is clear, race plays a significant role in the educational experience of Black students.

As an educational leader, I have a vested interest in the role of leadership. Research has revealed that the role of leadership either at the school or district level plays an important role in the success or failure for all students (c.f. Goddard, Skrla, & Salloum, 2017; Johnson & Uline, 2006; Brown, Benkovitz, Muttillio, & Urban, 2011), and Black students (c.f. Norte, 1999; Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). Leaders who are critically self-aware and explicitly deal with the impact of race both within and outside the school experience have been shown to positively impact the educational success of

their Black students (Norte, 1999). Therefore, as a leader, it was incumbent upon me to conduct a self-examination to help improve my ability to perform as an educational leader.

As a White Male educational leader in a school district that experienced a demographic change in its student population, from 78% White to 78% Black in ten years, exploring the role race may have played in my personal and professional life is of great relevance and importance to me and by extension, most educational leaders who are likely to be White and male. As the demographics in the community and schools changed, my lived experience in the district as a leader certainly mirrored the theoretical frameworks of White hegemony. I held deficit views of the Black students and families that were enrolling in the district in increasing numbers. Many of the decisions I made were informed by my deficit thinking. As well, the achievement and success of the Black students in the district declined, although I believed we were providing adequate educational opportunities and supports for the students.

While I was aware of the issue of race played a role in the educational experience of the Black students in the district I served, my understanding of the issue was minimal at best. It was not until I was passed over by the Board of Education for an opportunity to interview for the position of superintendent and a Black superintendent was chosen to lead the district, that I began to engage in critical self-assessment. Therefore, I conducted my research using critical auto-ethnographic methods to explore myself as an individual and how race-based power structures informed the relationships I engaged in in my professional life during the time I worked with a Black superintendent.

Background to the Issue

After centuries of legal dehumanizing and oppression of people of color, the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s brought sweeping changes in our nation's legal doctrine and legislation that promised to make significant strides in righting the racial inequalities that have defined our nation's collective history. Referred to today as the Civil Rights Movement, this period brought about new legislation declaring discrimination and segregation illegal such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the Fair Housing Act. During the same period, the Supreme Court made decisions that reversed previous racially inequitable rulings by striking down discriminatory practices of government entities in public places such as schools, public parks, and public transportation (Brown & Jackson, 2013).

Perhaps the most well-known decision of this period is the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In its decision, the court ruled that state-mandated segregation of public schools was unconstitutional, ending what was left of the "separate but equal" doctrine established over a half-century earlier in the 1896 case *Plessey v. Fergusson*. Many in our country were hopeful *Brown* marked an end to a long and painful history of government-sponsored oppression in education that included such atrocities as state laws that criminalized the education of slaves, all of whom were Black. With *Brown* came the hope that a new era in which White and Black students would attend public schools' side-by-side had arrived.

However, as with all Civil Rights efforts, attempts to integrate schools post-*Brown* faced pragmatic and ideological challenges grounded in a deep history of racial oppression. For example, segregated residential patterns designed by decades of racist

housing policies implemented by local, state, and federal governments made the bussing of students into nearby school districts the primary method of integration (Rothstein, 2017). Derrick Bell (1976), a founder of the Critical Race Theory, highlighted an ideological flaw in integration arguments made by the NAACP and other Civil Rights minded lawyers in writing, “the essence of integration effort arguments was that Black students needed to gain access to White schools because “equal educational opportunity” means integrated schools (p. 478).” In other words, bussing came at the expense of efforts to improve the quality of Black schools and education in large part because the White schools were perceived as superior, merely by the presence of White students (Bell, 1976). Evidence at the time from the limited examples of integration into White schools showed that Black students were not receiving an equitable education (Bell, 1976). The ramifications of a lack of focus on the quality of education of Black children fester today.

Parents, Black and White, resisted integration by bussing efforts. Given the racial climate of the times, many Black parents were fearful of retaliation for sending their children into predominately White schools (Eckes, 2004) and, as Bell (1976) had argued, they wished to focus on improving the quality of instruction provided in their local schools. White suburban parents objected to inner-city Black students bussed into their schools, and they were opposed to sending their children to widely perceived inferior inner-city schools (Bell, 1976). Some objections to bussing efforts from White communities rose to the level of the Supreme Court. In *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974), the Supreme Court reversed a lower court court-ordered desegregation plan in the Detroit Public School system, which mandated participation from predominately White suburban

districts. The lower court had found the state responsible for the segregation because of its role in drawing the enrollment boundaries for school districts. The court therefore ruled that surrounding districts, which were predominately White, must be a part of the integration solution. The Supreme Court disagreed and ruled that desegregation of the Detroit Public School system was not the responsibility of the surrounding suburban school districts as they did nothing to cause the segregation. This ruling adversely impacted desegregation efforts by many large, urban, and predominately African American school districts such as Atlanta, Chicago, New York, Newark, and Philadelphia as they lacked diversity within their districts (Brown & Jackson, 2013).

In addition to resistance from parents, implementing *Brown v Board of Education* faced overt resistance from government officials across the nation and particularly in the south. For example, rather than allow Black children to attend predominately White schools, the Prince Edward school system chose to close all the schools in the public school system and provide vouchers for parents to choose the school they wished for their children to attend- a luxury that Black students could not take advantage of because the private schools that would accept the vouchers were not bound by *Brown* and therefore did not accept Black students (Eckes, 2004). In another example of government resistance, George Wallace, the late 4-term governor of Alabama, infamously defied the federal government when he ordered the Alabama state police to physically block entrance to public schools in Huntsville, Tuskegee, and Birmingham.

In the years since *Brown v. Board, I and II*, resistance to integration has morphed into what Bonilla-Silva (2017) has described as a more insidious form of racism, racism without racists. While the overt acts of resistance or racism may have subsided, racism

festers today, but with a new language, a new grammar (Bonilla-Silva, 2012). Layered over the overt acts of resistance to integration and bussing by government and parents is a long history of a subtle or passive resistance (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014) known as White Flight. White Flight is the act of White people physically changing their residence or school of enrollment to flee increasing racial diversity in their neighborhood or schools. A key ingredient in the creation of “vanilla suburbs, chocolate cities” was the exodus, or ‘flight’ of White people from the racially diverse central cities after World War II (Frey, 2018).

It is important to emphasize that this exodus was not solely a matter of personal freedom and choice; the ability to change residences to the neighborhood of one’s choosing is a privilege afforded to White people that our government actively denied Black people (Rothstein, 2017). However, the slow erosion of such racist governmental actions has resulted in significant changes in migration patterns in our country. The suburbs and suburban school districts today are rapidly becoming home to increasing numbers of people of color. Predictably though, new White Flight patterns have emerged from the suburbs to the outlying areas of our city suburbs (Frey, 2018). In other words, as Black people began to move to the predominately White suburbs, White people have responded by moving beyond the suburbs to exurban areas.

White Flight creates a wide range of challenges for public schools, each of which tends to impact Black children more so than White children and negatively so. White parents have chosen to take advantage of within the district school of choice options, withdrawing their children from their neighborhood school to enroll in a less diverse school within the same district. Some parents elect to de-enroll from the public schools

altogether and enroll in private schools (cf. Tarca, 2005; Evans, 2007a; Turner, 2015; Diem, Frankenberg, Jellison Holme, & Welton, 2016). Many White parents go so far as to move their residence to less diverse neighborhoods.

As White families flee neighborhoods or schools, enrollment in the local public school tends to decrease, thus reducing the amount of revenue available to the schools. With limited or decreasing funding, schools are not able to provide the level of academic and health services needed to support students, especially Black students who have been underserved by the public school system. Black children experience health conditions such as asthma and other chronic illnesses at a higher rate than White students. Black children need more remedial education than White children. These additional needs come at a cost that is not often affordable schools experiencing increasing diversity and decreasing enrollment.

White parents and teachers insidiously work together to perpetuate White flight by protecting others from experiencing diversity. For example, many White people view diversity in schools as a loss of status or excellence for teachers, students, and parents (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Yosso, 2002) and teachers have referred to working in such schools as “dirty work” (Cooper, 2009). Such perceptions and comments often result in White teachers seeking job transfers within their district to less diverse schools (Evans, 2007). White parents not only took advantage of within district school of choice to enroll their children in less diverse schools in the district (Diem et al., 2016) but have also advised prospective families to avoid schools that they consider too diverse (Cooper, 2009).

In more than one situation, groups of White parents banded together to threaten secession from a larger district by legally creating a new school district with rezoned enrollment maps that exclude more diverse neighborhoods (Diem et al., 2016; Evans, 2007). The insidiousness of White Flight makes it is quite common for communities and school districts experiencing an increase in residents and students of color to experience a rapid decrease in White residents and students (cf. Cooper, 2009; Tarca, 2005; Turner, 2015).

White Flight also involves other methods of avoiding Black people. White people may choose to avoid school-based activities and curriculum that push their comfort boundaries with diversity. For example, Evans (2007) found that parents pulled their children out of school early for the day to avoid school activities that sought to bring about racial awareness, such as Black History Month assemblies. White parents called to complain about an African American teacher's selection of multicultural material (Madsen & Mabileka, 2014) or complained that increased focus on diversity by the district had resulted in lower quality education for their children (Cooper, 2009). Thus, White Flight also refers to parents and students who "flee" multicultural curriculum and activities.

While the Civil Rights movement and *Brown v Board of Education* brought much hope that Black children would begin to experience equity in education, much of the promise of the Civil Rights Movement never materialized. Parents, students, and scholars alike lament the failed promise of racially integrated schools (c.f. Bell, 1980; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). What victories did occur, as one Critical Race Theory Founder Derrick Bell (1992) pointed out, were merely "symbolic" doing little if anything

to improve the lived day-to-day experience for Black people. Today, Black students are more likely to sit in overcrowded classrooms, have a teacher who is not certified, be suspended, and expelled or be referred to special education programs. For those Black students who do reach graduation, many are not prepared for success after high school. The conditions of the public-school system and education for Black children has come from a long history of racist housing policies, explicit and subtle acts of resistance to *Brown v Board of Education* integration efforts, and years of White Flight. Black children are often left to attend schools and communities that have been abandoned by White people.

There is little question that Black children today suffer substandard educational conditions and experiences created by a history of racism in our country. People in positions of power and influence, White people, made the decisions that created these conditions and experiences.

I see a strong parallel in my professional experience to that of the history described above. As a White male educational leader my career began in a White space, the predominately White school district I served in. In less than ten years, I found myself professionally in a Black space, the same district that had experienced a significant demographic shift in less than ten years. In that shift, I witnessed and personally engaged in resistance to diversity. I believe that my personal experience, my research, and most importantly, my critical analysis of my role in either perpetuating or improving the conditions and experiences of the Black students and staff that I served can serve as a model to educators and, White male educational leaders who so often struggle to examine themselves and the world around them with a critical eye.

Conceptual Framework

The stalling progress of the Civil Rights Movement in the late 60s and early 70s led to the emergence of two oppositional forms of scholarship: Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and its progeny, Critical Race Theory (CRT). CLS was driven by attorneys and scholars who shared the goal of exposing and challenging the idea that legal reasoning was neutral, value-free, and unaffected by social and economic relations, political forces, or cultural phenomena (Freeman, 1978). CLS scholars questioned the role of the legal system in legitimizing the status quo. (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Additionally, CLS scholars were frustrated by the White majority's co-opting of the language of the Civil Rights movement, for example, Dr. Martin Luther King's dream that people would be judged not by the color of their skin, but rather by the content of their character. Cases such as the landmark 1978 Supreme Court ruling in *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* in which the court decided that the University's practice of setting aside enrollment slots for racial and ethnic minorities violated the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002).

Critical Race Theory emerged when a group of legal scholars began to develop an agenda that focused on the effects of race and racism, understand how White supremacy and its oppression of People of Color had been established and perpetuated (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). These scholars were dissatisfied with the hesitancy of CLS scholars to address the significance of race and the endemic racism responsible for the social inequalities of the day. The question for CRT scholars is not *if* race plays a role in the oppression of people of color, but in *what* and *how many* ways it does. Racism is deeply

engrained from birth in the individual (Lawrence, 1987) and its grammar (Bonilla-Silva, 2012) is such a part of our society that it is all but invisible to White people, the majority of whom accept the reality of the world with uncritical eyes (Diangelo, 2018). CRT is grounded in the notion that racism flourishes today, is endemic in our society and not just simply the isolated actions of a few bad actors. CRT makes central the experiential knowledge of subordinated people (Love, 2010), it raises the voices of people of color and challenges the dominant perspective/Eurocentric values that normalized White and Whiteness (Love, 2010; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). CRT seeks to identify, analyze, and change the relationship between race and power (Solorzano, 1997; Delgado and Stefanic, 1993; Dixson and Rousseau, 2005). This challenging of the dominant perspective, or White hegemony, is a major component of the CRT and is central to my research.

White hegemony, a cultural hegemony, is the dominance of whiteness or White culture over others (Powell, 1996). The word *Hegemony*, as it first appeared around the 8th century BC, was used to describe the dominance (political, economic, and military) of a city-state over other city-states (Wikipedia). *Hegemony* referred to forceful acts until the early 20th Century when Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Philosopher and founding member of the Italian Communist Party, introduced the notion of a *cultural hegemony*. Gramsci, after having witnessed the failure of attempted worker revolutions posited by Karl Marx, realized that force alone was not enough, rather a culture had to be created to maintain hegemonic power (Buttigieg, 1975). The masses were made to be content with the power and wealth distributions that favored the ruling class through the ruling class's use of Civil institutions such as schools, media, language which created a collective consciousness that favored the dominant group. This collective consciousness is

illustrated by a society's mores, societal rules, ideas of beauty and value, etc. that all favor the dominant group (Buttigieg, 1975).

Whiteness or White culture has been expressed as valuable and exclusive property (Harris, 1993) and/or a position or social location (Charbeneau, 2015) from which to judge others. Whiteness is a property or position that provides privilege while at the same time denying privilege to others, and as a set of cultural practices that are usually invisible, thus going unmarked and unnamed (Rodriguez, 2000). White dominance is protected and perpetuated by a systematic, mystified, and complex process (Leonardo, 2004). Central to this process is the willful acceptance by White Americans of the invisible majority story lessons that profess race no longer matters, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

White hegemony is dependent on an accepted common sense or majority story that explains and rationalizes the status quo. Deficit thinking, meritocracy, individualism all builds the accepted common sense. This majority story is dependent on a dominant class that is willing to suspend disbelief and be ignorant of the reality that is around them. It is well-documented that most White people are unaware of their race and deny they receive race-based privileges others do not (cf Aviles de Bradley, 2015; Diangelo, 2018; Leonardo, 2004; Lewis, 2001; Picower, 2009). Equally well documented is a lack of critical reflection by White Americans on the overwhelming and contradictory evidence of a racial hierarchy in our society that demonstrates the significance of race (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Many scholars have determined that White people's unawareness of their own race and the lack of critical reflection are intentional and expose methods of White hegemony (Bell, Leonardo, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Zeus Leonardo in his

2004 article, *The Color of Supremacy: Beyond the discourse of 'white privilege'* stated it plainly in writing,

In order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetuate on people of color. As such, a critical pedagogy of white racial supremacy revolves less around the issue of unearned advantage or the state of being dominant, and more around direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it (p. 137).

Leonardo's words inspire me to use Critical Race Theory to examine myself and the role that my race has played in my personal and professional life. I intend to use Critical Race Theory to analyze and dismantle the role that White hegemony has played in my personal and professional life.

Context

In his book, *Diversity Explosion* (2018), internationally recognized demographer William Frey, highlighted four significant demographic changes that will dramatically accelerate the changing demographic face of our nation. These changes are 1) the rapid growth of "new minorities" including Hispanics, Asians, and increasingly multicultural populations; 2) the sharply diminished growth and rapid aging of America's White population; 3) Black economic advances and migration reversals, and 4) the shift toward a nation in which no racial group is the majority.

As public schools are generally a reflection of the neighborhoods they serve, these trends seem to be playing out in the public-school classrooms across the nation.

Demographically, public-school classrooms are experiencing a similar decrease in enrollment of White students and an increase in enrollment of students of color. Even suburban schools, long the bastions of White middle-class families, are experiencing

increasingly diverse student enrollment demographics paired with declining White student enrollments.

