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# A Qualitative Case Study on Teachers' Identities, Ideologies, and Commitment to Teach in Urban and Suburban Schools

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A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON TEACHERS' IDENTITIES, IDEOLOGIES,  
AND COMMITMENT TO TEACH IN URBAN AND SUBURBAN SCHOOLS

by

Talonda Michelle Lipsey

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Urban Education

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

August 2013

## ABSTRACT

### A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON TEACHERS' IDENTITIES, IDEOLOGIES, AND COMMITMENT TO TEACH IN URBAN AND SUBURBAN SCHOOLS

by

Talonda Lipsey

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013

Under the Supervision of Professor Thandeka K. Chapman, Ph.D.

Using narrative inquiry, this study employed a Critical Race Theory lens to examine the ways in which identity factors such as race, culture, socioeconomic status, and gender work in concession with teachers' ideologies, as demonstrated by their values, beliefs, and perceptions about race, to inform their teaching practices, experiences with students and families of color, and commitment to teach. The main question this research study sought to examine was: How do teachers' identities and ideologies, as demonstrated by their values, beliefs, and perceptions, influence their decisions to remain in or leave urban and suburban classrooms?

The study focused on the lived experiences of four teachers, 2 whom taught in urban schools and 2 whom taught in suburban schools. Based on the findings of this study, it is my contention that the ideologies espoused by my four participants all evolved from a

source of pain, rooted in their identities and their experiences living in a racialized country. The ways in which they reacted, however, made all the difference. Each of the women's identity and their experiences with race, had a direct impact on their ideologies and the ways in which they interacted with their students. At times their experiences led them to operate from an activist stance, rendering them powerful, while at other times, their experiences caused them to function from a source of pain, thus rendering them powerless.

The following four recommendations were derived based on the findings of this study: the need for teachers to develop a clearer understanding with regard to the historical underpinnings, permanence and pervasiveness of racism in America; the need for teachers to become self-reflective about their identities and the ways it relates to privilege and whiteness; the need for teachers to develop a critical consciousness and seek alternative ways of understanding the world, particularly from the paradigms of the marginalized and oppressed; and the need for teachers, particularly teachers of color to continue to challenge majoritarian tales and forge alliances with White teachers who are committed to participating in the fight for equity.

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## Dedication

First and foremost I would like to give thanks, praise, honor and glory to God--the creator of the universe and the author and finisher of my life. I now am wise enough to understand that nothing in my life has been the result of chance and that everything is working out for my good. I pray that God continues to use my life and my work for a greater purpose to help and inspire others.

To Dr. Thandeka Chapman, Dr. Barbara Bales, Dr. Julie Kailin, Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Dr. Linda Post--my dissertation committee: I truly believe that you were my "Dream Team." I feel extremely honored and privileged to have worked with you and I am so appreciative of all of the guidance and support that you've provided throughout my entire doctoral experience. Thank you for setting the bar high and challenging me to reach the highest standards for academic excellence. Thank you for being champions of equity and justice! It is through your scholarship and advocacy in urban education that I have been so deeply inspired to join in the fight against racism, marginalization, and oppression.

I would like to extend a very special thank you to Dr. Thandeka Chapman. Dr. Chapman, there are no words to express the gratitude I feel with regard to the role you've played over the last 6 years. Not only have you served as a brilliant professor and advisor whom I greatly respect and admire, but you have also been a dynamic leader and mentor, to whom I am truly grateful!

To the participants of my study, thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this research process. I truly could not have done this without you! Thank you for being so honest and candid, even during moments of uncertainty and through experiences of discomfort. It is my sincere hope and desire that teachers and students alike will be blessed through your stories and the experiences that you've shared and that together, we can make a positive contribution towards the advancement of education to students throughout the world.

Finally, I dedicate this study to my parents, my husband, my sister Tejuana, my nephew Louis Earl, my family, friends, church family, former students, educational colleagues, and my community. To my mother and father, I am so appreciative of the countless sacrifices that you've made just to ensure that I had a better life and future filled with success. God could not have given me better parents! Thank you for always putting your children first! Thank you for instilling the love of God, family, and life in me. Thank you for leading by example and imparting the values of wisdom, knowledge, discipline, balance, and hard work within me. Mom, thank you for teaching me to always look for the good in people. Daddy, thank you for always reminding me to "keep my eyes on the prize!" It has always been my sincere desire and ambition in life to make you as proud of me as I am of you! I love you! To my husband, Corey, thank you for always encouraging me to follow my dreams and to excel in life. Thank you for always being there with your love, support, and friendship. I love you and I look forward to our future together...the best is yet to come! To all of my family and friends, thank you for always being there. Nothing in life is more important to me than the love, appreciation, and respect I have for you! Finally, to my ancestors and my community...it is on your shoulders that I stand. It is my prayer that I use the gifts God has given me to give back to others.

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But can you expect teachers to revolutionize the social order for the good of the community? Indeed we must expect this very thing. The educational system of a country is worthless unless it accomplishes this task. Men of scholarship and consequently of prophetic insight must show us the right way and lead us into the light which shines brighter and brighter.

-----Carter G. Woodson (2008)--The Mis-Education of the Negro

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

- Purpose
- Phenomenon of Interest
- Research Questions
- Theoretical Framework, Ontological & Epistemological Considerations
- Relevance of Research to field of Curriculum & Instruction
- Our Identities and Ideologies Shape Who We Are
- What's Race Got to Do With It?: The Silenced Dialogue of Race
- Teachers, Identity & The Possessive Investment in Whiteness
- Whiteness as Property: The Right to Exclude
- Whiteness as Property: The Right to Transfer
- Teachers, Cultural Capital, & The Possessive Investment in Whiteness
- The Impact of Cultural Capital on Teachers' Perceptions and Behaviors
- Possible Critiques of this Proposed Research Study

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which teachers' values, beliefs, perceptions, and identities influence their decisions to remain in or leave urban classrooms. Narrative inquiry was used to investigate the ways in which identity factors (such as race, culture, socioeconomic status, and gender) influence teachers' perceptions of students and families of color. This inquiry is significant because teachers undoubtedly have an indelible influence on the academic outcomes and future success of students.

## **Phenomenon of Interest**

*“We all carry worlds in our heads, and those worlds are decidedly different. We educators set out to teach, but how can we reach the worlds of others when we don’t even know they exist? Indeed, many of us don’t even realize that our own worlds exist only in our heads and in the cultural institutions we have built to support them.”*

--- (Lisa Delpit, 1995, *Other People’s Children*, p.xiv)

Teachers need to know who they are as people, understand the contexts in which they teach, and continuously question their knowledge and assumptions (Cross, 2003; Howard, 1999; Hyland, 1998; Kailin, 1999, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Milner, 2003). Such knowledge and understanding are just as, or arguably-- even more important than their mastery of techniques for instructional effectiveness (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Teachers must have a deep understanding of their own identities (both individual and collective) and the ways in which such identities work to shape their perceptions and ideologies *before* they can become effective teachers of students in both suburban and urban schools (Kailin, 1999, 2002). A central aspect that is crucial in the understanding of one’s identity, is the acknowledgement that the whole concept of “identity”--in and of itself-- is a social construction. The concept of the “self” does not exist in isolation. In

fact, we can only come to *know* ourselves in relation to knowing others. Knowing who or what we are is only accomplished with regard to knowing who or what we are not.

Housee (2008) clearly asserted this when she stated:

It would not make sense to say one is black, if white was not identified and signified; and vice versa. Our sense and experience of ourselves are directly linked to the specific historical, social, and political context in which we find ourselves, and to the nature (often oppositional) of the interactions we encounter. (Hall, 1990) (p.422)

The acknowledgement of the construction of identity is important in the field of education for several reasons. Historically, the ways in which particular groups have been characterized by others (by way of peers, family, media, and society as a whole) have a direct impact on an individual's thoughts, actions and behaviors. Such thoughts, actions, and behaviors must be considered when examining a teacher's commitment to teach in an urban or suburban school because teachers influence not only the academic achievement and cognitive development of students but their self-concept and attitudes as well (Irvine, 2003). According to Talbert-Johnson (2006), "students from culturally diverse backgrounds tend to be more dependent on teachers than do their dominant peers and tend to perform poorly in school when they do not like their teachers" (p. 151). An examination of the possible relationship between one's attitudes, values, beliefs, and perceptions, and their commitment to teach is essential because of the escalating gap in academic achievement between students of color and their white counterparts, the overrepresentation of African American and poor children in low-ability tracks and special education courses, and the ever-increasing drop-out rate of students of color (Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

Each year, teachers exit the educational arena at considerable rates and as a result, there is a constant demand for highly qualified educators. The No Child Left Behind Act passed in 2001 is a United States federal law aimed (in rhetoric) at improving the performance of U.S. primary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts, and schools and by raising the academic achievement of children. Under the NCLB Act, teachers must be “highly qualified” in order to obtain teacher certification and licensure. It is difficult to find a reasonable person who would dispute the importance and necessity of having a highly qualified teacher in each classroom across the nation; however the problem herein lies with the notion of how one defines and determines who’s “highly qualified.” Wakefield (2006) states that the No Child Left Behind Act allows states to design or select their assessments for screening candidates and certifying or licensing teachers, having only the major stipulation that states provide quality assurances in order to receive federal funding. Such assurances include having teachers who possess at least a bachelor’s degree, are fully certified, and can show mastery of the subjects they teach, either by completing coursework, passing state subject-matter tests, or meeting some other state-set criteria (Viadero, 2007). As of 2008, The PRAXIS Series assessments, created by the Educational Testing Service, has been the form of assessment adopted by most states as the tool for measuring and determining “highly qualified” teachers.



According to J.R. Brown, L.J. Brown, and C.L. Brown (2008):

the PRAXIS tests are developed to measure the specific content and pedagogical skills and knowledge for beginning and practicing teachers. The PRAXIS Series assessments are designed to be comprehensive and inclusive but are limited to what may be covered in a finite number of questions and question types.

PRAXIS I covers Academic Skills Assessments, and PRAXIS II covers Subject Assessments by featuring multiple-choice and essay questions that are reported to measure both breadth and depth of knowledge. Interestingly, skills related to an individual's disposition toward teaching or potential for success as a teacher are not covered by these tests; however, policymakers are using these tests for this regulatory purpose. (p.31)

According to Ingersoll (2007):

Teacher shortages and subsequent teacher recruitment initiatives are not new to the K-12 education system. In the early and mid 1980s a series of highly publicized reports trumpeted an almost identical series of diagnoses and prescriptions (National Commission on Excellence and Education, 1983; Darling-Hammond, 1984; and the National Academy of Sciences, 1987). Indeed, teacher shortages have been a cyclic threat for decades. (Weaver, 1983)

Although teacher shortages and teacher recruitment initiatives may not be a new phenomenon, the rate of teacher attrition appears to mount with each approaching year.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010):

Of the 3,380,300 public school teachers who were teaching during the 2007-08 school year, 84.5 percent remained at the same school ("stayers"), 7.6 percent moved to a different school ("movers"), and 8.0 percent left the profession ("leavers") during the following year. Among public school teachers with 1-3 years of experience, 77.3 percent stayed in their base-year school, 13.7 percent moved to another school, and 9.1 percent left teaching in 2008-09. Among public school teacher movers with 4 or more years of teaching experience, 55.3 percent moved from one public school to another public school in the same district and 42.3 percent moved from one public school district to another public school district between 2007-08 and 2008-09.

Teacher attrition has many implications on the success of a school system because it influences the stability and academic success of students, school finance, and the overall

culture of the school (Feng, 2005). Teachers in urban, low-income communities are as much as 50% more likely to migrate or leave than those in low-poverty schools (Olsen & Anderson, 2007).

### **Research Question**

The main question this research study sought to examine was: How do teachers' identities and ideologies, as demonstrated by their values, beliefs, and perceptions, influence their decisions to remain in or leave urban classrooms?

### **Sub Questions:**

- What ideologies do teachers hold with regard to race? How do these ideologies connect to their commitment to teach in urban schools?
- What emotional and physical consequences may be related to teaching in urban schools?
- What roles do race, culture, socioeconomic status, and gender play in the participants' experiences with and perceptions of students and families of color?

### **Theoretical Framework, Ontological, and Epistemological Considerations**

The paradigms by which this research study used as a means of data analysis was critical race theory (CRT) as well as the use of interpretivism. Both paradigms were necessary for analysis because the research question focused on ideologies and perceptions as well as the concept of race. According to David Stovall (2005):

CRT is educational protest, as well as scholarship intended to provide new insight and opportunity for educational praxis. Rooted in legal, social, historical, and philosophical ideology, the purpose of CRT could be interpreted as twofold: to identify White supremacy in education; and to develop a praxis to counter its hegemony. (p. 197)

Using Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework was essential in examining the ways in which teachers' identities and experiences with regard to race and Whiteness, intersect with their perceptions, ideologies, and commitment to teach students of color. CRT is relevant to the field of education in several ways including: the intersectionality of race and racism with gender, class, and sexuality; the challenge to dominant ideology (this includes a challenge to "dominant social and cultural assumptions regarding culture and intelligence, language and capability, objectivity and meritocracy") (Yosso, p.98); the commitment to social justice; the centrality of experiential knowledge; and the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches (Yosso, 2002). By focusing on the ways in which race, culture, socioeconomic status, and gender play in teachers' experiences with and perceptions of students and families of color, this research study sought to understand the intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of difference which have, historically, been used to oppress such as gender, class, and sexuality. Because racism has been and continues to be a pervasive and permanent part of American life (Bell, 1992), it is important to examine the role identity has played in the maintenance and/or eradication of racism and hegemony. According to Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995):

If racism were merely isolated, unrelated, individual acts, we would expect to see at least a few examples of educational excellence and equity together in the nation's public schools. Instead, those places where African Americans do experience educational success tend to be outside of the public schools. While some might argue that poor children, regardless of race, do worse in school, and that the high proportion of African-American poor contributes to their dismal school performance, we argue that the cause of their poverty in conjunction with the condition of their schools and schooling is institutional and structural racism. Thus, when we speak of racism we refer to Wellman's definition of "culturally sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities". We must therefore contend with the "problem facing White people [of coming] to grips with the demands made by Blacks and Whites while at the

same time avoiding the possibility of institutional change and reorganization that might affect them.” (p. 55)

This study examined the ways in which race and racism informs people on an individual level as well as the ways in which it is a part of a broader, systemic structure. This research study sought to challenge the dominant ideology through the telling and re-telling of teachers' experiences. In addition, this study sought to perform a thorough analysis on the ways in which teachers' discuss issues of race and culture and how they position themselves and their students within these discourses. Using stories to tell and re-tell one's experiences is an important element of naming one's own reality. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995):

Critical race theorists argue that political and moral analysis is situational--"truths only exist for this person in this predicament at this time in history." For the critical race theorist, social reality is constructed by the formulation and the exchange of stories about individual situations. These stories serve as interpretive structures by which we impose order on experience and it on us. (p.57)

Because one's reality is socially constructed and is dependent on several factors involving identity such as: how one is perceived in the world, how one is depicted in society, and how one is shaped by parental, peer, and social influences, it is important to have a thorough understanding of how one views the world and how such paradigms impact their ideologies and behaviors.

By using a Critical Race Theory framework, this research study examined the ways in which race and racism play a pivotal role in the educational system and ultimately the academic success of students. This research is significant in that it also examines Whiteness, a culture of which most of the teaching population are inherently a part of, and the ways in which this culture influences perception, ideology, and

commitment—all very vital components that can have a huge influence on academic success. Joe L. Kincheloe (1999) stated:

In the multicultural context a critical pedagogy of whiteness theoretically grounds a form of teaching that engages students in an examination of the social, political, and psychological dimensions of membership in a racial group. The critical imperative demands that such an examination be considered in relation to power and the ideological dynamics of white supremacy. A critical pedagogy of whiteness is possible only if we understand in great specificity the multiple meanings of whiteness and their effects on the way white consciousness is historically structured and socially inscribed. Without such appreciations and the meta-consciousness they ground, awareness of the privilege and dominance of white Northern European vantage points are brined in the cemetery of power evasion. Neither our understanding that race is not biological but social, or that racial classifications have inflicted pain and suffering on non Whites should reject the necessity of new forms of racial analysis. (p.163)

It is essential that teachers understand their cultural position with regard to race and the ways in which race can directly shape one's perceptions, which then shape one's ideologies and which can have a tremendous bearing on the educational outcomes of all students.

The use of narrative inquiry and storytelling was also significant in this study in that it sought to challenge the "stock explanations" used by members of the dominant group that justify and reify reality in ways that maintain privilege and hegemony (Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). This study was committed to social justice in that it sought to uncover the ways in which teachers' values, beliefs, perceptions and identities not only influenced their commitment to urban classrooms, but student achievement and academic success as well. The goal of this research was not to blame or attack teachers because of their race and culture, nor to make them feel guilty or ashamed, but rather to examine the ways in which the racial and cultural experiences of

teachers influenced their identities and ideologies about educating students of color and their commitment to teach in urban and suburban schools.

### **Relevance of Research to the field of Curriculum & Instruction**

This area of research was particularly significant because while there is a vast amount of research on teacher attrition and an increase of studies examining the identities of teachers and the ways in which such identities impact their ideologies and perceptions about race and culture, presently, there is not a sufficient amount of research which examines teachers' identities, their ideologies about race and culture, *and* their decisions to leave or remain in urban schools. Because approximately 90% of the population of teachers is White, this research was very necessary in order to provide insight into areas in need of change as we continue in the struggle of school reform and the closing of the achievement gap. Carr & Thomas (1997) state:

A number of factors can explain the low educational outcomes or underperformance of some groups in schools: the formal—as well as the hidden--curriculum, involvement of parents, teacher effectiveness, beliefs of minority groups, and school culture.

Teachers are, undoubtedly, an important factor, and the influence of the lived experiences of predominantly White teachers and administrators working with an increasingly racially diverse student body needs to be understood.”(p.68)

More fully understanding the tremendous impact a teacher has on the lives and outcomes of students is essential because such understanding can have a dire consequence on educational policy such as hiring practices, ways of assessing teacher quality, student assessment, and curricular reform. If it was understood that teachers' attitudes, values, beliefs and perceptions affect how they perceive their students and how their students

subsequently perceive them and respond academically, more professional development opportunities might be offered and more attention may be given toward assessing teachers' attitudes, values, beliefs, and perceptions in teacher education programs during the start of their careers.

This research project was also relevant in that its implications can benefit students, teachers, administrators, and teacher educators in several ways. The findings of this research could benefit students in urban schools by affording them a greater opportunity of being educated from a pool of highly qualified teachers that have positive attitudes, values, beliefs, and perceptions concerning students and families of color, and this can subsequently influence their achievement levels. Administrators could potentially benefit from utilizing the findings of this project to effectively implement better hiring practices that are more cost-efficient, as well as to provide more support to their teaching staff by initiating the professional development and continuing education opportunities that are necessary for teachers.

Although administrators and students could benefit immensely through the findings of this study, those whom would potentially benefit most from this study are teachers. Implications from this research study could be used to help teachers reflect on their identities and ideologies about race and culture and on the ways in which such factors influence their teaching practices as well as student outcomes. In an article discussing teachers' ideologies, Elliott (2008) stated:

By helping teachers see how ideologies impact life on both the micro and macro levels—those that dominate, structure, and sustain social inequalities---they can begin to develop an appreciation of how their own teaching decisions are influenced by ideologies residing both within and outside themselves.” (p.214)

Just as there is a need to assess students' prior knowledge in order to learn of their experiences and any preconceptions and/or misconceptions they may potentially hold about a particular subject *before* teaching that topic, the same should be required of teachers. If these pre-assessments and re-assessments of teachers' attitudes, values, beliefs, and perceptions are not conducted, we will continue to experience the same revolving cycle of teachers entering and exiting urban schools. In order to form longstanding, authentic relationships that transcend socially constructed boundaries, and to unite in an effort to completely eradicate all forms of oppression and inequity, we must work to understand ourselves as we simultaneously work to understand one another.

Gerardo Lopez expressed this brilliantly when he stated:

School leaders must be prepared to work with individuals who are culturally different and help create learning environments that foster respect, tolerance, and intercultural understanding. They must also have an awareness of the effect of racism and how it intersects with other areas of difference such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, and class oppression. (2003, p. 71)

Being prepared to work with individuals that are culturally different and having a genuine awareness and understanding of difference is important because in the United States and throughout the world, difference has historically been used as a means of oppression (by way of racism, sexism, religious oppression (i.e. anti-Semitism/anti-Islam), heterosexism, classism, ageism, and ableism) (Daniel--Tatum, 1997). Each individual has a unique, complex identity of which any one of their characteristics (race or ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and physical or mental ability) has the ability of positing one in a position of dominance (in which one is advantaged by society because of group membership) or positing one in a position of subordination (through exclusion from group membership) (Daniel-Tatum, 1997). Therefore, it is vital



that school leaders are adequately equipped with the attitudes, values, skills, and behaviors that are necessary to impart a curriculum that is not only equitable but culturally relevant as well. This is especially true of teachers and administrators who play such a large role in the academic achievement and educational outcomes of all students in both urban and suburban school systems. In many of the studies reviewed for this analysis, teachers often reported that they were colorblind with regard to matters of race and educating students of color. Phrases such as “I don’t see race” and “I treat all of my students the same”, were commonly uttered and stemmed most likely from the pressure of being “politically correct” in today’s society or from the fear of being perceived as racist if they actually disclosed the truth that they do, in fact, consider race when educating students. This creates an interesting dilemma because the claim of colorblindness often silences an important dialogue on racial matters while hiding under the veil of equality. Critically examining issues of oppression and inequality will not be easy, yet one must remain committed. It is not enough to teach children that all people should be treated equally without critically analyzing the complex systems used within our society to oppress such as racism, classism, and sexism—one must be proactive and openly challenge such systems on a constant basis.

### **Our Identities and Ideologies Shape Who We Are**

Who we are, or rather—who we *think* we are, is based on the intersectionalities of our history, experiences, interpretations, perceptions, and interactions. When one ponders the question of who he or she is, his or her assessment is grounded in a multiplicity of factors including what the world says about them the person. The way in which one is

defined by one's parents, peers, teachers, and community-- in conjunction with how one has be represented in society (both presently and historically) by way of the media and other cultural images-- all play a pivotal role in the construction of one's identity (Daniel-Tatum, 1997).

Birthed from our identities, emerge our ideologies. According to Lewis (2001):

The power of ideologies lies in their ability to facilitate collective domination in such a way that they often make vast inequalities understandable and acceptable to those both at the top and the bottom of the social order. (p.800)

Ideologies permeate homes, schools, churches, social circles, and other institutions on a continuous basis and when they are not critically examined, they have the ability to mask themselves under the guise of neutrality, fact, and truth. Power resides within ideologies because ideologies can be used as idiomatic weapons of mass destruction. When left unchallenged, ideologies have the power to dominate, oppress, reify existing structures of inequality, and silence people through nonchalant complacency.

By the same token, ideologies also have the power to uplift, generate, cultivate, inspire, challenge, tear down structures of inequality and oppression, and elicit hope. Ideologies are powerful because they can be dissipated with destruction or pregnant with possibility! As such, a critical examination of one's identity and ideologies is crucial in understanding the ways in which identity informs ideology--which subsequently informs a teacher's practice-- which consequently, informs student achievement.

### **What's Race Got To Do With It? : The Silenced Dialogue of Race**

A 2010 news report on CNN's Anderson Cooper reported on a recent study which examined children's perceptions of race. The study, piloted by renowned child

psychologist and scholar Margaret Beale-Spencer, found that children were biased towards lighter skin. The study was conducted in a similar fashion to the infamous “Doll Study” conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark during the 1940s that was so influential in the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education case to de-segregate schools. Beale-Spencer lead a team of three psychologists (two testers and one statistician) to interview 133 children from 8 schools: 4 in the greater New York City area and 4 in Georgia. In each school, the psychologists tested children from two age groups: 4 to 5 years old and 9 to 10 years old. In order to gain more conclusive results that could be compared to the original doll study, the psychologists only tested children who identified racially as either Black or White.

Children were given a chart containing pictures of dolls ranging in skin tone and were asked a series of questions such as: Show me the dumb child. Why is he/she the dumb child? Show me the mean child. Why is he/she the mean child? Show me the bad child? Why is he or she the bad child? Show me the ugly child. Why is he/she the ugly child? Show me the child that has the skin color most adults like. Show me the child that has the skin color that most adults don't like. Show me the child that has the skin color that most children like. Show me the child that has the skin color that most children don't like. Show me the child that has the skin color that most girls want. Show me the child that has the skin color that most girls don't want.

Beale-Spencer derived 3 major findings from this pilot study. The first finding was that while children, as a whole, responded with a high rate of white bias (white bias being defined as white children identifying the color of their own skin with positive attributes and darker skin with negative attributes, several questions imparted an

overwhelmingly display of white bias. When asked, "Show me the dumb child," approximately 76% of the younger White children pointed to the two darkest skin tones. When asked, "Show me the mean child," approximately 66% of the younger White children pointed to the two darkest skin tones. When asked, "Show me the child that has the skin color most children don't like," again 2/3 of the younger White children pointed to the two darkest skin tones. Finally, when asked, "Show me the bad child," more than 59% of the older White children pointed to the two darkest skin tones.

Beale-Spencer's second major finding was that African-American children also responded to the questions with a high rate of White bias, but to a lesser extent than that of the White children. When asked, "Show me the one (referring to the color bar) that you think most children would think looks bad on a boy," more than 70% of the older Black children chose the darkest skin tone. When asked, "Show me the child that has a skin color that most children don't like," more than 61% of the younger Black children chose the two darkest shades, and when asked, "Show me the ugly child," more than 57% of the younger Black children chose the two darkest shades. It is important to note that the research team did interview both Black and White children that elicited more race neutral responses.

Beale-Spencer's third major finding found that overall, younger and older children maintain the same patterns of stereotyping and that their ideas change little between the ages of 5 and 10 and although all children are exposed to stereotypes, White children learn and maintain these stereotypes much more strongly than African American children. According to Beale-Spencer (2010):

All kids on the one hand are exposed to the stereotypes. What's really significant here is that White children are learning or maintaining those stereotypes much

more strongly than the African-American children. Therefore, the White youngsters are even more stereotypic in their responses concerning attitudes, beliefs, and attitudes and preferences than the African-American children.

Left to wonder what causes children to maintain such patterns, Beale-Spencer theorizes that such patterns are a direct result of children being bombarded with stereotypical messages on a daily basis. Beale-Spencer contends that the adults in children's lives must put forth a concerted effort to override the deluge of stereotypical messages and images children receive on a daily basis. Beale-Spencer said, "The message is the same for all parents. Parents have to re-frame what children experience."

While very much heartbreaking, and particularly disturbing, most of the responses elicited by these children were not surprising. In fact, the responses given by these children were merely a reflection of the messages transmitted by the media and society as a whole. Messages that characterize White as pure, angelic, and beautiful and Black as tainted, demonic, and ugly. Subliminal and overt messages that criminalize Black men so that one develops an unconscious fear of Black men and Black people in general. Messages that characterize African-Americans as unintelligent and brainless buffoons. The majority of these children, Black and White, not only have internalized the value of whiteness and white supremacy unconsciously, but exhibited it in their hypothetical behaviors and desires as well. Because these assumptions have been left uncontested by the persistent images and mischaracterizations of the media, and by the silenced dialogue of their parents, many of these children have internalized these messages as fact. In a follow-up interview with some of the parents of the children that participated in the study, most of the White parents admitted that they had not talked with their children about race and racism, while the opposite was true of the Black parents. According to a

2007 study in the Journal of Marriage and Family, approximately 75% of White families with kindergartners never, or almost never talk about race; whereas approximately 75% of African-American parents have addressed the concept of race with their children.

While it would be ridiculous to assert that these children have been literally trained by their parents to be racist and prejudiced, they have been and continue to be, brainwashed with messages of whiteness and privilege by the media and society as a whole. When CNN showed footage of these interviews to the parents of the children in this study, the parents were shocked, embarrassed, ashamed, and some even seemed saddened. One White mother was stunned after viewing footage from her son's interview and seeing her young son point to the pictures of the darkest child over and over again when asked to point to the mean child, the dumb child, and the bad child--and then point to the picture of the White child when asked to point to the good child. This mother said that she was disappointed and upset by what she witnessed and that the message implies that she should do a better job at home in discussing issues of race and difference. More surprisingly was that this particular parent said that she spent 15 years as a teacher trying to teach first-graders about "different kinds of societies and cultures and racism." This mother admitted that she did not live in a diverse community and indicated that her son's responses were most likely a reflection of the fact that he was most comfortable around people who looked like him, given that these were the conditions that he had been exposed to his entire life. Analogous to the reaction of this one White mother, many of the parents simply could not understand where their children picked up such negative messages because they were not receiving them in the home. However, the pivotal lesson learned on that day by these parents, especially the White parents, was that they were

doing more harm to their children by *NOT* addressing issues of race, racism, prejudice and stereotypes, and that applying a colorblind philosophical mantra was indeed harmful. Hopefully, these parents learned that it is not enough to simply teach children to “be nice” and that everyone is equal. One must actively challenge and counteract notions of white supremacy, privilege, and discrimination. This CNN study adds credence to the necessity of examining teachers' attitudes, values, beliefs, and perceptions with regard to race because, as shown in the pilot study conducted by Beale-Spencer, values and beliefs about race are formed very early in life. If left unchallenged, these values and beliefs carryover into adulthood. For these children interviewed by Beale-Spencer and children across the nation alike, one must ponder the influence such unexamined beliefs will have in their adulthoods, in their social interactions, in their careers, AND subsequently as teachers... IN THEIR CLASSROOMS.