Michigan Suburban District Demographics

A review of Common Core Data housed on the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) website for the years 2010 to 2017 revealed that Michigan's suburban school district have been experiencing similar trends in demographics detailed by Frey (2018). The data indicated enrollment in schools categorized as Suburban Large, Suburban Mid-Size, and Suburban Small in Michigan increased by approximately 3% from 665,504 in 2010-11 to 680,064 in 2017-18. Suburban school districts in Michigan also became more diverse. Data from NCES showed that Hispanic enrollment grew from 31,307 or (4.7%) of suburban enrollment to 46,067 or (6.77%). Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander enrollments increased from 20,713 (3.11%) to 24,821 (3.65%). In the same period, as Frey noted, Blacks migrated to the suburbs and Black student enrollment increased from 101,603 (15.27%) to 111,356 (16.37%). In line with national trends Michigan's traditionally White suburban school districts have been enrolling more students of color.

Another relevant demographic trend identified by Frey (2018), was in the population of people reporting as Multicultural. Frey predicted that the next official census would show a rapid increase in those reporting as Multicultural. This trend appears to be playing out in suburban schools as the enrollment of students identifying as two or more Races increased the most and more than doubled from 13,916 (2.09%) to 28,865 (4.24%). Finally, Frey noted that the White population is declining and moving out of the suburbs to locations outside of metropolitan areas. White student enrollment

declined from 494,030 (74.23%) and declined to 466,461 (68.59%). As the nation records an increase in people reporting as multicultural, so too have Michigan's suburban schools, at the same time enrollment of White student's has been declining.

Teacher Demographics

As school districts across the nation are enrolling fewer White students and more students of color, teachers have remained a predominately White group. According to NCES, as far back as the 1987-88 school year, 86.9% of the nation's teachers were White. Though the diversity of this group increased each year slightly, in 2015-16, teacher demographics still show 80% are White. The breakdown of minority teachers shows that like the national demographic changes, Asians, Hispanics, and teachers who report as two or more races account for a small but growing percentage of the overall population of teachers while Black and American Indian teachers declined. Between the 1987-88 and the 2015-16 school years, the portion of the total teaching population who are Hispanic increased from 3.0% to 8.8%; Asian teachers grew from 0.9% to 2.3%, and since the 03-04 school year (the first year data was available) two or more races increased from 0.7% to 1.4%. Since 1987-88, American Indian/Alaska declined from 1.0% in 1987-88 to 0.4% and Black teachers decreased from 8.2% to 6.7%. Despite small increases in the numbers of minority teachers, most teachers are White.

According to MiSchoolData.org, the state of Michigan reported in the Fall of 2010, a staggering 90.15% of teachers were White, 7.82% were Black, 0.98% were Hispanic, 0.60% were Asian, and 0.14% reported as multi-Racial. Contrary to the increasing diversity of our country and the state of Michigan, in the Fall of 2016, the percentage of Michigan teachers reporting as White increased to 91.51%. Hispanic and

Asian teachers made up a slightly larger percentage of total teachers, 1.18% were Hispanic, and 0.71% were Asian, 0.25% reported as multi-Racial. Black teachers made up a smaller percentage representing only 6.01% of the teaching force. The percentage of Michigan teachers who self-report as White has been increasing over the years while the percentage of Black teachers has decreased slightly.

Administrator Demographics

Administrator demographics in Michigan have remained consistent over a six-year period. In 2010, Michigan administrators were a slightly more diverse cohort than teachers with 84.32% reporting as White, 13.70% as Black, 1.08% as Hispanic, and 0.38% as Asian, and 0.16% reported as multi-Racial. In 2016, the demographics of administrators were relatively unchanged with 84.31% reporting as White, 13.13% as Black, 1.34% as Hispanic, and 0.57% as Asian, and 0.33% reported as multi-Racial. The demographics of Michigan's administrators are slightly more diverse than the demographics of the teachers, but the administrator's demographics remain relatively unchanged over the six-year period between 2010 and 2016.

Superintendent Demographics

Two organizations that conducted demographic surveys of superintendents across the nation are The Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) and The American Association of Superintendents (AASA). CGCS represents the nation's largest urban school districts and admittedly provides a selective rather than random sample. AASA, which has affiliations with 49 state administrator associations which provides a national, yet small sample. Both groups administered surveys in the past decade that collected demographic data on the superintendent.

The results from the CGCS presented survey results that indicated a diverse group of superintendents. CGCS surveyed its 66 member districts in 2014 and received responses from 53 of the districts. I see no indication that they have conducted a similar survey in the years since 2014. Their report *Urban School Superintendents: Characteristics, Tenure, and Salary Report* indicated that their member districts account for 6.9 million or 14% of America's 49.2 million K-12 students. Of those that responded, approximately 45% of the superintendents were White, 42% were Black, and 9% were Hispanic or 51% combined. CGCS reports that the diversity of their member districts had increased since 2003 in which Black and Hispanic superintendents accounted for 43% of superintendents. CGCS' survey of their 66 member districts produced results that indicated a near even split between the number White superintendent and non-White superintendents.

The results produced by AASA in their survey of superintendents painted a less diverse picture of superintendents across the country. AASA conducts a decennial survey of superintendents entitled *The American School Superintendent 2010 Decennial Study*. Their *Superintendent Salary and Benefits* report is a yearly complement to the ten-year report. The 2010 Decennial report showed that 94% of Superintendents in 2010 self-identified as White (Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, and Ellerson, 2011). According to the 2017 *Superintendent Salary and Benefits Study* out of 1172 respondents 93% self-reported as White (non-Hispanic) and 2% self-reported as Black or African American (Finnan & McCord, 2018).

As a point of reference to surveys conducted by professional organizations, I share superintendent demographic data from a recent study. Chingos, Whitehurst, and

Lindquist (2014) found that in their study of superintendents in Florida and North Carolina, 83% of the superintendents were male, and 93% were White. While Non-White superintendents accounted for 7% of superintendents, those 7% represented 20% of the student bodies represented in the study. Non-White superintendents were more likely to lead larger urban districts. Like AASA, Chingos et al. (2014) found the superintendent office to be overwhelmingly held by people who self-report as White.

Teacher Preparation Program Demographics

Teacher preparation programs have and continue to enroll mostly White students. For example, Picower (2009) reported that 80% to 93% of all current teacher education students were White females. In 2012, 74% of prospective teachers enrolled in traditional programs, 65% of those enrolled in university-based alternative programs, and 59% of those enrolled in non-university-based alternative programs, were White (Sleeter, 2017). Bryan (2017) a clinical assistant professor in the College of Education at a predominately White Institution in the south reported that approximately 85-90% of pre-service teachers in my program are White, middle-class, and female. The demographics of those enrolled in teacher preparation programs remain predominately White signaling a continuation of the status quo for our African American students.

The demographic patterns of students, teachers, administrators, superintendents, and future teachers are important to the field of education and my research as it plays a part in creating the conditions in the public schools that students of color attend. More importantly, the data show that the odds are overwhelming that a Black student will not have a teacher who is Black during their time as a K-12 student. The research shows that most White people struggle to identify their race and the role race plays in our society

and in the educational process. Therefore, students of color are likely to suffer under White teachers and administrators who are perpetuating White hegemony by creating a systematic environment of White hegemony in the schools they teach and lead in. Not surprisingly then, the research shows that districts that undergo demographic changes engage in activities of White hegemony such as deficit thinking, colorblindness, and others.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The educational outcomes and experiences for Black children in our public schools are unacceptable. The research is clear that the race of the students and adults in the educational environment matters. White educational leaders hesitate and even resist acknowledging and examining the impact of their race and how it has shaped the way they respond to diversity. Even more so, they struggle to understand the impact of race on the lives of their African American students. Those racialized experiences of the White administrators and the African American students directly impact the learning environment.

White hegemony perpetuates deficit thinking amongst White educational leaders that tells them that the negative outcomes for Black children are a result of deficits the children, their families, their culture and so on, bring to the educational environment. However, the responsibility for solving the problem of unacceptable education outcomes and experiences for African American children falls not to the students, but the adults charged with their care.

The journey to improving the educational experiences and outcomes for Black children begins with a critical self-examination with a focus on the role race plays in the

life of educational leaders and of course, their students. The research shows that when leaders critically examine themselves and explicitly focus on race, the achievement of all students increases and the gap between White and Black students closes (Norte, 1999). Therefore, I want to use this dissertation to critically examine my lived racial experience and its impact on me as an educational leader so that I can better serve the students in my purview and so I can serve as a model for other White Male Educational Leaders who need to do the same.

For my research, I will conduct a critical autoethnography. This blurred and messy autobiographical genre of writing (cf Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Chang, 2008) allows the author to write in highly personalized styles, using accounts that draw upon their experience for the purposes of extending sociological understanding (Wall, 2006). Autoethnographic work allows an exploration to begin without a specific list of questions. Through the process of data collection, analysis, and reflection specific questions will not doubt reveal themselves. Some questions will be worth pursuing as part of this research, while others may be set aside for subsequent research projects. With that being said, I begin my research with an overarching goals/questions of 1) what role did race play in shaping my responses to demographic changes in the school district that I served; 2) how I can use this new understanding to improve my practice as an educational leader; and 3) how my research and experience can serve as a model for others like me who represent most educational leaders serving all students and in particular, Black children.

Significance of the Research

Most African American children will only attend schools with White teachers and leaders (c.f., Hunter & Donahoo, 2003). At the same time, more and more White teachers in historically White districts are encountering a growing number of students of color and in particular, Black children (Holme, Diem, & Welton, 2014). The issue of how White leaders respond to demographic change in the schools they serve is only going to grow as our nation heads towards a minority White country. As the demographics of our teachers and leaders remain stubbornly White, the audience for this research is likely to continue to grow. As stated previously, White people struggle to come to terms with the fact that we live in a racialized world. To address this problem, providing models of how one can conduct a critical self-analysis can be an important step towards progress. As there are few, if any, examples of White male educational leaders conducting such an analysis, this research certainly fills a gap in the existing research.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW
Racism in School Issues

Unconscious Racism

Charles Lawrence put forth in his 1987 article, *The Id, The Ego, and Equal Protection: Reckoning with Unconscious Racism* the notion that our American society has come to accept, expect, and perpetuate a racial hierarchy in our country. The foundation of this notion is that we have irrationally attached such significance to a person's race, that we structure our society, granting access and privilege to some over others according to their race. This racial structure, a hierarchy that places White people at the top and Black people at the bottom, saturates all aspects of our society; therefore, beginning early in life, we learn racial lessons of value, beauty, distribution of power and wealth and so on. Sometimes these lessons are explicit, such as the parent that teaches their children that people of color are less capable than White people. However, most of the lessons come from living a non-critical existence in this racial structure, allowing implicit lessons to be passed on. These lessons, lessons of racism, Lawrence argued, are far more damaging because they live in our unconscious. Put more directly, Lawrence characterized racism as a disease, for which the "diagnosis is difficult, because our own contamination with the very illness for which a cure is sought impairs our comprehension of the disorder (Lawrence, 1987, p.321)."

Lawrence's words serve as the foundation of the focus of my research and literature review. White hegemony is the disease he stated we were infected with. As a

White male educational leader, I had certain beliefs systems, or interpretations of how our society operates. As a White male, I recognize that my belief systems went unexamined. The research is clear, however, that it is the responsibility of an educational leader to examine their belief systems to set a vision for the organization they lead so that all students, especially our underserved Black students can succeed.

Belief Systems

The first dilemma of White hegemony is illustrated in a brief discussion of a school system's belief system and efficacy. In the literature I found two prevalent and intertwined themes; low expectations of students of color (cf Mitchell, 2011; Yosso, 2002; Evans, 2007 & 2007a; Davis, Gooden, & Micheaux, 2015) and teacher and administrator belief in the deficit thinking of students of color (cf Bryan, 2007; Lewis, 2001; Madsen & Mabokela, 2014; Liou & Hermanns, 2017).

School and district leaders play a primary role in determining the belief systems and developing a sense of collective efficacy (Leithwood, 2010) in their building or district through their words and actions as they make sense of forces that impact the learning environment such as a demographic shift in the district (cf Goddard, et al, 2017; Evans, 2007; Khalifa et al., 2016). All too often, low expectations and deficit thinking shape the interactions between stakeholders and manifest in countless ways such as resistance to diversity (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014), the over-disciplining students of color (Dancy, 2014; Ladsen-Billings, 2011), and lack of rigor in the curriculum (Turner, 2015). Conversely, when stakeholders have academic optimism (all students can learn and at high levels), academic emphasis (a high degree of drive for academic success), (Brown, et al, 2011) and high levels of collective efficacy (cf Brown, et al, 2011;

Leithwood, 2010; Goddard, et al, 2017), student achievement for all students increases and the gap between White and Black students closes.

The belief system of the district must be one that values diversity, one that has positive beliefs and assumptions about people of color. Leaders that have been successful in raising the achievement levels for all students and at closing the gap between Black and White students have developed a sense of collective efficacy in part, by dealing explicitly with the issue of race (Norte, 1999). To have high efficacy, one needs to rid themselves of deficit thinking and low expectations of students of color and believe that they and their students can succeed in improving the learning of all students.

The literature illuminated a difference in reactions amongst leaders to demographic shifts. Some leaders attempted to deal explicitly with the issue of race by, for example, setting race-focused visions, policies, and so on, thus increasing the likelihood of sustainable success (cf Norte, 1999; Goddard, et al, 2017). Other leaders attempted to work around the issue of race, through colorblind visions, policies, etc., frequently resulting in a maintaining of the status quo (cf Lewis, 2001; Davis, et al, 2015). Regardless of the difference in reactions, White hegemony, i.e., low expectations and deficit thinking, was an omnipresent force confronting educational leaders. White hegemony is a powerful combination of explicit and implicit obstacles exhibited in the educational organization's belief system. These hegemonic belief systems have a direct impact on the educational process for all students and in particular, students of color (Evans, 2007a).

White Flight

White flight is a passive form of resistance to diversity (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014) that can be seen in many aspects of demographically changing school districts. White people have employed many different forms of flight such as moving one's residence, choosing another school or district, transferring to other work assignments, or pulling students out of school early to avoid multi-cultural lessons or activities. White flight is often a collaborative effort amongst White parents who advise new families what schools to avoid because they are too diverse (Cooper, 2009), as well as white staff members who view diverse schools as "dirty work" and seek job transfers within their district to less diverse schools (Evans, 2007). The end goal of any form of White flight is to avoid Black people.

White flight, is best known as White people fleeing diversity by moving out of neighborhoods as people of color move in or utilizing intra-district school of choice options, allowing them to remain in their residence, yet send their children to less diverse schools in the same district. Some parents elect to withdraw from the public schools altogether and enroll in private schools (cf Tarca, 2005; Evans, 2007a; Turner, 2015; Diem, et al., 2016). In school districts where leaders had implemented student integration policies, groups of parents went so far as to band together and attempt to secede a geographic portion of the district to create new less diverse enrollment boundaries (Evans, 2007a; Diem et al., 2016). It is quite common for communities, school districts, and schools experiencing an increase in people of color to also experience a rapid decrease in White residents and students (cf Cooper, 2009; Tarca, 2005; Turner, 2015). White flight is a common form of resistance to diversity that demographically changing districts must deal with.

White parents evade curriculum, instruction, or other activities that seek to educate about and celebrate diversity. For example, Evans (2007) found that parents avoided school activities that sought to bring about racial awareness by pulling their students out of school early to miss a Black History Month assembly. Districts experienced pushback from parents that led to the cancellation of units of instruction. Parents called to complain about the African American teacher's selection of multicultural material (Madsen & Mabileka, 2014). As well, other White parents have advised prospective families to avoid schools that they consider too diverse or complained that increased focus on diversity by the district had resulted in a lower quality education for their children (Cooper, 2009). White flight is not only when White parents physically flee a district that is experiencing demographic changes, parents and students can also "flee" multicultural curriculum and activities.

White flight creates challenges for educational leaders in several ways. For example, as the White population of a school or district decreases, often the total population of students decreases as well creating a reduction in financial revenue. Educational leaders have responded by creating marketing plans or adding gifted and talented programs described as opportunities for all students but are truly designed to retain White students and their families (Evans, 2007). Educational leaders in demographically changing schools and districts also face White flight from their teaching staff. White teachers have engaged in White flight by requesting transfers to less diverse schools within the district they were employed (Evans, 2007a). The resultant holes in teaching staff create staffing challenges in more diverse schools. White flight has many

consequences from financial to staffing that school and district leaders must contend with.