### **Teachers, Identity, and The Possessive Investment in Whiteness**

A possible link to teacher attrition is the notion of teachers' identities and ideologies and the ways in which they influence a teacher's commitment to teach in urban schools.

In an article which focused on teacher preparation programs, Cross (2003) provided credence to this rationale for examining the racial beliefs and perceptions of incoming and veteran teachers. Cross (2003) stated:

As has been the case for years, it appears that neither the race of a teacher nor a teacher's ability to teach in multiracial environments is considered a component of teacher quality. The absence of meaningful dialogue at the national level about the role of race in teacher quality is perplexing. Educators and teacher educators are struggling to improve the quality of teaching in urban schools as one means to improve educational achievement for large populations of low-income children of color. (p.203)

While *not* examining a teacher's race or their ability to teach in multiracial environments seems perplexing to Cross, a plausible explanation for this pervasive silence, is the effort to maintain the status quo, or what George Lipsitz coined as the "Possessive Investment in Whiteness". If one continues to deny the institutional and structural racism that has served to disadvantage, one does not have to acknowledge that they have been a beneficiary of unearned privilege due to skin color, or that this unearned privilege has accounted for more opportunities and better outcomes with regard to academic success, employment and wealth attainment (McIntosh, 1990). Continuing to deny structural inequalities upholds the notion of meritocracy and the notion that one succeeds and fails in America based on individual choices and one's merit--or lack thereof (D. Bell, 1992; King, 1991; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). In describing the possessive investment in whiteness Lipsitz (2006) stated:

I use the term *possessive investment* both literally and figuratively. Whiteness has a cash value: it accounts for advantages that come to individuals through profits made from housing secured in discriminatory markets, through the unequal educational opportunities available to children of different races, through insider networks that channel employment opportunities to relatives and friends of those who have profited most from present and past racial discrimination, and especially through intergenerational transfers of inherited wealth that pass on the spoils of discrimination to succeeding generations. I argue that white Americans are encouraged to invest in whiteness, to remain true to an identity that provides them with resources, power, and opportunity. This whiteness is, of course, a delusion, a scientific and cultural fiction that like all racial identities has no valid foundation in biology or anthropology. Whiteness is, however, a social fact, an identity created and continued with all-to-real consequences for the distribution of wealth, prestige, and opportunity. (p. vii)

Harris (1993) argued that the mere possession of whiteness is a valuable asset. She contended that whiteness works as property in that it includes "exclusive rights of possession, use, and disposition" and that its attributes are "the right to transfer or



alienability, the right to use and enjoyment, and the right to exclude others" ( p. 1731).

The general beliefs and values held by many people in this country have been formulated in part by a collective memory in America that has shaped, framed, and defined one's thinking about race, ability, and human worth (Winfield, 2007). Because America has built a reputation of being " the land of immigrants", there are several ideas in which many Americans have exhibited great pride, and to which some have ascribed as the central tenets of this nation. Many of these principles have made the value of whiteness as property elusive. One such example is the "bootstraps" mentality in which all are expected to be self-sufficient and self-reliant. It is common knowledge that almost everyone in this society has benefited in some manner, either directly or indirectly from the help of others and rarely does one make significant accomplishments alone-- yet this "bootstraps" mentality continues to get passed down from one generation to the next.

### **Whiteness as Property----The Right to Exclude**

Several federal policies have been established to maintain urban poverty, while others have served in maintaining the hegemonic structure of America. The GI Bill signed in 1944 after World War II paid for the education of 8 million veterans and allowed these veterans to go to college to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to increase their income, support their families, and live the "American Dream". Most African American veterans, however, were denied the opportunity to attend college on the G.I. Bill.

Another powerful example is the accumulation of wealth through home ownership. In the 1930s when the Federal Housing Administration provided loans and

new terms for home ownership, White people were able to move into newly built homes in the suburbs and make low mortgage payments, while African Americans and other minorities were discriminated against and not allowed to own new homes in the suburbs. Between the 1930s and 1960s, \$120 billion dollars was used to finance mortgages, with less than 2% going to African American homeowners (Smith, L.M.). African Americans were not afforded the opportunity to own a home, but instead were given the option of renting and living in public housing. This structural dichotomy initiated a rise in homeownership in the suburbs for European Americans on the outskirts of the city, and a rise in the construction of “vertical ghetto housing projects” for African Americans in the inner city. Even after President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act in 1968 and African Americans were legally allowed to move into White neighborhoods, issues of “block busting” and “White flight” took over and consequently eroded the tax-base which resulted in a domino effect of lost jobs and school dilapidation. As the value of homes in suburban neighborhoods appreciated, the net worth of European Americans grew.

### **Whiteness as Property---The Right to Transfer**

Because the majority of Americans obtain their wealth from their home value, the wealth accrued by European Americans can be passed on from generation to generation. Today, the average Black family has 1/8 the net worth of White families (Smith, L.M.). The New Deal Housing Act, which granted European Americans the privilege to attain wealth and pass it on to future generations is a direct cause for the lack of wealth generated by African Americans as well as the disproportionate amount of African

Americans living in poverty. The sad reality is that many Americans actually believe that they've acquired their success and wealth solely through hard work and continue to ignore the systematic forces which have allowed some generations to get ahead in society while holding others back through practices of hegemony, racism, and discrimination. Through the continual minimization of the influence of structured inequality in the form of schooling, residential segregation, and wealth attainment, the bootstraps mentality continues to be perpetuated through identity politics and the possessive investment in whiteness. It is essential to understand the possessive investment in whiteness as seen through identity because whiteness and white privilege is often obscure and many people are unaware of its existence. As McIntosh (1990) so poignantly stated:

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks. (para. 3)

### **Teachers, Cultural Capital, and the Possessive Investment in Whiteness**

Cultural capital can also be viewed as a transferable asset by which teachers have the ability to exclude. This exclusion can be deliberate as well as unconscious. McLaren (2002) defines cultural capital as the “general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed on from one generation to another. Cultural capital represents ways of talking, acting, modes of style, moving, socializing, forms of knowledge, language practices, and values” (p.93). As the word “capital” implies, cultural capital is an asset which can be used to acquire other kinds of assets, such as

educational credentials, career placements and promotions, as well as financial gains.

According to Wildhagen, “Intergenerational transmission of cultural capital, along with blocking others from acquiring cultural capital, ensures that children from the dominant group possess cultural capital that they can parlay into academic success” (2009, p.175).

The dominant culture as defined by McLaren (2002) refers to “social practices and representations that affirm the central values, interests, and concerns of the social class in control of the material and symbolic wealth of society” (p.75). The dominant culture is able to exercise domination over subordinate classes or groups through a process known as hegemony in which domination is maintained not by a sheer exercise of force, but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family (McLaren, 2002). The ways in which hegemony is maintained within urban schools covers a wide spectrum of power relations and regulations that marginalize students of color in multiple ways ranging from: the way in which school districts are mandated to follow a prescribed list of standards, to the standardize tests given to students which are specifically biased with regard to students of color and ELL and which are not a true reflection of their skills and abilities, to the way in which individual classrooms are run, positing the teacher as the “gatekeeper” of knowledge and the students as the “blank slate” of learners who must passively conform to the detrimental structured system enforced in order to be recipients of this emblazoned knowledge. McLaren asserts that:

the dominant class secures hegemony—the consent of the dominated—by supplying the symbols, representations, and practices of social life in such a way that the basis of social authority and the unequal relations of power and privilege

remain hidden. By perpetuating the myth of individual achievement and entrepreneurship in the media, the schools, the church, and the family, for instance, dominant culture ensures that subordinated groups who fail at school or who don't make it into the world of the "rich and famous" will view such failure in terms of personal inadequacy or the "luck of the draw". The oppressed blame themselves for school failure—a failure that can certainly be additionally attributed to the structuring effects of the economy and the class-based division of labor. (p.76-77)

These hegemonic institutional structures of schooling do little to sufficiently equip students of color with the different types of cultural capital that are necessary to efficiently compete with their peers and counterparts of the dominant class. When these students fall short as a result of the unequal distribution of power and privilege, they are made to feel as if this failure were somehow their fault and that the cause of their failure stemmed from their lack of the skills, intelligence, and ability needed to "make it".

### **The Impact of Cultural Capital on Teacher's Perceptions**

Educators and the specific ideologies and perceptions they hold with regard to students of color plays a huge role in the impact of cultural capital on students. In a study examining the ways in which cultural capital is used as a resource for privileged high school students and their parents as a means of maintaining qualitative advantages, Wildhagen (2009) states:

Most scholars argue that one reason cultural capital gives students an educational advantage is that it fosters better communication with teachers, communication that contributes to teacher's positive perceptions of these students. According to this argument, teachers are more likely to reward students whom they see in a positive light than those whom they do not perceive positively, regardless of the students' academic abilities. According to this view, then, cultural capital boosts students' academic outcomes because of its positive effect on student-teacher relationships. (p.174)

Teachers often knowingly and unknowingly cater to students whom they perceive to be similar to them in some respect. Students who are perceived by teachers as being different, have a difficult time establishing a bond with their teachers and oftentimes find themselves in the vicious cycle of having perceived behavioral problems, often resulting in frequent disciplinary action, followed by more perceived behavioral problems and the cycle continues. This could be one potential explanation for the academic research which shows that many teachers of the dominant culture, especially White females, report a greater amount of difficulties and issues with regard to teaching students of color, especially Black males.

Students who show a display of cultural capital similarly shared by the teacher are held in high regard and often elevated to “model student” status. This creates an advantageous cycle for these students who are often praised by the teacher, given higher grades, and receive assistance; in turn this creates a high level of optimism and self-efficacy within the student, who responds by demonstrating a higher level of academic achievement. McLaren (2002) added credence to the powerful and subjective role of teachers when he stated:

For many teachers, for instance, the cultural traits exhibited by students—e.g., tardiness, sincerity, honesty, thrift, industriousness, politeness, a certain way of dressing, speaking and gesturing—appear as natural qualities emerging from an individual’s “inner essence”. However, such traits are to a great extent culturally inscribed and are often linked to the social class standing of individuals who exhibit them. (p. 94)

Teachers’ beliefs regarding the possession or dispossession of cultural capital not only impacts their personal perceptions of their students, but it also deeply impacts the curriculum. The ways in which traditional school curricula maintain the social

stratification upheld within our society is evident in the type of skills fostered in children attending urban school systems versus the skills and abilities fostered in children attending suburban schools.

### **Possible Critiques of this Research Study**

One possible critique to this study may be the argument that it is of no value to study the racialized ideologies and perceptions of teachers and how they relate to students' outcomes because such an investigation will not change the broader, systemic condition of the achievement gap (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). With regard to diversity workshops and other professional development programs aimed at altering teacher bias in an attempt to close the achievement gap, Vaught and Castagno (2008) made the following assertion:

We suggest that there is an inherent and problematic tension in attempting to address a systemic and structural problem (in this case the achievement gap) solely through individual transformation. A Whiteness as property analysis of participant responses to the trainings allows those responses to serve as a window through which to view the tension between the individual and structural in efforts to challenge racism. As will become clear through our data analysis and discussion, this awkward pairing of a structural problem with an individual solution is *both* illustrative of the entrenchment of race and racism in the United States *and* fails to result in greater equity in schools. (p.98)

Vaught and Castagno (2008) are correct in their contention that the cause and the persistence of the achievement gap is due to systemic, hegemonic forces; however, Vaught & Castagno fail in acknowledging that teachers racialized perceptions and ideologies are in fact directly tied to student achievement (Cross, 2003; Daniel-Tatum, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lewis, 2001).

Vaught & Castagno conducted a study in which they examined teachers attitudes towards Whiteness and White privilege in two major urban school districts--a West Coast urban district of which the authors refer to as Jericho, and an urban district located in the Rocky Mountain region, of which the authors refer to as Zion. The authors found that with regard to White privilege, the teachers they interviewed in their study had a narrow understanding of White privilege--often addressing the phenomenon as the "ability to be free of scrutiny" (p.99); however, these teachers failed to recognize the salient way in which White privilege benefitted Whites both individually and collectively by wielding power over others as well as the systemic nature of White privilege. These teachers often denied the existence and function of White privilege. Vaught and Castagno (2008) themselves recognized the unawareness of their own subjects of study when they said:

White privilege, and institutionalized racism, as understood by teachers in Jericho and Zion was contingent upon local context and so was cast as an entirely individual experience. They communicated no recognition that their privilege moved with them from context to context and that their authority as White teachers of children of color was highly powerful and determinative (Delpit, 1988). (p.101)

The fact that these teachers did not recognize their privilege and status within society, as well as the authority and power that they held over students gives credence to the necessity of examining teacher's ideologies and perceptions about race. If teachers are unaware that their privilege, position, and power plays a determinative role in student achievement, how can we ever expect to close the achievement gap? As demonstrated by various scholars (Cross, 2003; Daniel-Tatum, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lewis, 2001), there is significant research which shows that teachers' ideologies and perceptions about race are invariably tied to student achievement. It is



important to state that by no means is a thorough examination of teachers ideologies and perceptions about race the sole solution toward closing the achievement gap. It would be unrealistic to assert that studying individual teachers' perceptions and ideologies, in the absence of eradicating the structural inequities that have historically contributed to and maintained hegemony and the Possessive Investment in Whiteness, completely solves the problem of the achievement gap.

On the other hand, it would be equally negligent to negate the significance of examining individual teachers' perceptions and ideologies and the ways in which such individual perceptions and ideologies mirror a collective identity of Whiteness, white supremacy, and White skin privilege that is so pervasive in our American society. In fact, failing to acknowledge the ways in which individual ideologies and perceptions mimic the broader collective structure of society only works to absolve individuals of responsibility and action. Historically, as well as presently, systems have been and continue to be, created and run by a collective group of individuals who have a vested interest in a common goal (the maintenance of hegemony and the status quo). This usually results in a system which works to improve the lives and conditions of a few, while worsening the lives and conditions of others through oppression. In order to dismantle such systems of oppression, one must look at not only the system itself--but the individuals who have (both willingly and unwillingly) taken and continue to take part in it.

Vaught & Castagno's (2008) contended that locating the problem on an individual level (by blaming teachers), only served to protect the districts liberal interests through "promoting a discursively moral critique of racism but maintaining the larger

structures that fail to promote true equity for children of color" (p.107). The authors stated:

The liberal interest is defined by working within and relying upon existing structures, and assuming that those structures are just and equitable. In Jericho and Zion Public Schools, this would imply that the structure of the school systems is good, but that changes need to be made within individuals who reside inside that structure. This new racism (Giroux, 1994) adopts the liberal discourse but avidly supports the legitimation (Crenshaw, 1995) of a system as a whole and positions individual teachers as culprits. (p.107)

Examining the racialized perceptions and ideologies of individual teachers, does not rely upon the existing structures, nor does it assume that these structures are just and equitable. Changes need to be made both to the system as a whole, as well as to the individuals whom reside within it. This assertion does not posit individual teachers in and of themselves as intentional perpetrators of racism, inequality and injustice --they are regarded as representatives of the broader systemic structure of hegemony--of which the concept of Whiteness as property is a part. In addition, given the fact that an overwhelming majority of the teaching force is White, it is impossible to separate the individual from the structure--they are inextricably intertwined.

Finally, Vaught & Castagno (2008) makes the following contention from their study:

Strikingly, acknowledging a kind of White privilege is a form of entrenching White property by extending formal equality through the hyper-individualized discourse of liberal self-awareness. This self-awareness is limited, however, because it is not accompanied by a structural awareness. The very nature of legitimation is that it is deceptive. The formal equality that legitimates systems confuses superficial change at the individual level with structural transformation. (p.108)

In this study, Vaught and Castagno fail to acknowledge the fact that it is impossible to transform structures without transforming individuals during the process. It is indeed the

individuals that collectively form the structures. The structures did not form themselves and do not run themselves and therefore cannot transform themselves-- independent of individuals. It is vital for individuals to possess a self-awareness as well as a deep understanding of systemic structures in order to evoke positive change. While asking an individual to become more self-aware may lead to hostility and defensiveness due to feelings of being attacked or blamed directly for the social condition of society (as it did with some of the teachers Vaught and Castagno interviewed)-- not expecting a person to critically examine themselves out of fear for eliciting hostility and guilt only absolves one from the direct responsibility we all have in tearing down systems of inequality and oppression.

Daniel-Tatum (1997) gave credence to this responsibility that each member of society has for working to break the cycle of oppression and marginalization. Prejudice, according to Daniel-Tatum is one of the inescapable consequences of living in a racist society, and although it has been present since the birth of our nation, one cannot escape the charge of conducting an incessant self-analysis into the ways one has participated (both by choice or involuntarily) in the maintenance of hegemony and the status quo. With regard to this onus, Daniel-Tatum (1997) asserted:

To say that it is not our fault does not relieve us of responsibility, however. We may not have polluted the air, but we need to take responsibility, along with others, for cleaning it up. Each of us needs to look at our own behavior. Am I perpetuating and reinforcing the negative messages so pervasive in our culture, or am I seeking to challenge them? If I have not been exposed to positive images of marginalized groups, am I seeking them out, expanding my own knowledge base for myself and my children? Am I acknowledging and examining my own prejudices, my own rigid categorizations of others, thereby minimizing the adverse impact they might have on my interactions with those I have categorized? Unless we engage in these and other conscious acts of reflection and reeducation, we easily repeat the process with our children. We teach what we were taught.

The unexamined prejudices of the parents are passed on to the children. It is not our fault, but it is our responsibility to interrupt the cycle. (p. 6--7)

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

- How I Selected the Literature
- Significance of this Literature Review
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- Mentoring and Support
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- Characteristics of Successful Teachers of Students of Color

### **How I selected the Literature**

Upon initial research of this topic, I performed a general search for academic journal articles using the UWM Library search engine. I used several key words as my initial search phrases including: "White teachers and urban students", "Teacher attrition in urban schools", and "Teacher retention". Surprisingly, this search returned a large amount of articles. I then went through each result and looked at titles and various types of documents. If the article was from a peer-reviewed journal and if the title appeared relevant to my topic, I then proceeded to read the abstract. If the article still seemed pertinent after reading the abstract, I printed the article so that I may read it in its entirety. If a particular article was very useful, I looked at the references the author cited and used them as an additional means of locating articles. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were used for this literature review. In addition, several books written by well known scholars in the field of urban education were also analyzed and incorporated into this literature review.

### **Significance of Review**

This literature review is especially relevant to the field of urban education because according to Zimpher & Ashburn (1992), "the majority of people entering the teaching field are white women from small towns who typically express a desire to teach in small towns serving middle income students" (p. 9). It is definitely not a crime to be a White woman from a small town, nor is it a crime to desire to teach students who are similarly from a small town and of the same socio-economic status. After all, it is human nature to gravitate toward that which one is most familiar. What is questionable, however, are the ways in which such desires to teach middle-income students from small towns influence

the teaching practices of these teachers and the academic achievement of the low-income students of color that attend urban schools.

### **Literature Review Part I: Teacher Attrition**

High rates of teachers leave their professions each year and there is a constant demand for providing highly trained educators. According to Warshauer-Freedman & Apple (2009), “About 25% of our nation’s teacher’s leave their classrooms after just one year, and almost half leave within 5 years” (p. 324). Teacher attrition has many implications on the success of a school system because it influences the stability and success of students, school finance, and the overall culture of the school (Feng, 2005). This “revolving door” of teachers constantly entering and leaving urban schools can have a lasting effect on the climate of a school or school system. In this section of the literature review, I seek to investigate the reported causes of teacher attrition.

Research has pointed to several factors that contribute to the attrition and retention of teachers in elementary and secondary schools. Teacher attrition is defined in this context as the state in which a teacher decides to leave their teaching position. There are two types of attrition, temporary and permanent. Temporary attrition refers to teachers who leave and then return, whereas permanent attrition, refers to teachers who leave the teaching profession entirely (Latham & Vogt, 2007).

According to Olsen and Anderson, teachers in urban, low-income communities are as much as 50% more likely to migrate or leave than those in low-poverty schools (2007). What are the factors which cause teachers to leave the urban context? What level of urban education preparation do teachers have before entering the field of education? Where do they go (and why) after leaving the urban context?

### **Justification of Relevance**

The problem of teacher attrition is one of importance because in an era in which students in an urban school system may experience much instability in their home life, it makes it extremely difficult and complicated when this instability is brought into their school life also. Haberman (1995) stated:

For children in poverty, schooling is a matter of life and death. They have no other realistic options for “making it” in American society. They lack the family resources, networks, and out-of-school experiences that could compensate for what they are not offered in schools. Without school success, they are doomed to lives of continued poverty and consigned to conditions that characterize a desperate existence: violence, inadequate health care, a lack of life options, and hopelessness. The typical high school graduate has had approximately 54 teachers. When I ask successful graduates from inner city schools, “How many of your teachers had led you to believe that you were particularly good at anything?” the modal response is none. If graduates report this perception, I wonder what those who have dropped out would say ? (p. 781)

Students who constantly get this “starting out” experience from their teachers due to the high turnover rate and overwhelmingly percentage of inexperienced teachers teaching in urban schools, will learn considerably less than students who may have veteran teachers. A thorough review of the literature could provide explanations as to why teachers are leaving the urban school system and offer solutions with regard to what needs to be done so that we don’t continue to lose more. This inquiry could also be used to find solutions so that students would benefit from having veteran teachers and teachers who are committed to their academic success.

Teacher attrition can have drastic effects on the academic achievement of students. The Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) 2005-2006 district report card reported the data derived from the Wisconsin Knowledge and Comprehension Test (WKCE). Since the mid 90's, the state of Wisconsin has required that all school districts administer



the WKCE to all 4th, 8th, and 10th graders. The WKCE tests student knowledge and comprehension in five subjects which include reading, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The district report card stated:

While improving student performance in all five subject areas on the WKCE is important, achievement in reading and mathematics is particularly significant, as they are key factors in determining a school's adequate yearly progress (AYP) status according to the re-authorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind)." (Division of Research and Assessment, 2008)

The 2005-2006 WKCE results for reading and math for grades 4, 8, and 10 were as follows:

<b>Course Subject</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Percentage of MPS Students who were Proficient</b>	<b>Percentage of students in the overall state of Wisconsin who were proficient</b>	<b>Difference between percentage of students proficient in the State of Wisconsin and the students proficient in MPS</b>
Reading	4th	61%	82%	21%
Math	4th	44%	73%	29%
Reading	8th	58%	84%	26%
Math	8th	37%	73%	36 %
Reading	10th	41%	74%	33%
Math	10th	31%	70%	39%

In reading, 61% of MPS fourth grade students were proficient compared to 82% of students in the state of Wisconsin overall-- a 21% difference. In math, 44% of MPS fourth grade students were proficient compared to 73% in the state of Wisconsin overall--

a 29% difference. The achievement gap widens between grades 4 and 8. In reading, 58% of eighth grade students in MPS were proficient, compared to 84% in the state of Wisconsin--a 26% difference. In math, 37% of MPS students were proficient compared to 73% of students in the state of Wisconsin overall--a 36% difference. For tenth grade, 41% of MPS students were proficient in reading compared to 74% of students in the state of Wisconsin overall--a 33% difference. And finally, 31% of MPS students were proficient in math compared to 70% of students in the state of Wisconsin overall--a 39% difference (Division of Research and Assessment, 2008). Because research has shown that teacher attrition is as much as 50% higher in urban schools (Olson & Anderson, 2007), coupled with the fact that the Milwaukee Public School system is the largest urban school system in the state of Wisconsin and has the largest gap in academic achievement between students attending MPS and those in the state overall, a more in depth investigation of the affects of teacher attrition on student achievement is warranted.

There are several recurring factors named within the literature review in terms of why there is such a high teacher attrition rate. Such factors that will be discussed in further detail include: lack of mentoring and support, lack of support in the field of special education, school location and demographics, lack of training and professional development, and personal factors. This section will also look at the experience of juvenile justice teachers and educators who teach in rural school systems.

### **Mentoring and Support**

Many teachers leave the teaching profession because they carry the perception that they were thrown into the job of teaching with little to no support. The perception of some beginning teachers is that they receive little support from their colleagues,

administrators and the parents of students. With regard to this lack of support, Lisa

Renard (2003) stated:

We expect brand new, just-out-of-the-wrapper teachers to assume the same responsibilities and duties as our most seasoned professional, and we expect them to carry out those duties with the same expertise and within the same time constraints. We hold new teachers accountable for skills that they don't yet have and that they can only gain through experience. (p.63)

In a study conducted by Andrews, Gilbert & Martin (2006), new teachers as well as administrators were surveyed to determine which support strategies were being provided and valued. The two groups were compared to determine whether beginning teachers' perceptions were consistent with what administrators said they provided. The survey was administered in two areas of the state of Georgia.

Of the 58 surveys sent to administrators, 33 were returned. Of 140 surveys sent to mentor teachers, 57 were returned, and out of 243 beginning teacher surveys sent, 54 were returned. The responses from teachers and administrators in this study indicated the following: Teachers valued opportunities to collaborate with other professionals most, new teachers valued having mentors, and both new teachers and administrators agreed that this practice is occurring in most instances, and lastly, teachers asked for feedback on classroom performance in a non-evaluative way. There was a disparity between administrator responses and teacher responses, which may be indicative of a problem related to perceptions. (Andrews, Gilbert, and Martin, 2006).

### **Special Education**

Attrition rates are higher for special education teachers than regular teachers.

According to Edgar and Pair (2005), special education teachers are leaving the profession at a higher rate (7.3 versus 5.6) than general education teachers. The Commission on the

Conditions for Special Education Teaching and Learning contends that “four of every ten special educators leave special education before their fifth year of teaching” (Edgar & Pair, 2005, p. 163).

Kaff (2004) conducted a survey of 341 special education teachers in the state of Kansas. During the time of the study, 153 of the respondents were considering leaving the field of special education. These teachers expressed their concerns with having to take on multiple responsibilities and perform multiple roles that get in the way of teaching, without the adequate resources. The respondents reported that the overcrowding of classrooms with students of ranging disabilities made it difficult to meet the needs of the students. These teachers also expressed frustration with regard to the insufficient time given to complete tasks, lack of training, and the burden of having to perform many extra-duties extending beyond the school day without pay (Kaff, 2004).

In another study, researchers Brownell, Smith, McNellis & Miller (1997) conducted an investigation in which they conducted phone interviews of 93 randomly selected Florida teachers who did not return to their special education teaching positions after the 1992-1993 school year. Each of the selected leavers were sent a letter explaining the research, a list of interview questions, and a postcard to return with their correct address, phone number, and convenient contact times. The phone interviews were approximately 10-15 minutes in length and were audio taped and transcribed.

The researchers asked the participants questions regarding their current employment situation, their primary and secondary reasons for leaving the field of special education, whether any factors or incentives would have caused them to stay or influence them to return to special education, future career plans and if in retrospect, they would

enter into the field of special education if they had the chance to do it again (Brownell, et al, 1997)

The researchers found that with regard to their current employment status, the majority of leavers indicated that they took positions that were education related and included positions such as: general education teachers, non-administrative positions, administrative positions, district-level specialists, and substitute teachers. Special educators who left the classroom for non-educational positions made up the second largest category of leavers, and the remaining leavers were retired from the system or on maternity leave (Brownell, et al., 1997).

When asked the reasons for leaving the special education classroom, teachers were placed into three categories: disgruntled leavers, non-disgruntled leavers, and unable to discern. The disgruntled leavers felt unsupported, unprepared or overwhelmed by student needs, job responsibilities, or felt a sense of disempowerment. Non-disgruntled leavers specifically indicated that they enjoyed teaching special education. These teachers left the special education classroom because of external factors which included: other job opportunities, certification requirements, family influences, retirement, or their position was not re-offered. Leavers in the unable to discern category left because of certification requirements or their position was not re-offered (Brownell, et al., 1997).

When asked of incentives offered to encourage them to return, the largest portion of leavers said that there were no incentives that would encourage them to return to a special education classroom. Many leavers mentioned administrative support, increased

salary, reduced workload, and flexibility in certification requirements (Brownell, et al., 1997).