School to Prison Pipeline

School and district leaders are responsible for the belief systems, policies, and procedures that create the environment in which children have their educational experience. Evidence would suggest that the needs of Black children are not being met by the belief systems, policies, and procedures created by public school leaders. Some go as far as to suggest that the policies and procedures of the public school system create a school environment known as the school-to-prison-pipeline (cf Dancy, 2014; Bryan, 2017). The school-to-prison pipeline is an accumulation of negative outcomes for Black children that have the effect of systematically pushing them out of the public education system and into the legal and prison systems. A discussion of the school-to-prison pipeline and some of the factors that contribute to it such as the disproportionate discipline, the disproportionate referral to special education, and the achievement gap is relevant as it not only helps to understand the urgency and complexity of this trend, but also serves to better detail the work that lies ahead for educational leaders. The school-to-prison pipeline is accumulation of the negative outcomes for Black children created by the beliefs, policies, and procedures created by educational leaders in our public schools.

The school to prison pipeline describes a disturbing national trend in which the public school system systematically pushes Black children out of the school system and into the criminal justice and prison systems (cf Dancy, 2014; Bryan, 2017). The systematic push begins as early as pre-school with the disproportionate discipline of Black children. It is often concurrent with the disproportionate referral of Black children

to special education programs throughout their school career. A cumulative effect of disproportionate discipline and special education referrals is a denial of access to general education and advanced learning opportunities. Or, in other words, the property of Whiteness (Harris, 1993). This denial leaves Black children to inhabit spaces of low rigor, low expectations, low academic achievement, and school environments that mirror, and some have argued, are designed to prepare them for life in the prison system.

Many of the processes related to discipline, special education, and advanced learning opportunities rely on subjective decisions often informed by White educators misinterpreting the actions and abilities of Black students and their culture (cf Townsend, 2000; Blanchett, 2006; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, and Tobin, 2011; Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2005; Frankenberg, Ayscue, & Tyler, 2016). The use of the word “misinterpreting” should not be understood as unintentional. Clearly, there is significant evidence that it is the result of White privilege and or racism (Blachett, 2006; Townsend, 2000). There is no doubt the stain of White hegemony has cultivated the specimen of the school-to-prison pipeline.

In the following sections, I will discuss the disproportionate placement in special education, disproportionate discipline, and the achievement gap to better understand the school-to-prison pipeline. There are undoubtedly other factors that contribute to this system, but I will limit my discussion to these central and intertwined factors.

Disproportionate Referral to Special Education

Black students are disproportionately pushed from the general education classroom to the special education classroom. This push results in an over-representation of Black students in special education classrooms and programs. When the percentage of

students in a special education program exceeds the total percentage of students in the school or district, this ratio is identified as an over-representation. Several articles reference the over-representation of Black students in special education (cf Blanchett, 2006; Dancy, 2014; Salend & Garrick Dunaney, 2005). The extent of the over-representation reported is fairly constant, for example, 20% of the student population is Black yet they account for 33% of students identified as mentally retarded, 27% of students diagnosed as emotionally disturbed, and 18% of students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities (Dancy, 2014), 14.8% of the student population and 20% of the special education population (Blanchett, 2006) or 16% of student population and 33% of the special education population (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002). Once in the special education programs, Black students experience lower academic growth and exit special education far less than their White peers (Blanchett, 2006). Some report that only 10% of Black boys who are referred to special education return to the general education classroom permanently and only 27% ever graduate (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Black students are disproportionately removed from the general education setting through the special education referral process thus limiting their opportunities to receive on grade level instruction.

In addition to segregation from general education, evidence of further segregation within the special education program exists which goes against the federal guidance of providing special education supports in “the least restrictive environment,” meaning students still attend general education classes and either receive supports in the classroom or at a time that does not take them away from the general education instruction. However, Black special education students have been shown to spend up to 60% of their

school day segregated from general education classrooms (Blanchett, 2006). Referrals to special education programs remove Black students from the general education setting as well as further segregate them within the program thus keeping them from rigorous learning opportunities expected by federal guidelines.

Disproportionate Discipline of Black Students

Black children experience disproportionate discipline throughout their experience in public schools. As early as pre-school and until they exit the system, Black children are more frequently disciplined, suspended, suspended for longer periods, and expelled than their white counterparts. Data from the Office of Civil Rights has shown that Black children are three and a half times more likely to be suspended and expelled than their White peers (Davis et al, 2015). Skiba et al, (2011) found that Black students are between two and three times as likely to be referred to the principal's office for problem behavior than their White peers. Black students also encounter a disconnect where White teachers have tolerated the same behavior from their White students that they disciplined their Black students (Ladson-Billings, 2011; Bryan, 2017). Deficit thinking and low expectations of Black children likely contribute to the disproportionate discipline as teachers and administrators may misinterpret the social cues from Black students (Blanchett, 2006).

Deficit thinking views held by White leaders and teachers of people of color play a central role in the disproportionate disciplining of Black children. Being Black or Brown has been associated with negative connotations (Lewis, 2001), feelings of fear of Black elementary students (Picower, 2009), Black males have been described by their teachers and administrators as aggressive, violent, and threatening (Evans, 2007a;

Picower, 2009) and Black girls report their teachers as being afraid of them (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). Black girls have been described as loud (Tarca, 2005), displaying elevated aggression (Blake, Butler, Lewis & Darrensborg, 2010), displaying a general lack of appropriate values and taste (Cousins, 1999), inadequately feminine (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). The deficit views of Black students held by many White leaders and teachers, influence decisions in the discipline process resulting in disproportionate discipline of Black students.

Ladson-Billings (2011) took the notion of deficit thinking further by exploring the loss of childhood Black males suffer not only in society but, more importantly, at the hands of the public school system. She describes Black males' childhood, "evaporating before they are eight or nine-years-old when teachers and other school officials begin to think of them as 'men.' The fear and control previously referenced appears to be activated and the once 'cute' boys become problematic 'men' (Ladson-Billings, 2011, p. 10)." There is a historical ontological reasoning about Black male deviancy and inferiority, where even Black males in kindergarten are hypersexualized and considered a threat to White female sexuality (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Though she applies this notion to Black males, it could help to provide more robust context for examining the disproportionate discipline of Black children, male and female, in the public school system.

As the demographics of a school district change, Black students frequently encounter school environments in which leaders have implemented strict policies and procedures (Tarca, 2005). The schools are often heavily regulated (uniforms, no talking in social spaces such as hallways and the cafeteria, specific procedures for lining up, and

so on (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Many school leaders implemented zero-tolerance behavior policies (Evans, 2007a), while others modified existing behavior policies by implementing purportedly race-neutral behavior systems such as Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). Some researchers criticize PBIS because they claim it forces all students to conform to White middle-class values (Welton et al, 2013) while others who do not (Skiba et al. 2011). Regardless of the critique, the behavior system, or the zero-tolerance policies, the results are the same, disproportionate discipline of Black students. To keep up with the increase in disproportionate referrals of Black students' suspensions and expulsions of African American students, leaders have had to hire additional staff support (Evans, 2007a). Black students are more likely to attend schools that have armed police officers on campus thus increasing the likelihood that they are placed in police custody and inserted into the school to prison pipeline (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Common leadership responses to demographic change include implementing strict no tolerance policies and procedures to maintain order in the school environment creating an environment which contributes to the disproportionate discipline of Black students.

The result of the deficit thinking and increased focus on regime and behavior is that Black students as early as pre-school are disproportionately disciplined and suspended (Bryan, 2017). One analysis of OCR data showed that Black children accounted for 48% of students in pre-school receiving an out of school suspension, despite their only accounting for 18% of the pre-school population (Davis et al, 2015). The Civil Rights Office (2014) reported Black boys represented 9% of the current kindergarten population yet they represented 48-50% of all suspensions at that level

(Bryan, 2017). Black males account for 8% of the student body yet 22% of suspensions (Ladson-Billings, 2011). This data does not improve as the students matriculate to higher grades. Black males are more likely to be suspended or expelled from secondary schools for minor disciplinary infractions in comparison to their White counterparts (Bryan, 2017; Mitchell, 2011). One study found that Black girls in high school were more than four times more likely to be out-of-school suspended than White girls (Blake et al, 2010). The disproportionate discipline of Black children begins as early as preschool and continues through the K-12 experience.

Researchers have described a domino effect of exclusionary disciplinary practices such as out of school suspensions (cf Townsend 2000; Skiba et al, 2011; Barnes & Motz, 2018). Students who are suspended miss out on instruction, are relegated to low rigor remedial courses, frequently continue to do poorly academically, thus increasing their likelihood of retention. As well, students who are suspended typically do not receive instruction on prosocial behavior. Townsend continues by pointing out that students who are suspended spend time with other people who have not learned prosocial behaviors, spend unsupervised time on the streets, and are at greater risk for encountering the legal system (Barnes & Motz, 2018). A result of the cumulative effect of this domino effect is that Black students who have been suspended frequently self-select to leave the school system thus increasing the dropout rate and reducing the graduation rate of Black students (Townsend, 2000). Exclusionary discipline practices have a compounding effect as students who are removed from the school fall farther behind academically, associate with other suspended students who may not possess the social skills necessary to succeed

in the school environment and are at greater risk of encountering the legal system while suspended.

Evidence of the negative impact of out of school suspensions can be seen as early as kindergarten. Most Black boys leave kindergarten 2-3 standard deviations lower than their White counterparts (Aratani, et al, 2011; as cited in Bryan, 2017; Mitchell, 2011). This discrepancy is important because third grade literacy rates are used to determine future prison spatial needs (Bryan, 2017). Exclusionary discipline practices affect Black students early in their K-12 experience causing them to fall behind in important academic areas such as reading, a skill which is such a predictor of future success or failure, that it is used to predict future prison spatial needs.

Achievement Gap

The common understanding of student achievement is that Black students do not perform as well academically as White students (cf Turner, 2015; Bryan, 2017; Leithwood, 2010; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009). When compared to White students, Black students enroll in fewer advance learning opportunities (cf Yosso, 2002; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Kettler & Hurst, 2017), do not score as high on standardized tests (cf Tarca, 2005; Johnson & Uline, 2006), graduate high school (cf Dancy, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2011) and enroll in colleges at lower rates (cf Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Black students do not perform as well academically as White students in measures such as standardized testing, advanced learning opportunities, high school graduation, and college enrollment.

The dominant narrative, grounded in White hegemony, is that this underperformance is the result of the effort of the individual student and their families. It

denies the evidence of substandard conditions most Black students, even the ones who avoid being trapped by the school-prison pipeline, encounter in their public-school experience. For example, Black children are more likely to attend under-resourced schools (cf Dancy, 2014; Hunter & Donahoo, 2003). They are more likely to have a teacher who is inexperienced or new to the profession (cf Hunter & Donahoo, 2003; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009), and they are more likely to sit in classrooms with larger class rosters and experience a revolving door of teachers. Black students are not likely to have a Black teacher (which has been shown to positively impact their education), in part because Black pre-service teachers experience higher failure rates on state teacher certification exams thus decreasing the pool of Black teachers (cf Hunter & Donahoo, 2003; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009). Each of these factors, which are beyond the control of Black children and their parents, contributes to an unacceptable, substandard educational environment and outcomes for Black children.

A more accurate framing of the issue of academic disparities of Black students is that the failure is on the school system and not the individual and their family. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) reframed the achievement gap as an educational debt owed to Black students. Essentially, she takes issue with the framing of the disparities in achievement being described as an “achievement gap” because it ignores the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components that make up an education debt. The concept of an educational debt shines an ideological spotlight on the conditions our Black children suffer versus the belief that disparate outcomes are the result of individual effort. The concept of an educational debt represents the significant shift in world view that is needed amongst educators in our country, most of whom are White.

With cautious hope, there are examples of success in closing the achievement gap in the literature (Norte, 1999; Johnson and Uline, 2006; Brown et al., 2011). Those examples point to several common characteristics and actions districts possess and engage in that have closed the achievement gap between White and Black students while at the same time raising achievement for *all* students. The cautious hope spoke to a primary and common characteristic of these districts. Successful districts had a vision and belief system that countered White hegemony by explicitly focusing on the impact of race, eliminating deficit thinking, and holding high expectations for Black students and all students. As discussed earlier in this writing, this is significant and difficult work.

Building leaders have been found to play a critical role in building a sense of academic optimism, collective efficacy, and teacher trust, as well as applying their knowledge of best practices to help teachers improve their instructional craft (cf Norte, 1999; Johnson and Uline, 2006). Academic optimism consists of academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and teacher trust. Academic emphasis is a building or districtwide focus on improving the instruction and academic performance of each individual student (Brown et al., 2011). Collective efficacy, discussed earlier, is the belief that teachers and administrators can help their students meet high academic standards (Brown et al., 2011; Leithwood, 2010; Goddard, et al, 2017). Teacher trust represents a sense of trust between students, teachers, parents, and administrators (Brown et al., 2011; Johnson & Uline, 2006). As well, in these districts, parent involvement and partnership was at a very high level (cf Brown et al., 2011; Norte, 1999; Leithwood, 2010). Building leaders play an important role in creating academic optimism, collective efficacy, and trust in their buildings.

The literature review highlighted many issues that are relevant to my dissertation. Many of the material points are about the conditions that Black children experience in our public school system, conditions that I have spent my career trying to mitigate. A foundational finding for my research is that the adults, most of whom are White like me, hold deficit thinking of Black students and their families and act in accordance with those beliefs. This finding is problematic because it explains the current conditions as well as provides a view into the future of education that does not appear primed to disrupt the status quo. As White people struggle to recognize their race, and how race impacts the day to day lives of Black people, they conduct the business of educating Black students from a place of compliance rather than truly owning up to the issues and teaching and leading in bold ways that explicitly deal with race.

The focus of my research is on me. In what ways did I perpetuate White hegemony, in what ways did I disrupt White hegemony? My world view has changed from one that consisted of deficit thinking of people of color to one that is more in line with Ladson-Billings' "educational debt." I recognize that the individual's success is directly related to the conditions of our society and schools that are well beyond the control of Black individuals. How, through my research, do I better understand myself, the culture of the school throughout the demographic change, my time working under a Black superintendent. How do I use this understanding to improve my practice, make positive social justice changes in my professional practice, and how do I make sense of my experience in hopes to serve as a model of transformation for others like me in the world of education?

Educational Leadership and the Issue of Racism

The Role of a Leader

National standards on leadership such as the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) call on school and district leaders to set the vision and culture for those they lead (Johnson & Uline, 2006). It is, therefore, critical for educational leaders to have the proper mind set or belief system in order implement a vision that will result in success for all children. A review of the research shows that in places where the leaders have successfully created a culture of academic optimism, believing that ALL students can and will learn at high levels (Brown, et al, 2011), collective efficacy, the belief that educators have what they need to be successful in educating their students (Leithwood, 2010; Goodard, Skrla, & Salloum, 2017), and a vision explicitly focused on the issue of race (Norte, 1999; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016), the academic achievement of all students has risen and the achievement gap between Black and White students was reduced. As demographic changes occur in school districts, how leaders interpret those changes is passed on to the teachers, staff, and students through the words and actions of those leaders (Evans, 2007). Put another way, the success or failure of districts that experience demographic changes is largely determined by the beliefs and actions of the leaders (Evans, 2007; Khalifa, et al., 2016).

Examining the K-12 educational experience for Black children reveals a bleak picture of how educational leaders interpret and make sense of race (Evans, 2007). The disproportionate discipline of Black students, the disproportionate referral to special education, and the disparity in educational outcomes such as results on standardized tests, graduation rates, and college enrollment, paint such a dismal portrait of the public

education system experience for Black children, that it has been referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline (Dancy, 2014; Bryan, 2017). This Black student experience in our public education system would suggest that most leaders, most of whom are White, may lack the proper belief system and therefore struggle to implement a vision and culture that is best for Black children.

To build an understanding of the role leaders play in creating a positive vision and culture for demographically changing school districts, I begin with a discussion of belief systems. The best interests of Black students are often at odds with the dominant hegemonic ways of understanding and practicing school leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016). Again, as most educational leaders are White, the hegemonic ways are White hegemonic. The actions of the leaders and teachers that have led to the disparate outcomes for Black children come from the interpretations, the beliefs, of educational leaders (Evans, 2007). The discussion below illustrates concerning and common educational realities for Black children, the sum of which would suggest that educational leaders are not rising to the challenge of providing an equitable learning opportunity for all children, especially Black children.