When asked of future career plans, most of the leavers indicated that they wish to remain in education in some capacity but not as classroom teachers in special education (Brownell, et al., 1997).

In a lecture presented at the *Twenty Fifth annual conference of Mid-South Educational Research Association*, presenter Q. Sultans (1996) discussed special education teacher attrition in the state of Kentucky and its reasons. The investigator administered a questionnaire to 98 students enrolled in special education courses required in the M.A. Ed. Program. The respondents represented 27 counties in central and southeastern Kentucky. The respondents provided demographic information and were asked to give three reasons in no more than one phrase why, in their opinion, special education teachers leave special education and choose to teach general (regular) education. Sultan found that the excessive amount of paperwork was the most common reason identified for special education teacher attrition (80% of the respondents said this was the number one reason for attrition). This paperwork included an on-going maintenance of data concerning the implementation of goals and objectives on the student's individualized educational programs, as well as regression and recoupment for those students who may need extended school year programs and services. The second most common reason, reported by 42% of the respondents was the lack of respect, support, cooperation, acceptance, and understanding by the general (regular) education teachers. The third reason cited by 34% of the respondents was the lack of administrative

respect, support, and cooperation. Lack of students' progress, work overload, lack of parents' interest ranked fourth, fifth, and sixth respectively (Sultan, 1996).

### **School Location and Student Demographics**

In an article entitled *Perceptions of Violence: The Views of Teachers Who Left Urban Schools*, Smith & Smith (2006) explored teacher's perceptions of violence, and its links with their decisions to leave urban schools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted of twelve former urban educators ranging in age from 24 to 70. Eight of the respondents were female, and four were male. One of the males was Hispanic, while the other eleven respondents were white. The experiences of the interviewees was the main source of data, however the authors also looked at ethnographic descriptions, document reviews, and general observations to substantiate the results.

The authors found that the threat of violence in the urban schools was a factor that greatly contributed to the stress level for many of the teachers. Many of the teachers witnessed violence first-hand while others related stories that they heard from others. In addition to concerns about in-school violence, these teachers were also fearful of the neighborhoods where they taught, therefore their teaching was limited to inside the classroom even when a lesson might have been enhanced by an outdoor component. While some of the respondents didn't hesitate to tell their stories of violence in urban schools, some were hesitant because they did not want to contribute to the stereotypes that perpetuate negative views of urban schools. The teachers who were from middle-class backgrounds viewed the communities in which they taught as socially dysfunctional and unsafe. Smith & Smith (2006) conclude the article by offering suggestions to reduce

attrition which included college training for teachers and staff development on recognizing and defusing potentially violent situations.

In another case, Strunk & Robinson (2006) performed a study using the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and a Teacher Follow up Survey (TFS) from the National Center for Education Statistics. They found that in accordance to previous research that showed teachers more likely to leave their jobs in schools with high percentages of minority students, teachers are more likely to quit as the percentages of Black and American Indian students increase in their schools (Strunk & Robinson, 2006).

S. Kelly (2004) addressed the controversy of whether the teachers of socially disadvantaged schools leave more frequently than teachers in advantaged schools and the data showed that poverty and minority enrollment did not have a tremendous effect on the attrition of teachers. With regard to teachers who teach lower-track classes, although they may be less satisfied with teaching, Kelly found that they did not leave the school or profession at higher rates than other teachers. It is important to highlight that this data did not include information such as the race, ethnicity, and gender of the respondents.

### **Teacher Preparation Programs and Professional Development**

One large area of focus in studying teacher attrition is regarding the level of preparation and training teachers experienced before entering the teaching profession. Some teachers majored in education as undergraduates while some entered post-baccalaureate certification programs. The type of educational program a teacher completes is an important factor in determining whether teachers are equipped with the skills necessary to persist in teaching.



Latham & Vogt (2007) performed a study in which they researched teachers prepared in professional development schools (PDS) and those trained in a traditional university—traditional in this case being institutions that do not specialize in the professional development of its teachers. The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education defined a PDS as containing specific elements including (a) student teaching, field placement, and onsite undergraduate coursework that allows for more time and more total immersion in the school environment; (b) professional development opportunities for teachers through work with university faculty members; (c) a focus on improving student achievement; and (d) improving teacher pre-service preparation, teacher in-service professional development, and student achievement through cooperative research (Latham & Vogt, 2007).

Latham & Vogt's study consisted of 506 elementary education graduates from Illinois State University over an 8-year period, 1996-2003 who had prepared in a professional development school (PDS) and 559 traditionally prepared graduates to use as the comparison group. The data were obtained from three databases and the dependent variables for the study were entry into teaching, and for entrants, the number of years persisting in teaching. Teacher's careers were examined in two stages. First, did the graduates become employed in Illinois public schools? Second, if they were employed, how long were they employed? The main explanatory variable was the type of teacher education preparation, PDS prepared versus non-PDS prepared.

When looking at what impact teacher preparation has on teacher attrition, Latham & Vogt derived three main implications from the study. Although Professional Development Schools students and non-PDS students had similar academic skills when

they entered teacher education, PDS-prepared teachers entered the teaching profession more often and stayed longer. In addition, transfer students from community colleges exited education earlier than students who took their entire course of the study at the university. PDS prepared teachers significantly persisted in the field of education more than traditionally trained teachers (Latham & Vogt, 2007). From this data, as well as from personal knowledge and experience, teacher preparation programs appears to have a significant influence on whether teachers choose to leave the profession or remain.

### **Personal Factors**

Personal factors influencing the decision to quit teaching were also noted in many of the researched articles. These factors included pursuing higher educational goals, raising families, and health issues. The lack of specificity with regard to the personal factors that influenced teachers' decisions to leave also gives credence to my study, in that there needs to be a further examination into what extent, if any, personal factors including identity, lived experiences and ideologies play into teachers decisions to leave the profession.

### **Juvenile Justice System**

Houchins, Shippen, & Cattret (2004) conducted a study examining the attrition and retention rate of juvenile justice teachers. Typically, juvenile justice teachers' work with incarcerated students that have severe educational, psychological, physiological, and social problems. Research shows that a disproportionate number of youth who are incarcerated are illiterate, come from a minority background, and have disabilities (Center on Crime, Communities, and Culture, 1997). One might suspect that teachers working with this specific population of at-risk students desire to leave the teaching

profession at higher rates than teachers in other schools, however, Houchins, Shippen, & Cattret found that 80% of the 338 teachers participating in the survey reported being very satisfied or satisfied being a juvenile justice teacher. Over half of the teachers reported that they experienced stress “weekly” to “almost daily”, noting stress factors such as student behavior, too much to do and too little time, too many administrative requirements such as paperwork, severity of student needs, too many administrative directives, and the highest stressor reported: negative student behavior.

With this high level of stress on teachers within the juvenile justice system, why did 63% percent of these teachers say that they would remain with the juvenile justice system for a very long time or until they retire? One possible explanation is that almost eighty percent of the teachers indicated that they somewhat or strongly believe that they made a difference in the lives of their students (Houchins, Shippen, & Cattret, 2004). One question relevant to ask with regard to this study is whether the teachers of the juvenile justice system reported being satisfied with their experience working in the juvenile justice system because of their sense of safety in a structured environment in which they felt protected from harm and danger.

### **Why do some teachers stay?**

In the article *Teacher retention: Why do beginning teachers remain in the profession*, researchers D. Inman and L. Marlow (2004) performed a study which focused on analyzing the attitudes of beginning teachers in order to identify positive aspects of teaching as factors that may lead to teacher retention.

The sample was composed of teachers from randomly selected schools in Georgia. The Professional Attitude Survey, composed of 10 items designed to gather

information regarding 21 characteristics related to teacher career stability was used.

Teachers were asked to respond to questions relating to demographics, teacher background, reasons for remaining in the profession, and job satisfaction. 1,250 surveys were sent out to participating schools. The teachers independently completed the surveys and returned them via mail. 500 surveys were returned with 40% of them being classified as coming from beginning teachers, having fewer than ten years of experience (Inman & Marlow, 2004).

The results of the returned surveys were divided into two phases based on years of teaching experience. Phase 1 teachers also referred to as beginning teachers had 0-3 years of teaching experience, and Phase 2 teachers had 4-9 years of teaching experience. Salary was the only external factor identified by beginning teachers as a reason for remaining in the teaching profession with 27% of Phase 1 teachers and 50% of Phase 2 teachers specifying its importance. Employment Factors including working conditions (teacher roles, support from administration, paperwork, class size, availability of resources were important to 33% of Phase 1, and 50% of Phase 2 teachers.

Perceived job security (tenure, qualifications of teachers) was the highest ranking employment factor indicated by Phase 1 and Phase 2 teachers—with 53% of Phase 1 teachers and 57% of phase 2 teachers identifying its importance. Collegiality (similar teaching ideology, expectation or intrinsic awards) was not as important to Phase 1 teachers (13%) as Phase 2 teachers (57%) (Inman & Marlow, 2004).

In another study, Ussem and Neild set out to investigate the initiatives that were launched in Philadelphia that increased the retention rate of first year teachers from 73% in 2002-2003, to 91% in 2003-2004. 61 new teacher coaches were hired and trained

during the summer of 2003 and each coach was matched with 20 teachers whose subject matter and grade level was consistent with the coach's expertise. In contrast to the districts traditional "colleague mentors" (practicing classroom teachers who mentored new colleagues at their school), the new teacher coaches were based outside the schools and did not have classroom teaching responsibilities.

Coaches helped in whatever way the new professionals needed, including (but not limited to): finding scarce classroom supplies, suggesting or bringing in resources, setting up the room, modeling lessons, observing classes and giving feedback, and providing emotional support and advice about working in the system. Interviews, surveys, and focus groups indicated that these coaches played a key role in boosting new teacher retention during 2003-2004 and the district chose to continue the practice for all new recruits. New teachers were overwhelmingly positive in describing the support they received from their coaches.

In addition to new teacher coaches, the district launched several recruitment initiatives between 2002 and 2004 that included an aggressive marketing effort to attract applicants. Billboards, radio spots, and web sites were used as marketing ploys to attract applicants. A \$2400 a year tuition reimbursement for new teachers teaching in hard-to-staff schools, pursuing a master's degree and \$1000 a year for those in all other schools was offered as well as \$1000 awards for "Teacher Ambassadors"--teachers who recruit new candidates into high-need areas of the district. In addition, a \$1000 stipend and partial reimbursement of Praxis exam fees for student teachers who sign on as teachers in the district., and a hiring bonus of \$4500 for new district teachers, paid out in two installments over three years was offered as incentives.

What needs to be done in order to increase teacher retention?

In Pathways to Burnout: Case studies in teacher isolation and alienation, Schlichte, Yessel, & Merbler (2005) conducted a study which aimed to seek out protective factors that would enable first-year special education teachers to manage better demands of their new career instead of succumbing to its rigors. Letters introducing this research study were sent to three special education directors in a Midwestern state. The directors sent copies of the letter to first-year special education teachers in their school cooperation, inviting them to participate. Five first-year special educators who volunteered were interviewed individually using a semi-structured script. The interviews were audio taped, transcribed, and analyzed for emerging themes. After transcribing and analyzing the interviews, the following observations were noted as strategies that may be helpful for novice teachers , administrators, and mentor teachers: Mentoring is an important element in seeking to establish a strong sharing relationship between the mentor and first-year teacher. Novice teachers should not need to rely on a single source of support, such as their mentor teachers. In addition to being supportive and helpful themselves, administrators need to foster a collegial environment. Building administrators should be aware of the many stressors that novice teachers encounter. In addition to mentors, novice teachers would benefit from being assigned to buddy teachers to promote socialization. Novice teachers should be trained to recognize the importance of establishing relationships with students. Incremental progress and accomplishments of these students can be the springboards for connections that retain both special educators and their learners. Administrators should be cognizant that student-teacher relationships

can be critical to student performance. When first-year special educators give up, so do their students. When students lose, there can be no winners. Teacher educators should encourage networking and collaboration among students in their classes. Each class within a professional education sequence can provide an opportunity to practice establishing cooperative and supportive bonds with a new set of “colleagues” or fellow students. These skills could be important during first year teaching, and the development of a support network may be critical for success and professional satisfaction (Schlichte, Yessel, & Merbler, 2005).

### **Discussion**

Support, or lack thereof, was a main factor noted with regard to why teachers chose to leave the schools they taught in or the teaching field entirely. Some teachers felt as if they received no support from administrators regarding issues such as work load and expectations. There seemed to be a lack of communication surrounding perceptions of support by administrators. In the study conducted by Andrews, Gilbert, & Martin (2006), data showed that administrators felt they were being supportive to the teaching staff but the teachers surveyed within their school did not feel supported. The implications from these studies highlight an important element that should be considered: as long as there is a miscommunication between administrators and their staff, there will be a constant exodus of teachers. There should be constant dialogue regarding issues of professional development and support between the staff and administration. Administrators need to be visible and should work to build professional relationships with their staff members in the effort of encouraging teachers to feel comfortable discussing their concerns without the threat of feeling intimidated or fearful of losing their jobs.

Support and mentoring of new teachers was another factor that contributed to the cause of teacher attrition. In several studies, new teachers felt overwhelmed by the amount of responsibility. Renard (2003) suggested lightening the load for new teachers and allowing them to gain experience and develop before asking them to take on multiple tasks such as teaching several subjects at once, advising extracurricular activities, or coaching. Some teachers felt isolated from other staff and felt that a mentor would have contributed to their success as a teacher.

I personally empathized with this feeling of nonsupport because as a beginning teacher, I felt “out-of-the-loop” at times regarding school policies and practices that I was unfamiliar with, however, I became an advocate for myself and I asked veteran teachers for assistance in areas I didn’t understand. In the process, I built a support system and a network of colleagues I could depend on. However, the onus should be placed upon the administrator as well as the teacher to introduce the policies and practices of a new school, as well as to check-in periodically to discuss issues of concern that teachers (both old and new) may be experiencing.

Again, attrition rates were higher for special education teachers than regular education teachers. Special Education teachers felt that they had to deal with complex issues such as the overcrowding of classrooms, students with ranging disabilities, insufficient time to complete tasks, lack of training, the excessive amount of paper work and performing extra duties extending beyond the school day without pay. With regard to the frustrations expressed by special education teachers, I also empathized because at times, I too felt overburdened concerning the expectations and responsibilities I had to complete with regard to my students. Sometimes there just were not enough hours in a



day to perform all of the tasks that were set before a teacher and it was easy to become discouraged, however-- I think that this is a feeling shared by most teachers, not just those working in the area of special education. I've personally overheard conversations between my colleagues expressing their frustrations with special education teachers because they have a fewer amount of classes which contain fewer students and they feel that the paperwork and other tasks balance out their responsibilities. In far too many school systems, educators are set in opposition against one another and instead of coming together in a collaborative effort, teachers remain divided and this subsequently contributes to the feelings and perceptions of non-support.

Perceptions of violence were another contributing factor to teacher attrition. Teachers teaching in urban schools discussed personal experiences and experiences heard from others as reasons for leaving the teaching arena. There was a conflict between research studies with regard to whether poverty and minority enrollment contributed to the increase of teacher attrition.

With regard to the discussion surrounding school demographics and perceptions of violence, I feel that teachers need to look at the bigger picture when viewing schools and communities as dysfunctional and unsafe. Is it fair for teachers to teach and get paid in a community that they wouldn't bring their own children to? Instead of looking at the schools in urban communities as violent and dysfunctional, we should use our voice to bring awareness to issues in the community that are impacting our students because we are losing so many gifted youth to poverty and the streets.

When looking at the city of Milwaukee, I contend that our neighborhoods and communities would not be viewed as violent and dysfunctional if the teachers we paid

had to live within the communities that they taught in. It is not enough to say that teachers that teach within MPS have to reside in Milwaukee, because due to Milwaukee having one of the highest segregation rates in the nation, a lot of teachers live within Milwaukee, but on different sides of town and different neighborhoods than that of the students they teach. Perhaps if teachers became a part of the neighborhoods their students lived in, they would be able to contribute to it, in an effort to promote peace and a more positive atmosphere.

### **Disagreements within the review of the literature**

Attrition rate was higher for special education teachers versus regular education teachers, yet 80% of the teachers of the juvenile justice system in Georgia reported being satisfied with their jobs, even though a high majority of their students are classified as special education students.

There was also an inconsistency in the research regarding whether there is a higher attrition rate for teachers in socially disadvantaged schools. While information was presented regarding teacher's perceptions on violence in urban schools, an Event History Analysis of Teacher Attrition performed by S. Kelly addressed the controversy of whether the teachers of socially disadvantaged schools left more frequently than teachers in advantaged schools. The data showed that poverty and minority enrollment did not have a tremendous effect on the attrition of teachers.

I could not locate any significant research examining the life experiences of teachers who left urban schools to teach in suburban schools. After reviewing the literature on teacher attrition, I am left with the following lingering question: How does

one's upbringing and the experiences of teachers influence their perceptions of the students they teach?

### **Conclusion**

While many of the participants expressed a variety of factors which contributed to their exit from the field of education, there were some overarching themes expressed throughout the literature. Perceptions of support were a huge factor echoed throughout the literature. Teachers, especially those new to teaching and in special education, often felt unsupported by their administrators and colleagues in areas such as the multiple responsibilities and tasks they were required to perform. Perhaps there should be some type of collegial support in place to address the needs and concerns of teachers in which teachers feel they have an outlet to vent. In studies that determined the factors influencing teacher retention, many teachers satisfied with their jobs noted an abundance of support, which included mentors and coaches that assisted them in areas of resources, modeling lessons, observing lessons and providing feedback etc.

While the review of the literature pointed to general factors regarding the causes for teacher attrition such as school location, student demographics, and perceptions of violence, further research is warranted with regard to understanding how teachers' identities and ideologies, as demonstrated by their values, beliefs, and perceptions, influence their decisions to remain in or leave urban classrooms. Perhaps the millions of dollars spent annually on teacher recruitment initiatives could be used more efficiently in other areas of need such as professional development, classroom resources, etc.

## **Literature Review Part II: Teacher's Identities, Ideologies and Beliefs about Race**

### **Defining Race, Ideologies, and Beliefs**

A plausible explanation for why it is so difficult to discuss the concepts of race, identity, ideologies, and beliefs, is because while these terms are very powerful and play an active role in our everyday lives, they are all terms that have been socially constructed, and identity, ideologies and beliefs are based largely on personal interactions and experiences. It is necessary and most appropriate to provide definitions of these terms, as a means of offering a theoretical framework for the way in which I am analyzing and interpreting the literature. In discussing race, Haney-Lopez's definition of race will be utilized. Haney-Lopez (1994) defined race as "a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry" (p.165). In explaining how race is socially constructed, Carr & Thomas (1997) stated: "Individual groups, and institutions have often manipulated the concept of race to create or reinforce political and ideological regimes and myths" (Alladin, 1995; Elliot & Fleras, 1992, pp.26-47)(p. 68). Thus various definitions of race have been used historically as propagandized notions to further one's agenda.

In this research study, I define ideology as the values, beliefs, and perceptions held by an individual or group about a particular phenomenon, which are consequently manifested through the actions and behaviors of that individual or group. With regard to ideologies, Lewis (2001) stated, "Ideologies tell particular kinds of stories about the way the world works" (p.799). Similarly, Hall (1990) stated, "ideology refers to 'those images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and make sense of some aspect of social existence" (p.8).

Finally, Rust (1994) defined beliefs as "socially constructed representational systems that people use to interpret and act upon the world" (p.206). Beliefs can be shaped by past experiences, languages, customs, and assumptions of culture and they develop over a lifetime of watching, learning, and interacting (Easter et al. ; 1999).

### **Teachers' Identities and Ideologies**

Many teachers, entering the field of education, do so with their focus on areas of content and teaching strategies, but rarely on themselves (Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

Because of the confluences of the frequently chaotic nature of education and the overwhelming demands of teaching, ideological influences and social constructions of identity are not matters typically examined by teachers on a regular basis. According to Talbert-Johnson (2006):

If teachers are to become highly qualified in urban schools, they must possess not only the content knowledge but also the affective characteristics that enhance their effectiveness in the classroom. It is relatively easy to measure a teacher's content knowledge and pedagogical skills; however assessing dispositions becomes more complex. In fact Galluzzo (1999) asserts that too often, teacher education focuses on the academic ability of candidates while neglecting the dispositional aspects. Moreover, he states that although some people should not teach because they are weak academically, others should not teach because they lack the emotional stability. (p. 152)

Teachers need to embark upon a liberatory assessment in which they critically examine the ways in which they may have been socialized to ignore issues of power, privilege and inequality.

In her article entitled *Dysconscious Racism: Ideology, Identity, and the Miseducation of Teachers*, Joyce E. King described the dynamics of a liberatory pedagogy, which allows people to: consider alternative conceptions of themselves and

society, challenge their taken-for-granted ideological positions and identities that are considered normative, and question their acceptance of cultural belief systems which undergird racial inequity (1991). A liberatory pedagogy for the elite is not grounded in “fixing” students of color in urban schools by providing them with the ideals, values, and beliefs of the mainstream middle-class, but rather its focus is on how such ideals, values and beliefs have been used to view students of color in urban schools from a deficit perspective and subsequently oppress, rather than liberate them. King (1991) stated, “By focusing on ways that schooling, including their own miseducation, contributes to unequal educational outcomes that reinforce societal inequity and oppression, students broaden their knowledge of how society works” (p.134). It is important to examine and understand the significance that being raised and educated in relatively monocultural environments has had on shaping the worldviews, ideological positions, identities and beliefs of both pre-service candidates in teacher education programs as well as the current teaching force.

In addition, it is vital to continue examining the ways in which schools have played and continue to play a role in exacerbating and perpetuating racism, the reification of race, and hegemony both in hidden and overt ways. The purpose of having frequent discussions surrounding an analysis of one’s ideologies and identity is not to imply that teachers are racist. One’s racial identity does not make one racist. A large majority of the teachers in public schools indeed have good intentions, however, many of them are unknowingly exhibiting what King (1991) refers to as “dysconscious racism.” King (1991) defines dysconscious racism in this manner:

Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the *absence* of consciousness (that is, not

unconsciousness) but an *impaired* consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness. Uncritical ways of thinking about racial inequality accept certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths, and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages White people have as a result of subordinating diverse others (Wellman, 1977). Any serious challenge to the status quo that calls this racial privilege into question invariably challenges the self-identity of White people who have internalized these ideological justifications. (p.135)

Because of the ways that whiteness and privilege have cleverly disguised themselves through the normalization of practices, behaviors, and beliefs, some White people are naïve about the ways in which race operates and the ways in which their lives have been racialized (Lewis, 2001).

With regard to the complex nature of teachers' identities and teachers' ideologies about race and culture Paula Elliott (2008) stated:

New teachers are often subjected to societal messages that normalize the perspectives of White middle-class teachers while relegating those of low income and students of color to the realm of "Other" which is often equated with being deficient. In particular, the socialization of experiences of teachers of color and their personal familiarity with discrimination may compel them to challenge the ways lower expectations are directed to students based on race, language, and economic status (Bartolome, 2004). There is substantial evidence that teachers' beliefs, which are influenced by race, class, culture, and other social group memberships, directly impact their practice and are extremely difficult to change (Cochran-Smith, 1997). Providing greater knowledge and understanding of teachers' ideological positions can help counter dominant belief systems and the negative consequences resulting from the preponderance of messages that validate the experiences of some groups of people at the expense of others. (p. 212)

Teachers' perceptions and ideologies with regard to race and culture play a pivotal role in not only their classroom practices and subsequently the academic achievement of students, but in the everyday schooling experiences of their students. It was Talbert-Johnson's (2006) contention that:

Because teachers bring to schools their own set of cultural and personal characteristics that influence their work, it is not surprising that their beliefs, dispositions, behaviors, and experiences would also be included. The reality is that when teachers and students are out of sync, the inevitable occurs: miscommunication and confrontation between the student, the teacher, and the home; hostility; alienation; diminished self-esteem; and eventually school failure. (p. 153)

It is essential to examine the ideologies and perceptions of school leaders with regard to both race and culture, especially when educating students of color. Carr and Klassen (1997) found that the race and culture of which teachers are a part of greatly influences their perceptions about the behaviors and abilities of their students. Carr & Klassen (1997) stated:

Regardless of how little experience with racial or cultural diversity teachers have had, they enter the classroom with a considerably rich body of knowledge about social stratification, social mobility, and human differences based on their life experience. The analogies the White teachers in this study drew between racism and what they knew about sexism, class mobility, and White ethnic experience tended to minimize or neutralize racism and multicultural education's implications for action. However, from the teachers' perspectives, they were accounting for racial discrimination, not ignoring it... (p. 69)

Because of the fact that America's teaching force is vastly White, the population of teacher educators are overwhelmingly White, and urban schools are intensely made up of mostly students of color, the importance of preparing teachers to teach in urban schools is essential. Cross (2003) asserted:

The confluence of these three factors creates an enormous gap between who prepares teachers, who the teachers themselves are, and who they will likely teach. Scholars describe this as a cultural/racial mismatch, or gap, that results in a significant detachment of White teacher educators and White teacher education students from children of color. This detachment has serious consequences for what children of color will learn and what teachers will experience in the profession. It essentially raises the challenge of how to address "the huge problem of an institutionalized white, largely female, teaching staff" (Sleeter &



McLaren, 2003) teaching primarily students of color. Gay (2003) articulates how the mismatch is manifested in virtually every component of teaching:

The fact that many (teacher education) students do not share the same ethnic, social, racial, and linguistic backgrounds as their students may lead to cultural incongruencies in the classroom which can mediate against educational effectiveness. These incompatibilities are evident in value orientation, behavioral norms and expectations of styles, social interactions, self presentation, communication, and cognitive processing. (p.204)

As stated in the introduction, the need to have a long, serious dialogue regarding the influence of teachers' beliefs, ideologies and perceptions about race is long overdue.

While this topic is of a very serious and intense nature, and one that offers no quick and easy resolutions, when choosing how to tackle this phenomenon, silence, colorblindness, and colormuteness are not the answers. Pollock (2001) contended:

When one is faced with describing a perceived problematic racial pattern, as we have seen, a common response is what we might call colormuteness. Reluctant to navigate the question of how race may matter, we actively delete race terms from our talk (Pollock, 2000). Such silences, of course are not specific to Columbus or California City. As other investigators have noted, people in schools and districts across the country routinely resist talking about even the most blatant racial achievement disparities. Silence about such patterns, of course, allows them to remain intact. Racial patterns do not go away simply because they are ignored. Indeed, once people have noticed racial patterns, they seem to become engraved on the brain. They become, most dangerously, acceptable—a taken-for-granted part of what school is about. (p.9)

### **Teachers' Beliefs about their Student's Communities, Families, and Abilities**

There is a substantial amount of research examining teachers' perceptions about their students of color, their families, communities, and academic abilities. In the same study on teachers' perception of violence and their decisions to leave urban schools, reviewed in the teacher attrition section of this literature view, Smith and Smith (2006) asked their participants to recount stories about their teaching experiences in urban

schools. Ten of the twelve respondents chose to tell stories that included violent episodes. The authors noted that this fact alone points to the significance of the link between attrition and perceptions of violence. Upon recounting their stories of violence, some of the teachers did not relate stories that were first-hand accounts, but recounted stories that they'd heard from others.

The respondents often voiced their fears about the neighborhoods of which these schools were located. The following are comments, given by the respondents, which are reflective of such fears: "This place was in the middle of the ghetto. Your life wasn't worth ten cents outside the door"; "I didn't even like driving there during the day and I bought a cell phone just to feel a little safer"; "It spooked me out to sit alone in my classroom after hours in that neighborhood and I'd practically run to my car if it were dark out and no one could walk me out"; "They found bodies in the park next door to the school"; "I had to drive past this place where a bunch of vagrants hung out and drug dealers were selling."

Several other comments given by the respondents reflected the fact that not only were the teachers' affected, the students' were also negatively impacted by the fear and attitudes of their teachers. Some teachers reported that their lessons were limited to the inside of the building because of their fear of the neighborhood (even when they knew that a particular lesson could be enhanced by a field trip or outdoor component). The fears exhibited by these teachers further exacerbates the divide in the academic achievement and success between students taught in urban schools and those taught in suburban schools. This divide leads to an increase in the achievement gap as well as the

limiting of students' career prospects due to missed opportunities and experiences in which learning could have been enhanced.

Smith & Smith (2006) found that overall, the threat of violence in the urban schools was a factor that greatly contributed to the stress level for many of the teachers. The teachers, who were from middle-class backgrounds, viewed the communities in which they taught as socially dysfunctional and unsafe. The authors offered suggestions for reducing attrition which included college training for teachers and staff development on recognizing and defusing potentially violent situations.

In another study, Hyland (1998) highlighted a segment of an interview she conducted with Mrs. L., a 19 year veteran mathematics teacher. Mrs. L. was born and raised in a small Midwestern town and at the time of interview, taught in a small town high school with an enrollment of 1,252 students, of which 67% of the student population was White, 24.3% Black, 2.2 % Hispanic, 6.05% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% Native American. Although Mrs. L. often exhibited reluctance with regard to discussing issues of race, during one particular interview, she recounted a story about a family vacation in which she and her family got lost in New York City while driving from the airport to a friend's house in New Jersey. Mrs. L. shared with Hyland that she was scared because she saw no one who looked like her and her family in the neighborhood in which they were lost. She stated:

I told the kids to lock the doors, I was so scared. I mean there were people playing basketball and stuff all over the streets. We drove straight through to New Jersey without even stopping for the bathroom. I told the kids they could go in a jar if they needed to. None of these people looked like us. So, I guess I do know what it feels like to be a minority.” (Hyland, 1998, p. 28)

Hyland assessed this statement made by Mrs. L. in the following manner:

Based on these statements, I have assumed that her perception of African Americans includes an image of poverty and social problems. She has a certain fear of African American people. Her assertion that this experience gave her a glimpse into what it feels like to be a minority implies that she has given very little thought to the unequal distributions of power that permeate the daily experiences of people of color. She assumed that her experience of driving through an African American neighborhood was equivalent to what it feels like to be a member of a marginalized racial group. (p. 28)

Hyland's assessment of Mrs. L.'s perception of African Americans and their communities is indeed convincing. Hyland could have gained an even deeper insight into Mrs. L.'s perceptions and beliefs about race had she probed Mrs. L. to find out what exactly Mrs. L. feared would happen to her and her family, had there been an emergency and the family had no choice but to stop in the neighborhood of which they were driving. More importantly, where did Mrs. L. learn this perception and how does it influence her daily interactions with and perceptions about her students of color? Hyland confirmed her assessment of Mrs. L. when she asked the teacher whether she would ever consider teaching in an inner-city school. Mrs. L. gave an unequivocal, "No" and said the following:

My perception of the inner city, whether it's right or wrong, is that there are more social problems and that the kid would be bringing in more family problems. I've never dealt with anybody in the inner city. It just seems to me that people wouldn't live in the inner city if they could get out. So, there's a whole array of money problems and jobs and all that kind of thing. My perception is, let's see, NYPD blue, and those kinds of things and you see the conditions that people live in. They wouldn't live there if they had means to get out and live in the suburbs or live in a small town or live someplace else. So it seems to me that they would bring in a lot more family problems and, and social problems into the school. There would not be enough money in the world to influence my decision that way. I just don't think that I would teach there. I wouldn't even consider it. I've seen too many movies probably, and I don't think I'd feel safe on top of the whole thing. I think that's probably the biggest factor, the safety; and that the problems just seem so overwhelming. (Hyland, 1998, p. 29)

Mrs. L. sentiments about people of color are clearly in need of further examination. It is my contention that this attitude is not unique to Mrs. L, but rather a belief shared by many teachers' who teach students of color and who do not share in the background or culture of the students whom they teach. The fact that Mrs. L. based her "knowledge"-- or more accurately worded-- "assessment" of people of color through the images she gleaned from the media, is particularly disturbing. In addition, the verity that Mrs. L. actually believed these negative stereotypes about people of color to be true, and the fact that she automatically related the fact of being African-American to social problems, makes this situation and others alike even more troubling. The reality that Mrs. L. displays no knowledge of the racist, systemic, and institutional forces that have created and maintained the social problems that many people of color endure, including poverty, is disconcerting. Hyland (1998) stated:

Since she believes social problems to be out her control and attributes student failure to certain social problems, she is most likely to abdicate responsibility for the learning of her African American students. She has not found it necessary to question her racial assumptions and has chosen to live in a neighboring town that is all white. (p.29)

Cross (2003) found that negative perceptions about students of color were not limited to the neighborhoods and communities of which these students lived, but extended to the students' families as well. When examining the ways in which teachers acknowledge the background knowledge and experiences of their students, Cross found that teachers usually only acknowledged students' lived experiences during matters concerning ways in which such experiences elucidated behavioral problems. One teacher that Cross interviewed stated, "We should include the experiences of parents yet

recognize that parents may not have a lot to offer” (p.207). When reflecting on this comment and others expressed by the teachers she interviewed, Cross stated:

Negative perceptions about the students and their families inhibited the teacher’s abilities to think positively about the race or culture of those they were teaching. This certainly did not lead them to think that the race or culture of their students had any positive implications for their teaching. They could not cite means in which the students’ lives could benefit their teaching, or how making significant connections to the students was a basis for good teaching. (p.207)

Such thoughts and negative perceptions are reflective of teachers’ expectations and their ties to the hidden curriculum. Irvine (1990) defined the hidden curriculum as “the unstated but influential knowledge, attitudes, norms, rules, rituals, values, and beliefs that are transmitted to students through structure, policies, processes, formal content, and the social relationships of school” (p.5). When examining whether institutional racism existing within the school where she taught was being recognized, Hanssen (1998) found “various unintentional forms of racism that were hiding behind the standard practices” of her “hard-working, well-meaning colleagues” and even that of her own unexamined practices. Hanssen described her experience of working as a reading/ English teacher in a racially and economically heterogeneous urban high school. While the students in this school were comprised of various racial and ethnic origins (with approximately half of the student population comprised of African American students), the teaching faculty and administration was comprised entirely of European Americans. Hanssen found racism and ethnocentrism embedded within elements of the curriculum choice, hiring practices, and the overall ethos of the school. Hanssen (1998) stated, “While the administrators and many of the teachers were walking around the school trying to be colorblind, many of our

students were “seeing white”. Even though there were lots of faces of color, it still felt like a white school to many of our nonwhite students.” (para. 14)

In the same article, Hanssen also examined whether the complexity of institutional racism was addressed in the school setting, once institutional racism was acknowledged. Hanssen recounted an experience in which she gave her class the choice to read one of several novels from a selection which included novels from the traditional canon, more contemporary novels, and two autobiographical novels written by African American women. After reading their novel of choice, the students then gave presentations on the novels. The issue of racism came to light during these presentations as the African American students in the class articulated the impact of racism in their daily lives. Hanssen described the emotions behind these students’ thoughtful statements as “strong—reflecting a deep level of anger, bordering on rage” (para. 21). The reaction displayed by the rest of the class was one in which Hanssen was not ready to handle. The other students in the classroom could not handle the naked anger expressed by the African-American students. Hanssen described some of reactions exhibited by the non African-American students as that of denial, hurt, anger, and of totally shutting down. Upon reflecting on the experience Hanssen (1998) wrote:

Although our two-day discussion was not some superficial swipe at multiculturalism, I don’t think that it was positive. It tapped into the deep-seated thoughts and feelings, but I’m not sure it helped anyone reexamine them and possibly grow or change. Even though I did a good job of facilitating the conversation in terms of bringing the issues to the surface in clear and responsible ways, I didn’t have the skills to help the group work through the emotions of this kind of exchange in a way that would make it a reflective, growing experience. I felt at the end that people hadn’t learned anything. The black students had had the opportunity to vent, and the others were either unaffected or maybe a bit hurt. Probably all the students had simply become more entrenched in their existing perspectives. I wondered if I had done more harm than good. I learned many

things from this experience, but one of the most important was the complexity of issues of racism. It is not simply a matter of talking things through and coming to a better understanding. (para. 23)

I partially agree with Hanssen's analysis of this experience. The fact that she and other students perceived the recounting of experiences of racism from the African-American students during their presentation as an "opportunity to vent" is particularly troublesome in that here, Hanssen makes the reverse mistake that she made earlier when she reported that her students often "blamed racism" when dealing with conflicts with people of authority. Here, Hanssen focuses on the individual and not the overall systemic issue of race and racism. Hanssen perceived her students' account of their experiences with racism, as a means of venting and did not utilize the situation as an opportunity to truly deal with the fact that issues of race and racism are very much embedded within the everyday lives and experiences of people of color. While Hanssen acknowledged the complexity of dealing with issues of race, she expected her students to grow and change immediately as a result of this one incorporation of multiculturalism into her curriculum. Hansen should've realized that neither growth nor change occurs overnight and that because the issues of race and racism are so complex, it is unreasonable to think that the problem of racism can and will be solved within a day and with one lesson. It is likely that the complexity of race and racism demonstrated by this one classroom experience frightened Hanssen and based on the reactions of her students, it is likely that she might be hesitant to incorporate critical reflections of race into her curriculum in the future. Hanssen (1998) hinted at this when she stated:

I had no idea where that left me. Listening to "another white woman was clearly the last thing my 17-year-old black males students wanted to do. My concern about these issues was not enough. Racism and race relations, as we saw



demonstrated so dramatically in the response to the O.J. Simpson trial, are far too complex. The gulf between the races is deep, and the level of suspicion seems insurmountable at times. (para. 26)

I believe that this is an accurate assessment regarding the complexity of discussing issues of race and racism in the classroom. This is perhaps the reason why such topics are often left untouched. Hanssen's reflection on her experience with dealing with such issues supports the notion that even those who attempt to make a positive change by discussing these challenging topics, often feel a sense of hopelessness. When reflecting upon the role of White teachers in supporting the advancement of communities of color, Hanssen expressed her uncertainty. On this, Hanssen (1998) stated:

Despite the objections of some leaders within communities of color, I am assuming there is some contribution that people like me might make, particularly since most students of color are in the difficult position of having many white teachers. While I am clear that actively seeking the employment of teachers of color is a first step, in the meantime, I must continue trying to figure out what my role might be. I am seeking to learn what I can by reading both literary and nonliterary texts related to issues of race. I am trying to listen to people of color, both public leaders and my own students. As much as possible, I am working to break through the walls of discomfort and mistrust to engage in honest conversations. And I am constantly on the lookout for the possibility of developing professional relationships with educators of color. I suspect that it will be in collaboration with one of these colleagues that I may discover the most significant contributions I can make. (para. 27)

While Hanssen's attempt to learn about issues of race is a crucial step toward becoming more culturally competent, perhaps the act of forging authentic, personal relationships and friendships with people of color and diverse cultures will have a more positive and meaningful effect and impact on the incorporation of culturally relevant pedagogy in education for Hanssen and others alike. It is my assertion that as long as teachers like

Hanssen only look to develop “professional relationships with educators of color” as a means of educating all students, there will continue to be a racial divide.

Another study conducted by Picower (2009) examined the ways in which White pre-service teachers conceptualized race and difference and the role such conceptualizations played in maintaining existing racial hierarchies. Picower studied eight White, female, pre-service teachers in their twenties who were enrolled in a course on multicultural education during their last semester of a childhood teacher education program at a New York City university. A white female herself, Picower commented that she believed her participants felt safe and comfortable to reveal some of their previously unspoken beliefs about race and difference to her specifically because they shared the same racial identity.

Picower found that the early experiences her participants had with diversity played a pivotal role in shaping their present perceptions and ideologies about race and difference. While the participants reported having little interaction with peers or teachers of color while they were growing up, they did recount experiences with African Americans who worked in their homes as housekeepers and nannies. Picower noted that these experiences with people of color were hierarchical in nature, "setting up the association that people of color are to serve or work for White people (2009, p.201). The participants were not cognizant of the fact that these relationships were hierarchical in nature, but rather, viewed them as signs that their families were open minded about other races and ethnicities. In addition to hierarchical, the understandings that Picower's participants formed about race and interactions with individuals from other races were also hegemonic. Picower (2009) stated:

Through their life experiences and their interactions with individuals of other races, the participants gained and maintained hegemonic understandings of the world concerning race. The term 'hegemonic understandings' refers to the participants' internalized ways of making meaning about how society is organized. By using particular racial ideologies, they share multiple stories that justify their fear of people of color, urban communities, and students. These stories often positioned Whites as victims of racism and stereotypes while simultaneously reproducing assumptions and misconceptions about people of color, particularly African-Americans. (p.202)

The participants shared hegemonic stories about fear and the anxiety they'd experienced in situations with people of color. This fear and anxiety was not legitimate, but was rather perpetuated by stereotypes from their earlier experiences, influences from their families, and the media. The participants often characterized African-Americans as dangerous criminals who threatened their sense of safety. These hegemonic understandings carried over into the participants perceptions of urban schools, students and families. Because most of the participants had grown up in monocultural environments, they were especially fearful of African American neighborhoods and communities. In addition, Picower's participants saw themselves as the real victims of racism by drawing on dominant narratives of reverse racism and discrimination because they were White.

In trying to maintain their hegemonic understandings, Picower found that her participants called upon several "tools of whiteness" when their hegemonic understandings were challenged which included emotional tools, ideological tools, and performative tools. According to Picower (2009) :

Tools of whiteness" facilitate in the job of maintaining and supporting hegemonic stories and dominant ideologies of race, which in turn, uphold structures of White supremacy. In an attempt to preserve their hegemonic understandings,

participants used these tools to deny, evade, subvert, or avoid the issues raised. (p. 204-205)

The participants used several emotional tools-- based on their feelings, to express the guilt and anger they felt when confronted with concepts of racism. These emotional tools, were manifested in sentiments such as "I never owned a slave" and "stop trying to make me feel guilty." In addition to emotional tools, the participants also used ideological tools of Whiteness such as "Now that things are equal" and "It's personal not political" in which they dismissed the pervasiveness of institutional and systemic racism. The participants further downplayed their own responsibility in anti-racist initiatives by claiming that such issues were out of their control. The participants viewed their mere presence in urban schools as altruistic and helpful, even though they were not willing to take an active stance against racism and White supremacy. The participants felt that their kindness to others was a sufficient response to institutional and societal issues of racism. In describing how Nikki, one of the participants ascribed to this "just be nice" mentality, Picower (2009) stated:

Nikki used this tool to negate the need for multicultural preparation when teaching in diverse environments. There is no need to learn about culturally relevant pedagogy, English-language acquisition strategies or any other of the other skills being taught in this course because 'it should be enough' to have an 'open mind'. In this way, the tool of 'just be nice' functioned to uphold White supremacy by perpetuating White teachers' ineffectiveness in urban communities of color. It maintained White innocence while keeping the focus of urban educational failure on students rather than on their own willful lack of preparation to teach in communities unfamiliar to them. (p.208)

It is not enough to have an open mind, because as shown through Picower's interviews, the concept of an "open mind" is oxymoronic in that one's ideologies are shaped early on by their lived experiences, societal and familial influences. While one can be open to

change, one cannot claim to be objective or neutral. Furthermore, this "just be nice" mentality described by Picower is a paternalistic power play that refuses to acknowledge the injustice created by structured inequity that one must concede when taking an anti-racist stance.

Such silence with regard to issues of racism and injustice and the paternalistic claims of being helpful and nice are examples of what Picower described as performative tools of Whiteness. According to Picower, "performative tools were the behaviors in which participants engaged to protect their beliefs based on their ideological tools or hegemonic understandings" (p.209).

Picower's study is important in that it underlies the responsibility that teacher education programs have in transforming these hierarchical and hegemonic understandings educators may hold with regard to people of color.

In another study which investigated the impact that White teachers have on the academic achievement of Black students, Douglas et al. (2008) found that teachers' attitudes and perceptions indeed had an influence on the academic success of students. Douglas et al. interviewed eight African American high school students who attended a predominately White high school in Northern Colorado. The researchers were interested in the role White teachers played in facilitating the academic success or failure of Black students as well as the influence perceptions (held by African-American students of their White teachers and perceived perceptions White teachers held of their African-American students) played in the academic achievement of African American students. The issue of respect was the most powerful theme that emerged from the data concerning the experiences of African-American students being taught by White teachers in a

predominately White school. Several of the students expressed that they often felt that were not respected solely because of their race. This perceived disrespect lead to incidents in which these Black students felt impelled to demand respect. In addition to the perceived disrespect, many students also felt that their teachers and peers held negative perceptions of them and were judgmental of them based on stereotypes. Being the demographic minority in a predominately White setting, these students felt an extra burden of having "to carry the weight of all Black people on their shoulders" (para. 22).

Douglas et al. (2008) assert that teachers bring their epistemological assumptions and personal frames of references into their classrooms and such frames of references guide the way they teach as well as their interpretations of presently occurring experiences including how they perceive Black people. According to Douglas et al. (2008):

If a teacher's personal frame of reference is a dominating factor in the classroom, one tends to believe that it can have a negative effect on whether or not the White teacher can effectively address the educational needs of the Black student. If you come into a situation with a pre-conceived notion about a group of people, the relationship between the two parties is already at a disadvantage. As an educator, the White teacher has a responsibility to the Black student and this society to contribute to the academic success of that Black student, without any reservations. (paragraph 32)

Teachers undoubtedly have the responsibility to contribute to the academic success of all of their students regardless of race, class, sex, religion or ability. Pre-conceived notions about any one of these factors can certainly have a detrimental impact on the academic success of a student. For example, if a teacher comes into the classroom with the epistemological assumption that all Asian students are good in math, or that students with learning disabilities can only perform lower-level work, the expectations as well the

academic success of these students is indubitably compromised. Douglas et al. recognize that students also carry epistemological assumptions and personal frames of reference with them based on their previous experiences and teachings and such frames also have the ability of hindering their academic success.

Douglas et al. (2008) contended that teachers must be self-reflective on their teaching practices, must embrace diverse cultural practices and values in their classrooms, and incorporate such practices and values into their teaching. In addition, Douglas et al. insist that teachers must take an active stance against experiences of inequity and disenfranchisement of students through antiracist teaching and getting to know their students as individuals in an effort to avoid negative stereotypes and generalizations of people of diverse backgrounds.

In another study, Haviland (2008) described a phenomenon she coined "White Educational Discourse" (WED) in which the worldview or cultural model of Whiteness is activated and brought to life in White-dominated educational contexts through a "constellation of ways of speaking, interacting, and thinking in which White teachers gloss over issues of race, racism, and White supremacy in ways that reinforce the status quo, even when they have a stated desire to do the opposite" (p.41). Haviland conducted a yearlong study of an eight-grade language arts classroom and a university student-teaching seminar. Haviland found that the participants in her study generally perpetuated the following three characteristics of Whiteness: "that Whiteness is powerful yet power-evasive, that Whiteness uses a wide variety of techniques to maintain its power, and that Whiteness is not monolithic" (p.41).

When exhibiting Whiteness as powerful yet power evasive, Haviland's students used the following Discourse moves when discussing race: avoiding words, false starts, safe self-critique, asserting ignorance or uncertainty, letting others off the hook, citing authority, silence, and changing the topic. Haviland interpreted these Discourse moves as ways of carefully avoiding acknowledgement of the power that Whiteness conferred on Whites and positioning Whites as less than powerful agents of change.

As a means to maintain power, Haviland found that participants engaged in several behaviors including: "affirming sameness, joking, agreeing and supporting, praising and encouraging, teacher and student caring, socializing and sharing personal information, and focusing on barriers to multicultural education" (p.47). In building a community of closeness, comfort, and safety, Haviland's students retreated from openly critiquing and challenging themselves or one another. Haviland found that such safeness stifled critical reflection and was thus a deterrent to change.

### **Notions of Colorblindness**

Because we live in a society which awards people merit and privileges based on skin color alone, it is quite understandable why some would want to silence the discussion about race—especially if they have been recipients of this merit and privilege, however, when one lives in a society in which they are not awarded merit and privileges precisely as a result of skin color, it is quite understandable as to why the need to discuss such matters is so salient. This is especially true with regard to educating students of color. While many members of the dominant group believe that characterizing themselves' as colorblind is a good thing, and some teachers who subscribe to this particular ideology do so because they really do want to treat all people equally, it is my



contention that teachers' that portray themselves as being color-blind are actually hurting their students of color, by not recognizing their distinctiveness.

Being colorblind does not render equality, but rather it renounces and dismisses the history, struggles, and experiences of people of color. Hyland (1998) expressed this ill-logic clearly when she stated:

Being "colorblind" means not recognizing color, which is self-consciously pervasive in the identity of people of color. In one sense, not noticing and acknowledging color is another way of not recognizing the uniqueness of each student in a classroom. Color-blindness is an important means by which white institutions maintain the status quo.

Although color-blind ideology is obvious, it is not viewed as pejorative by most white people because as part of the dominant group, they need not acknowledge their racial identity and group affiliation. (p. 30)

Oftentimes some people who employ a colorblind approach do so on the basis of innocence and uncertainty about the exact way in which to approach race, however the argument can be made that others pretend to be colorblind as a political attempt to not only maintain the status quo but also to protect and maintain the possessive investment in whiteness. Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) stated:

The liberal, free-market, and pragmatic rhetoric of color-blind racism allows Whites to defend White supremacy in an apparently nonracial manner (Bobo and Hutchings, 1996; Bobo and Smith, 1994; Carmines and Merriman, 1993; Kluegel and Bob, 1993; Jackman, 1994). Color-blind racism allows Whites to appear 'not racist' ("I believe in equality"), preserve their privileged status ("Discrimination ended in the sixties!"), blame Blacks for their lower status ("If you guys just work hard!"), and criticize any institutional approach—such as affirmative action—that attempts to ameliorate racial inequality ("Reverse discrimination!"). Hence, the task of progressive social analysis is to blow the whistle on color-blind racism. We must unmask the color-blind racists by showing how their views, arguments, and lifestyles are (White) color-coded. We must also show how their color-blind rationales defend systemic White privilege. Analytically this implies developing new questions for our surveys and using new strategies for the

analysis of contemporary racial attitudes. Politically it implies that we must concentrate our efforts in fighting the new racist, all the nice Whites who tell us “I am not a racist but...” (p. 78)

In many of the studies reviewed, teachers often reported that they were colorblind with regard to matters of race and educating students of color. Phrases such as “I don’t see race” and “I treat all of my students the same”, were commonly uttered and were most likely due to the notion of being “politically correct” or out of fear of being perceived as racist if in fact they admit that they do, in fact, consider race when educating students of color (see for example Lewis, 2001). This creates an interesting dilemma because the claim of colorblindness often silences an important dialogue on racial matters while hiding under the veil of equality. L.A. Bell (2002) alluded to this dynamic when she stated:

Color blindness also operates for many Whites as a way to avoid appearing to be racist, something they clearly wish to avoid, and naming white as a race is something only white supremacists do. The contortions required to deny what one sees also prevent Whites from unearthing and addressing racist assumptions and feelings they would prefer to avoid. (p.239)

In a study conducted at Foresthill Elementary school, located within a suburban neighborhood comprised mostly of middle and upper-middle class families, the school demographics showed that Whites made up approximately 90% of the student body and approximately 88% of the school personnel. Research with regard to race and education is usually focused on students of color, however this particular study was unique in that it examined the way in which race operated in an almost all-White setting. The researcher, Amanda E. Lewis, conducted an ethnographic study of this elementary school community and examined the way in which members of this school community “made

sense of the concept of race, their own racial identities, the role of race in their daily lives, and the impact of race on opportunity structures” (2001, p. 783). By taking part in participant observation and interviewing, Lewis sought to examine the racial messages students received from adults by way of the ideology, curriculum, and behaviors of the Foresthill community. Lewis contended that while it was important to research the ways in which race influenced educational settings populated predominately by students of color, it was equally important to examine the ways in which race influenced educational settings populated by White people. Lewis (2001) stated:

In this sense, it is important to study the construction of Whiteness and White racial identities (perhaps especially in White settings). Most White students in the United States are still attending schools that are almost entirely White (Orfield, 1993; Orfield & Monfort, 1992). In fact, most live in highly racially segregated neighborhoods and have little regular, substantial contact with people of other races (Massy & Denton, 1993). As much of the recent literature on Whiteness has pointed out, it is often Whites’ lack of understanding of their own roles as racial actors that stands as a roadblock to further progress toward racial justice (Feagin & Vera, 1995; Fine et al., 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Jackman, 1994; Lewis, 1998). Understanding how White students develop their racial subjectivities and understandings is crucial to understanding future possibilities for greater racial equity in the United States. (p. 782)

During her yearlong study, Lewis found that issues of race were often glossed over by teachers, parents, and students in the Foresthill community. Whenever the students of color that attended Foresthills Elementary School voiced complaints or concerns of racism, they were often perceived as being over-reactive or were said to have been “playing the race card”. Teachers often stated that they were “color-blind” and time and time again, the ideology and curriculum presented at Foresthills falsely mimicked such claims. According to Lewis:

Color-blind ideology presumes or asserts a race-neutral social context (e.g., race does not matter here). It stigmatizes attempts to raise questions about redressing racial inequality in daily life through accusations such as “playing the race card” or “identity politics,” which imply that someone is trying to bring race in where it does not belong. (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Crenshaw, 1997; Gitlin, 1995; Tomasky, 1996) (p.800)

Lewis (2001) continued:

As Crenshaw (1997) argues, in its assertion that race does not matter, color-blind ideology attempts to mask the power of race as it simultaneously demonstrates precisely the difference race does make (e.g., when one asserts that he/she does not pay attention to race, the implication is that to notice it would have deleterious outcomes). In many ways color-blindness is powerful precisely because it espouses the ideal Martin Luther King expressed in his “I have a Dream” speech. Yet it is particularly troublesome because it operates in a context, as in Sunny Valley, in which color-consciousness remains pervasive and pernicious, just more covert than during Jim Crow. In this way, color-blind ideology serves to explain and thus protect the status quo—the current racial formation. As was echoed in the discourse of Foresthills’ adults, it suggests that “the problem” is not a historical and/or present day pattern of racism, but is a result instead of bad attitudes, and if we just let things be, it is only a matter of time before racial gaps fade away naturally. (p.801)

Lewis presented several examples in which students of color experienced racism at the hands of their peers and again by their teachers through the downplaying of the seriousness of these incidents. Lewis found that students of color at Foresthills Elementary School reported incidents of being taunted with racial slurs and incidents in which they were socially outcast because they were “different”. Lewis (2001) stated:

As these examples of racial logic and in operation at Foresthills show, school personnel’s limited interventions or downplaying of such incidents do little to address the anxiety and upset of those who are the victims of this hurtful behavior. Moreover, it demonstrates that rather than being benign, the trivialization of racial incidents has a pernicious effect. In fact, there was some evidence that teachers were at least moderately aware of these kinds of incidents, but they understood them to be relatively unimportant and, to some extent, deracialized them.” (p.790)

Lewis went on to explain that glossing over such racial incidents implies that these situations are not unusual but are regular, everyday conflicts and that both parties should be held responsible, thus making it seem as if the actual victim somehow contributed to and provoked the incidence. This thereby protects the perpetrator and reinforces the victim's sense of outsidership and insecurity.

Lewis insisted that whenever she had attempted to raise the subject of race, "its salience was downplayed, trivialized, or challenged" (2001, p. 786). Teachers, parents, and community members often expressed the sentiment that with regard to their everyday interactions, behaviors, and beliefs, they tended to view all people as equal and did not "see race". For example, when interviewing Mrs. Fisher, a Foresthill parent who was also a high school teacher in a multiracial school located in another district about what she told her children about race and racism, Fisher said, "Well I try to tell 'em that people are who they are, and you have to not make a judgment on what they look like or anything like that" (p. 792). Mrs. Fisher went on to state that she did not know how many African American, Latino, or Asian students she had in her classes because she just didn't "notice" such things. However, her color-blind assertion was contradicted later in the conversation when she discussed her displeasure with some groups' behavior and performance in class. Lewis (2001) recorded Mrs. Fisher as stating:

Do I think of those groups differently?...Yeah. I do. I think that the backgrounds that a lot of the—the attitudes that those people have towards...how to be successful, are different. And I think that, um, the Asian attitude, from parents who aren't far from being, you know, born, in some place in Asia. Their attitudes towards success are that you work hard, and you keep working hard, and you keep working hard, that's how you're successful. I don't find that attitude among Latinos or Blacks. (p. 792)

This is a clear example of the ways in which some teachers report to have a color-blind ideology, yet clearly hold racialized, stereotypical perceptions of their students' abilities, motivations, and effort. The sad truth is that this paradoxical viewpoint of students of color, expressed by Mrs. Fisher, is all too common among teachers across the nation. The fact that we live in a segregated society further complicates the matter in that due to the fact that people like Mrs. Fisher, the Sunny Valley community, and others alike have little to no experiences and interactions with people of color on a regular basis, they are left to glean what little knowledge and information they have about people of color from the negative depictions and portrayals of minorities in the media. Lewis concluded her article by stressing the extreme importance of White people learning not only about the reality of racial equality, but about the roles in which they potentially play in its reproduction.

In a different study, examining the experience of one White beginning teacher's attempt to examine her own racial identity, ideology, and cultural competence while teaching in a multicultural classroom, Bueler et al. (2009) sought to determine what cultural competence looked like for beginning teachers working in urban and under resourced schools and how factors such as emotions, racial identity, and school context influenced such negotiations. Throughout the course of the study, Kelly, the teacher being studied, struggled with her understanding of her own racial identity and its influence on her beliefs and teaching practices.