Vision

The vision of a school or district is set by the top leaders of the district, the Board of Education and the Superintendent. The vision can reveal an understanding of the differences in the behaviors and actions of those who believe education is a means to empower people of color who have been subjected to a long history of systematic oppression and those who believe education is a means to assimilate students into a dominant culture (cf Norte, 1999; Johnson & Uline, 2006). Norte (1999) and others (cf

Koschoreck, 2001; as cited in Leithwood, 2010; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; as cited in Leithwood, 2010) have noted the importance of a district vision that explicitly identifies equity and race as a priority. Norte (1999) noted, in his work with school leaders as a part of the Leading for Diversity project, the goal of which was to identify effective characteristics for building effective interethnic communities, found that the leaders had made social justice and the issue of race an explicit part of their stated vision (Norte, 1999). An effective leadership practice is to develop a district vision that explicitly identifies the issue of race.

CHAPTER THREE

OVERVIEW OF METHODS

Introduction

In the public education system, Black students disproportionately have negative experiences and outcomes as compared to students of different race and ethnicities. Most adults that are teaching and leading Black students are White, and the literature shows that White people struggle to come to terms with the issue of race. Black students sit in classrooms and school buildings with White teachers and leaders who often have low expectations, deficit thinking, and sometimes, purely racist beliefs about their Black students. As a White Male educational leader in a district that served a predominately African American student body, I wanted to explore how my race impacted the way I operated as an educational leader of Black students.

I set out to conduct a Critical Autoethnography to explore the impact of my race as an educational leader. Autoethnography challenges traditional ways of doing research and representing others (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). The method centers the self as the site of inquiry within a cultural context (Marx, Pennington, & Chang, 2017; Reed-Danahay, 2017) connecting the personal to the cultural (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In autoethnography, the researcher conducts a systematic analysis, shifting focus between the process, the culture, and the self (Reed-Danahay, 2017; Chang, 2008), of personal experience to understand cultural experience (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

Autoethnography is a non-traditional research method that centers the self within a cultural context and engages in cultural examination through a systematic analysis.

Autoethnography has been described as a blurred or messy autobiographical genre of writing (cf Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Chang, 2008). Autoethnography allows the author to incorporate creativity, the arts, poetry, etc., (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016) and write in highly personalized styles, using accounts that draw upon their experience for the purposes of extending sociological understanding (Wall, 2006). Autoethnography is a flexible, messy, and blurred genre of writing that allows the author to be creative in analyzing highly personal lived experiences.

Critical autoethnography builds on autoethnography by adding the use of critical theory to explore the social power relationships of and between an individual and culture. The critical aspects of fundamental importance to critical autoethnography are 1) to understand the lived experiences of real people in context; 2) examine social context and uncover power arrangements; 3) fuse theory and action to challenge the process of domination (Reed-Danahay, 2017).

Critical autoethnography has tremendous power to illuminate privilege, power, marginalization in educational contexts (Marx, Pennington, & Chang, 2017). Critical auto-ethnographies ascertain vital and often unforeseen connections between the personal experiences and cultural experiences; identify manifestations of power and privilege in everyday practices; discern social injustices and inequities; change dangerous beliefs and practices; improve living conditions; promote resistance and transformation; and determine how to get along better, together, in ways that recognize and celebrate difference (Adams, 2017). Critical autoethnography it was crucial to acknowledge the contested nature of concepts such as the self or identity and that any personal narrative should be subject to the question, "whose interests are being served?" Personal narratives

should not be taken at face value but, instead interrogated for the social positionings they entail (Reed-Danahay, 2017). Critical Autoethnography has been quickly growing in popularity (Anderson, 2006; Reed-Danahay, 2017).

Carolyn Ellis (2016) provided what I have found to be the most appropriate and meaningful description of what autoethnography has been to me:

Autoethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, and reflexively. It asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defenses, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be. And, in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living.

Autoethnography has absolutely created a way of living for me. Since learning about autoethnography, every interaction of my daily life has been touched by the reflexive living and challenging of my own assumptions, as I hope to articulate through my research.

Setting

The district is a 2.6-square-mile inner-ring suburb of a large, predominately socio-economically disadvantaged, and African American metropolitan city. The district's community consists primarily of single-family homes, a small number of apartment complexes, and a small number of small businesses. A now-defunct shopping mall, its claim to fame that it was the first enclosed shopping mall in the country, sits on a very

large piece of land on the outer edge of the community. A major freeway runs through the center of the community. On one side of the freeway, the district's community is bordered by a wealthy predominately White suburb and the city of Detroit. On the other side of the freeway, the large city and two working-middle-class predominately White suburbs border the community. In 1990, the U.S. Census reported 14,903 people lived in the district's community, with 97.9% of them White and 0.9% were Black. Schooling options within the city boundaries included a male-only high school and a female-only high school affiliated with a large regional Catholic Church and school system. Another local church offered Kindergarten through 12th grade in two buildings, and a Kindergarten through 12th-grade public school system.

The 2010 U.S. Census data, the most recent available at the time of this writing, showed that while the population remained stable, a 3% decrease to 14,392 people, a considerable demographic shift had taken place in Harper Woods. The community was at that point 35.3% White and 58.8% Black or African American. The two Catholic high schools had long since closed their facilities in the district's community and relocated in suburbs farther away from the large city. The vacant buildings had been purchased by a charter school and reopened offering Kindergarten through 12th grades. The local church closed its schools, demolishing one building and selling the other, which then housed several failed charter schools through the years.

The School District I worked for consisted of three buildings: two elementary buildings (grades K-3 and 4-6) and a secondary complex that housed a 7-8 middle school, a 9-12 high school, and the Central Office offices. MiSchoolData.Org, the state of Michigan's "Parent Dashboard for School Transparency," reports a variety of data points

on public schools in the state. Student population data is collected by the state of Michigan through General Collections more commonly referred to as “Count Days.” The earliest reported data available is from the 1999 General Collection, which showed 1,066 students were enrolled in the district. Whites made up 78% and African Americans 15% of the student body. Historically, the community elected middle-class White males and females to the Board of Education. The superintendents of the district since its inception have been middle-class White males and two middle-class White females. The teaching staff was predominately middle class, White, and female.

The school district benefited from a community that supported its local school district. The passage of a \$34,460,000 bond in 2004 cleared the path for a new secondary campus to open its doors in 2007. The new campus housed the middle school and high school, an additional one classroom alternative high school, and the Central Office offices. The district steadily increased in size through the implementation of innovative programs such as alternative schools, virtual learning programs, and School of Choice. Like the community, the school district was experiencing a demographic shift beginning in the late 1990s.

In the Fall 2009 General Collection, 1,136 students (+70 students from 1999) were enrolled in the district. Non-resident student enrollment for the year totaled 43, 36 of which were residents of the large city’s public school district. A significant demographic shift had taken place as African Americans accounted for 78% of the entire student body. As of the Spring 2017 General Collection, 1,781 students (+645 students from 2009) were enrolled in the district. 251 out of 561 non-resident students were

residents of the large city's public school district. The demographic shift continued as African Americans made up 91.61% of the entire student body.

Participants

As I conducted a Critical Autoethnography, I am the subject of my research. From the onset of this process, I found understanding and articulating who I am to be particularly challenging. As a part of my exploration of who I was as a person so I could then communicate who I was as a researcher, I engaged in a pre-research activity intended to "help people visualize their social selves" (Chang, 2008, p. 97). The activity, Chang's *Culture Gram*, asked me to consider and list all my identities, arrange them on a graphic organizer and select the three I felt most strongly about, thus revealing the identities shaping my research. On my graphic organizer, I wrote *Husband*, *Father*, and then I stopped. I could not think of any other identities.

After grappling with the concept for a short while, I concluded that I was stuck. Thoroughly frustrated, I chuckled at the irony as I opened Chang's book to use the examples *she* provided in the appendix to complete an activity about who *I* am. Clearly, I needed help studying myself. From the examples listed in the book (language, religion, hobbies, and so on), I had an "a-ha!" moment as I realized that throughout my life, I had not given much thought to who I am. I had lived an unexamined life.

Admittedly, it was not the first time I had come to this realization. However, I found this "a-ha" moment especially unsettling because, even in light of my recent history of lived experiences (professional experience, philosophical awakening from Doctoral course work, the untimely end to a 21-year career in education, and so on) *and* that I had spent the period that became the focus of this research questioning everything

that I knew about educational leadership and the world as I saw it, I still hadn't examined who I was, or how I experienced the world.

For example, even though I was unemployed at the time while reflecting on the activity, I recognized that I had not considered "unemployed" as a part of my identity. While I was fixated on the fact that I could no longer identify as an "assistant superintendent," in my view of myself, I had not filled that gap with identifying as unemployed. Understandably, some might consider not viewing "unemployed" as a part of my identity as evidence of a positive mindset or positive outlook, however, I cannot help but consider that it might speak to the common theme revealed in the literature that people are not very good at critically assessing who they are.

Continuing with the thought of a lack of self-awareness, this activity spurred one more "a-ha!" moment for me in the examples that Chang provided. While she had also listed "Korean" as one of her identities, I was again struck that my nationality, ethnicity, nor my race, had even entered my mind as an identity while doing the activity. To reiterate, at the time I had engaged in this activity, I was months into my Ph.D. coursework, had narrowed my research to focus on the role race had played in my lived experiences, and even still, my race was *not* something I identified or acknowledged unprompted.

The research reaffirmed these "a-ha!" moments; critical self-analysis is elusive to most people. White people do not often see their race or the influence it has on their lived experiences and the experiences of others (cf Picower, 2009; Cabrera & Corces-Zimmerman, 2017; Rodriguez, 2000). These two examples, in my mind, truly exemplified the challenges that I was interested in exploring, reinforced the need for a

structured and systematic study of me as an individual, my race, and my interactions with a culture, and that Critical Autoethnography was a necessary and appropriate method for my research.

Data Sources

I had several data sources to choose from as I began my research. Some of the data sources were helpful in creating a description of the context of my research such as the district demographics, student achievement data, budget history, enrollment data, and so on. However, as the focus of my Critical Autoethnography was on me, I found that the most important data sources were those that I had created and focused on my experiences at the time of my research focus. The data sources I identified for my research included:

- Black Journal
- Personal Journal
- Weekly update emails to my parents throughout the doctoral program

Below is a brief description of each of the data sources that became my primary sources for the research:

Black Journal

Beginning on August 24, 2017, and continuing through May 6, 2018, I had recorded 15 entries in what I refer to as “the Black Journal” which is literally a black hard covered journal. The entries in this journal were primarily focused on my professional experience and clearly expressed anger, frustration, fear, and so on as exhibited from the very first entry, “I have no doubt I am a sheep among wolves.”

Personal Journal

What I consider to be one of the primary sources for my research is my “Personal Journal.” I began writing in this journal after reading a book about building the habit of writing each day to be ready to complete my dissertation. I began my “Personal Journal” in January 2018, approximately five months into the tenure of the new superintendent. Unlike my Black Journal, because I began my Personal Journal with the purpose of it being a writing exercise, early on, the topics were random and not necessarily focused on work or my research. However, as time went on, I began to use this journal to record and interpret experiences I was having in my professional work environment as well as to think through what I was learning in the Ph.D. coursework. Eventually, my work experience became the sole focus of my journal writing. I had written total of 167 pages at the time my employment with the district had ended on June 28th of 2019.

Emails to Mom and Dad

The second source of data I classify as a primary source for my research is the emails I wrote weekly to my parents during my coursework for the Ph.D. The emails would cover the topics that were discussed in the courses during the week, and I would share my thinking about the topics as well as what I was considering as my research focus. I included any follow-up emails either from my parents or from myself about topics within the original emails. The emails capture a detailed description of how my philosophical view shifted as well as how I related the research to my professional life. As the coursework came to an end, I continued to write update emails through my qualifying exam process as well.

Organization of Data

I organized my data by source and within each source, the data was organized chronologically. I printed each of my data sources, except for the Black Journal, which was written in a physical journal, organized each source chronologically, and placed each of them in a unique three ring binder.

Putting each source in its own three ring binder would allow me to review that data source as its own entity. I felt that there was merit to being able to sit down and read through just my Emails to Mom and Dad, without having to skip over my other data sources. I felt that this would provide with a better understanding of each data source with its own characteristics, tone, and so on.

Early on in my analysis, a concern with the organization of my data presented itself. I found that with each data source isolated from the others, I was reading one source at the expense of others. For example, I might have read multiple months of personal journal entries without reading any of the emails. When I went back and read the emails for that same period, I quickly recognized that I had a much more robust description from which to work with in my analysis.

My solution to these concerns was to create a calendar system to track the dates of my data. I printed out blank monthly calendars and recorded each of my data source documents with a coding system. The codes I used for my research were:

- “BPJ” for Black Personal Journal
- “PJ” for Personal Journal
- “EM” for Emails to Mom and Dad

With these codes listed on the calendars, I was able to look at a month, say, for example, January 2018, and see all the different data I had available for that month. In other words, I could look at January 23, 2018, and see that I had written “PJ” for Personal Journal and “EM” for Emails to Mom and Dad. Therefore, on that day I had a Personal Journal Entry and an Email to Mom and Dad. From this system, I had a view of what data I had, from which source, and on what dates so I could be sure to cross reference the different sources.

Data Analysis Strategies

Prior to beginning my research and as a part of my dissertation proposal, I developed research questions. I developed these questions with the understanding that, consistent with the reflexive process of autoethnography and qualitative research, they were likely to evolve as I interacted with my data. The questions I developed were:

1. What events, social interactions, etc. did I experience in my personal, educational, and professional life that may have contributed to my shift in understanding of race in education?
2. What mental processes, activities, etc. did I engage in that may have contributed to my shift in understanding of race in education?
3. In what ways did my personal and professional self interact with the school district culture under the previous superintendent and the culture of the school district under the new superintendent? And in those interactions:
 - a. In what ways did I perpetuate White hegemony
and
 - b. disrupt the status quo in my role as a White educational leader in a predominately Black school district?

4. In what ways can I turn my knowledge, experience, and skills into action in my personal and professional life to disrupt the status quo of White hegemony. In other words, how can I improve my professional practice to fight for equity for students of color in any district that I serve in the future and, in doing so, serve as a model for others like me (Male, White, Middle Class, educational leader)?

My daily research routine began with a reading of my research questions to remind myself of my focus followed by reading through my data chronologically by source. As I read my data, I kept a research journal to record any thoughts, reactions, questions, and so on that I had. I concluded each daily session by reviewing what I had written in my research journal looking for any patterns, themes, connections to the literature, or any further reading of the literature needed to better interpret my data.

Within the first few data review sessions, my progress ground to a halt because my list of further reading needed had grown so rapidly that it was now preventing me from focusing on the analysis of my data. I felt that I had a ‘mile-wide’ ‘inch deep’ understanding of my theories. It seemed that many themes from Critical Race and White hegemony could be applied and explored more deeply and therefore I struggled to determine what I felt were the most important pieces of the theories to use going forward. I decided that I needed to take a step back and clarify my interpretation of my theories and determine what was most important and relevant to my research from each of my theories.

As I was reading my data, I felt that I had a thorough understanding of my theories but was unable to articulate those theories clearly and concisely and how I interpreted them. This lack of clarity on my part was causing me to head off in many

directions as I was attempting to analyze my data. I paused my research and took time to review the theories to make sure that I had a clear understanding of what I found most important from each of the theories. Below, I share what I determined to be the most important tenets of Critical Race theory and have provided, in parenthesis, a brief description of how I interpret each tenet:

- Racism is endemic (Our society is structured racially, race is a strong predictor of educational level, income, residence, careers, and so on).
- Skepticism of neutral, objective, colorblindness, and meritocracy (Our society is shaped around race; therefore, race influences our decision-making process thus countering the view that the law, or any part of our society, is neutral and that humans can be fully objective, color doesn't matter, and that everyone has a fair chance to succeed).
- Challenges ahistoricism recognizing that the contemporary is directly shaped by the past (The past still plays a role in shaping our society until we acknowledged that things are the way they are because of the past).
- Valuing and raising up the voice and experience knowledge of marginalized people. (The voice of marginalized people has often been dismissed because it didn't meet the standards set by people at the top of the racial hierarchy, listening to the voice of color provides a window into the racial experience of marginalized people).
- Seeks to identify, analyze, and destroy oppression of any kind. (Recognize that there is oppression everywhere and we should work to destroy that oppression).