Although she knew of the importance of incorporating the notion of race and identity into the curriculum, Kelly was often hesitant to do so because she didn't want to be misperceived by her African American students or cooperating teacher. Instead of

probing into the deeper issues associated with race, Kelly would often re-frame race as culture and relegate explorations of culture to matters of food, music, and dance.

Throughout the study, Kelly often displayed a “dual consciousness” of her Whiteness and privilege. While trying to be cognizant of her own race and identity, Kelly often resisted the act of directly incorporating race into her teaching practices, yet also described herself as White, female, avoidant, and passive—characteristics that manifested itself in her daily struggles with classroom management.

Kelly finally realized that as much as she wanted to disregard race, the racial differences between her students and herself indeed mattered and was regularly manifested, and such racialized situations made race impossible to ignore.

Buehler et al. discussed the dilemma beginning teachers face when trying to incorporate a social justice agenda into their teaching because in implementing such critically relevant pedagogy, they recognize that they are often implicated in the social forces that have created the obstacles that their students of color must confront—thereby making these teachers experience emotions of anxiety and guilt. The researchers warn that the act of becoming cultural competent is not easy and will not occur overnight but it is a continuous process. Buehler et al. stated:

Our research suggests that cultural competence cannot be thought of as a capacity that students develop in a gradual motion of forward progress. As Kelly’s story reveals, the process of becoming culturally competent was an arduous journey filled with forward movement followed by missteps and backsliding, followed by forward movement again.” (p. 416).

Buehler et. al concluded that the uncertainties about culturally competent teaching, expressed by Kelly time and time again, should be normalized when preparing beginning

teachers to become culturally competent and that such challenges and complexities should be embraced as a tenet of culturally responsive teaching.

### **Characteristics of Successful Teachers of Students of Color**

As a sign of hope and a look to the future, it is befitting to conclude this literature review with a section examining the characteristics of successful teachers of students of color. Dr. Martin Haberman, Dr. Julie Kailin, and Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings are three distinguished scholars, well renowned in the field of academia who have studied the ideologies of White teachers with regard to race and who have exhibited some measure of success in teaching students of color. These scholars are dedicated to creating “Star Teachers” committed to utilizing a “culturally relevant pedagogy” through “antiracist education”. In the book, Star Teachers of Children in Poverty, UW-Milwaukee Distinguished Professor Martin Haberman outlines the important qualities that separate successful teachers of urban students, of whom Haberman calls “Star Teachers” from “failures” or “quitters”. According to Haberman (1995):

Many teachers have so completely internalized the process of blaming the victim and not holding schools or themselves even partly responsible for children’s failure that they are not even aware they are doing so. By not specifically stating that a particular race or ethnic group has lower native intelligence, many teachers believe that they have avoided blaming the children. They simply do not comprehend that by blaming the economy, the parents, or the peers for the fact that a majority of poverty children are failing in basic skills, they are still centering the locus of fault in the children’s inadequacies. (p. 53-54)

In her book The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children, UW-Madison Professor and academic scholar, Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings discusses the effectiveness of employing a culturally relevant pedagogy when teaching students of color. Ladson-Billings stated:



Teachers who practice culturally relevant methods can be identified by the way they see themselves and others. They see their teaching as an art rather than as a technical skill. They believe that all of their students can succeed rather than that failure is inevitable for some. They see themselves as a part of the community and they see teaching as giving back to the community. They help students make connections between their local, national, racial, cultural, and global identities. Such teachers can also be identified by the ways in which they structure their social interactions: Their relationships with students are fluid and equitable and extend beyond the classroom. They demonstrate a connectedness with all their students and encourage that same connectedness between their students. (p.25)

In Antiracist Education (2002), Dr. Julie Kailin picks up the baton where Dr. Ladson-Billings ended in *Dreamkeepers*. Dr. Kailin calls for an antiracist education—a critical examination of the root causes of inequality and oppression, including the organizational, structural, and systematic forms of racism and oppression. Dr. Kailin stated:

The assumption underlying antiracist pedagogy for teachers is that it is necessary for them to confront racism in their backgrounds and their backyards in order to become conscious of how it is expressed in their teaching practice and their interactions with students of color, as well as white students. The goal is not only to raise consciousness at the individual level, but to contextualize this knowledge politically and historically, at the institutional level, as well. It is also assumed that teachers are in a position to benefit from reflexive learning situations, in which they engage in a critical self-examination. (p. 18)

All three of these highly respected scholars make vital assertions with regard to the importance of self-reflection and the need for a critical examination of the forces that shape teachers' identities, ideals, beliefs, and ultimately their practices. While the issue of race and the ways in which race shapes our ideologies, beliefs, perceptions, and practices is very complex and is also sensitive due to the historical role in which race has and continues to play with regard to racism, discrimination, power, privilege, access, and hegemony--critical reflection, dialogue and action are essential elements to change.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

- Research Design: Narrative Inquiry
- Research Participants
- Interviews
- Analysis
- Criteria for Rigor/Member Checks
- IRB/Logistics/Etc.
- Conclusion

### **Research Design: Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is the methodology that I utilized during this research study. I collected data through the use of interviewing. The rationale for using this method of data collection was because the intent of this research study was to examine the lived experiences of teachers and how such experiences shaped their identities, perceptions, and ideologies. The main question in which this research study sought to examine was: How do teachers' identities and ideologies, as demonstrated by their values, beliefs, and perceptions, influence their decisions to remain in or leave urban classrooms? According to Clandinin & Connelly (2000): Narrative inquiry is:

A collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives both individual and social. (p.20)

Narrative inquiry was the chosen method to explore my research question because it allowed the participants to name their own realities through the conveying of their stories and by using Critical Race Theory, it gave me as researcher, the opportunity to analyze and retell their stories through my own reality as it relates to my personal experiences, interactions, interpretations, perceptions, and history.

One critique of narrative inquiry is the argument made by formalists which contends that people can never see themselves as they really are. As Clandinin & Connelly (2000) explained it:

Formalists say that the facts of the case, the experience one claims to have, or the data collected by empiricist researchers have little bearing on their claims. Persons, they argue, can never see themselves as they are because they are always something else; specifically, they are whatever social structure, ideology, theory, or framework is at work in the inquiry. Because narrative inquiry entails a

reconstruction of a person's experience in relation to others and to a social milieu, it is under suspicion as not representing the true context and the proper "postera" by formalists. (p.39)

To answer this argument posed by the formalists I make the following disclaimer: By no means am I asserting objectivity with this research study. In fact, it is my contention that it is impossible to be objective. So for the ontological question regarding how one determines what is true, or how one perceives their own reality, I argue that with regard to experiences, reality is largely based on perception. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) made this point clear when they stated:

We all, novice and experienced researchers alike, come to inquiry with views, attitudes, and ways of thinking about inquiry. These histories, these personal narratives of inquiry, may coincide with or cross a boundary to varying degrees with the actual inquiries that we undertake. Almost all of us--it is unimaginable that we could not---come to narrative inquiries with various versions of formalistic and reductionistic histories of inquiry. To the extent that this is true, we are forever struggling with personal tensions as we pursue narrative inquiry. (p.46)

As a researcher, I discuss my epistemological framework, my own experience, as well as my biases. Furthermore, Critical Race Theory rejects the notion of neutrality and objectivity and grounds epistemological understanding in the milieu of one's experience, which is contextually shaped by social constructions, historical factors, and personal experiences (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

### **Participants**

Teachers who taught in urban and suburban schools for 3 or more years, were the participants I solicited for this study. I used 4 participants, 2 of who taught in urban schools and 2 who taught in suburban schools. While teachers who were currently teaching (either in urban or suburban schools) were the majority of the participants I

sought out to utilize for this study, I was also open to interviewing former teachers who had left the teaching field entirely, although I did not have any who participated in my study.

I sought a diverse population of participants with regard to race, class, age, and gender, however given the demography of the current teaching population, it was not surprising that I ended up with all female participants, 2 of which classified themselves as Middle-Class and White, and 2 of which classified themselves as Middle-Class and African American. The research study took place over the period of two academic semesters.

I recruited subjects for this study by word-of-mouth. I had connections to teachers who worked both in urban and suburban schools and I began my recruitment with the assistance of these individuals. Snow-balling was then used as a means of acquiring more subjects. With regard to schools I classified as urban, I interviewed teachers who taught in the local urban district. With regard to schools I classified as suburban, I interviewed teachers who taught in the districts surrounding the urban district. The interviews were conducted with the teachers during times that were convenient with their schedules.

### **Interviews**

Individual interviews served as the primary mode of data collection for this research study. The rationale for using individual interviews in this study was to obtain a first-hand account of the experiences, ideologies, and perceptions directly from the participant as well as to give the participants an opportunity to provide an in-depth explanation of each of their responses. Interviews also posed the benefit of allowing the researcher to divert from the planned questions (if and when the situation called for it)

and probe deeper into a sentiment expressed by the respondent in a previous response. Patrick Dilley (2000) states, “We must be inquisitive, intrusive perhaps but always in a polite and questioning manner, and always with an ulterior motive, to ascertain the thoughts behind the respondents’ answers” (p.136). Individual interviews allowed me, as interviewer, an opportunity to develop a friendly, professional relationship with the interviewees, with the intention of making the participants feel comfortable so that it was possible to probe deeper into the logic and reasoning behind their responses in order to gain deeper insight into the participants’ experiences.

Each of the participants was interviewed three times throughout this research study. As a researcher, while I would self-identify as an indigenous-insider because I share and endorse many of the cultural values, perspectives, beliefs and knowledge within the African American community, of which most students attending urban schools belong, (Banks, 2006). As an African American woman, I did not want my race and gender to influence my participants’ responses in any way by making them feel as if they are obligated to give “politically correct” or colorblind responses due to fear of stereotype threat. According to Bowman (2007):

The literature on race-of-interviewer effects indicates that White respondents and Black respondents are both susceptible to race-of-interviewer effects. Hachett and Schuman (1975) noted that in cross-racial interviewing the process for both races seems to be one of avoiding responses that might offend the interviewer of the opposing race and of being frank (or at least franker) with interviewers of one’s own race (p.61).

Bowman goes on to state:

A recurring theme in the research findings is that interviewees are more likely to modify their answers to racially charged questions as their perceived embarrassment in answering the questions “incorrectly” increases (Bowman referencing Snook, 2004). Social desirability is generally thought to underlie the

propensity for interviewees to tailor their answers to meet the expectations of the interviewer and avoid embarrassment. (p.61)

As an African American woman conducting a study about identity, in which race and racism were salient factors, I was particularly confounded about the ways in which my racial identity would influence my experiences with my White participants, especially since we were initially strangers, having no prior interactions or experiences with one another. Prior to conducting this study, I thought about several ways to mitigate this race-of-the-interviewer effect such as having someone else (who was White) conduct the interviews or conducting the interviews over the telephone to make the participants more at ease and to lessen the effect of social desirability responses, however, ultimately, I decided against both of these tactics and sought to develop clear, meaningful relationships established over time with the participants as a means of eliciting honest and candid responses.

In addition, a partial pilot-study interview was also conducted prior to this proposal which provided valuable insight into considerations that were made with regard to the potential dilemma my identity as researcher would bear on how the interviewees responded and their level of comfort, honesty, and disclosure. The participant used for the pilot study classified herself as a White, middle-class woman in her late twenties and at the time of the interview, taught K-4 at an urban elementary school for three years. The interview occurred inside an open student lounge on campus and lasted approximately 50 minutes. This particular location was chosen because of its semi-quiet, relaxed and casual atmosphere. I felt that because the sensitive topic of race was the focus of our discussion, it was important to conduct the interview in a friendly, informal and laid-back environment. I chose to conduct the interview in a back corner of the

lounge to ensure the participant's privacy and confidentiality while simultaneously providing a comfortable setting.

A semi-structured interview format was used for this particular pilot study. Prior to conducting the interview, a list of open-ended questions that were specifically related to my research question was created (Refer to Appendix C for the Pilot Study Interview Questions). This list of questions was synchronized in an order that flowed well and that allowed me to establish a base of trust and understanding with the respondent prior to delving into questions that might be perceived as extremely sensitive.

All of the interview questions were written in such a way that they asked the respondent to explain or describe her experiences and/or feelings about race and education and were carefully constructed with the intent of avoiding short responses and/or simple yes/no dichotomous answers. Because the topic of discussion surrounded race and education, I was aware that all of the questions were of a sensitive nature, and consequently, began the interview with what I perceived to be a relatively “lighter” question which asked about the respondent’s life experiences with people of diverse races and cultures in an effort to put the participant at ease. After reflecting upon this opening question in hindsight, I realized that I assumed that this would be a relatively easy question to answer, however, I did not take into account the fact that perhaps my respondent may have had negative experiences with people of diverse races and cultures, and instead of putting the respondent at ease, the question may have inadvertently made the respondent uncomfortable from the start. As a result of this hindsight revelation, for this study, I've chosen to move this particular question to the second interview in order to



allow me sufficient time to establish a positive rapport with the participants so that they feel comfortable discussing such experiences that may be considered sensitive.

Another insight obtained from the pilot study interview was the importance of conducting the interview in a manner as to not influence the participants' responses. During the pilot-study interview, I would only respond to the participant's answers by nodding my head (with the effort of acknowledging to the participant that I was listening to her and writing down her responses) however, I was particularly careful not to respond verbally to any of her answers. This required a considerable amount of restraint on my behalf but I recognized the necessity of remaining within the confines of my role as researcher. Remaining within such boundaries is important for several reasons including the fact that it does not lead the respondent to answer the question in any particular manner based on hints or comments from the researcher, it keeps the focus of the investigation on the respondent and not the researcher, and lastly it is what is professionally expected. Remaining relatively confined and restricted also adheres to the rule of thumb given to interviewers by Dilley (2000) which says that interviewers should talk 20 percent of the time during the interview and listen 80 percent of the time.

Lastly, based on the fact that the participant used in the pilot study was very open and responded extensively to most of the questions during the interview, for this dissertation study, I reduced the number of questions that I asked during each interview to approximately ten and I structured the interview in a way that allowed the participants sufficient time to reflect and expound on their responses, if they so chose. Overall, the participant used in the pilot-study was a relatively easy subject to interview, however there were some awkward moments during the interview in which I felt uncomfortable

asking specific questions about race. This awkwardness arose because I had to remain within the confines of my role as researcher and was not able to offer any explanation or rationale regarding my questioning.

One means by which I sought to counter this potential dilemma was through the use of several interviews in order to establish a friendly relationship amongst myself and interviewee and to ensure a high level of comfort. A further means for counteracting this potential challenge was through formatting the interview questions in a manner that ensured that the majority of the lighter, opened-ended questions were incorporated in the first interview, and during the beginning sections of the subsequent interviews.

I probed into the participants' identities, ideologies, and commitment to teach in urban and suburban schools over the course of three interviews, which spanned the length of two academic semesters. The rationale for doing three separate interviews was to allow the interviewer the opportunity to establish a connection and rapport with the participants over time that would allow them to feel comfortable discussing topics such as their life experiences, as well as sensitive issues regarding race and ideology. The goal of the first interview was to get to know the teachers and to allow them to get to know me. Appendix A identifies the questions that were used during this first round of interviews.

The second interview was used to allow the participants the opportunity to discuss their life experiences. This interview was slightly more structured than the first in that the participant was asked specific questions regarding their life experiences. It was during this interview that I gained a deeper understanding with regard to the ways in which the participant's lived experiences shaped and/or influenced their identities and

ideologies, as demonstrated by their values, beliefs, and perceptions. This interview focused on the first sub question regarding the ideologies teachers hold with regard to race and how such ideologies connected to their commitment to teach in urban schools. Prior to asking the participant new questions in the second interview, I re-caped the responses given by the respondent during the first interview as a means of member-checking with the intent of ensuring that as the researcher of this study, I'd accurately captured the sentiments expressed by the participant. Appendix A identifies the questions that were used during this second round of interviews.

The third and final interview was used to discuss the educational experiences of the respondents. This interview focused on the second sub question of this study pertaining to the perceived emotional and or physical toils related to teaching in urban schools. During this interview I found out about the joys and challenges that these teachers faced while teaching in both urban and suburban schools. During this interview, I also probed more into topics such as why the respondent decided to teach rather than work in another career field, whether the respondent preferred to teach in an urban or suburban school, and whether the respondent would leave if given the opportunity to transfer schools. Prior to asking the participants new questions for the third interview, I again re-capped the prior interview by going over the responses given as a means of member-checking and ensuring that what I documented, accurately represented the respondents' answers. Appendix A identifies the questions that were used during this final round of interviews.

The third sub question of my research study: What roles do race, culture, socioeconomic status, and gender play in the participants' experiences with and

perceptions of students and families of color? was embedded throughout all three interviews. I expected the answer to this particular research question to be gleaned from a thorough analyses and synthesis of the themes extrapolated from all three interviews.

An audio recorder was used to record the interviews, rather than simply using hand-written notes. Audio recording was chosen as the primary means for recording the data over the use of hand-written notes because audio recording gives me the freedom to focus on the flow of the interview, rather than focusing on writing down the exact words of the participants. Furthermore, audio recording gave me the freedom to go back and re-play segments of the interview to make sure that I am accurately interpreting what the participants said.

### **Analysis**

Once transcribed, I analyzed the interviews by looking for patterns exhibited among the participants' responses. While open to all themes that emerged from the data, I use the diagram in Appendix B as a framework to analyze the data specifically for the ways in which the participants manifested their particular ideologies. Through the use of narrative inquiry, I examined the experiences of the participants using a three-dimensional inquiry space. I analyzed the data from a backward and forward perspective, an inward and outward perspective, and lastly from a historical context. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) defined this metaphorical three-dimensional space by stating:

studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places (p.50).

The data was analyzed from an inward perspective in that I looked at the internal conditions of the participants including their feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. The data was analyzed outwardly by looking at the existential

conditions (the environment) that may have played a role in the experiences of the participant. The data was analyzed backward and forward by examining the data with regard to the past, present, and future. (Clandinin & Connelly; 2000).

Because experience is temporal (Clandinin & Connelly;2000), it was essential to locate experiences in time and then examine the historical context of such experiences by analyzing the ways in which historical factors have played a role in the shaping of one's identity, perception, and ideologies. For example, a teacher born during the Baby Boom era may report very different experiences and may hold very different perceptions about race and culture than a teacher born during the Generation X era. It was important to recognize that just as it is necessary to locate experiences in time, it was also necessary to acknowledge that people themselves change over time. As stated by Clandinin & Connelly (2000)," We take for granted that people, at any point in time, are in a process of personal change and that from an educational point of view, it is important to be able to narrate the person in terms of the process" (p.30).

### **Criteria for Rigor/ Member Checks**

It is my hope and desire that the implications of this study will provide a deeper insight and understanding about race and education that will benefit students, teachers, and the educational community as a whole. I sought out other educational researchers that share the culture of the participants and whom were also familiar with my topic of study and theory, to serve as informants for this study. The informants took on the role as serving as a guide for assisting in my understanding of areas of which I may be unfamiliar with due to racial and cultural differences. Foley and Valenzuela (2000) discuss the importance of developing “anthropological confidants” that assist in

interpreting the research findings. Foley and Valenzuela state, "The point here is that good cultural critiques usually are based on a number of intimate, 'collaborative' relations with research subjects (p.223)."

Several safeguards were put into place to ensure that the data collected from this study are credible and dependable. Each participant was interviewed three times and the interviews were scheduled over the span of two semesters in order to establish a relationship between the participants and myself. The topics discussed as well as the depth of questioning used in the interviews were structured according to the participants level of comfort with the researcher, always ensuring that each interview begins with the lighter questions in order to put the participant at ease. By triangulating these sources-- the use of informants, and by re-capping what the respondent expressed in previous interviews as a means of ensuring that the researcher has accurately documented the points that were articulated, I established appropriate criteria for rigor in this study.

While the data collected of the participants doesn't change the analysis, the way in which the data is interpreted depends solely on the researcher and his or her own experiences, which intrinsically contributes to his or her theoretical paradigm (Shaffir,1999).

### **IRB/Logistics/ Etc.**

A University of Wisconsin Institutional Review Board (IRB) new study form was completed, which detailed the following: this study's title, investigators, type of review requested, funding, study locations, study duration, subject population, study involvement, informed consent documents, subject incentives/compensations, and

principal investigator and student principal investigator assurances. The new study form is attached in Appendix D.

A University of Wisconsin Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol summary was completed which outlines: the study's purpose and objective, recruitment and consent procedures, data collection and design, and potential risks and benefits associated with the subjects. The protocol summary is attached in Appendix D.

A University of Wisconsin Institutional Review Board (IRB) informed consent was created outlining general information about the research study to the participants including: a description of the study, study procedures, and any potential risks and benefits associated with the study. The consent ensures the confidentiality of the participants and informs the subjects about what happens to the data collected. In addition, this consent informs the participants that they are allowed to withdraw during any portion of the study if they so desire. All participants who choose to participate in this study will sign an informed consent, authorizing their participation in this study and my use of the data collected. The informed consent is attached in Appendix D.

Finally, the findings of this study were written up in the form of a dissertation. It took approximately two academic semesters to analyze the results of my findings, then write and prepare to defend my dissertation. From start (research proposal and IRB submission) to finish (dissertation defense), this research project took approximately 4 academic semesters to complete.

## **Conclusion**

Teacher attrition is an issue plaguing public schools across the nation. With over 50% of new teachers leaving the teaching profession within five years (Warshauer-Freedman & Apple p. 324 citing Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; and Ingersoll, 2003), students are suffering academically from this revolving door of educators. Several negative consequences can result from a high rate of teacher attrition including an increase in spending on teacher recruitment, a continual influx of new, inexperienced teachers in and out of the school system, and an increase in spending on professional development and teacher education activities and courses. All of these factors can have potentially devastating effects on the educational achievement of children who have no other choice but to attend such institutions of learning. This research is important because while there is a significant amount of research on teacher attrition, at the present time, there is little research examining how teachers' perceptions and ideologies on race play into their decision to remain in or leave urban and suburban schools. This research is very necessary because it can provide valuable insight into areas in need of change as we continue in the struggle of school reform and in closing the achievement gap.



## **Chapter 4--Findings**

- My Story
- The Research Participants
- Lauren's Story--"Selectively" Colorblind--Poverty Conscious
- Mackenzie's Story--Critical White Ally
- Karen's Story--Culturally Conscious--Critically Unconscious
- Nicole's Story--Challenging Myths, Creating Counter-Stories
- Summary of Findings for Chapter 4
- The Pain and Power of Identity and Ideologies
- Overview of Recommendations

### **Chapter 4--Findings**

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which teachers' values, beliefs, perceptions, and identities influence their decisions to remain in or leave urban classrooms. Narrative inquiry was used to investigate the ways in which identity factors (such as race, culture, socioeconomic status, and gender) influenced teachers' perceptions of students and families of color and issues of race and racism. This inquiry is significant because teachers undoubtedly have an indelible influence on the academic achievement and future success of students.

The main question this research study sought to examine was: How do teachers' identities and ideologies, as demonstrated by their values, beliefs, and perceptions, influence their decisions to remain in or leave urban classrooms?

#### **Sub Questions:**

- What ideologies do teachers hold with regard to race? How do these ideologies connect to their commitment to teach in urban schools?
- What roles do race, culture, socioeconomic status, and gender play in the participants' experiences with and perceptions of students and families of color?

### **My Story**

According to Banks (2006):

The culture, context, and the positionality of researchers influence their assumptions, questions, findings, and interpretations...Research reflects the political and social context as well as the epistemological journeys of researchers and scholars (p.780-791).

Given the fact that I am employing a critical race theoretical framework through which to analyze and interpret the findings of this study, it is important that I share my own personal story as a means of providing the political and social context surrounding my own epistemological journey and as a means of outlining any potential biases which may affect the research process. Ladson-Billings (2000) provided credence to this notion when she so eloquently stated:

Thus CRT asks the critical qualitative researcher to operate in a self-revelatory mode, to acknowledge the double (or multiple) consciousness in which she or he is operating. My decision to deploy a critical race theoretical framework in my scholarship is intimately linked to my understanding of the political and personal stake I have in the education of Black children. All of my "selves" are invested in this work--the self that is a researcher, the self that is a parent, the self that is a community member, the self that is a Black woman. No technical-rational approach to this work would yield the deeply textured, multifaceted work I attempt to do. Nor would a technical-rational approach allow for the "archaeology of knowledge" (Foucault, 1972) that is necessary to challenge the inequitable social, economic, and political positions that exist between the mainstream and the margins. (p.272)

Here Ladson-Billings is unapologetic in her resolve to invest "all of her selves" into the work in which she is so passionate about. She makes no claims of objectivity or neutrality and in fact rejects a technical-rational approach in her fight for equity.

Conducting this dissertation study has been a self-revelatory process for me in which I've learned as much or even more about myself than I have my participants. I've realized that in conducting a study in which I am so fervent, it has been difficult to restrain my own ideologies and assumptions. I used these very ideologies and assumptions to guide what I heard, the analysis of data, and my interpretations of my participants' narratives. Their narratives have been filtered through my own perceptions, experiences, and perspective.

People often ask me why I chose to pursue a career in education. My journey of becoming a teacher and my current pursuit of becoming a teacher educator has been shaped largely by my personal experiences, the experiences of my students, and my position within the broader context of our society. My experience as a student and as an educator has been one filled with many interactions, both positive and negative, that have formed my epistemological viewpoint and theoretical framework into that of a critical race theorist and an avid enthusiast of culturally relevant pedagogy.

I too, have invested all of my "selves" into this work. My self as a student, teacher, novice researcher, community member and my self as a Black woman. Here is my story...

### **Colorblind vs. Critically Conscious Ideologies About Race**

#### **"I Once Was Blind But Now I See"**

While I always knew that people were different with regard to their skin color, race was never a subject really brought up during my early childhood. I learned of Martin Luther King, Jr. at home and school and I knew that he was assassinated because of the color of his skin, but I believed that prejudice and hate of that nature was a thing of the past. Like many young African-American children, I was raised under a multicultural paradigm that focused mainly on the celebratory aspects of our culture. Perhaps this was my parents way of protecting my innocence and shielding me from the harsh realities of racism that I was sure to encounter soon enough. It wasn't until a very unfortunate incident, that I experienced race in a negative sense.

As a child, I attended Garden Holmes Elementary School on the north side of Milwaukee. While I actually lived in a suburban subdivision on the northwest side of the

Milwaukee in which my family was one of only a very few families of color in the entire neighborhood, my parents worked on the north side of Milwaukee, therefore, I attended the elementary school located in my grandparent's neighborhood, which is where I spent the majority of my childhood. Garden Holmes was a neighborhood school comprised of predominantly African-American students from lower socio-economic and working class families. Each year, the Milwaukee Police Department would come to our school with McGruff, the Crime Fighting Dog to discuss safety issues such as saying no to drugs, avoiding strangers, etc. It was the same two police officers who accompanied McGruff each year at our school, so as students, we became very familiar with them.

One day when I was about seven or eight years old, I accompanied my grandmother on a trip to the gas station. My grandfather worked at this particular gas station and the gas station's owner called my grandmother asking her to come in to the meet with him. According to the gas station's owner, my grandfather was supposed to have worked that day but had not come in and in addition, it appeared that some money from the gas station was missing. Upon arriving to the gas station with my grandmother, I immediately noticed that the police officer that had been called to the scene was one of the two police officer's that came to speak at our school each year with McGruff. I was delighted because as a child, I really believed that police officer's were nice, friendly, and were there to protect us. My grandmother and I walked over to the gas station's owner who was speaking with the officer and right before I was about to open my mouth to say hello to the officer and tell him that I remembered him from my school, I heard this White police officer yelling at the storeowner of Middle-Eastern descent, "Why did you hire a Nigger! I told you to never trust a Nigger! You should have never hired a

Nigger!” I was astounded. Here stood this officer of the law, whom I truly believed was a good person and there to protect me, shouting racial epithets of the worst kind to the storeowner about my grandfather and my race as a whole, directly in front of me and my grandmother. What could we do? I was only a little kid, and my grandmother; a middle-aged Black woman who was born and raised during the Jim Crow Era and the Civil Rights Movement, could say nothing in defense to this White man—an officer of the law. We felt so powerless. I could see the pain, hurt, humiliation and demoralization in my grandmother’s eyes. Turns out, my grandfather had absolutely nothing to do with the missing money. This event was truly an unwelcomed awakening because it was at that moment, that my eyes were opened to hate, racism, and bigotry that I had never known before. I no longer viewed the world through the same eyes.

### **Early Life**

Becoming an educator was not my career goal initially. From as far back as I can remember, I’ve always wanted to pursue a career in medicine. The whole notion of meritocracy was embedded into my mind very early on as I was constantly told by my parents, teachers, and society alike that if I went to school, studied diligently, earned good grades, and worked hard, I would be successful in pursuing anything in life that I set out to achieve. My parents clearly wanted to encourage and nurture my dreams for the future and simultaneously protect and shield me from the harsh realities of racism, hegemony, and inequity that are so pervasive within our society. While I was knowledgeable about the experiences of overt racism, prejudice, and discrimination that African Americans throughout history have fought against in the pursuit of equality, I

was less familiar with the institutional and systematic forces that have been established and maintained as a means of marginalization and oppression. While being innocently naïve, optimistic, and operating under blind faith, I seized the wisdom, advice, and pursuit of excellence that had been so deeply ingrained by my parents and teachers so long ago. I went to school, worked hard, studied eagerly and earned the best grades. I graduated at the top of my class, with a 4.0 grade point average, and became the first African American Valedictorian in the history of my high school.

As I reflect on my educational experience, race and class issues were present throughout my schooling in both subtle and overt ways. One of the reasons that I decided to devote my career to the field of education was due to the experiences I had with my teachers and peers throughout my educational journey. My high school and college experiences are most memorable because it was during these times that I experienced racism, classism, and sexism at its best. Vincent High School was pretty diverse during my high school years of the late 1990s. In 1999, my graduating class was approximately 40% White, 50% Black, and 10% Native-American, Latino, and Asian-American. My high school peers were very close for the most part. There was not much class, gender or racial separation and tension amongst us—we all were friends. It didn't matter if you were black, white, male, female, middle-class or working class.

Having no other comparison against my education, I believed that most of my teachers were great, taught effectively, and that I learned a lot—however, my 9<sup>th</sup> grade Civics teacher, Ms. P. was a different case. Ms. P's class was a ninth grade citizenship course of approximately 25-30 students of mixed academic ability and a teacher who had been in the school system for a considerable amount of time. In a course in which

students should have been learning of their rights as citizens of the United States, as well as the laws governing our system, students were given book work daily, allowed to socialize with friends, chitchat about non-educationally related subject matters, and never taught the content within the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards.

This is how I recall my ninth grade citizenship class, taught by Ms. P. As a student in this chaotic class of non-learning, day after day I squandered my time away gossiping with friends, making weekend plans, talking about TV shows, music, movies, what happened during lunchtime, fashion, etc.; I did not realize that in the same class that we were supposed to be learning about our rights as U.S. Citizens, we were being robbed of our natural rights as students to have a decent education. As a fourteen year old, I didn't realize immediately that I wasn't learning anything in this class, after all, *I thought* I was having fun--I came to class each day, was given book work to do, searched for the answers in the text while socializing without actually reading the text, and handed in the work. What was the outcome of all of my socializing and bookwork-- an "A" both semesters in Ms. P's class. What was the true outcome of all of my socializing and bookwork-- not learning anything in this class and today, a feeling that I still lack information when it comes to my knowledge of the law.

One day, after many months in Ms. P's class of non-learning, it finally occurred to me that we hadn't learned anything all year (before this, I don't think I'd given it much thought—I produced the work, I got an "A"). Upon this epiphany that our teacher had essentially been a highly paid babysitter to a class of 25-30 ninth graders, I raised my hand and said, "Ms. P, why is it that you've never gotten up to teach the class? Why is it that we've learned nothing this year?" Ms. P's response, "I don't teach ninth



graders. I never teach ninth graders. You all are incapable of learning!” Needless to say, my classmates and I were literally dumbfounded, outraged and ashamed. Outraged because our *TEACHER*, the person our parents entrusted to help educate us, believed we were incapable of learning. We were ashamed, because it was nearly the end of the school year, and it took us all year to realize that we had been treated unfairly and stripped of our educational learning opportunity. Several days later, Ms. P brought in a bucket of vanilla ice cream for the students as a “treat.” Needless to say, I didn't eat the ice cream. I felt insulted that this teacher who told me and my classmates to our faces that we were incapable of learning, then tried to shut us up and bribe us with ice cream. It was in this moment that I was awakened to the fact that it was my personal responsibility to make sure that I learned as much as possible during each given learning opportunity. I knew that we had been wronged and discriminated against, either due to race, class, or both, yet, felt powerless and partially responsible for this situation.

Because I was a self-starter, relatively smart and never needed much help with my schoolwork, my parent's never questioned what I was learning in this class. Even after recognizing this injustice, I still did not go to my parents to inform them of it because I knew it would mean serious repercussions for Ms. P. I cared about Ms. P. and her job status, even when she could care less about the future of her students. Of course, I now realize that by allowing her to stay in this teaching position, I allowed her to continue the cycle and go through the system while doing hundreds of other students a disservice. The next year, Ms. P didn't return to our school. One positive thing that resulted from this experience, is that from that point on, I challenged my teachers when I felt the work was watered-down or below my potential for learning. This incident impelled my journey

towards becoming critically conscious with regard to matters of race, class, and equity. As a teacher, I began each school year by sharing this story about my ninth grade citizenship class with my students in an effort to challenge them to become critically conscious with regard to their learning opportunities.

There are two distinct events that I recall experiencing my Senior year of high school which involved overt racism. My high school only offered 4 Advanced Placement courses in which we could take to earn college credit: AP World History, AP Calculus, AP Statistics, and AP English. I had taken the AP Statistics and AP Calculus courses during my Junior Year and I signed up of the AP English and AP World History courses my Senior Year. At this point, I was ranked # 1 in my class, along with another student, a white male, whom I will refer to as Matt. Mr. C., the AP English teacher, sent word to me via several students that I had better drop his course before it even began because he was assuring me that if I remained on his class list, I would not earn an “A” in his class—no matter how smart I was or how hard I worked. What was I to do? What could I do? Out of fear, because I knew Mr. C. was very earnest in his intent to carry out his threat, I dropped the class and took another English class—again allowing another person to assert their authority, “superiority” and power over me through intimidation and vile threats. I would often see Mr. C. as I had to walk directly pass his class daily to my other English class, and from his malicious stares, I knew he had every intention to carry out his threat had I remained on his class list. Yet I told no one about it.

I learned many years later, after recounting this incident with the principal, that at the end of the school year, Matt's parents' actually scheduled a meeting with the principal and other school officials because they didn't think I "deserved" to be Valedictorian

because I didn't take AP English--even though Matt, who had then fallen to the #2 class rank didn't take AP Statistics--a course in which I took and earned an A. Up until this point, the Principal herself was unaware of the context surrounding the situation and the actual reason as to why I had initially signed up for AP English, but later dropped the course before it began. As a young, high school student, I allowed this challenge to my intelligence to go unquestioned, all as a means of not wanting to incite the uproar that was sure to follow had Mr. C.'s threats been revealed. Today, I ask myself why did I remain silent in the face of this blatant racism, protecting the perpetrator? Why did I go above and beyond, to make sure that Mr. C. didn't face repercussions for his actions?

The other racist event that occurred my senior year involved Mr. S., my 12<sup>th</sup> grade AP World History Teacher. Mr. S. made the remark to me in front of my entire class that the only reason that I was Valedictorian was because I “kissed-ass”—not because I was smart. Mr. S. liked to joke around, and he made this comment in a half-jokingly manner, however, something within me knew that this time, he was not joking at all and that he really meant this statement. At this point, I was tired of being intimidated and feeling like I always had to prove myself and my intelligence because I was ranked # 1 in my class. I responded to Mr. S. that I had earned my class ranking through hard work and that I had not and would not kiss any teacher's ass for a grade. He went on and continued to taunt me with his inferiority remarks until finally I told him to kiss my ass. My response to Mr. S. was by no means a reflection of the way in which I was raised. My parents raised me to show respect to all adults and to inform them of any situations involving adults because they would confront the individual and handle the situation.

However, this time I had been pushed to the brink and in the process stooped down to Mr. S.'s level of immaturity.

After being embarrassed because I told him to "Kiss my ass!" Mr. S. became very angry and threatened to throw me out of class, but at this point, it didn't matter to me. I called his bluff and told him to PLEASE throw me out of class because I was going straight to the principal's office to call my parents and inform them of this incident. Mr. S. immediately drew back into his "playful", joking-mode and tried to calm me down.

The use and belief in racial stereotyping was apparent in each of these three cases involving my high school teachers. Their sentiments, " You all are incapable of learning!" "You will not earn an A in this course, no matter how smart you are or how hard you work!" and "The only reason you are Valedictorian is because you kiss ass--not because you are smart!" all carried underlying convictions that these teachers believed that people of color, African Americans in particular, were intellectually inferior. Solorzano (1997)states that these racial stereotypes are used to paint a picture of inferiority when it comes people of color and matters of crime, welfare, drugs, and immigration and to justify a number of positions in education, such as:

- (1) having low educational and occupational expectations for Students of Color;
- (2) placing Students of Color in separate schools, and in some cases, separate classrooms within schools;
- (3) remediating the curriculum and pedagogy for Students of Color;
- (4) maintaining segregated communities and facilities for People of Color; and
- (5) expecting Students of Color to one day occupy certain types and levels of occupations. (p. 9-10)

The summation of my overall high school experience is reflective of these racial stereotypes and low educational and occupational expectations set for lower and working class students and students of color described by Solorzano (1997). Ranging from the poor to mediocre curricula and the fact that my high school only offered four Advanced Placement courses, to the daily interactions we had with our teachers, one could reasonably consider whether we were being set up for success or failure in life.

Ms. P. obviously felt justified in her remediation of the curriculum by giving my class book work on a daily basis and refusing to teach altogether because of her expressed beliefs in our intellectual inferiority. One could also question whether Ms. P. would have openly espoused those same sentiments had she been teaching in a majority White, middle-class suburban school. Mr. C. obviously felt justified in his conveyance of threats to me via several students on several different occasions, using subtle intimidation as an effective means for forcing me to drop his course. Similarly, Mr. S. clearly didn't expect me to challenge his authority after he expressed his racist remarks. While I knew that these were all cases of blatant racism, I still said nothing to my parents. Now, in retrospect, I realize that I should have told my parents each and every time I had such experiences, however at the time, I thought it was better to protect the teachers because I knew it would cause a lot of trouble for them had my parents become involved; yet I was willing to protect them and be victimized. If I knew then what I know now, I would have handled these situations in a totally different manner.

### **Intersectionalities of Race, Class, and Gender**

My college experiences with racism were no different, except that I experienced it in more subtle ways from some of the professors and students and issues of sexism and

classism were added to the already unbearable element of racism. Being an African-American female majoring in the field of science, I was one of a few, if not *the only* African-American in the majority of my courses. I attended Marquette University for my undergraduate studies and I had to take many science laboratory courses, which involved a lot of group work. I believe that most of my peers were hesitant to work with me because they had this underlying assumption that I was not as smart as they were because I was either African-American, female, or both. I constantly felt that I had to prove myself and this tension weighed on me daily, having to work in an environment in which some of my peers had never worked with a person of color before, let alone befriended one.

One particular incident occurred during a service-learning project in one of my physics courses. I remember being put into a group in which we were to meet on our own time and devise an experiment in which we would perform at an "inner-city" urban school and subsequently receive extra credit. The "leader" of my group, Michelle, scheduled a meeting for our group to discuss our plans for the project. This meant an extra trip to campus for me because I was a commuter and did not live in the dormitories. After a long day of attending classes, going to work at my part-time job and studying, I came to this scheduled meeting late that evening and no one was there. After calling Michelle, I learned that she "forgot" to inform me that she and the other group members decided to reschedule the meeting to another day and time. Michelle gave me the new day and time that the group (minus myself) decided to meet. Again, I drove to campus (approximately 35 minutes from my home) to meet with the group and once again, no one showed. This was a blatant sign that this group did not want to work with me. And

although they had absolutely no knowledge of my skills, abilities, intellect, etc., they did not want me in their group.

It is through such personal experiences and many more unspoken, that I decided to devote my studies to the field of Education so that I may confront issues of race and equity in order to make a positive change for the future. As a teacher, I brought these experiences into the classroom with me. These experiences, the good and the bad, cultivated my deep commitment to my community and to students of color and propelled me to join the ranks and embark upon an educational journey for social justice to fight against the systemic and institutional mechanisms that have been established to make the educational system appear fair, neutral, and objective when in reality it is riddled with injustice, inequity and contradiction-- created and maintained to protect the investments and privileges of some, while marginalizing and oppressing others. Being critically aware of this has further propelled me on a journey of teacher education so that I may reach many more by making a difference in the lives of teachers who through teaching, invariably shape the lives and futures of our students.

### **My Experiences as a Teacher**

I am filled with many emotions as I reflect upon my experiences as a teacher. Over the course of my three years as a ninth and tenth grade science teacher, I built many positive relationships with my students, some which remain even to this very day. The relationships forged with my students helped me to become deeply invested in my fight for social justice. I remember the very first year that I taught, I had a veteran teacher tell me not to waste my time performing science experiments with my students because "these students" couldn't handle it. Because I was a young, inexperienced teacher, I

followed this advice, even though I knew in my heart something was terribly wrong with this line of thought; however, because this particular person was a veteran teacher, and head of the department that I was teaching, I thought that he knew better than me being that he had over twenty years of teaching experience and this was only my first year.

Needless to say, I had more issues with behavior that year than in my second and third years, and for this I will accept the majority of the responsibility. Upon serious reflection of my experience as a student in the Milwaukee Public School system and after witnessing the deficient ideologies held by some teachers and passed along to me that "these students" couldn't handle learning, I was taken back to my 9th grade year of high school and thought about Ms. P. I remembered her reason for not teaching us...she thought we couldn't handle it. Was I to become another highly paid babysitter like Ms. P. and this other veteran teacher? Would I fail my students in the same way I felt some teachers and the system alike failed me? I knew that I had something to offer my students that they were not receiving from many of their teachers. This epiphany prompted me to start anew.

I began my second and third years of teaching by setting the bar high from the first day of school. I worked deliberately to develop and maintain a positive relationship with my students and their families. I made a conscious effort to learn about my students not only academically but personally. In her three year examination of successful teachers of African American students, Ladson-Billings (1995) found that each of the teachers in her study was intentional in their decision to teach in a low-income, largely African American school district and each identified strongly with teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These teachers established fluid relationships with their students by



becoming active members in the communities in which they taught. They often attended community functions such as church services and their students' sporting events and frequently patronized resources in the community such as beauty parlors and retail stores (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These teachers "saw themselves as a part of the community and teaching as a way to give back to the community" (Ladson-Billings (1995), p.163).

In a similar fashion to the teachers in Ladson-Billings (1995) study, I too created a bond with my students that extended into the community. If my students had outside jobs, I found out where they worked. They would beam with pride whenever I showed up to their jobs to patronize the business, whether it was McDonald's, the Dollar Tree, the car wash, etc. Then they would come to school the next day and tell all of their classmates and friends that I'd come to their jobs to shop, eat, get my car washed, etc.. I attended their football games, basketball games, track meets, and watched them as they cheered for our school. The payoff was extraordinary. I was able to show my students that my care for them extended beyond my classroom. They knew from my actions, that teaching was more than just a job for me-- I had a vested interest in their lives and their futures. Everything was not perfect of course. I had my challenges with several students, but my successes definitely outweighed my hardships.

Writing this portion has been difficult because as I reflect upon all my successes, I can't help but to lament the students I loss along the way. I try to keep track of my students whom I know went to college and who are doing well. Unfortunately, through the news media and in communicating with former students, I also keep track of my students whose lives have taken a tragic or misfortunate turn. To my knowledge, I have several students who are in college and who are doing well. On the contrary, I currently

have two students who are in prison for committing homicide, one student who was a victim of homicide, and one student who took his own life through suicide.

I never sought out to "save" any of my students, but for me, teaching is a matter of life or death because schooling is a matter of life or death. Due to the lack of family resources, networks, and out of school experiences that can compensate for what is not offered in schools, "for children in poverty, schooling is a matter of life and death. They have no other realistic options for "making it" in American society" (Haberman, 1995, p.6). Through teaching, I've sought to aid in providing my students with a better chance for the future. How can these students have a better chance for the future when the odds are stacked against them?

I remember one of my students, Michael. Michael would come to class, sit in the back and recite the words to a famous rap song that glorified money and drug dealing. I could see that Michael was deeply invested in the sentiments behind these lyrics, after all, these lyrics and others alike were mere reflections of his everyday experiences in the 'hood. I could see that Michael was on a fast track toward trouble. After talking with Michael, I learned that all he really wanted was a job. He wanted to work so that he could help take care of himself and contribute to his family. I also knew Michael needed a mentor. I tried effortlessly to give Michael job leads and to find someone who would mentor him but it was to no avail. Michael eventually stopped coming to school toward the end of the school year and I later found out why. Michael's grandmother contacted me requesting that I write a letter of support on behalf of Michael to be submitted to a judge. Michael had been arrested. I never found out exactly what the charges were, but

below is a copy of the letter that I submitted on his behalf (His real name has been replaced with the pseudonym Michael Williams).

June 4, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter on behalf of Michael Williams. Michael was a student in my ninth grade biology class at Vincent High School. I've known Michael to be a student, possessing great potential; however, he is in dire need of a positive role model to assist him as he strives to achieve the high expectations set for him.

Michael was quiet and reserved at the beginning of the school year. I realized early on that Michael was full of potential, yet he needed to be motivated in order to successfully complete his assignments. Once Michael realized that he had people behind him that believed in his success, he became a self-starter and started to achieve a greater success.

I would often talk to Michael about his future and I noticed that it seemed as if he was fighting an inward battle, struggling between the pressures of the street and the inner city and the pressures of academic life. I knew that Michael needed a person in his life that could model success and positivity and thus motivate him to do likewise so I submitted his name to our guidance office to be included in a mentoring initiative headed by New Testament Baptist Church—however, no one ever contacted Michael regarding mentorship.

I made a promise to Michael that I would do all that I could to help him find a job in the city so that he could spend his time outside of school working and acquiring a good work ethic. At the beginning of this year, I sent Michael down to our guidance department to speak with our step- up coordinator, Ms. Fisher. Ms. Fisher provided Michael with mock job applications and tips on finding a job. Michael told me and Ms. Fisher that he had applied to numerous places within the community, The Pizza Shuttle being one of these locations and had not received a call back. This shows that Michael made an attempt to gain employment but was unsuccessful.

I am convinced that Michael is a good person who is lacking guidance and with the aid of family, educators, positive mentors and role models, as well as the

community to believe in and motivate him, will be a success within our community.

If you have any questions or if I could be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,

Ms. Talonda Lipsey  
Teacher, Vincent High School

I never heard what happen regarding Michael's case. While my teaching experience has been filled with many highs and lows, it is the relationships that I've built with my students that have been my strongest measure of success. As stated before, I never set out with the intention or desire to save my students, only to use my skills and abilities to provide them with a promise for a better future. It is with this same hope in a promise for a better future that I remain committed to urban education and social justice.

### **Conclusion**

I end this section in the same manner in which it began-- by reiterating that I have invested all of my "selves" into this research study. My self as a student, teacher, novice researcher, community member and my self as a Black woman. As such, my identity had a tremendous bearing on every aspect of this research process, from the specific questions that I sought to examine, to the ways in which I structured my interviews, right down to the very themes which emerged from the data. Because the very essence of our identity is rooted in the intersectionalities of our history, experiences, interpretations, perceptions, and interactions, it was essential that I too examine my own identity and the ways it impacted the research process.

It is the experiences that I shared, and many more that have played such an integral role in crafting my scholarship and my motivation as teacher and researcher to maintain high expectations of all teachers regardless of race, socio-economic status, gender, religious beliefs or any other facet of identity which indubitably shape who we are. As teachers, we have an indelible effect on the future success of our students. Therefore, it is our responsibility to examine our cultural positions and the ways in which they influence the academic outcomes of all students. My overall goal in conducting this research study was to challenge each of my participants to share their narratives in an effort to examine the ways in which the cultural positions of these teachers influenced the academic outcomes and future success of their students. Their narratives have been filtered and retold through my identity. Here are their stories...

### **The Research Participants**

This study sought to examine the lived experiences of four teachers and the ways in which their identities and ideologies impacted their experiences in urban and suburban schools. Two of the participants, Mackenzie and Lauren are White, middle-class women who teach in urban schools. The other two participants, Karen and Nicole are African-American women who teach in suburban schools.

Lauren is a White, married, middle-class mother of two children in her mid-thirties who has been teaching at an urban high school in the city of Milwaukee for 6 years. Some of Lauren's early childhood experiences have played a pivotal role in shaping her identity and her worldview.

Mackenzie is a single, elementary school teacher in her late twenties. She grew up in a small, rural town on the northern west border of Wisconsin and she and her sister were raised by their father in a middle-income neighborhood. Mackenzie chose to become an urban educator after feeling something was amiss with regard to her primary and secondary education and her overall life experience of growing up in a monolithic, bucolic town.

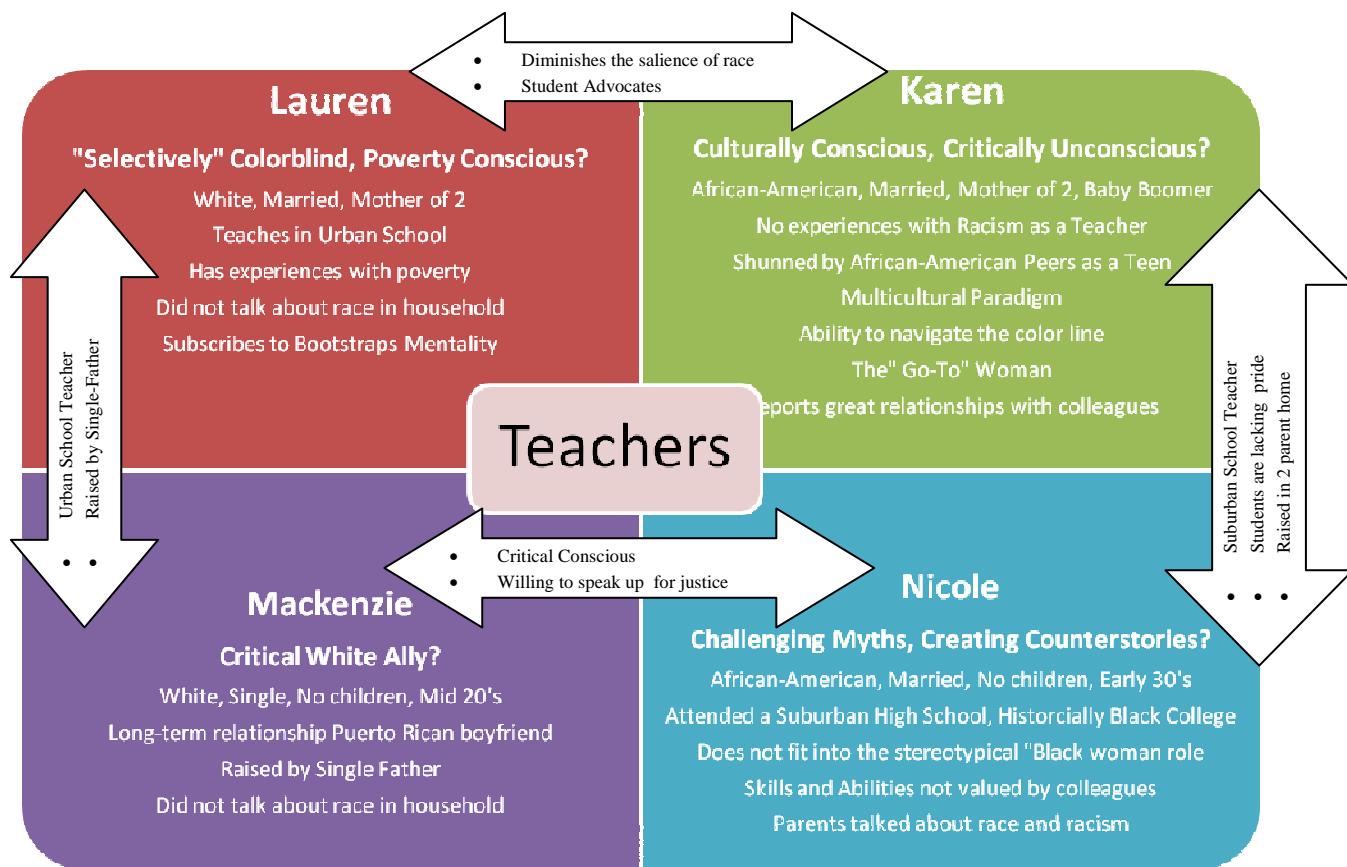
Karen is a middle class, married, African-American mother of two adult, college-educated children. Karen was born and raised in a small, rural farming community in the Midwest. As a baby boomer, Karen grew up during a time in American history when racial relations were strained and the fight for civil rights and equality was on. Karen was an elementary school teacher for a suburban school district on the outskirts of Milwaukee and recently retired after 25 years of service.

Nicole is a middle class, married, African-American woman who was born and raised on the Northwest side of Milwaukee. Nicole attended Milwaukee Public schools, which she described as being racially diverse, for her primary education and later switched to a suburban school on the outskirts of Milwaukee when she went to high school. Nicole currently teaches in a middle school in a suburban school district on the outskirts of Milwaukee.

The identities of the participants varied greatly, however there were some parallels in lived experiences, ideologies, and perceptions that emerged amongst the participants. Drawing on the tenets of Critical Race Theory, I analyze the ways in which the unique experiences of each of participant, have been instrumental in shaping their paradigms and perceptions about race. Each section talks about the participant with

regard to: the role in which their early life experiences played into shaping their identity and ideologies; particular experiences the participant has had regarding race and racism; the interactions and relationships each participants had with their students and the parents of their students; intersectionalities between race, class, and gender impact that identity and experiences of these participants; and whether these participants exhibit colorblind versus a critically conscious ideologies about race.

The chart below is a graphic representation giving a brief profile of these ladies and parallels which emerged as they shared their experiences over the course of three interviews. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of each of the participants.





## **Lauren's Story- "Selectively" Colorblind, Poverty Conscious**

Lauren is a White, married, middle-class mother of two children in her mid-thirties who has been teaching at an urban high school in the city of Milwaukee for 6 years. She holds both a Bachelors Degree and Masters Degree in Education. Lauren sought out an experience to teach in an urban environment. Initially she wanted to teach at Ethan Allen or in the prison system, but after receiving no job offers, she heard about a new charter school opening up in Milwaukee that worked with students who had been in and out of high schools. After meeting the principal, Lauren was invited to interview and subsequently teach at this new school. She has been teaching at this school since its inception and was instrumental in helping to craft the school's mission and vision statements, base rules and community agreements.

Lauren currently resides in a middle-class neighborhood on the south side of Milwaukee that is comprised mainly of city workers including fellow teachers, police officers, and fire fighters--all of whom are confined to the city per the residency requirements. Lauren's neighborhood is comprised mostly of White families, with very few African-American, Asian, or Latino families and closely resembles the suburban neighborhood in which she grew up for the majority of her life.