As I returned to the reading of my data, themes began to appear very quickly. The first theme that I recognized in my data was the theme of stress. To explore the theme of stress, I tried a couple of different strategies. The first strategy I tried was to read through my data and highlight words and phrases that addressed or illustrated the theme of stress. Once I had completed that activity, I then printed out all the journal entries and read through them separate from the original data sources.

The second strategy, and the one that I used for the remainder of my research was to read through my data sources and identify entries that seemed important to my

research. I created a separate document to record these important entries in chronological order. Once I had all of the entries, I had deemed important to my research on one document, I then went back and made comments about why I thought each entry was important. I also tagged each entry with the theme that I felt the entry supported.

I then began to pull each of my data entries by theme. If I had an entry that was about the theme of Stress. I cut and pasted it onto a separate document along with all the other entries I had that supported the theme of Stress. On the documents that were dedicated to each theme, I began to organize the entry in a way that told the story about the theme.

I went through several stages of paring down my writing on each theme. I did this paring down by putting the documents aside, and verbally retell what I knew about what I had written on each theme. I would then do my best to record, in writing, how I had just recalled a particular theme. This process helped trim excess information and really focus in on the most important aspects and details of each theme.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter examines entries from my emails to Mom and Dad, and my personal journal that I kept during my time with the new leadership team in the district. Several themes emerged from the analysis of the data. Those themes are Stress, Truth and Trust, Contradictions, Key Events, and Conversations. This chapter will discuss these themes in detail.

Stress

The first theme identified in my data was the theme of stress. I was experiencing an extraordinarily high level of stress during my time with the new superintendent and the Crew. My review revealed many writings in which I was trying to understand and articulate the cause of the stress as well as the physical and mental toll it was taking on me. I used words such as “boiling,” “horror,” “prison,” “dread,” “taking the life out of me,” and others in my descriptions of the stress I was experiencing. I wrote extensively about my many attempts to eradicate the “crushing pressure” caused by the stress I was suffering from. I had tried mindfulness and meditation activities, running, being intentional about trying to be appreciative of the positives in my life, the use of prescription medicine for the first time in my life, and other futile attempts to “*calm my soul*.” Respites from the stress were few and far between.

The full extent of the mental and physical toll of the stress was best, but not fully, understood on that day when I walked out of the district for the last time as I detailed in an email to my parents:

I left the district feeling like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I can't believe the stress that I was under. The tightness in my chest, the acid reflux, the pain and stiffness in my neck was not only gone, but because it was gone, I realized just how bad it really was.

What is most unbelievable is the level of anxiety that I was experiencing. Literally 24 hours a day I felt as if I was about to experience some traumatic event like a car accident. My adrenaline was running at a high level constantly. Weekends, weekdays, vacations I couldn't escape it. Today, it is gone.

This excerpt from my email shows that I had grown so accustomed to the level of stress with its mental and physical manifestations, that it wasn't until I was no longer experiencing the stress that I realized just how severe it was.

In the days and months that followed, I relived the stress as I worked to process and write about what I had been through. For example, after waking up one morning months after I left the district, in my journal I wrote:

I am curious why I remember this dream. As I stated at the beginning, I don't recall remembering any dreams for a very long time. I wonder if it has to do with the sense of calm that I am feeling lately. I feel that perhaps the last drops of stress from working in the district have left my body. If so, it took a long time to recover from working with him. Seven months. I still get flashbacks were[sic] I tense up, get a queasy feeling in my stomach and then I realize that I am only thinking about what it was like to go back into work each day.

This journal entry shows that I continued to experience the physical and mental manifestations of the stress even months after my time in the district. Mentally revisiting my time in the district and thinking about the different experiences I had would bring back the actual physical and mental sensations that I had felt at the time I was living the experiences. This condition began to subside approximately seven months after I had left the district.

Truth and Trust

Another theme that I identified was Truth and Trust. My data showed something of a perfect storm assaulting the concept of truth; I was deeply involved in the study of truth through the Ph.D. coursework, while at work it seemed the crew was incapable of speaking the truth. At times, I interpreted their words and actions as laughably at odds with reality and truth. At the same time, in my Ph.D. coursework, I was grappling with the concept of what truth is, whether there is an absolute truth, and the different ways we as humans arrive at a truth. Putting the search for “truth” aside for a moment, they lied. They lied about small things, such as the ingredients of dishes they had cooked to share with the group, and they lied about more consequential things such as whether a school principal, with an impeccable record of integrity, was signed up for an administrator certification program. It seemed like each day brought a new level of assault on truth and trust.

“We lie to get what we want,” was a frequent proclamation made by one member of the crew. Those words rattled around in my head during most of my time with them. That statement built a foundation of sand upon which I tried to construct any understanding of their use of or version of a truth.

There were several occasions with the crew when food would be brought in and shared with the group. Without fail, the food was plentiful and delicious. The food was often so good that I would try to convince myself that the stress and chaos was worth it—just for the food. I jest, of course, because nothing could justify the stress and chaos of the work environment, but the food was delicious. On this occasion, a member of the

crew had brought in several large catering trays filled with a variety of side dishes and one main dish which she announced as a rice and beef dish.

Moments after her announcement, a member of the crew who did not eat beef entered the room and began preparing himself a plate of the various dishes. As he was doing so, he asked what the meat was in the main dish to which she responded, “lamb.” As he began to eat the dish, someone from across the room asked why he was eating the dish as it had beef in it. Angrily the member of the crew asked, “you know I don’t eat beef, is this beef?” To which, contrary to what she had said when she presented the dish to the group, the maker of the meal reasserted, “it *is* lamb.” An argument ensued, and even though everyone in the room agreed that the dish was beef based on look, taste, texture, and the fact that it was originally presented by the maker of the dish as beef, she insisted that it was now lamb. The non-beef eating member stormed out of the room in anger.

As I reflected on the “Beef Incident” as it came to be known amongst the group, I could not understand why the maker of the dish would lie to her coworker like that. What’s even more confounding is that these two coworkers came to the district with a long established personal and professional relationship. They were friends of many years. What was the point of lying and lying about something that violated the dietary practices of her friend and colleague? To this day, I still don’t understand, though many more similar examples of a lack of truthfulness and trust between the members of the crew occurred to the point that it seemed that their relationship was one of mutual deceit.

“We lie to get what we want.”

There were many times when the crew was shameless about lying, meaning, regardless of how obvious it was they were lying; once the lie started, they went all in no matter what. In one situation, a member of the crew conducted a professional development session as a part of his role as district curriculum director. The session focused on science curriculum and instruction. In front of an audience of about 30 teachers, using the incorrect science standards as the guiding standards, this member of the crew presented an hour-long session on how to use curriculum standards to build lesson plans. His presentation was built on the out-of-date State standards and not the Next Generation Science Standards which had been adopted a few years early, and at a time he was employed in another state. Apparently, he was not aware that in his absence from the state, the Next Generation Science Standards had been adopted by the state. He revealed his lack of knowledge by disputing the teacher participant statements that the standards had indeed been adopted by the state. Days later, when called to task on his blunder by our Central Office administration, the superintendent included, he stated that he was only using the outdated standards as an example of how the teachers could use standards to build their science lessons. A response the superintendent somehow accepted as plausible.

In another situation, a member of the crew accused an elementary principal of lying about having registered for an Administrator Certificate program she needed to complete to continue to serve the district as a building administrator. This principal was promoted to her position months before the new superintendent and crew arrived in the district with the expectation that she would enroll in such a certification program within a certain number of months. Though enrolled in the program and still well within the

period of compliance to enroll in the program, the new superintendent, based on guidance from the member of the crew, incorrectly determined that the principal was out of compliance and had to cease all administrator activities.

The principal presented evidence of enrollment in the program, she produced the receipt showing payment and the registration form for the required course, the course was scheduled to start in a few weeks, and she shared the state documents detailing the process and that she was in compliance with the expectations of the State. Undeterred, and with no evidence, the accusing member of the crew insisted that the principal had not signed up and that only, “through a personal favor to the superintendent” by the leader of the only organization authorized to offer the course, did the organization agree to sign the principal up post deadline. Of course, when I looked up the name of the individual he said did the “personal favor for the superintendent,” I found that that individual was indeed in a leadership position of an educational organization- just not the organization that offered the principal certification course.

“We lie to get what we want.”

The member of the crew that made these baseless accusations had also, on several occasions stated that he, “had the perfect candidate” to lead the building the accused principal led. He, on as many occasions, had also stated, “everyone thinks I am trying to get Ms. Hughes out of her building, but I’m not.” His actions, of course, did not support the later statement.

Although the principal had presented the superintendent with the registration and payment information showing that she was indeed properly enrolled in the certification program, based on the crew members false accusations, again with no evidence, the

superintendent had me complete a discipline write up for the principal and prohibit her from making any administrative decisions in her building until such time as the principal completed the coursework for the certification program. This discipline plan became an unmanageable expectation for Central Office as the principal was to get approval from a Central Office administrator on every decision related to her building. I do not know how this issue was resolved, but eventually I was removed from the approval process, replaced by other members of the crew.

Contradictions

The theme of contradictions was a complex one. The foundation of this theme is the notion that people are living contradictions and that I was resistant to recognizing contradictions in myself. I came upon the notion of people being living contradictions through my study of autoethnography. Being a living contradiction simply means that what we think, say, and do are often at odds with each other. I exemplified being a living contradiction because my actions, words, and what I believed often contradict each other. Intertwined with my “living contradictions” is the idea from the theory of White Hegemony that as a White male, I am not very good at seeing myself, especially when it comes to the concept of race (cf Picower, 2009; Diangelo, 2018) .

My data revealed that I was quick to identify contradictions that I describe as easy contradictions or those that don’t take much self-awareness or self-reflection. These were the contradictions in the words and actions of the new leadership team, and contradictions between the community I lived in and the community I worked in. However, finding the contradictions that require self-awareness or self-reflection, in other words, *my* contradictions, was a much more challenging and laborious process that did

not begin until nearly the end of my time with the superintendent and crew. Ultimately, through grappling with my contradictions, another theme, that of my being a fraud, revealed itself.

Two Worlds

The first contradictions that I wrote during my disorienting dilemma were those related to living in two separate worlds: my work world and my personal world. In some of my first journal entries that I wrote, I took note of the contradictions between the neighborhood I lived in and the neighborhood I worked in. I wrote about the visible differences between the communities, and later discussed the differences in the people that were associated with the two communities.

The neighborhood I lived in was a wealthy, picturesque and geographically sprawling suburban community magnificently situated in a perfect blend of nature and commercial excess-I could walk along a babbling creek with few signs of human development, yet still be only a short walk to any and every convenience one could desire such as numerous Starbucks. This neighborhood is in one of the wealthiest counties in the state.

The community in which the school district I worked in is in an inner-ring suburb divided in half by a major freeway. Made up predominately of families living at or below the poverty level, the homes were small and close together, with many homes in various stages of disrepair dotted with the occasional well-kept home. There was a “good side” of the freeway, and a “bad side,” which was a common reference made by staff and families. By contrast to my home community, residents of this community must leave their community to visit a Starbucks or a beautiful park.

While I wrote about the visible differences between my work community and my home community, there was an overarching idea that I was “stuck between two worlds.”

In a September 2017 journal entry, I wrote:

I am very much leading a double life. Or, perhaps it is more accurate to say, I am stuck between two worlds. The first and far more enjoyable world is my “Oakland County” life. Here I am surrounded by nature and high performers. Deer walk through our backyard daily, trails, creeks, parks are a foundation of the environment. The people are successful, educated, and constantly seeking to advance themselves. I attend Oakland University surrounded by great thinkers and people who are at or near the top of their field. Literally, the sun is shining and the birds are chirping here. Then, there is my “Wayne County” life. I do not like this life Sam I am. Poverty, no nature, and people who are struggling to get off the bottom. Many of the professionals I work with are low performers who don’t show signs of seeking to improve themselves. Or if they are seeking to improve themselves do so through get rich quick schemes that have no lasting results. I do not like going to “Wayne County.” My life is in Oakland County.

This journal entry shows that I was noticing the differences between the communities and the people that I interacted with in those communities. For clarification, the statement about the people I work with being low performers was not necessarily a broad characterization of all the people in the community, rather, this comment was focused on one individual that I worked with who at the expense of performing the duties of her job in the district, spent her time promoting more than one get rich quick scheme that she was involved in. One of her schemes, a vacation planning program, resulted in her being disciplined for being absent from the district under false pretenses of a family funeral. Social media posts of her at the time showed she was attending an out of state conference for the vacation program. However, in other journal entries, I did continue to describe a difference between the people in the community, a description that shed a positive light on those in my home community over those in my work community.

My use of the word “stuck” between the two worlds was drawing attention to a cause of stress for me. In a subsequent journal entry, I wrote:

The stress has been unbearable in the last two days. It is amazing how it comes on and takes the life out of me. The stress is caused by one thing and one thing only, that is the pending return to work. I dread going back to work. My life and passion is not in Harper Woods anymore. It is with my family, my research, and Oakland County. There is nothing for me in Harper Woods or outside of Oakland County.

The world of research, and White Privilege makes sense to me. The rest of the world does not.

There were many factors contributing to stress that I have detailed in the earlier section on stress. However, “being stuck between two worlds” was also based in the issue of race, though I never thoroughly discussed this in my entries. I was a White guy working in a Black district and didn’t feel like I fit in because of this fact (a precursor to my theme of being a fraud). However, in the journal entry, my descriptions of the two communities I lived and worked in, and my other writings, I avoided acknowledging the issue of race.

The above journal entry was the first writing in my data that referenced race using the term White Privilege. I recall exploring the idea of White Privilege before writing this journal entry and by referencing White Privilege I showed that I had been contemplating the differences of racial makeup between the two communities. While White Privilege is a concept directly dealing with race, it is as if I was using White Privilege as a more palatable code word for race. I find it curious that I did this. In line with the theory of White Hegemony, I remember consciously not trying to focus on the difference of race between the two communities- we are taught/our society is structured to be colorblind, or not see or talk about race (Powell, 1996; Rodriguez, 2000). Though

my home community was a diverse community, it was still a majority white and wealthy community. Compared to my work community, a school district with 90% or more of the students and families being African American and living near or below the poverty level.

Their Contradictions Trumped *My* Contradictions

For most of my disorienting dilemma, I was diving deeply into my philosophy about educational leadership as a part of the Superintendent preparation course and the Ph.D. program that I was involved in at the time. Being focused on philosophies of educational leadership, I began to take note of contradictions between my developing philosophy and what appeared to be the philosophy, words, and actions of the superintendent and crew. As I detailed these contradictions amongst others, *my* contradictions between my philosophy and thoughts and actions, went unacknowledged.

One example of the contradictions I perceived in their words and actions was around the superintendent's and crews' verbalized value of the teaching staff. The superintendent would make kind and compassionate statements such as, "Education is a humanistic pursuit," meaning we had to treat people with compassion and respect, yet members of his leadership team would say things like, "don't let anyone ever think you need them," "trust no one," and, "we lie to get what we want." Essentially, the superintendent would make what I viewed as logical and compassionate statements about how a district should run and specifically how its employees should be treated, yet his team has created a truly toxic work environment, which he allowed to exist.

The contradictions around the value of the teaching staff contrasted with my developing philosophy of educational leadership. In an early journal entry, I wrote:

“Don’t let anyone ever think you need them.” This captures a profound difference in leadership philosophy. The notion that no one is valuable and that everyone can be replaced is a disturbing approach to leadership. Employees are valuable. In fact, they are a school districts most valuable tool. If everyone is expendable, then how do you get them to buy into a vision? How do. You get them to go above and beyond? How do you get them to stay for more than one year?

I found the statement, “don’t let anyone ever think you need them,” deplorable. Afterall, I had repeatedly stated my belief that employees are a district’s most valuable resource many times in my journal writings, a statement that I then contradicted numerous times in my writings. In much of my writing, I pointed out the contradictions I noted between their words and actions, and their words and actions contradicting the way I believed.