### **Colorblindness Vs. Critically Conscious Ideologies about Race**

Because Lauren and her siblings had to deal with the traumatic experience of being abandoned by their mother and spent the earlier part of their lives living in impoverished circumstances that were less than ideal, Lauren believes that she is able to relate to her students in a unique way. However, Lauren admits that she receives

backlash initially from most of her students as a direct result of her identity. Here are two separate instances in which Lauren talked about how she is perceived by her students:

Lauren: And I just like...and have always liked...and probably thought because I was middle income and thinking about the things that I went through, and my kids are going through the same thing, and I can relate to them. And that whole Black/White thing...like some of the kids think, "You don't know---cause you're White!" No, don't--don't judge me by *that* because...and I don't put it out there, but with certain kids I'll say, "I grew up and my mom...my mom left me. I came home and she was gone. Like...she just left me. I've slept on a hay stack because her boyfriend kicked us out of the house. I was in kindergarten. Imagine me sleeping under a plastic bag in a haystack in a rain storm because the boyfriend was too high and kicked me out... and they're [the students] like "you went through that" and I'm like, "Yeah! so don't judge me by this!" [Lauren gestures towards her face, referring to the color of her skin]. " I understand more than you think I do. Yes, some of your situations, I can never begin to imagine, but I can understand with you and you have to give me a chance!" (Personal Communication 10-25-11)

Lauren does not seem to understand the fact that her students are more than cognizant of the ways in which her skin color has made her privy to opportunities that have impacted her life in positive ways whereas their skin color has not afforded them such advantages and opportunities. Bonilla-Silva & Forman (2000) provided credence to this notion when they asserted:

Although some Whites acknowledge that minorities experience discrimination or racism, they still complain about reverse racism, affirmative action, and a number of other racially perceived policies. This occurs in part because in their view, racism is a phenomenon that affects few minorities or affects them in minor ways, and thus has little impact on the life chances of minorities, in particular, and American society more generally. For many Whites, racism is a matter of a few rotten apples such as David Duke, Mark Fuhrman, and the policeman who beat Rodney King rather than a 'system of social relations in which Whites typically have more access to the means of power, wealth, and esteem than Blacks [and other minorities]' (Hartman & Husband, 1974:48). Furthermore, Whites either do not understand or do not believe the new institutional, subtle, and racial character of the American racial structure (Bonilla-Silva and Lewis, 1999; Carmichael and

Hamilton, 1967; Hochschild, 1995; Jackman, 1994; Smith, 1995). These two factors combined may explain why Whites regard the complaints of minorities about discrimination as exaggerations or excuses. If Whites 'don't see' discrimination and do not understand the systemic racial character of our society (Kluegel & Smith, 1982, 1986), then they must interpret minorities' claims of discrimination as false (Essed, 1996) and blame minorities for their lower socioeconomic status (Kluegel, 1990). (p.68)

Lauren has tried to make a connection with her students, based on their socioeconomic status and some of the dire situations that are commonly experienced by people living in poverty, but she believes that many of her students do not give her a fair chance to relate to them and their experiences because they automatically discredit her based on her skin color alone. Here, she gives, an example:

Lauren: Umm...Because I definitely can relate to some of the stuff that has happened to them and some of the struggles. Because umm..like I said before, it was not a good situation for me and my sister and brother. So, umm...and when they hear that...and I don't just start telling my business, but when the kids get really like, "You don't know me, you don't know what I'm going through..." then I kind of pull them aside and say, "You know what, don't judge me just because you see this White face. That...these are...here's a few things that've happened to me. I...I can understand what you went through because it happened to me too." Umm...I say, you know, "I don't advertise that, I don't, you know...it's just something that makes me-- me. That I can relate. That I had a messed up childhood. And they did too, but guess what, I don't let it define me. Let it teach you how not to be as an adult. So...and I...everything bad that my birth mother did to me, I just took as a learning experience and said, I know not to do that to my kids. Or not to do...and I tell *them* that. You know, "Do this...you're having custody issues...you want your baby, do this. I'm telling you, this is what my parents did to get me...you know, that's what helped them in court. This is what helped them do whatever. (Personal Communication 11-3-11)

While some of the unfortunate experiences surrounding Lauren's early childhood may be deemed as an affirmative means of relating to some of her high school students, such experiences may also be regarded as limiting, in that they have distorted her perception, thus rendering her a "bootstraps mentality" and the false hope and understanding that if

she could make it out of such dire circumstances of poverty, anyone can. Several times throughout our three interviews, Lauren fell into the trap of dysconsciously "blaming the victim" for circumstances in which she failed to recognize the systemic structures of inequality and racism embedded within, that have created and sustained such conditions (King, 1991). Lauren, just could not seem to understand the role privilege played in helping her family overcome their impoverished circumstance and the ways in which racism plays in sustaining the plights of impoverished people of color. Furthermore, Lauren seems to have difficulty moving from the individual to the systemic. She cannot understand that when her students look at her, and say that she cannot understand their struggles, they're not seeing her from an individual perspective, but rather, view her as a representation of Whiteness and all of the beneficial properties that are associated with it. Solomon et al (2000) gave credence to this notion when they asserted:

The candidates' formation is left at the level of white people rather than moving to an understanding of systems of whiteness. This conflation of whiteness and white skin (Levine-Rasky, 2000) makes it difficult for students to move beyond their feelings of anger and frustration to develop a clearer understanding of the way in which whiteness is also a constructed category, and one that comes with significant forms of capital that is seldom afforded to marginalized groups. (p.159)

Lauren admitted that her understanding of past and present race relations in the United States has grown over the years as a direct result of the relationships she's established among her colleagues, and that these relationships have yielded some very powerful, ongoing conversations surrounding race. During my interviews, Lauren was able to acknowledge the fact that she still believed that racism was alive and well in today's society, however she did not seem to have a critical consciousness and understanding regarding the ever present systemic effects of racism. In questioning how

she's come to understand the past and present race relations in the United States, Lauren said:

Lauren: Umm...We have some good conversations at my school. And umm...A few of my teachers who are African-Americans say, "Well don't you think we deserve some reparations for what happened?" And I said, "Well, you got to remember that it didn't happen to *you*. I didn't do it to you. It was like *way* back in our ancestry that we...we never met them...we never...you know...so I said, If that's what *you feel that you need*...is it going to change anything? If the government gives you money, say...'yep, we did wrong, all these people did wrong to you, here's money'---is that going to change what happened to you? And umm....I said, you know..*my* family...my family didn't come over here until way after slavery and...from Ireland...I said, so I wasn't even a part of it. You know...but I think, it's still...in certain areas it's still the same. You know, they still have different feelings about different races and depending where you go Asians are bad...depending on where you go, you know, umm...Blacks are bad. And depending on where you go, Whites are bad. And so I think...I don't think anything has really changed. I think a lot of people put on a good front about how things have changed and how things should be...but I honestly don't think, you know... I see it every day. Coming over, and I say the bridge. You come over the bridge over the valley and it's like a completely different world.

Talonda: Right.

Lauren: And...I can't say who's at fault for seeing ..you know... houses boarded up. Umm...I know it means jobs aren't there, and I know that people aren't getting jobs specifically because of their race or ummm....but then I see education. That you know...my kids are coming to me and they can't read and so...umm...who's at fault? Well, if they had teachers that weren't doing for them, yeah! We're to blame. Or whoever did that, you know...we're supposed to prepare kids to succeed wherever. And if there's no jobs...but now it's different because of the economy, you know? So...there's a lot of...there's a lot of reasons why things stay the same and why certain things are different. And I think umm...anybody can get out of their...umm...where their place is in life...umm...I'm a perfect example. I think if I would've stayed with my birth mother, I probably would be in the situation as some of these kids. Ummm...But I teach...but thankfully my dad fought and fought and fought to get custody of me and take me out of that even though he struggled, he did what he...what was best for us. And umm...but, you know...I see ...I see the kids filling out job applications that they can't even write. And now, they're in high school. And now I'm....I don't want to say fix because I

don't fix kids...I help them learn. But you have to fix it. How do you....How am I gonna get you...okay you're a 1/2 credit shy of graduation, well...what good...what can I really do for you... at this point? Well, I have to teach you how to survive. I have to teach you the words, the language, the writing, how to read certain leases, things like that. Well, am I really doing you a service either? But after while, you have to go...you have to help them survive. And...and that's hard for me, you know...I...because I want them to learn to read. And I want them to learn to write, but after while you're like, "Well you're gonna leave here whether I like it or not, even though I don't think you're ready--because you have all of your graduation requirements...but you're still not ready." So...." (Personal Communication 11-3-11)

The fact that Lauren lacked a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which the prevalence of racism has had a historical impact on not only the educational plight, but the economic quandary of people of color in the United States is evident from her meritocratic viewpoints. In her discussions with her co-workers about reparations, Lauren seems to understand racism as a thing of the past with no historical remnants:

"Well, you got to remember that it didn't happen to *you*. I didn't do it to you. It was like *way* back in our ancestry that we...we never met them..." (Personal Communication 11-3-11).

To answer the question raised by Lauren of if the government "gave" African-Americans money, would that change what happened to us, although I do not have the authority to speak for the entire African-American race, I surmise that the majority of African-Americans would agree, that no amount of money could **ever** fully compensate for the amount of blood, sweat, and tears shed, and for the lives lost, during the enslavement of our ancestors and the subsequent struggle and fight for civil rights by our forefathers. Perhaps if Lauren had a better understanding of the ways in which the United States government historically "gave" White people money, she would have an alternate perspective with regard to how she views the economic plight of people of color.

Furthermore, did Lauren perceive her family's need to utilize the Food share Wisconsin Program for a period of time during her childhood as the government "giving" her family money?

According to Bell (1992):

Lulled by comforting racial stereotypes, fearful that blacks will unfairly get ahead of them, all too many whites respond to even the most dire reports of race-based disadvantage with either a sympathetic headshake or victim-blaming rationalizations. Both responses lead easily to the conclusion that contemporary complaints of racial discrimination are simply excuses put forward by people who are unable or unwilling to compete on an equal basis in a competitive society. (p.4-5)

While Lauren can physically "see" the difference in living conditions when she crosses the bridge from her residential community on the south side of Milwaukee to the community in which she teaches on the north side of Milwaukee, her attribution with regard to the cause and maintenance of these differences is deficient.

"And...I can't say who's at fault for seeing ..you know... houses boarded up. Umm...I know it means jobs aren't there, and I know that people aren't getting jobs specifically because of their race or ummm....but then I see education. That you know...my kids are coming to me and they can't read and so...umm...who's at fault?" (Personal Communication 11-3-11).

Here, Lauren tries to posit the condition of poverty to failed educational policy. Anyon's (2005) main thesis in *Radical Possibilities*, is that poverty is not a result of failed educational policy and reform or urban family dynamics, but is a direct result of the macroeconomic policies created and maintained by the U.S. government. Furthermore, the fact that Lauren refused to even question how the majority of her students of color could be funneled through the educational system all the way to the 12th grade without ever learning to read and write is indicative of her colorblindness and noncritical

understanding of the institutional functions of racism embedded within the educational system (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999).

Lauren did not see herself as having anything to do with the historical remnants of slavery:

"And umm....I said, you know..my family...my family didn't come over here until way after slavery and...from Ireland...I said, so I wasn't even a part of it" (Personal Communication 11-3-11)

Later in the dialogue, Lauren subscribed to the meritocratic notion of the "American Dream" as a solution to overcoming the plight of poverty, in the same manner in which she and her family were able to.

"And I think umm...anybody can get out of their...umm...where their place is in life...umm...I'm a perfect example. I think if I would've stayed with my birth mother, I probably would be in the situation as some of these kids. Ummm...But I teach...but thankfully my dad fought and fought and fought to get custody of me and take me out of that even though he struggled, he did what he...what was best for us." (Personal Communication 11-3-11)

Here, Lauren attributed her family's ability to overcome their economic hardship to her father's resilience and his ability to pull himself up by his bootstraps. She did not account for the role White privilege may have played into her family's triumph over poverty. As such, she holds firmly to the notion that anyone can overcome their lot in life if they just struggle and try hard.

### **Colorblind Notions/ Sincere Fictions**

When asked about whether she thinks racial inequity continues to persist today, Lauren had this to say:



Lauren: Yes. Not necessarily slavery. Umm, I mean there's...people say that there's like corporate slavery where there's less of a wage for Black employees and another wage for White employer. White employer, other than Black...you know, minorities aren't getting the same offers for that, I am...that's politics...I don't get into politics, but...I believe that that is true...that I'm sure in some businesses, the owner doesn't rent and nothing of course would happen with that...it's just that there wasn't a position for them. But umm...but yeah, I think it's still happening." (Personal Communication 11-3-11)

Lauren had no problem acknowledging the fact that racism and inequality was ever-present in today's society, but she could not seem to connect racism and inequality to the different outcomes she witnesses among people who live in poverty. She doesn't seem to be able to draw the link between the past and the present and how such issues as racism and inequality might affect the educational system. According to her statements, it appears that Lauren is still viewing inequity from an individualistic point and does not understand it from a systemic viewpoint. Lauren often expressed her assessment of racism, poverty and inequality in the form of "sincere fictions"-- a term coined by Feagin to refer to images of white merit and moral superiority that shape, usually unconsciously, the views and attitudes of many White Americans. According to L.A. Bell (2002):

these views are "sincere" in that Whites who espouse them truly believe themselves to be color blind people who do not discriminate against others. They are "fictions" in that they ignore the enduring realities of racism in the United States in favor of an optimistic tale of continuous progress and social reform that bolsters images of white decency and goodness (Scott, 1990; A. Thompson, 1998). White fictions about racism are not simply individual constructions but are supported by an entire social fabric that reinforces white dominance while concurrently professing commitment to equality and opportunity (D. Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1995). Their very sincerity makes them dangerous in that they prevent white people from questioning our own assumptions about race, recognizing the normative whiteness on which these assumptions are based, and consequently understanding structural racism and our own social responsibility to address it (p.237).

When asked directly whether she considered herself colorblind, Lauren had this to say:

Lauren: "Yes and No. Umm...Yes because I mean, all the kids I teach are Black. So...and I love that when they say, "You're just doing that because I'm Black!" Well...that's all that's here is Black. You know? And so...right...I am doing that because you are Black. Because you're the only...that's all that's here. And umm...but, no. I don't look at a person's skin and say, "Ooh, I...maybe I shouldn't like them because...I give everybody a fair shot. If I don't like you, it's because of your personality. It's not because you're Black, or you're Hispanic, or you're White. You know...umm..and the kids...the kids learn that---right off the bat. Like I said, the last time I had went to my principal about the Black/White thing and I said, "You know, I think they don't respect me simply cause I'm White!" And he's like, "You're probably right. Because they haven't had good experiences with White teachers." And so, usually for like the first week or so, they're a little hostile..standoffish...you know, they don't really know what to do...and then they kind of figure it out---that you know what, if I didn't want to be here, I wouldn't be here. And umm...during our...when the kids first come in, our new student process, umm...I tell them, I say, "Listen, I know what I got into when I signed up here. I picked this school. I picked you guys because you guys deserve just as good of a chance as anybody else does." And umm..you know, I said " I wasn't assigned here, I wasn't forced to be here, I.., I thoroughly enjoy working with you guys and this is why I picked here and so..." and that's only my advisees, they're the only ones that hear that. Or in my...we have small groups and so, and it's like different advisory groups kind of meet together, but if they're not in that, sometimes they don't hear that. And so umm...but like I said, I think it's fair that they do it, and at first, I really let it bother me. And then after while, I'm like, you know what, that's all they know. And so until they get to know me... and until they get to know that I'm real and genuine and why I'm there is for a good reason, that's there...they can do whatever they want. Not *whatever* they want, but you know, I understand why they might be a little hostile. So..." (Personal Communication 11-3-11).

Lauren's identity as a White woman in an urban school with all Black students has heightened her sensitivity with regard to race. What is particularly interesting in Lauren's case is that as a White woman, because she is the minority in her working environment, she has a unique paradigm regarding the way she perceives certain situations.

Several times throughout our three interviews, she often dysconsciously (King, 1991) posited herself as the victim of "reverse discrimination." Lauren stated that when she first began teaching at her school several years earlier, she would visit the principal's office upset because she did not think the students respected her simply because she was White. She has since come to understand that the initial vibe she gets from students, new students in particular, has less to do with her identity and more so to do with these students feeling out their new environment. What Lauren also needs to eventually come to recognize is that the racial skepticism that she receives from her students and their initial distrust of her, has less to do with her individually, but is a direct result of the collective identity of whiteness that she bears. Solomon et al. (2005) gave credence to this notion when they asserted:

The difficulty experienced on the part of the candidates to acknowledge the existence of alternative ideologies, can result in a focus on their own personal sense of suffering and oppression. The inclusion of the notion of reverse discrimination, or the maintenance of racism as individual aberrant acts for example, limits their ability to move their understanding of an existing situation away from the personal and the individual to effectively examine the underlying systemic and institutional structures that reinforce racism. The maintenance of this focus on the self, their feelings of discomfort, guilt, anger, frustration, etc., serves to ensure that there is limited space and energy to address the needs of other groups whose very existence is mired in oppression and inequity. (p.155)

Lauren acknowledged the fact that with regard to her knowledge and understanding of racism in the United States, she lacked a historical prism in which to filter her experiences as a White, middle-class woman when considering the alternative ideologies and experiences shared by people of color. As such, Lauren was more inclined to view racism from an individual stance and not from a systemic point of reference. Because Lauren did not consider herself a benefactor or perpetrator of racism, she often diverted

the focus of conversations of inequity and inequality based on race, to matters of class and meritocracy, anchored in her own experience of overcoming the economic barrier of growing up poor. This self-victimization and shifting of the focus often clouded Lauren's perspective and limited her from understanding the ways in racism has systemically impacted people of color as a collective whole.

## **Early Life**

Lauren was born and raised by her single mother on the north side of Milwaukee until she was in first grade. Her parents were separated and did not get along with one another. Lauren and her two siblings went to live with their father, who resided in a middle-class suburb right outside of Milwaukee, after being abruptly "abandoned" by their mother. Lauren remembered coming home from school one day and observing that everything in their apartment was gone and her mother was gone too.

Lauren: I mean I remember coming home from school one day and she was just not there. Everything was out of the house. So we came...my sister, I have a twin sister and I have an older brother...so we came home...two first graders and a third grader and there was nothing. So we went to school and she cleaned out the house and left. And we came home and there was nothing there--except a letter for my brother saying to go next door to the neighbors and call my dad and tell him to come get us. So it was kinda like...and my dad always tried to have a positive attitude about my birth mother. He was like "I loved her once enough to make three children." He never talked bad about her. That way...now that we're older, he'll say some more editorial, feeling things...but when we were growing up he never talked bad about her because he said that we had to make that decision on our own and we had to figure that out...and so if she wanted to see us...there were times when she didn't show up and if she did show up it was not a safe environment to be in. So after a while, it became our decisions not to go with her. But we made the decisions. And then it was, "Oh...you're keeping them from me." No, it's *us* not wanting to be there! We're old enough to understand what's going on. So yes and no. Yes we would [come to Milwaukee] but not with any regularity" (Personal Communication, 10-25-11).

Based on her traumatic experiences of neglect and abandonment by her mother, Lauren has internalized the inner city as being an unsafe place and a place of loss. One might question the ways in which Lauren's conscious decision to work in an urban setting is a reconciliation effort to heal and mend her painful childhood experiences. Thomas (2007) questioned the ways in which her pain, which resulted from her distancing from her Greek ethnicity has resurfaced emotionally in the ways in which she interacts with her students, Thomas (2007) stated:

My conflict and emotional pain have fed into my imagined alliance with students. Although I might share with some of my students the experience of being a child in an immigrant family, I do not share in their unique cultures or their experiences of racism and class marginality. I have projected my emotional pain on to their non-White lives in the hopes of saving them and myself.

Where do our oppressions intersect with those of our students? Where do they depart? How do the social locations (of power and powerlessness) of our individual students meet each other? Where do they depart? I believe we have only begun to ask ourselves these questions. In assuming that my sense of oppression legitimated my role as teacher without privilege, I conceptually missed how the racial differences between my students and me created distance and thwarted learning. ( Interrogating My White Privilege: "Appropriating Blackness" section, para. 9-10)

While Lauren believed that she could relate to her students from a class standpoint, she did not share in their experiences with race. Like Thomas, one could question whether Lauren was projecting her emotional pain of poverty, neglect, and abandonment on the non-White lives of her students in the hopes of saving them and herself and what effects if any, these projections had on her inability to see race as a factor and the ways in which she was privileged.

Upon reflection of her early life experiences with regard to race, Lauren recalled one distinct event that occurred during her early childhood when she and her siblings

lived in an inner city apartment complex on the North side of Milwaukee with their birth mother. Our dialogue regarding the experience went like this:

Lauren: And...umm...we had a kitchen...a metal kitchen in our...you know, like a side kitchen and our window was open, and there was no screen in the window and kids threw mud balls into our kitchen...and just trashed the [place].

Talonda: On \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_? (Talonda gives the cross-section of the location of Lauren's apartment)

Lauren.: Yep. They didn't come in, they just threw mud through the window.

Talonda: Really?

Lauren.: And so that was a racial thing too. So that was another racial thing that I remember.

Talonda: So you think they threw the mud into your window because you were White?

Lauren: Well, I don't know. But.... there were Black kids in our complex and they threw the mud into our apartment, into our room.

Talonda: Do you remember being the only White family?

Lauren.: That I don't remember. Like I...kind of have certain memories...certain memories...certain memories. Cause, you're like 5 and 6 you know. Umm...but yeah. I don't...I don't remember. But I do remember *that* because I remember coming in and just being like....(Lauren makes a facial gesture conveying a look of astonishment and shock.)

Lauren: You know...cause you heard 'em, and then you went in there and they were just like throwing mud in the house.

Talonda: They probably thought it was a game.

Lauren: Yeah...Um hmmm.... (Personal Communication, 11-3-11)

In this instance, Lauren viewed herself and her family as victims of a hate-crime, inflicted on her family by Black children, solely because of their race. And although Lauren couldn't recall whether her family was the only White family in the building, and, regardless of the fact that she had no knowledge of whether other (Black) residents were also victims of this mud ball disaster, Lauren automatically relegated this act to an act of racial prejudice. By offering an explanation for the children's behavior, I inadvertently shut down the conversation with my comment about the game. This neophyte researcher move gave Lauren the opportunity to dismiss the uncomfortable conversation. While I agree with her inference that this may have been brought on by race, I am most interested in how this instance is part of a pattern in Lauren's thinking about race. This story recounted by Lauren offers particular insight into Lauren's ideologies with regard to race and how she perceived herself, along with her family, as victims of racial discrimination. In her discussions of race, Lauren does not see whiteness as a privilege, but as a way she is marginalized by black students and adults"-- a theme that recurs several times throughout our 3 interviews and a point on which I will elaborate later.

After being abandoned by their mother when Lauren was in the first grade, Lauren and her siblings moved in with their father and attended the public school in their monolithic, middle-class suburb. With regard to finances, even though Lauren's father worked full-time, her family still struggled financially during her childhood and adolescence, even utilizing resources provided by the government including the Food share Wisconsin Program, which aids in helping low income families obtain nutritious food.

### **Personal Family Interactions Regarding Race**

Although Lauren teaches in an urban school district and believes that there are some good schools within the district, she chose to remove her son from the Milwaukee Public School system and had him transferred to a neighboring suburban school district on the outskirts of the city. Lauren rationalized her decision in this manner:

Lauren: Well you "heard" that MPS is horrible, horrible, horrible. And that only certain schools were good. And I've never gotten into politics...even now with the whole union thing---I've never been into that. We'll just all have to [see] as it comes and deal with it as it comes, but I guess what you hear is that it is horrible. But ummm...being in MPS, I remember that I didn't have a bad experience. But then again, I was in there a long time ago. But my son went to a MPS school and the only reason I took him out of a MPS school is because they were getting rid of all...they were losing so much funding. And his school was losing gym and library time...art and music and my son loves this. And he's a good student, so I cannot fault MPS for his education because at 2nd grade, he was reading at a 5th, almost 6th grade level. He's doing math at a 5th/6th grade level. So his basic building blocks and all that stuff is solid. But I couldn't ...my son loves that stuff...and I couldn't as a parent say, " Well because I'm a MPS teacher and I believe in MPS..." It's not about believing in MPS. It's about you taking these things away and I have an opportunity to get my kid what he likes...like he likes school but he also likes these other things. And if I can provide him an opportunity to get that, I have to do that. I mean..parents here...they get their choice program...they get to pick what school...you know...so *I'm* choosing to send him to (Suburban School District)...which is...you know...not that far from Milwaukee... It's not bad, because not all high schools or not all MPS schools are bad---it's some bad teachers. It's not the whole system. It's certain cogs in that system. (Personal Communication 11-3-11 )

The mere fact that due to budget cuts, her son's school had to cut programs and courses that are necessary and essential to educating children and providing them with the opportunity to gain upward mobility, is ample reason for Lauren to move her son outside of MPS. However, by focusing on budget cuts and not recognizing the role(s) race and segregation have on urban schools, Lauren exhibits a lack of racial consciousness. As a



White, educated, middle-class woman, married to a White, educated, middle-class man, Lauren's identity afforded her a particular privilege that is denied to others. With this privilege comes options. Lauren was able to simply remove her child from this failing, underfunded school system and place him in a highly resourced suburban school, without considering how her actions contributed to issues of white flight and the reduction of social capital in urban schools.

While no one begrudges Lauren's decision to choose better schooling options for her child, this is an example of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) in that, Lauren and her husband knew that their son would be afforded more intellectual property in this suburban school via the quality and quantity of the curriculum, imparted directly through the variety of highly rigorous course offerings (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). And, because of these better funded schools, their son's intellectual property would be undergirded with "real" property by way of more highly qualified teachers, computer and science labs, and state-of-the-art technology (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In sum, Lauren and her husband knew that the intellectual property, in addition to the "real" property afforded by a suburban school system, would guarantee their son's opportunity to learn. (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings and Tate(1995) provided credence to this notion when they contended:

The availability of "rich" (or enriched) intellectual property delimits what is now called "opportunity to learn"--the presumption that along with providing educational "standards" that detail what students should know and be able to do, they must have the material resources that support their learning. Thus, intellectual property must be undergirded by "real" property, that is science labs, computers and other state-of-the-art technologies, appropriately certified and prepared teachers. (p.54-55)

Moreover, Lauren and her husband's decision to move their son from MPS to a suburban school showed the "Rights to Use and Enjoyment" property function of whiteness in that their son had full access and extensive use of highly funded school property--most of which children of color attending Milwaukee Public Schools cannot access (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Conversely, Lauren has chosen to teach in an urban school because she sees a need for poor children to have good teachers. When asked how her family reacted to the idea of her teaching in an urban school, Lauren had this to say:

Lauren: Bad. Like even now my husband's friend is a police officer and he always ask if I have my (cover) on. And my dad is like 'You're so stupid'...and whatever. And I'm like 'You know what'... I... I will say that sometimes when I'm there at night I'm a little nervous, ummm...but like I said, my friends we go out...I go to the Comfort Zone...I go to 502...You know... I go with them and my friends are not stupid...like the guys say 'Call me when you get here...We're coming to get you. Don't walk by yourself. We're gonna come out and get you. Don't walk to your car by yourself'. But that's not just because it's a Black neighborhood. It's because they know that crime happens and they're very protective of each other. But ummm...my family was not thrilled with the idea of me teaching in such an area...and like I said, my husband's friend he's an officer right around that area so he kind of knows what's going on or whatever. He always kinda ribs back at me, 'You got your (cover) on and your knife? Are you gonna be there after night. Do you need a police escort to your car?' He jokes... Because he knows what's happening ...yeah, but they were not happy. And even now...they comment back and forth sometimes about like if I talk about a situation that I had (Personal Communication 10-25-11).

The response of Lauren's friends and family, to her working in an urban school is telling on many levels. First, both Lauren's father and her friend, who was a police officer, incited a raced-based fear, within Lauren that they most likely exaggerated to an even greater extent within Lauren's psyche, based on their status alone. Lauren is particularly close to her father and holds him in high regard due to the role that he's played in her life.

She has a great deal of respect for him, and it is therefore likely that he has a considerable amount of influence on her, hence, she's likely to take his advice and the things that he says, to heart. The fact that both of these influential men incited an exaggerated fear for Lauren's safety and well-being, to the point where her own father called her "stupid" for teaching in the inner-city of Milwaukee, and her police officer friend cautioned her to arm herself with a knife and wear a cover, is especially troublesome. It is particularly interesting that although her father and friend incite a fear within her based on race by explicitly linking crime, danger, and violence to the all Black neighborhood in which she teaches, Lauren consciously deflects these racist notions and continues to perceive these matters as socio-economic, not race based.

Take notice that, after admitting that, at times, she becomes nervous when she's at the school during the evening, Lauren's struggle to remain colorblind is demonstrated when she points out that she occasionally patronizes night clubs in the Black community with her Black friends, but the men in her family remain on high alert when she is in these surroundings. She doesn't list white clubs where she is asked to call for a ride when leaving. Thus, the connection between race and violence is mentally sealed, even though Lauren doesn't recognize it. The connection between crime, violence, and the inner-city is a commonsense tale of urban communities. Bell (1992) explains:

What we now call the "inner-city" is, in fact, the American equivalent of the South African homelands. Poverty is less the source than the status of men and women who, despised because of their race, seek refuge in self-rejection. Drug-related crime, teenaged parenthood, and disrupted and disrupting family life all are manifestations of a despair that feeds on self. That despair is bred anew each day by the images on ever-playing television sets, images confirming that theirs is the disgraceful form of living, not the only way people live. (p. 4)

The common sense tale of violence and crime as regular events in urban areas is exemplified in the way the police respond to urban school violence, and reinforces Lauren, and her family's, perceptions of the students and community where Lauren works. Lauren gave one such example:

Lauren: Or like we had a situation a few weeks back where it wasn't a student, it was the family member of a student ...[They]found out that a girl had jumped the student and the mom and the grandma...came up and they had a gun. And we called 911 and the police...it took over an hour and a half to respond. Now, if that was Brookfield... And I finally texted my friend and was like "WTF---Where are the cops! We called over an hour and a half ago saying that there was a gun in the parking lot at a high school! Where are the cops!" So, now...I just go right to him...I'm like 911...I don't even have to say...911...Within minutes, somebody's there. I don't know what he says on his end---I don't care what he says on his end...but he's like...You know, I put it on Facebook that I thought it was ridiculous. And he's like...the sad thing is that some of these dispatchers...they're not police officers so they don't know what to pick out...but I'm like, " gun, school" --those two words should not be in the same sentence. He's like, "It's sad...It's a sad reality that they choose--- what they tell the police officers, depends on how fast they respond. It's just ridiculous! (Personal Communication, 10-25-11)

Lauren was exact in her surmisal that had this been a school in the suburbs, and a report came in that there was a gun at a high school, the police response would have been immediate. Lauren's acknowledgement of this notion is interesting in that it raises the suggestion that she is NOT colorblind. Lauren was able to recognize the role race played in the different police response between urban neighborhoods, where the majority of the residents are people of color, and suburban neighborhoods, where the majority of the residents are White. For now, I'll describe Lauren as being "selectively colorblind." What gave Lauren the ability to acknowledge the salience of race in some situations but deny it in others? This is a question I will come back to later. It is also important to note that because of Lauren's identity (as a white, middle-class woman teaching in a Black,

impoverished neighborhood), she was able to receive an immediate response from law enforcement. While she viewed this as mere social connections based on her personal acquaintance with a police officer, Lauren was not able to recognize that this too, was an example of White privilege. Be that as it may, Lauren's white privilege worked to the benefit of many that day and may have possibly prevented a senseless act of violence.