I did not take note of my own contradictions, though there were plenty of times that what I wrote contradicted what I stated I believed at the time. In a nine-day period in March of 2018, I contradicted myself repeatedly from one journal entry to another, and sometimes, even from sentence to sentence, yet I made no mention of these contradictions.

My first journal entry of this period was a dense one with deep contradictions:

*People are doing a lot of crying. When I meet with him, everything makes sense.
I do believe that people are the most important asset a school district has.*

The people doing a lot of crying were the employees of the district because of the stressful environment in the district under the new leadership; people were leaving the district, either by their own volition, or because they were forced out or terminated.

Many of those employees were at the very ends of their careers, yet they chose to leave the district, taking significant pay cuts, just to escape the stress.

Without skipping a beat, in this journal entry I jump to the opposite end of the issue in writing, “when I meet with him, everything makes sense.” What I meant by that is that when the superintendent shared his perspective of leadership, why things were the way they were, and/or why he was doing the things he was doing in the district, his plan made sense to me. I could excuse the stress of others because of what he said. It seemed, according to his words, as if the conditions of change, people crying losing jobs, choosing to leave, and so on, were simply part of the process of changing a culture, that the district was on the right path to success.

In the very next sentence, I take the opposite position once again in stating that people are the most important asset a school district has. Meaning that they should be treated with respect and shouldn’t be subjected to such treatment exhibited and created by the new superintendent. The contradiction, of course, is that either people are valuable and shouldn’t be subjected to such a stressful environment, or the stress was justifiable and therefore people aren’t as valuable as I had professed.

Six days later, I wrote:

I believe the ends justify the means. I didn’t realize that this was true, but looking back on the past seven months at my place of work I now realize, I have made judgements, rationalizations, and moral decisions that I have not made thus far in my career.

There has been collateral damage. People have lost their jobs, I have placed a lower value on the jobs that thore[sic] people hold because it is more difficult to fire or justify firing someone with more of an education.

And yet, at the same time, there is a level of hypocrisy amongst the staff. Actions that were overlooked under the leadership of the previous

superintendent are held up as an example of lack of character under our current superintendent. Is it a race issue since the previous is White and the current is Black?

I see the big picture. If we can achieve the vision of the district, we will be changing the lives of thousands of students and their families each year. So I am okay with what might be considered collateral damage.

In this journal entry, I was explaining that I had changed to become a different leader than I was prior. I was making different and difficult leadership decisions, and I believed the collateral damage of people losing their jobs in pursuit of the end goals justified those damages. I stated that I am okay with people losing their jobs because we are on the path to success yet, I believe that employees are the most important resource a district has.

Nestled in the above journal entry is an interesting acknowledgement that I see the staff who had been in the district prior to the new superintendent applied different standards to him than they had to the previous superintendent. I had seen evidence of staff justifying the actions of the previous superintendent, where they had not justified the same actions under the current superintendent. I had wondered whether this was an issue of race since the previous superintendent is White and the current superintendent is Black.

Three days later, I wrote in my journal:

I can tell you now that my leadership style is based on a core belief that people matter. People are the greatest asset in any organization. In order to achieve the highest results, strong relationships must exist. Leadership without relationship cannot produce the long-term success that is possible with strong relationships. One main factor in this equation is that learning is a social construct. Organizations are only successful if they learn. An individual with knowledge that isn't shared throughout the organization will not benefit the organization.

In this journal entry I went back to my core belief that people matter. This entry was in response to what I viewed as unfair/ unreasonable expectations and discipline measures in the district. My reference to learning being a social construct was a comment on leadership in large school districts where the staff and administrator turnover rates were so high that I wondered how a district improves from year to year if everyone with institutional knowledge is removed.

The connection back to my experience here is that the superintendent and the crew had come from a large urban school district and had talked extensively about the leadership model of removing everyone in a building or office and replacing them with new people on a yearly basis. In one story they had shared, every administrator had to apply for their job on an annual basis. There were no guarantees that they would have the same job for more than one year. This model made no sense to me from a social construct perspective nor was it anything that I had ever experienced in my professional career thus far.

Key Events

In January of 2019, I had to remove a White teacher for using the “N-word” in front of her students. The teacher claimed she was teaching a lesson on derogatory words. She had started the lesson with other derogatory words before using the “N-word” as an example. In the classroom, she was saying the full word and not the phrase, “the N-word.” I wrote about this event in my personal journal:

*Yesterday, I removed a white teacher from the classroom for saying "n***er" is a derogatory term. Her students, 100% of whom are African American. As the students asked her to please stop saying that word, she persisted and tried to explain her position.*

*Since she was teaching a lesson on derogatory terms, and she began with Eskimo, she connected the lesson to a term that is relevant to her students. She stated numerous times that she did not call anyone a "n***er" rather she explained that "n***r" is a derogatory term.*

*One student was on her phone and had told the teacher that she was telling her mom exactly what was going on. the teacher interrupted and said, " I told her to have her mother call me so I could explain that I didn't call anyone a "n***er" I said that "n***er" is a derogatory term.*

The teacher did not recognize the fact that her students were becoming upset and were becoming more upset each time she repeated the word.

Reflecting on this situation, I can still hear the voice of a female student who pleaded with the teacher, “would you *please* stop saying that word. I can still hear the pain in the student’s voice. I can also hear the unusual calmness in the teacher’s voice as she repeated the word and as she tried to explain to me what was going on and why she was using the word. To reiterate, the teacher didn’t use the abbreviated “the n-word” she used the full word each time.

In the same journal entry, I contemplated the impact that this experience likely had on the students of color and compared it to my experience sitting in a classroom:

How does a teacher sit in a classroom in a district that is nearly 100% African American for four years and decide to do this? I assume she hasn't used this lesson before. I would likely have heard about it. So after no less than 5 years in the district she decides that she is going to teach this lesson and connect it to her students by using a highly offensive term as an example. And repeat it and repeat it and repeat it.

I cannot imagine being a high school student sitting in a classroom with a teacher who so clearly has no respect for me or my race. As an affluent white male I had my suspicions that some teachers liked me and others didn't. They may have made those decisions on my actions by, but never because of the color of my skin. How does one student walk back into that classroom with that teacher as their teacher and go forward from here. They KNOW she doesn't care about them. They KNOW she is a

racist. They KNOW she has a screw loose. How, as a district, do we put her back in front of our kids? We can't.

This entry shows that at the time of the event, I was beginning to understand the depth of the problem when Black students must sit in a classroom with a teacher that clearly doesn't value them or their Black experience. However, despite some evidence that I was begging to understand the depth of the problem Black student experience in public schools, my retelling of this incident left out pertinent information that revealed my actions did not support my understanding.

At the time of the incident, I was doing "Exemplary Classroom" compliance checks with an instructional coach. The exemplary classroom was a list of items, such as word walls, daily agendas, examples of student work showing mastery, and so on, that were required to be on the walls of every classroom and in the hallway outside each classroom in the district. The instructional coach and I were walking from classroom to classroom in the high school recording the level of compliance in each classroom.

We were standing in the hallway in front of a neighboring classroom reviewing the required items when the instructional coach asked me if I had heard what she had heard. I had not and was mid-sentence in telling her I hadn't heard anything when I heard the teacher use the "N-word." We walked into the classroom and witnessed the teacher trying to convince her students that she wasn't calling anyone the "N-word." While we were in the room, she repeated the "N-word" several times despite us telling her she needed to stop using the word.

I was able to convince the teacher to stop using the word and the situation appeared to deescalate. I thanked the students for being so understanding and told them

that I would handle this matter as soon as I could. I then told the teacher she was to immediately move onto another topic, that I would deal with her later. At that point the instructional coach and I left the room to continue with our compliance checks. I had prioritized completing a compliance check activity over providing immediate relief to our students who were victimized by their teacher.

About 5 or ten minutes later, as the coach and I were standing in a different hallway comparing notes on another classroom, a teacher came out to let us know that the situation we just left was “blowing up” on social media. It was at that point, no less than five minutes after I left the students in their classroom with the teacher that had just delivered an “N-word” laden lesson, that I was moved to action. I told the instructional coach to contact the principal and have her come up to the room to remove the teacher. I went to the room and told the teacher to leave the room and head down to the principal’s office. In a matter of minutes, the principal arrived with a replacement teacher and the three of us, the teacher, the principal, and I, went to the principal’s office to address the teacher.

Conversations

In my journal, I documented two conversations I had had with individuals who have a close personal relationship with me. The individuals, “Andy,” as I will call him, is the mid-fifties adult child of “Dennis” and “Gerri,” who are in their mid-seventies, all are White. The difference in candor between Andy and his parents was striking, as the older generation was blatantly verbalizing their deficit and racist thinking about people of color, yet, Andy, while still showing deficit thinking, was much more filtered in his verbalization of his thoughts.

\$400 Per Seat in a Privilege Free Zone

I had invited Andy to be my guest at a National Hockey League (NHL) game. Though, as a hockey fan he needed no convincing, I shared the highlights of what our experience would be at the game. The seats were 8th row center ice, for a hockey fan, those are amazing seats. As well, the seats are only accessible through an exclusive club where we would be treated to complimentary charcuterie tables, multiple food serving stations with pre-made and made to order options, hors oeuvre and dessert tables, complimentary non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages, and much more. As an added luxury, in the club there are TVs broadcasting not only the game we would attend, but also other NHL games going on across the continent. Of course, we could sit and watch all these games from the comfort of a wide range of seating from couches to booths, to recliners and so on. At over \$400 a ticket, given to me by a relative of mine, we were sure to have an outstanding time! The night of the game, while situated in this environment of privilege and excess, Andy and I cogitated on the existence of privilege and issues of race.

The conversation began about a recent news story that involved four White teenagers that had recently thrown a large rock off a freeway overpass striking a vehicle and killing the driver. We discussed what the appropriate punishment for the teens would be. Andy and I agreed that leniency should be extended to the teens. Yes, we agreed, they had committed a horrible crime, however, we questioned the benefit of punishing them for the remainder of their lives:

Yes, these boys were dumb teenagers. I agree the teenage mind is incapable of making good rationale[sic] decisions in the heat of the moment. I agree that punishing them with life in prison may not be the best outcome in this case.

Our conversation meandered through a variety of topics and eventually to the issue of race. I documented the gradual revealing of Andy's deficit thinking of African Americans:

Some perceptions he had about Black people emerged that illustrate that while he is liberal in his thinking around the punishment of white teenage murders, he might be fairly traditional in his White Privilege...

... The conversation then revealed that he felt that Black people don't value education.

Continuing in my journal entry I considered how our conversation might have been different had the teenagers been African American.

What I don't agree with is that if these boys were African American, he and I would have been having the same conversation. I believe that if these boys were African American, we might not have even been discussing the case because there might be an unconscious bias at work with the cousin that says, this isn't newsworthy. [I imagined that if the boys were African American, his narrative of this event would be] Of course these boys killed a man, they knew what they were doing and should get what they deserve.

The quotation in this journal was my attempt to convey the narrative of Blacks as criminals and Black males losing the benefit of being a child. Where the research has demonstrated that Black children especially male children, are viewed as older and prone to violent ways, it would be easy to imagine that the media would not have picked up this story, and that Andy might have had a much different view on whether leniency should be granted to Black teenagers having committed the same crime as White teenagers. These journal entries illustrate the different standards people often have with matters of

race. Had this story not been an ostensible aberration, ‘good White teenagers (not Black teenagers) commit horrible crime,’ it is possible that the media might not have covered the story. I was wondering if my cousin wouldn’t find it necessary to grant leniency to the suspects if they were Black. I could easily imagine that he may have simply believed they deserved the maximum punishment possible and deserve to be sentenced to life in prison.

Later in this conversation, I shared an experience I recently had had with an African American classmate in one of my Ph.D. classes. This classmate, an administrator at the University and a mother of a twenty-something child mother was checking her phone for text messages during a group discussion we were having. She apologized explaining that she was awaiting confirmation that her son had arrived at his destination for the evening. She was very concerned because as a Black male driving at night, she believed that he was at a greater risk of being pulled over by a police officer for “driving while Black.”

She shared with our group the routine that she and her husband go through every time their son gets behind the wheel of a car. The routine began years in advance with making sure that their son understood the constitutional rights that he has as a citizen of this country. They also taught him what a police officer can and cannot do when they pull someone over for a traffic violation. With every drive, they remind their son of the importance of always keeping his hands visible, asking permission before moving, following the directions of the officer, and being polite. They also share with their son that as a Black male, he is more likely to be shot during a traffic violation stop than White males.

As I shared that the Black doctoral student mother in my current class has the “What do you do if you get pulled over” conversation EVERY time her son gets in a car, he responded, “now, I have had that conversation with my son, too.”

Andy countered the story I was sharing by stating that he too talked to his son about what to do if he were to be stopped by a police officer. The guidance he gave his son was to be polite and respectful and do what the officer says. I continued in my journal:

Everytime[sic], I asked?

Do you fear that he may get shot if he doesn’t behave properly if pulled over? He relented and said he has had it only a few times and no, he didn’t fear that it could result in a shooting.

These journal entries illustrate the differences in lived experiences, or the expectation of lived experiences between the African American parents and Andy, a White parent. The experiences may be similar to a point, but at some point, their experiences differ greatly. I believe the African American parents have a real fear that a traffic stop by a police officer could be deadly for their son, while Andy, while he worried about his son behaving during a traffic stop, did not worry about his son being shot.

My journal entry and my recollection of this conversation with Andy also highlight the messy process of transforming a world perspective and developing a new understanding of the impact race plays in the lived experience of people. While my goal that evening was to highlight to Andy the privilege that he and I inherited through no efforts other than being born into lives of privilege, that not everyone was born into the same privilege, and that our privilege is inseparable from White privilege, the words I used to make this point bordered on reinforcing racial stereotypes and generalizations. In

my journal entry I expounded on my statement that he had revealed that he doesn't believe that African Americans value education:

Now, here I should have asked questions. Instead I shared that they do, but when you are stuck in generational poverty, how do you break out? He and I watched our dads get up each day, put on a suit, and go to work. If you are born into a family where the father has died, is incarcerated, or isn't present, how does a child develop a model of what success looks like? Is it the fault of the child?

In these statements, I have spoken for a whole group of people who are not a monolith while also reinforcing deficit thinking that African Americans are all stuck in generational poverty in part because of the lack of positive male role models who are in prison.

As for valuing education, how does a parent who must work multiple low paying jobs to support their family find time to help their 7th grader with Advanced Algebra homework? I have a Bachelor's, Master's, Education Specialist, and am working on my Ph.D. and I don't know how to help with this homework, and fortunately I have a wife who is home with my children while I am at work. Fortunately, she can help at this point, but there will be a time when she isn't able to help because the content is too challenging.

If I, as a parent, haven't completed advanced education and don't know how to do Algebra, and I must make it clear, I have advanced degrees and I cannot help with Algebra homework, what then is a parent to do when they can't help with 6th grade math or 5th grade math and so on?

In the above paragraphs, I reinforce the deficit thinking that African Americans are all stuck in low paying jobs, that they may not have two-parent households, and that they can't help with academic subjects.

The gap in education begins the moment African American students enter school. They are suspended at higher levels of frequency, they are referred to special education at higher levels, and the gap only widens as each year progresses.

This final statement in my journal entry on this topic, captures the essence of what I was trying to articulate in my journal entries and when conversing with Andy.

As I closed out my journal entries around this conversation with my cousin, I articulated my understanding on the issue of race:

I find most interesting how my life has come full circle. Having grown up rich, having a Black maid, having racists views- or views that perpetuate the stereotypes on the issue of race and racism, I now am arguing that there is racism. There is a need for change. A Black child and a White child do not start the race at the same starting point nor do they start the race with the same quality shoes! This is no fault of the child. To not recognize that racism exists, and I must be fair, the cousin did recognize that racism exists, he proved his understanding of this by using the tired example of racism exists not just from a white perspective but Black on Black, the Chinese, the this and that. To not recognize that he and I, as white males, have had a cake walk of a life because of things that are outside of our control- wealthy parents, white and male- is to continue racism.

We Tried Bussing, It Didn't Work

At a Christmas gathering, I had a conversation with Dennis and Gerri. The conversation started when Dennis asked me how my Ph.D. was going and what my topic was. As I explained that I was very early in the process, had not solidified my topic, but was contemplating exploring the role race had played in my professional experience, he interrupted me to share a recent experience he had volunteering in an area school district that has a student body that is predominately African American and socio-economically disadvantaged. I summarized his story in my journal:

He had been invited to speak to elementary students about the automotive history of Michigan. The principal was very nice, but there was no plan. There was no room, the secretary ended up giving him the computer

room. He was shocked that out of the 20 students that showed up, only 5 sat right in front of him, the rest were just trying to get out of class.

From his comments about most of the students just trying to get out of class, he showed his deficit thinking about students of color. He did not provide any other details that would support his position that the students were just trying to get out of class, it was simply where the students chose to sit that gave him the insight needed to determine that they were not serious about their education. Like his son, Dennis revealed his deficit thinking of Black students and that they do not value education.

My retelling of Dennis' story continued:

The principal at the end asked the students to see their notes. Dennis said they all said they took notes, but only one of them did. The rest of them lied. The principal told them to go home and type up their notes so they could turn them into her tomorrow. Most of the kids don't have laptops, or their sister has a laptop, but won't let them use it.

Here Dennis not only suggests that because only one student took notes, the students were not only not interested in his presentation, but also accuses the rest of lying. He also makes deficit assumptions about the students homelife and whether they have access to a computer and assumptions about family relatives, of whom which he has no information upon which to make any sort of judgement or statement, yet he assumes that their sisters won't allow them to use computers that they may or may not have.

At this point in the conversation that evening, Gerri wife joined in with much more direct and offensive statements:

Gerri chimed in that they are so lazy. "I hear about them having all of these opportunities like internships, and then within two weeks they had all quit."

Referring to all African Americans as “they” and “them,” Gerri reinforced Dennis’ negative assertions about the students and added to the deficit thinking by generalizing that all Black students are lazy and quitters. And, as if reading the script of White hegemony, she went on to hold up Asians as the “model minority:”

“Why aren’t the Asians’ like that,” she asked? “We should just tear down the city and start over. Move them all out of the city.” But then she stated that they moved up to 26 mile to get away from all of that.

From this journal entry, it is apparent that Gerri had acknowledged that she and her family had engaged in White flight. Unlike what is stated in the literature, she did not make any excuses for her White flight. She was direct in stating that they moved to get away from people of color.

Later in the conversation, Dennis exposed that his deficit thinking of people of color wasn’t limited to Black people, he shared insight into his beliefs of Hispanic people too:

(My wife) overheard Dennis tell (our daughter) that it was great that she was learning Spanish because when you grow up and want to get your lawn mowed, you are going to have to speak Spanish to the guys that cut your lawn.

Though I did not document it in my journal, during that conversation I had shared some of the reading that I had been doing on race. I was sharing my understanding of the Black experience and that there were disadvantages that people of color experience that

White people may not, and at some point, Gerri, interrupted with a question which led to another point of view she held that supported the research:

Gerri asked, "Well, what is the solution?" I guess the first question is, "what is the problem?" My guess is, and it was pretty well informed by the conversation last night, is that she sees the problem as Black people are lazy, uneducated, and have criminal tendencies.

When I suggested that integration might be a starting point, Gerri was quick to chime in that they tried that before. Kelly (her daughter) was a part of an experimental district that bussed suburban kids into the city and vice-versa. It didn't work. The education for the suburban kids went down. Would you want your kids going to an inner city school?

These journal entries touch on many of the tenets of Critical Race and White hegemony.

Dennis and Gerri had explicitly stated that they don't believe that Black people are equal to White people. By their comments, they have shown that they believe that any problems that Black people may experience in life, is the fault of their being "lazy."

Dennis and Gerri have shown that they sit in a place of privilege because no White person would ever cut their lawn, only a person of color is fit for that level of work.

They also showed that from their position of power and privilege they should also have the right to not live among people who are not like them.

Gerri supported the theory of interest convergence and supported the critique of integration efforts by bussing. She showed that after one unsuccessful attempt to resolve significant societal racial equity issues such as segregated schools, that there was no point in trying again. Interest convergence argues that the pace of civil rights advancement for people of color only moves at a pace which White people are comfortable. She has the privilege of saying we tried it didn't work, not let's just move away from the "problem"

so we don't have to deal with it, unlike people of color who are left to suffer the disadvantaged lived experiences.

Chapter Four Synopsis

The review of my data revealed distinct themes of Stress, Truth and Trust, and Contradictions. Each of these themes spoke to my experience of making sense out of my time working in my former district and with the new superintendent and leadership team. The time was stressful. It was stressful because of the disconnect between the worlds that I was negotiating; the world that made sense to me, my personal life, my "White life," and my work life, the diverse life.

My data revealed that, while the African American students in the district I served had negative experiences at the hands of their teachers, I did not act with an appropriate sense of urgency, prioritizing the completion of a compliance check activity over ensuring the students emotional safety by removing the teacher immediately.

My data also conversations I had with people close to me in my personal life that support the research on White hegemony. These conversations seemed to come right from the research as they at times blatantly stated beliefs that people of color are inferior.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of my study was to identify the role that race played in shaping my responses to demographic changes in the district that I served, how I could use this new understanding to improve my practice as an educational leader, and how my research and experience could serve as a model for others like me who represent most educational leaders serving all students and in particular, Black children. The literature was clear that White men, like me, live a non-racial life, in other words, since they are rarely disadvantaged by their race, they don't recognize that they do have a race and that race provides an experience that people of color do not benefit from. The literature was also clear that African American students are more likely to have negative experiences in public schools by being over disciplined, pushed to special education or pushed out of the education system completely by their teachers and administrators, the majority of whom are white.

To understand how my racial experience influenced my words, actions, and world perspectives that I brought with me to my work environment, I conducted a critical autoethnography. This study examined the impact race had had on my life and the interactions I had with the new superintendent and leadership team. The goal of the research was to improve my practice as an educational leader, to be able to articulate my experience and how I ultimately shifted my world perspective to one that is more understanding and empathetic to the experience of others, in particular the Black students and staff members that I worked with so that others like me, white male educational

leaders, could reflect upon their own experience and improve their practice, thereby improving the educational experience and outcomes of Black students in public schools.

Summary and Implications of Findings

My experience supported the literature. I, like so many White people, lived a segregated life with limited opportunities to interact with people of color in authentic ways. I held deficit views of people of color and questioned the words and actions of the new leader and crew because I didn't think they knew what they were doing based on my experience as an educational leader. I judged the new leader and crew from my position of Whiteness. Even though I was a willing participant, seeing the world from a new perspective took a lot of time and effort. It took a disorienting dilemma to move me to that critical self-analysis. It wasn't until I started to listen to the voice of color, the stories, and counter stories that the new leader and crew were sharing that I began to look inward for a solution to the stress that I was experiencing. When I started listening to the voice of color, I witnessed that the Black students in our district, like those in the literature, were suffering at the hands of their White teachers. Worse yet, I recognized that the students were suffering at my hands as well.

Admittedly, this process was difficult, stressful, even painful. I liken my experience to that of the Allegory of the Cave and the difficult and painful process of breaking free of one's perceived and comfortable reality and being dragged up into the sunlight of what truly is reality. I believe that I am a better educational leader because of my new understanding and appreciation of the role race plays in my life and the life of my students and staff. This understanding and appreciation extends to all forms of oppression influencing the decisions being made by adults in the educational system

whether it is poverty, gender, and so on. Because I went through a difficult process, I gained a new appreciation for the painful experiences- often far more painful than what I went through- so many African American students encounter each day due to their race in and outside of the classroom each day. With this new understanding and appreciation, I can more appropriately name the challenges to be resolved and be better informed as I work to find solutions.

The main findings were 1) I had lived a segregated life because throughout my life I had engaged in White Flight; 2) The lessons of White hegemony were being reinforced in my home community and life; 3) I was “stuck” between two worlds; my personal life world, and my work life world (Forced Integration); 4) Transforming my world perspective was difficult; 5) Changing my world perspective took a Disorienting Dilemma to initiate the change 6) I am more critically conscious 7) Black students experience harm at the hands of their White teachers and leaders- I was complicit in this, if for no greater lesson than, the urgency of now- I have the luxury of time, that people who are being harmed do not.

Segregated Life

Since I was a child, my personal life has been a segregated life with few authentic interactions and relationships with African Americans. Of the interactions I had with African Americans most were based on the services they provided my family; house cleaning, service at private clubs my family belonged to, and so on. As an adult, the number of authentic interactions with African Americans in my personal life (separate from my work life) only increased nominally. As an adult, I lived a segregated life because I had engaged in White Flight when choosing communities to live in. Whenever

I changed residence, I had it in my mind that I was doing so for better resources such as schools, parks, amenities, and so on. However, the communities that I chose to live in were always majority White communities.

While our attitudes about racial segregation have changed over the years and more White people indicate that they would consider living in a racially diverse community, the reality is we choose to live in less diverse neighborhoods (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Because of our segregated lives, most white people report having little contact with African Americans (Lewis, 2001). White people have demonstrated that they verbalize reasons such as “looking for better schools or communities” to raise their children, as they move from diverse communities and schools to less diverse communities and schools (Lewis, 2001). My choice of places to live matched the patterns of White flight that show White people moving from more diverse urban and suburban areas to less diverse suburban and exurban areas (Frey, 2018).

White Hegemony Lessons Reinforced Unchallenged

Having lived a segregated life steeped in White hegemony, an unexamined deficit perspective of African Americans was allowed to fester. The people around me did not have to consider their race or the race of others because they were leading a life of privilege. In denial of our segregated life, we told ourselves that we were better, had worked harder, were more honest, or had somehow otherwise earned the right to live where we did that African Americans had not. African Americans, we told ourselves, had not earned that right due to a multitude of presumed failings on their part. With little to no daily contact with African Americans, the stories White people like Dennis and Gerri

talked about African Americans being lazy and not valuing education went unchallenged. With no authentic relationships to provide a counter to their stories, they could avoid thinking critically about their experience, select only the information they needed to support their story, and disregard any information that may present an alternate version. To them, because students did not sit in the front of the room, Dennis saw proof supporting his belief that African American students do not care about education.

A founding tenet of Critical Race Theory is that racism is endemic in our society (cf Lawrence, 1987; Bonilla-Silva, 2012; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015) despite most White people believing that racism ended with the Civil Rights movement (cf Cammorata, 2017). Our society, inclusive of the arts, pop culture, the business world, the judicial system, our schools, and so on is and perpetuates a racial hierarchy that keeps White people at the top and African Americans at the ‘Bottom of the Well,’ (Bell, 1992). This racial structure is so pervasive that it has been described as an invisible grammar that provides the rules for how we think, speak, and act around the issue of race in this country (Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Keskinen, 2017). To preserve their privileged position atop the racial structure, many White people willfully ignore overwhelming evidence of the racial structure (Zeus, 2004), while at the same time believing that they have somehow earned their place in the structure that others have not (Cammorata, 2017).

Stuck Between Two Worlds- Forced Integration

Like most White people, I chose to live a segregated life in my personal life. Unlike most, however, I was, as I described it, ‘stuck’ between two worlds: my work community and my personal community. In my work community, I was forced to participate in an integrated life. The demographics of my work community changed

many years ago. When that change was happening, I resisted. I held deficit views of the African Americans coming into the community, and I verbalized those views at times. As many of my White coworkers chose to find employment in other districts because of the changing demographics, I understood their decisions and even contemplated the same decision. Those of us who stayed, commiserated over the sad direction we believed the district going.

My resistance to the increasing diversity in the district matched patterns of the passive resistance of White flight (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014) in that as my coworkers moved to less diverse districts, I shared my deficit thoughts about the changing demographics, and while I didn't refer to it as "dirty work" (Cooper, 2009), I certainly did not encourage anyone to seek employment or enroll in the district because of the changing demographics. My coworkers engaged in White flight by seeking employment in other districts or by seeking reassignment to different schools in the district that hadn't seen as much demographic change (Evans, 2007).

For reasons I do not recall now I stayed in the district and as a result, I interacted with African Americans daily. I interacted with the students, their families, and our staff members. From the interactions, I developed relationships, and these relationships revealed stories of lived experiences that countered the "common sense" deficit thinking that had thrived in my personal life and community. For example, though I did not document the conversations I had had with my coworker and friend Andrae, he and I spoke often at work and eventually formed a friendship outside of our place of work. My friend Andrae was African American (he passed away unexpectedly at the time I was

writing this dissertation). We talked about race often and he would speak to the importance of building relationships in our demographically changing district. “You have to reach out and *touch* them,” he once said sounding like a church Pastor giving a sermon. I remember how he emphasized the word *touch*. He was making the point that we need to get close enough to a person who is different than us to understand them, to care for them.

A founding tenet of Critical Race Theory, Voice of color or naming your reality, seeks to uplift the knowledge and experience of people of color (cf Delgado, 1984; Evans, 2007;). Raising up and valuing the Voice of Color, the lived experience of people of color challenges the long-held acceptance that certain knowledge and experience- White knowledge and experience- is more valuable and credible than the knowledge and experience of people of color. The use of storytelling (Love, 2010) raises consciousness of common experiences and opens the possibility for social action (Fernandez, 2002). Through stories, people can reflect on their own experiences and how the experiences of others either confirm or run counter to those experiences. Critical Race Theory seeks to elevate the stories of People of Color which are often counter stories to the common sense of White Hegemony.

Transformative Learning Experience

I went through a transformative learning experience (Mezirow, 1997) which led to an awakening of my critical consciousness (Freire, 1996). I now recognize and acknowledge the invisibility of the racial structure of our society as viewed by the uncritical eye. I see the endemic racism of our society, the existence of which so many

White people deny. I understand and can articulate the influence race had and continues to have on my lived experience and the lived experience of others. By experiencing integration in my work community, I was exposed to the stories of my African American coworkers, causing me to critically assess my world view, perception of others, the way our society is structured, and so on.

My experience of transforming my world view was difficult, painful, and rare as Mezirow, (1997) and others (cf Kitchenham, 2008; and Merriam, 2004) have put forth. By living an integrated life, my world perspective, described as a meaning system (Merriam, 2004) or frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997) was inadequate and/or at odds with the lived experience, words, actions, thoughts, and stories of my African American students and coworkers. My frame of reference was inadequate because it had largely informed by a segregated life steeped in White hegemony and it was at odds with the lived experience of African Americans, because what I heard and saw from them was counter to the lessons of White hegemony.

I interpret my being confronted with the different meaning system, frame of reference and lived perspective of the African Americans as a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1997). I had, “a strong tendency to reject ideas that fail(ed) to fit our(my) preconceptions, labeling those ideas as unworthy of consideration- aberrations, nonsense, irrelevant weird, or mistaken (Mezirow, 1997, p.5).” This experience was stressful, even painful, though for reasons not discovered through this research, rather than doubling down on my world perspective as so many like me do, I reflected critically on my own assumptions.

Critically reflecting on one's assumptions is rare. Changing or transforming one's meaning structure, frame of reference, and so on, to a more inclusive, autonomous, discriminating one is even more elusive for so many (Freire, 1996; Mezirow, 1997; Kitchenham, 2008) and "mandates an advanced level of cognitive development (Merriam, 2004)." It gives me great pause to envision myself as someone capable of the advanced level of cognitive development Merriam suggests is required to transform my thinking as I have an unremarkable academic history. Yet, at the same time if I can attain critical transivity (Kitchenham, 2008), if I have the advanced level of cognitive development (Merriam, 2004), and can become critically conscious (Freire, 1996), then perhaps my research is a sign of hope that others may learn from my experience.

Black Students Have Negative Experiences in the Public School Setting

My final finding of this research is that I was complicit in the harming of the African Americans that our district served. My response to the teacher that used the "n-word" in front of her students was a failure. After the students were verbally attacked by the teachers repeated use of the "n-word," I thanked the students for their calm behavior, left them with their attacker and asked them to "be patient" as I figured out the right way to handle the situation. I then left to complete a meaningless compliance activity I had been assigned by the superintendent.

Black students have negative experiences in public schools (cf Dancy, 2014; Bryan, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006). As a White educational leader, I didn't understand and often misinterpreted the racial experience of the African American students in our district (cf Archer-Banks, 2012; Lewis, 2001; Evans, 2007). With this lack of understanding and misinterpretations, White educational leaders make decisions that may

make sense to them as leaders, but not the students. As I was not harmed by the use of the “n-word” and I will never be able to fully comprehend the harm it brings to African Americans, I handled the situation on a timeline that illustrated Derrick Bell’s (1980) concept of Interest Convergence. Grounded in my ignorance of the racial experience of my students, I did not act with urgency and sincerity

In closing, had I to do it again, I would have responded with an “urgency of now,” recognizing that African Americans have negative experiences and negative outcomes in the public-school setting at a disproportionate rate and they need people like me to do our part to make sure they don’t. A much more appropriate response would have been to immediately remove and suspend the teacher, condemn the use of the word, acknowledge the harm they had just experienced, issue a public apology and condemnation to the parents and community as a starting point.

Limitations

There were two limitations to my research; the relocation of my family and I due to my finding a new job as superintendent in a district hundreds of miles away from the place we had called home. The second limitation was the impact COVID-19 and a national narrative accusing public school districts of systematically indoctrinating Kindergarten through twelfth grade children into Marxism through the teaching of Critical Race Theory. These limitations took me away from my research and helped improve my research.

The first limitation in my research was an unanticipated change in residence that I had to make with my family. After almost a year searching for a new educational

leadership position locally, I had to broaden my search to other areas of the state. I was hired as superintendent in a district located over two-hundred miles away from the area that my family and I had lived up to that point. For a period of six-months, while we searched for a new home, I commuted between the two communities on weekends. The relocation, the acclimation into a new district and community, all within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in a period of nearly a year during which I did not work on my research.

The second limitation came in February of 2021, approximately five months into my tenure as a new superintendent, when President Joe Biden announced that all Federal employees would undergo training on issues of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Gender Identity, and other social issues. The reaction from a portion of our society nationwide was fierce and focused on local School Boards. My community was no exception. Our Board of Education meetings became a political battle ground for people on both sides of issues of COVID-19, Critical Race Theory, LGBTQ+, Climate Change, and so on.

The Board of Education and I faced wild and unfounded accusations of Marxist indoctrination through the teaching of Critical Race Theory in our Kindergarten through twelfth grade classrooms. As parents and community members shared their bastardized interpretations of Critical Race Theory and what they believed was going on in the classrooms of our district, I found the need to revisit my understandings of the theory so that I could better respond to their claims. In short, my real-life experience improved my research in two ways; First, it forced me to dig deeper into my theories so that I could better articulate them, and second, my experience in the district provided real life

confirmation of both of my theories. These two factors indeed, modified and ultimately enhanced the way I conducted my research.

Future Research

For those who were familiar with Critical Race prior to 2020, I cannot imagine any would have ever been able to predict the future of this theoretical approach to viewing and interpreting the world that we live in. Following the eruption of racial tensions in the summer of 2020, canceling Critical Race Theory became the rallying cry of opponents of our greatest of public institutions the public school system. The history of this attack on public schools and Critical Race Theory was being written as I completed this research. Across the nation, school board elections, mine included, featured candidates who pledged to ban Critical Race Theory and take back control of “their” districts. State governments had banned the theory with many more, including the state I am an educational leader in, promising to do the same. The logical next step in research would be to document this history and examine the impact of these attacks and elections on the school districts, the treatment of marginalized students, and our public-school systems across the nation.

Conclusions

I conducted a critical autoethnographic study to explore, (a) the role that race played in shaping my responses to demographic changes in the public school district that I served, (b) how I could use this new understanding to improve my practice as an educational leader, and (c) how my research and experience could serve as a model for other White leaders, who like me, represent most educational leaders serving all students and in particular, African American children.

I found that in my personal life, I had lived a segregated life, one in which the “common sense” of White hegemony was perpetuated daily. In my work life, I had lived an integrated life, one in which I was exposed to the counter stories to White hegemony through the authentic relationships I developed with my African American students and coworkers.

Being exposed to the counter stories was not an easy process, rather it caused great stress in my life as I tried to first make sense of the words and actions of those that I worked with. At first, I rejected and resisted the counter stories and judged the words and actions of the others from my position of Whiteness. As I turned my gaze inward, I went through a transformational learning process which resulted in my having a deeper understanding of the impact race had on my life and the life of those that I worked with. As a result of my research, I now recognize the racial hierarchy of our society, and understand that racism is endemic in our society. Without my integrated experience in my work life, I do not believe a transformational learning experience would have been possible.

This research adds to an area of research that is lacking- critical self-reflection by White male educational leaders. This research can serve as a model of self-reflection for other educational leaders, especially White educational leaders. The research is clear that White people struggle to recognize their race and that their race impacts the way they make decisions as leaders. When the White leaders serve African American students, the impact of race on both the leader and the student is critical to understand. A leader must understand the role that race plays in their student’s life.

References

- Adams, T.E. (2017). Critical autoethnography, education, and a call for forgiveness. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 19, pp. 79 – 88.
- Allen, Q., And White-Smith, K.A. (2014). “Just as bad as prisons”: The challenge of dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline through teacher and community education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 47, pp. 445-460.
- Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35, pp. 375-395.
- Archer-Banks, D.A.M., and Behar-Horenstein, L.S. (2012). Ogbu revisited: Unpacking high-achieving African American girls’ high school experiences. *Urban Education*, 47, pp. 198-223.
- Ayscue, J.B. (2016). Promising or potentially harmful? Suburban school responses to racial change. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 91, pp. 326 – 347.
- Aviles de Bradley, A. (2014). Homeless educational policy: Exploring a racialized discourse through a critical race theory lens. *Urban Education*, 50, 839-869.

- Barnes, J.C., and Motz, R.T. (2018). Reducing racial inequalities in adulthood arrest by reducing inequalities in school discipline: Evidence from the school-to-prison pipeline. *Developmental Psychology*, 54, pp. 2328-2340.
- Bell, D. (1976). Serving two masters: Integration ideals and client interests in school desegregation litigation. *The Yale law journal* 85.4, pp. 470–516.
- Bell, D. (1980). Brown V. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma. *Harvard law review*, 93, pp. 518–533.
- Bell, D. (1992) *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: the permanence of racism*. New York: Basic Books.
- Blake, J.J., Butler, B.R., Lewis, C.W., and Darensbourg, A. (2010). Unmasking the inequitable discipline experiences of urban black girls: Implications for urban educational stakeholders. *Urban Rev*, 43, pp. 90-106.
- Blanchett, W.J. (2006). Disproportionate representation of African American students in special education: Acknowledging the role of white privilege and racism. *Educational Researcher*, 35, pp. 24-28.

- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2012). The Invisible weight of whiteness: The racial grammar of everyday life in contemporary America. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(2), pp. 173-194.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Boylorn, R., and Orbe, M. (2016). *Critical autoethnography*. New York: Routledge.
- Brooks, J.S., Arnold, N.W., and Brooks, M.C. (2013). Educational leadership and racism: A narrative inquiry into second-generation segregation. *Teachers College Record*, 115, pp. 1-27.
- Brown, K.M., Benkovitz, J., Muttillio, A.J., and Urban, T. (2011). Leading school of excellence and equity: Documenting effective strategies in closing achievement gaps. *Teachers College Record*, 113, pp. 57-96.
- Brown, K., and Jackson, D. (2013). The history and conceptual elements of Critical Race Theory. In Dixson, A.D., and Lynn, M. *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education* (pp. 9-22). Buffalo, EBSCO Publishing.

Bryan, N. (2017). White teachers' role in sustaining the school-to-prison pipeline: Recommendations for teacher education. *Urban Rev*, 49, 326-345
doi:10.1007/s11256-017-0403-3

Buttigieg, J.A. (Ed.) 1975. *Antonio Gramsci Prison Notebooks Vol. 1*. New York: Columbia Press.

Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethnography as method*. New York: Routledge.

Charbeneau, J. (2015). White faculty transforming whiteness in the classroom through pedagogical practice. *Race Ethnicity and Education*. 18, 655-674.

Chingos, M.W., Whitehurst, G.J., and Lindquist, K.M. (2014) School superintendents: Vital or Irrelevant? *Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings*.

Cooper, C.W. (2009) Performing cultural work in demographically changing schools: Implications for expanding transformative leadership frameworks. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 45, 694-724.

Cousins, L.H. (1999). "Playing between classes": America's trouble with class, race, and gender in a black high school community. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 30, pp. 294-316.

- Dancy, T.E. (2014) (Un)doing hegemony in education: Disrupting school-to-prison pipelines for black males. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 47, 476-493.
- Davis, B.W., Gooden, M.A. & Micheaux, D.J. (2015). Color-blind leadership: A critical race theory analysis of the ISLLC and ELCC standards. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 51, 335-371.
- Delgado, R. (1984). The imperial scholar: Reflections on a review of civil rights literature. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 132(3), pp. 561-578
- Delgado, R. & Stefaniec, J. (1993). Critical race theory: An annotated bibliography. *Virginia Law Review*, 79 (2), pp. 461-516.
- DiAngelo, R. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism* Boston: Penguin Random House.
- Diarrassouba, N., & Johnson, S. (2014). Responding to demographic change: What do suburban district leaders need to know? *NCPEA International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 9.
- Diem, S., Welton, A., Frankenberg, E., & Jellison Holme, J. (2016) Racial diversity in the suburbs: How race-neutral responses to demographic change perpetuate inequity in suburban school districts. *Race Ethnicity and Education*. 4, 731-762.

- Dixson, A.D., & Rousseau, C.K. (2005). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory in education ten years later. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), pp. 7-21.
- Eckes, S.E. (2004) The 50th anniversary of Brown: is there any reason to celebrate? *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 37(3), 219–226.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T.E., and Bochner, A.P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research*, 36, pp.273-290.
- Ellis, C. and Bochner, A. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity. In Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd Ed.)*, pp. 733-767. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Evans, A. (2007). School leaders and their sensemaking about race and demographic change. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43, 159-188.
- Evans, A (2007a). Changing faces: Suburban school responses to demographic change. *Education and Urban Schools*, 39, 315-348.
- Finnan, L.A., and McCord, R.S. American Association of School Administrators. (2018). *2017-18 Superintendent Salary & Benefits Study: Non-Member Version*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

- Frankenberg, E., Ayscue, J.B., and Tyler, A.C. (2016). Diversifying high schools in racially changing suburban districts: Expanding opportunity, creating barriers? *Peabody Journal of Education*, 91, pp. 383-403.
- Freeman, A.D. (1978) Legitimizing racial discrimination through antidiscrimination law: A Critical review of supreme court doctrine, *Minnesota Law Review*. 804.
- Frey, W. (2018) *Diversity Explosion*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Goddard, R.D., Skrla, L., and Salloum, S.J. (2017). The role of collective efficacy in closing student achievement gaps: A mixed methods study of school leadership for excellence and equity. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 22, pp. 220-236.
- Hanushek, E.A., and Rivkin, S.G. (2009). Harming the best: Schools affect the black-white achievement gap. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 28, pp. 366-393.
- Hunter, R.C., and Donahoo, S. (2003). The nature of urban school politics after Brown: The need for new political knowledge, leadership, and organizational skills. *Education and Urban Society*, 36, pp. 3-15.

Harris, C.I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106, 1707-1791.

Holme, J.J., Diem, S., and Welton, A. (2014). Suburban school districts and demographic change: The technical, normative, and political dimensions of response. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 50, 34-66.

Johnson, J.F., and Uline, C.L. (2006). Preparing educational leaders to close achievement gaps. *Theory Into Practices*, 44, 45-52.

Kettler, T., and Hurst, L.T. (2017). Advanced academic participation: A longitudinal analysis of ethnicity gaps in suburban schools. *Journal of the Education of the Gifted*, 40, pp. 3-19.

Khalifa, M.A., Gooden, M.A., and Davis, J.E. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 86, pp. 1272-1311.

Kowalski, T. J., McCord, R.S, Peterson, G.J., Young, I.P., & Ellerson, N.M. American Association of School Administrators. (2011). *The American school superintendent: 2010 decennial study*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.

- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in the U.S. *Educational Research*, 35 (7). Pp. 3-12.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2011). Boyz to men? Teaching to restore black boys' childhood. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 14, pp. 7-15.
- Lawrence, C.R. (1987). The id, the ego, and equal protection: Reckoning with unconscious racism. *Stanford Law Review*, 39(2), 317–388.
- Leithwood, K. (2010). Characteristics of school districts that are exceptionally effective in closing the achievement gap. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 9, pp.245-291.
- Leonardo, Z. (2004). The color of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of 'white privilege'. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 36, 137-152.
- Lewis, A.E. (2001). There is no "race" in the schoolyard: Color-blind ideology in an (almost) all-white school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38, 781-811.
- Liou, D., & Hermans, C. (2017). Preparing transformative leaders for diversity, immigration, and equitable expectations for school-wide excellence. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 31, 661-678.

- Love, B. (2010). *Brown plus 50 counter-storytelling: A critical race theory analysis of the “majoritarian achievement gap” story. Equity & Excellence in Education, 37, 227-246.*
- Madsen, J. & Maboлека, R. (2014). Leadership challenges in addressing changing demographics in schools. *NASSP Bulletin, 98, 75-96.*
- Marx, S., Pennington, J.L., and Chang, H. (2017). Critical autoethnography in pursuit of educational equity: Introduction to the IJME special issue. *International Journal of Multicultural Education, 19, pp.1-6.*
- McCoy, D. L., & Rodricks, D. J. (2015). Critical Race Theory. *ASHE Higher Education Report, 41(3), 1–117. <https://doi-org.huaryu.kl.oakland.edu/10.1002/aehe.20021>*
- Mitchell, A.B. (2011). The efficacy of all-male academies: Insights from critical race theory (CRT). *Sex Roles, 69, 382-392. doi 10.1007/s11199-011-0074-6*
- Norte, E. (1999). Structures beneath the skin: How school leaders use their power and authority to create institutional opportunities for developing positive interethnic communities. *The Journal of Negro Education, 68, pp. 466-485.*
- Picower, B. (2009). The unexamined whiteness of teaching: How white teachers maintain and enact dominant racial ideologies. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 12, 197-215.*

Powell, R. (1996) Confronting white hegemony: Implications for multicultural education.

Multicultural Education. 4, 12-15.

Reed-Danahay, D. (2017). Bordieu and critical autoethnography: Implications for

research, writing, and teaching. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*,

19, pp. 144-154.

Rodriguez, N. (2000). Projects of whiteness in a critical pedagogy. Dismantling White

Privilege: Pedagogy, Politics, and Whiteness. 1-24.

Rothstein, R. (2017). *The color of law*. Liveright Publishing Corporation.

Salend, S.J., and Garrick Duhaney, L.M. (2005). Understanding and addressing the

disproportionate representation of students of color in special education.

Intervention in School and Clinic, 40, pp. 213-221.

Skiba, R.J., Horner, R.H., Chung, C.G., Rausch, M.K., May, S.L., and Tobin, T. (2011).

Race is not neutral: A national investigation of African American and Latino

disproportionality in school discipline. *School Psychology Review*, 40, pp. 85-107.

Skrla, L., & Scheurich, J.J. (2001). Displacing deficit thinking in school district

leadership. *Education and Urban Society*, 33(3), 235–259.

- Sleeter, C. (2017). Critical race theory and the whiteness of teacher education. *Urban Education*, 52, pp. 155-169.
- Solorzano, D.G., (1997). Images and words that wound: Critical race theory, racial stereotyping, and teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 24 (3), 5-19.
- Soloranzo, D.G., and Yosso, T.J. (2002). A critical race counterstory of race, racism, and affirmative action. *Equity & Excellence*, 35 (2), 155-168
- Tarca, K. (2005) Colorblind in control: The risks of resisting difference amid demographic change. *Educational Studies*. 38, 99-120.
- Townsend, B. (2000). The disproportionate discipline of African American learners: Reducing school suspensions and expulsions. *Exceptional Children*, 66, pp. 381-391.
- Turner, E. (2015). Districts' responses to demographic change: Making sense of race, class, and immigration in political and organizational context. *American Education Research Journal*, 52, pp. 4-39.
- Wall, S. (2006). An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(2), 146–160.

- Welton, A., Diem, S., and Jellison Holme, J. (2015). Color consciousness, color blindness: Suburban school districts and demographic change. *Education and Urban Society*. 47, 695-722.
- Yosso, T.J. (2002). Toward a critical race curriculum. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 35 (2), 93-107.
- Zhang, D., and Katsiyannis, A. (2002). Minority representation in special education. *Remedial and Special Education*, 23, pp.180-187.