### **Student/Parent Relationships**

Throughout our three interviews, Lauren gave repeated accounts of her willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty for her students. Here are several chronicles:

Lauren: I spend money on everything. When we first started, I used to put granola bars and trail mix...and whatever in my desk cause you could tell when kids --especially after a weekend or after a break they were hungry and they're proud. And now...I've learned things. I'll be like, 'You know what, don't be ashamed or afraid to ask. You don't have to ask up here...we can go in a side room...we have an amazing network of teachers here. We will try to figure something out to help you in any way we can.' And I keep trying to push off all of my baby's stuff. Because I have tons of baby stuff...and I'm not having any more. And my friends know now that I have teenage students and they need stuff for their babies. And now I'm a dumping ground for their stuff. They'll come and bring it to me. (Personal Communication 10-25-11)

Lauren: But the kids that generally need it, you know those kids. And those are the kids that I can seek out for help...like if they need help with something, I don't mind helping them because I know that they are appreciative of everything you give them. I had a student who had a baby and his baby boy was younger than [Lauren's daughter] by a couple of months and [Lauren's daughter] kind of stopped her things, before she really needed to. So I would have rice cereal...it was open, and it was safe. Or I would have jars of food that came in a pack and the pack was open, but the food wasn't opened. And this student was like, "Ms. \_\_\_\_\_, I'll take whatever you can give me." I had those Gerber puffs that [Lauren's daughter] had but grew out of them...he would take anything

literally because he knew that he needed it and if I was willing to give it to him, that it was safe...like, I would never hurt his baby. But that's why I say that you need to have that trust. If that trust hasn't been built with them, and they're maybe like, "Oh...She's White. Will she try to hurt my baby..." No...I would never try to hurt your baby! You know where I work every day. If something happened to your baby, you know where I'm gonna be every day. But yeah...That's my students. It's a mix." (Personal Communication 10-25-11).

Lauren was conscious of the subtle ways in which she could assist her students without making them feel inferior or like she was trying to rescue them. The fact that she was willing to donate items of need to her students, and make sure that they did not go hungry, were examples of the love and care that she possessed for them. This also reinforced the connection that Lauren had with her students through poverty, not race, thus allowing Lauren to remain colorblind. It is important to note that while Lauren may have been motivated by good intentions in her desire to assist her students living in poverty, her understanding regarding some of their responses to this endeavor was sometimes ill-informed and misguided. Here's one such example:

Lauren: Coats. I don't spend money on all the coats and stuff like that but friends give me coats and I bring them to school. And it frustrates me because you have coats and they're like, "Oh, that's not BabyPhat" or "That's not Coogi"

Talonda: Do they really say that?

Lauren: um hmmm...And it pisses me off. You do not understand how that irritates me. For their babies...For their children. And I'm like, they gave them to me for my kids, but I know next year I can go and get them a coat if my kid needs a coat next year. These kids need coats now. So why am I gonna hoard these coats when I don't need them right now. So I brought in a big tub of coats. And one teacher took a coat out of there. And that was after they'd been sitting there and no kid would take anything.

Talonda: So, I was gonna say---Is this just a few students or is this the majority?

Lauren: Well...No. And I say that it bothers me because sometimes the mind does not go to the right places. And when I'm giving you a free lunch, and I'm buying all of your school supplies--not me personally, the school...and we're buying your notebooks and your pens and we don't ask you for school fees because we know that a lot of kids, "supposedly" can't afford it...but you're coming in here with a bag of flamin' hots and 3 Pepsi's and you're hitting the vending machine for \$10.00 a day and ummm...your nails are done and your hair is done...and you got a \$500.00 cell phone in your hand and you've got tags hanging off your shirt saying that you paid \$200.00 for the shirt--that doesn't make sense to me. And that kind of bothers me sometimes. And then when you try to help them because they ask you for it--then it's not good enough. It's like---wait a second...well then sell your \$200.00 shirt...sell your \$500.00 Coach shoes that you're wearing...maybe then you can get your kid a BabyPhat coat. But I'm telling you right now--he's gonna stain it and you're gonna be pissed and you just wasted \$500.00 on a BabyPhat coat. So you try to tell them, "I'm wise in this area. I have two children. I know what's gonna happen you know." (Personal Communication 10-25-11).

While Lauren's reaction certainly deserves merit regarding the ungrateful attitude that some of her students may possess, Lauren did not acknowledge the systemic structures of society which prey upon the poor and impoverished and glorify designer labels and expensive material goods as emblems of respect, economic affluence, and cultural inclusion. Lipsitz (2006) provided credence to this notion when he contended:

More than low wages or high interest rates make ownership of Cadillacs and other commodities symbolic terrain for African-Americans; the obstacles to asset accumulation that they face are part of a structure of racialized power and unequal opportunity that pervades their personal experience but remains practically invisible in historical narratives about citizenship, economics, and power in the United States. (p.164-165)

So the form of wealth attainment and power for today's generation may not come in the form of a Cadillac, but it is in the ownership of others symbols of wealth including designer clothing, expensive jewelry, etc. Furthermore, this glorification in material wealth, further inscribes a hatred of the self, in people of color. In other words, unless

people own these particular "valued" material assets, their life is not of value. Let's take a look at some rap lyrics, which bears a huge influence on today's generation of teens, that reinforce self-hate and glorifies material wealth:

Heart throb? Never! - Black and ugly as ever!  
 However - I stay Coogi down to the socks  
 Rings and watch filled with rocks!"

-- Notorious B.I.G., 1995, "One More Chance"

In this small snippet from the forever immortalized 1995 rap song "One More Chance" by the late rapper known as Notorious B.I.G., the rapper raps about how he believes he is physically unappealing "Heart throb? Never!" and calls himself "Black and ugly as ever"-reinforcing a hatred of the self. The next word "However"--negates the reality of his self-hate and low self esteem by replacing this lack of self love and respect with wealth. Here's a more contemporary example of deleterious lyrics influencing today's generation of teens, made famous by rapper Kanye West in his 2012 song "Clique":

You know, white people get money, don't spend it  
 Or maybe they get money, buy a business  
 I rather buy 80 gold chains and go ign'ant  
 I know Spike Lee gone kill me but let me finish  
 Blame it on the pigment, we living no limits

-----Jay-Z, Big Sean, & Kanye West, 2012, "Clique"

This entire sound-bite reinforces commonly held negative stereotypes of African-Americans and juxtaposes them with commonly held positive stereotypes of White people. The first two lines, "You know, white people get money, don't spend it--Or maybe they get money, buy a business" " alludes to commonly stereotypes held of Whites as being autonomous, capitalistic, with values of delayed gratification (Allen, 1997; Bell, 1992a, 1992b; Haney-Lopez, 1996; Ignatiev, 1995; Kincheloe, 1999; Morrison, 1992; Tochluk, 2008). In contrast, Kanye directly juxtaposes these stereotypes



with those held of African Americans in the last three lines. He starts out by saying, "I rather buy 80 gold chains and go ign'ant." This perpetuates the stereotype of African Americans being stupid (what is the purpose of having 80 gold chains) and hedonistic, and Kanye knows this which is why he follows the line up by saying, "I know Spike Lee gone kill me but let me finish." In his last line, "Blame it on the pigment, we living no limits," West attributes his skin color for his lack of self-control as if this is an inherent feature of the African American race. Lauren could not understand that for some of her students, the mere ownership of these expensive commodities were symbols of wealth, status, and ultimately respect---things she possessed automatically, by way of her skin color alone. As Harris (1993) affirmed:

Possession--the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property--was defined to include only the cultural practices of whites. This definition laid the foundation for the idea that whiteness--that which whites alone possess--is valuable and is property. (p. 1721)

Lauren did not understand that her skin color in and of itself was a valuable asset and for some African Americans, who, as a people were once constructed *as property*, and who have a long history of not being afforded the opportunity to own property (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1998), their stake in materialism is a result of their subconscious longing to participate in a system which values and respects them (Morrison, 1970; Naylor, 1986). Because Lauren believed that she could relate to her students from a socio-economic standpoint, she could not understand the ways her identity and privilege distanced her from her students and the ways they perceived the world. On this Thomas (2007) said:

Pointing to my own ethic-class privilege has revealed to me that the distance that separates me from my students is greater than I imagined. As we, as White

educators, recognize this distance we break the spell of imagined alliances that obscures student subjectivity (ways of understanding the world that emanate from an individual or group's racial, ethnic, gender, and class positions). In terms of class, we wrongfully imagine that as educators with an anti-materialist bent we can relate to our students who we often assume to be impoverished. I remember being really concerned about a student who told me that he dreamed of having diamonds shaped in a pattern at the bottom of his swimming pool. Our students feel the distance as we cringe at these types of materialistic statements and encourage a different way of thinking. A perspective of many of our students is that a stance of anti-materialism is foolhardy in a world where wealth equals power and respect. For many of our students who encounter economic hardship, our ability to dismiss material wealth as a value might be offensive and confusing. (Interrogating My Ethnic-Class Privilege: Creating Imaginary Alliances section, para. 7)

This would have been a prime teachable moment for Lauren to engage in with her students had she an awareness of the functions of whiteness property and its historical ties to materialism. Instead, Lauren became offended by her students' response. Incomplete or misguided interpretations can serve to reinforce negative stereotypes about people of color.

### **Intersectionalities of Race, Class, & Gender**

This complex nature of Lauren's identity, her working environment, and how she perceives the world, carried into Lauren's experiences with her co-workers and the administrator at her school. When asked whether she ever recalled an incident involving racism or a racial incident that she's witnessed personally, heard about, or experienced in her work in schools, Lauren surprised me with her response. Lauren's school is relatively small compared to the other urban high schools in the city, and therefore is comprised of a relatively small population of students and a small staff. Although Lauren has been teaching at this school since its initial opening several years ago, she reported that most

of the Black staff members knew one another prior to working at this school and had already forged an inner-bond or "clique" that she feels she, and the other White teachers, are not a part of. Lauren feels that they have been excluded from this inner circle, but she doesn't view the closeness of these relationships as a result of her co-workers having a prior history with one another, she views it as a matter of race, and she even alludes to cronyism with regard to how they got their jobs . According to Lauren:

Lauren: The only people who aren't in "the clique" are the White teachers...and so...at times, you're like, "Well why do they keep going into his office. Why do they...you know..." And so maybe that...because we're not...like I said, it's always...it's someone who knows somebody and...of course...at any place, if you know somebody, you know they're a good employer, you know their...you like their style ...you want to hire them. But it's just, weird to see that the people who aren't in that inner circle, are all the people who aren't....they're...they're...that they're white. And everybody else is... (Personal Communication 11-3-11)

As a white woman in America, Lauren is probably used to being in the majority when it comes to her environment. In fact, this is one of the taken-for-granted privileges in McIntosh's "Invisible Knapsack." Lauren probably took for granted the fact that in most cases, she has the privilege to "arrange to be in the presence of people of her race most of the time" (McIntosh, 1998) if it is her desire. Lauren's perception is particularly interesting because it highlights her willingness to recognize the salience of race in instances where she thinks she is being marginalized and is a victim of discrimination. This provides credence to the notion that Lauren is "selectively" colorblind. She claims colorblindness in instances where she is forced to question the ways in which her identity has benefitted her in society. On this Ullucci & Battey (2011) commented:

Color blindness, according to Rosenberg (2004, p. 257), allows people to deny that "race, especially skin color has consequences for a person's status and well-being. That blindness to skin color and race remains a "privilege" available exclusively to White people." It is the refusal to acknowledge the costs and

benefits associated with one's racial and cultural identity. It provides cover for many Whites, who by claiming color blindness are able to dismiss their complicity in racial hierarchies. (Ullucci & Battey, 2011, p. 1196)

Furthermore, Lauren's insinuation that her colleagues were hired merely because of their race and not their merit raises questions of whether Lauren has an unconscious belief in the inferiority of Black teachers (Bell, 1995). This is a particularly interesting conundrum in that Lauren purportedly espouses a belief in meritocracy, yet in this instance, she questions the very nature as to how these teachers of color received their positions.

### **It Takes A Village**

Lauren shared a particular incident in which she and other staff members were, in fact, excluded based on their identity that left Lauren with feelings of isolation and dissention, further credence to the notion that Lauren is "selectively" colorblind. Lauren mentioned that she and the other White teachers are specifically excluded from forums held with the students on topics of race, racism and other critical issues. Here, Lauren explained the situation and spoke of her feelings regarding this particular situation:

Lauren: *And even...they kind of...they told the White teachers that we weren't allowed in...because they were having open discussion...they felt that the kids might not be open to discuss--like, like--you know--we're adults, and we...do you know what I'm saying?...like, umm...but they feel that, as kids, they may not be as open as they should be because of.. how can you...say stuff about White people if...like what's bothering her.*

Talonda: How do you feel about that? Because...

Lauren: That hurts... because, what? I'm good enough to teach now, but I'm not good enough to...and like I said, I'm pretty open and I don't take like...because I understand. I can't begin to like...to like...to internalize...like what they went through and all that, but like...I...I can understand the basic principles of what

happened and what...what difficulties they're facing. And why can't...don't you think this would help me? And you're asking them to learn these things and hopefully take it home, so why not teach me those things and hopefully take it home? Why can't I split it? (Personal Communication 11-3-11)

This particular narrative is significant in that it encapsulates the very ways in which Lauren's identity as a White, middle-class, "selectively" colorblind woman, informed her experiences of teaching in an urban school. Here, Lauren wrestled with the paradox of seeing herself as colorblind, when it came to her role as a teacher, with her ability to recognize the prominence of race whenever she felt that she had been marginalized as a direct result of her race. Thomas (2007) offers insight on how to contend with these two very polarizing notions: As Thomas (2007) asserted:

We can bridge the divide between White teachers and their non-White students by first recognizing that there is a distance between "us and them." This distance is based on a history of racial domination by Whites and, because of it, the feelings of marginality and pain that our students bring with them into the classroom. As individuals, who have built our sense of self around progressive ideals, it is difficult for us to recognize our White privilege because it suggests our complacency with racial domination. It is also difficult for us to recognize our class privilege because it is fused with our alternative ways of thinking. It is because of the privilege of education that we can transgress our society and embrace an alternative way of being in the world. (Interrogating My Ethnic-Class Privilege: Creating Imaginary Alliances section, para.1)

Because of the salience of race, the pervasiveness of racism, and the society in which we live, there will always be a divide based on race, however there is still hope in bridging this divide.

### **Summary**

Lauren clearly had the best intentions for her students' success. Her desire to teach in an inner city, urban school, demonstrated her commitment towards helping

students overcome obstacles, in the same manner as did she. Because Lauren could not fully comprehend the reality and prevalence of racism in our society, she held firmly to her belief in the notion of meritocracy as she relied heavily on her family's experience of overcoming the barrier of poverty. Because she viewed herself through the lens of poverty, it was difficult for Lauren to come to terms with her identity as it related to being privileged in America. This often led her to see herself as a victim and not as a person of privilege.

### **Mackenzie's Story-Critical White Ally**

Mackenzie is a single, elementary school teacher in her late twenties. She grew up in a small, rural town on the northern west border of Wisconsin near the state of Minnesota and she and her sister were raised by their father in a middle-income neighborhood. Growing up, Mackenzie's town was comprised mainly of farmland, but in recent years, has been developed into subdivisions inhabited by upper-middle class and wealthy residents. With regard to race, Mackenzie described the town she grew up in as "all-white." In fact, there was only one African-American in her entire high-school graduating class of students. He was adopted and his adoptive parents were White.

After high school, Mackenzie set out to explore life in an urban setting because she believed there was "more to life" than the reality created by her rural, middle-class upbringing. She moved to Milwaukee when she attended college and has remained a resident of Milwaukee for nearly a decade. Mackenzie chose to become an urban educator after feeling something was amiss with regard to her primary and secondary education and overall life experience growing up in a monolithic, bucolic town.

Mackenzie has always wanted to be a teacher. From the time she was a little girl, she had aspirations to teach. Mackenzie currently resides in a middle-class neighborhood on the east side of Milwaukee, bordering the shores of Lake Michigan. Her neighborhood is comprised mainly of city workers which include fellow teachers, police officers, and fire fighters--all who are confined to the city of Milwaukee per the residency requirements. With regard to race, her neighborhood is comprised mostly of White families, with very few African-American and Latino families and closely resembles the suburban neighborhood in which she grew up for the majority of her life.

## **Colorblindness Vs. Critically Conscious Ideologies about Race**

### **Willingness to Confront Strangers on Issues of Racism and Injustice**

Since moving to Milwaukee, Mackenzie has grown tremendously with regard to her understandings of racism and injustice and she has grown bold in her willingness to confront others in the face of these issues. Mackenzie told the story of how she reacted in one instance of racism that she's witnessed. Last winter, she was invited to go on a weekend trip to Wisconsin Dells with one of her friends. Mackenzie paid over \$100.00 dollars to stay in a cabin with her friend and several other people, all of whom were friends of Mackenzie's friend. Mackenzie described these people as being extremely racist. Mackenzie remembered them saying racist things throughout the night, things which Mackenzie refused to repeat during our interview. Mackenzie tried to ignore these comments and have a good time, but her breaking point came after she couldn't take hearing these comments any longer. In tears, she shouted, "I can't be around you people! You have no idea!" (Personal Communication 11-1-11). Mackenzie then gathered her things and left, driving all the way to Minneapolis to stay with friends.

Mackenzie was clearly appalled and maybe even embarrassed by whatever racists comments were being made. "They were saying...I...I can't even tell you what they were saying...I don't remember." (Personal Communication 11-1-11). Once she reached her breaking point, Mackenzie refused to remain silent in the face this racism. There were no people of color at this cabin. She could have easily said nothing, and ignored these ignorant, racist comments like so many people do, but for Mackenzie, remaining silent would've sent the sign that either she agreed with whatever was being said or that she couldn't change it.



Mackenzie's willingness to speak up in the face of racism and injustice extended beyond her personal interactions. Mackenzie was willing to confront racism on behalf of her students. She shared the story of confronting a tour guide when she and her students went on a fieldtrip to an environmental center in a rural part of Wisconsin. Mackenzie described this tour guide as being extremely condescending to her students. She described her students as being upbeat and very enthusiastic at the beginning of the fieldtrip, but after their encounter with this tour guide, their demeanors switched to being reserved and discouraged. This tour guide's condescension came in the form of the way in which he was interacting with the students and his assumption that these particular students of color had never been outdoors before and that they stayed indoors playing videogames all the time. On confronting this man, Mackenzie said:

Mackenzie: I said "You know...well, I play video games." I have a Wii at my house. And I'm like, and my kids have"...I'm like, "They know a lot... and if you would not talk *at* them---" And I wrote this on my evaluation... Oh I actually think I still have it (Mackenzie is looking for the evaluation she gave to the this Environmental Center). I wrote, "Do not talk at children. My children do not respond well to being talked at! And you were talking *at* my children! You were not...this was not them learning. You know, there are professors and people who are great in their field, that know what they're talking about, but *you were talking at them!*" And I...I did say that to him. I'm like, "You know...next time maybe you want to ask them questions---pose a question and then give the idea to see what it is they actually know. Because you said a lot of things today that my children already knew." I'm like, "They were classifying leaves while we were walking. Did you notice that--No!--Because you were thinking that they're '*urban children*.'" And I totally know what he was thinking cause I grew up...been there, done that! Umm..and so, you know...it's so clear. Just yesterday...it's a small little example of yesterday. And I just feel *so awful* for my kids because they have to like prove double I feel like...That they...like not only for our school but for their race. And for them being children. It's like," So...if these were a group of White kids, you would not have been talking to them like that...and *I know it! I know* you would not have. And I know the parents would have *totally* sassed you if that had happened--if they would have seen that--if you would have been

talking to the children like that!" And so...you know... I see it from my...from this perspective. And it's...I try to explain to my children like..."You know, people can act like that---but if--you almost have to like prove them *wrong*! That you're who you are and what you represent. You running on the burial ground---wasn't showing our school or your race or you being a child any...it wasn't doing you any good at all! And it made you look crazy." (Personal Communication 11-1-11)

In the quote above, Mackenzie clearly demonstrated her critical consciousness on several levels. First, Mackenzie challenged the racist implications underlying this tour guide's unmerited assessment that her student's spent the majority of their time staying indoors playing video games by informing the tour guide that she too owned a video gaming system--thus challenging the stereotype that people of color are the only consumers who enjoy video gaming. Secondly, Mackenzie challenged this tour guide's perception that her students had no background or experiential knowledge about the things they were learning about at the environmental center, simply because they were from an urban environment. Moreover, Mackenzie understood the racism embedded within the very way in which this tour guide communicated with her students-- speaking at them, as if they were not even human. She undoubtedly understood his actions as patronizing, denigrating, dehumanizing, and grounded in the his racist stereotypes and assumptions about people of color. As such, Mackenzie was bold and fearless to speak out against this disparaging behavior. In addition, Mackenzie not only felt the need to speak up on behalf of her students, she also valued developing a critical consciousness within her students, making them fully aware of the double consciousness (Du Bois, 2008) they would have to cope with throughout their lifetimes as a result of their race and how they are perceived in America.

Mackenzie made sure that her students understood that when they went out into the world, they were being judged through the eyes of other people, solely on the basis of their race and how their behavior had the potential to either disrupt or reinforce negative stereotypes. The onus to "be on your best behavior at all times because some racist person-- who has never had any real encounters with people of color might look at you and judge you by the way you're behaving," is a huge responsibility to put on a child, but it is not new and unfortunately it is a reality that people of color will have to contend with throughout their lifetime.

When asked whether she considered herself colorblind, Mackenzie gave an emphatic "No!". On this she said:

Mackenzie: Because I very much so...I use to. I use to think everyone...you're..."I'm colorblind--I don't see the difference...umm but, I think you need to be able to recognize the difference in order to do something about that difference---to like fight against it, you know? Umm...I'm trying to think like....I need...I need to recognize that I have *those* feelings ...like yesterday at Subway. Why did I all of a sudden think, oh now, I'm the only white person? You know? What--what made me all of a sudden think that? I need to...*I need to* consciously think okay, "I'm having these thoughts" in the first place. And what does that mean? And how should I react? Umm...so...definitely not. I definitely recognize it. And I...I grew up that way, so in all, I would say that everyone I grew up with claimed themselves to be colorblind.

Talonda: They did?

Mackenzie: Yeah. I think that's a huge ummm...red light or red flag...when somebody says they're colorblind because that's impossible! (Personal Communication 11-1-11).

Here, Mackenzie acknowledged the salience of race and the reality and prevalence of racism in our society (Bell, 1992; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). Mackenzie demonstrated her rejection of colorblind ideology as

she was able to recognize herself and her students as racialized beings (Bell, 1992; Milner, 2008).

### **Early Life**

Race was not a topic readily discussed in her household and having grown up in a monolithic environment, Mackenzie states that she did not really become conscious of race until later in life when she was in Junior High school. Mackenzie recounted one of her earliest experiences with race and how this particular experience resonated with her later in life.

Mackenzie: Ummm....I remember thinking like...actually, I remember when I was really, really little...this is gonna sound really bad, but...when I was really little, I remember driving through Minneapolis with my mom and my step-dad and I remember seeing ummm...a whole bunch of people on the street and they were African-American and I don't know... And I remember them locking the doors...and I remember hearing that sound, that (Mackenzie makes a loud click-click sound). That like, cluck-- you know, when all the doors lock in the car. I remember hearing that. And for some reason, that...I think I'll always remember. And I remember thinking, "Why would you do that?" But not without...I wasn't *critically* thinking about it, I just remember thinking, "That's...*weird*." or "That's *odd*. Why? ...Why did you just lock all the doors?" And I remember thinking that was strange. So that's probably one of my first memories ever.

Talonda: Did you...after like you said...you may not have internalized why they were locking the doors, but did you ...maybe internalize from that experience...a safety issue?

Mackenzie.: Yeah. For sure.

While they didn't say it verbally, by locking their car doors, Mackenzie's parents sent a very clear message about how they viewed people of color as being violent and a threat to their personal safety. This notion of violence and criminalization of people of color was more-than-likely exacerbated time and time again throughout Mackenzie's childhood from the depictions of African-Americans and other people of color by way of mass

media including television, cinema, magazines, social media, pop culture, etc.

(Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Although Mackenzie was unable to articulate it verbally at the time, she clearly internalized the meaning behind her parents' locking the car doors because this perception of violence carried over into her adulthood.

Mackenzie: So then...Okay, fast forward to when I'm 18 and I knew something...I think internally I always knew something was wrong with that but I couldn't express it and there was nobody around me that would even understand why I thought that was wrong or why I'd even...I couldn't verbalize or critically talk to anybody about that. Nor did I know that I wanted to.

(Mackenzie laughs nervously)

Mackenzie: And then when I was 18 and I moved to Milwaukee ummm....the very first time I got on a city bus, this *man*---African-American put...I remember sitting on the bus and he came and put...and I had my head up against the window... and it was like the back of the bus where you could get off and you could see people....there's no seats in front of you, it just that wall... and ummm...he came and put his middle finger up...in my face...and I don't know what...what....you know maybe he was feeling something...you know...my insecurities...because I was definitely uncomfortable, ummm...and I still didn't know why or anything like that, but I think, looking back now it's probably because...well when I was little, my parents locked the door when I saw my first Black person ever. And so, umm... who knows what he saw that I...at the time didn't. And then he...he stuck his middle finger up in my face---*like this close to my face* (Mackenzie puts her finger like an half inch away from her face--directly above her nose, in between her two eyes). And I was just like...(Mackenzie makes a gesture showing a stunned, frozen look on her face). And I didn't say...I mean, I was complete---I didn't say anything...But I don't know what I may have been presenting myself as on the bus...But I was by myself...it was winter...no, it was late fall...I think it was snowing because I had my winter jacket on---I remember that. And then I had my head up against the window and he got off, and then he started pounding the window where my head was...So who knows, it could have been just "a crazy" (Personal Communication 11-1-11).

(Mackenzie starts laughing after recalling the incident)

In this account, Mackenzie reflected on the way her internalized notions of associating African-Americans with violence and a threat to her personal safety spilled over from her childhood and manifested itself in her adulthood by way of her encounter with this stranger on the bus. Mackenzie's hindsight reflection about this incident indicates growth and a garnered wisdom that she's obtained through her prolonged immersion in the African-American community. In her reflection on the situation, she did not place blame on the African-American man, although his actions were indeed vulgar and unwarranted. Instead, Mackenzie looked at how she might have provoked his actions --" Who knows what he saw that I...at the time didn't." Mackenzie's willingness to challenge her perspective and see things from an alternative viewpoint further demonstrates her growth in critical consciousness. Mackenzie could have used this situation to exacerbate the negative stereotype of associating Black people with violence that she internalized as a child, instead, she viewed this incident as an individual act and did not attribute it to the entire African-American race.

### **Student/Parent Relationships**

Throughout each of our three interviews, Mackenzie's demeanor would often shift whenever she spoke her students. Her eyes would light up, the pitch of her voice would raise, her tone would lighten and her overall expression seemed to brighten whenever she reflected on her students. In recounting a special bond she formed with one particular student whose mother died the previous year, Mackenzie said:

Mackenzie: I had a child after his mother died. His mother died while the class was on a camping trip. The child was with the whole class. I wasn't there. This was in the summer. It was actually like right before I took over the class--so it was like that summer with his teacher before. But he was obviously like completely out of it for like the whole year last year. And he started smiling at

some point. With me---which was like totally odd. Ummm...and I think it was because I had given him in private...I wrote him a little note and put like a little journal in his backpack and said "This is for your mom. This is a journal to write to your mom. Nobody else needs to know about it. You can lock it up or whatever, but if you need to talk to your mom, you can write to her through this journal. And so if you're ever feeling down or whatever, just write about it in your journal." And throughout the whole year, I was able to say, "You know...I noticed that you're having a bad day, have you written to your mom lately?" and he would be like, "No." And I'd be like, "Go write to your mom. Go tell her what's going on and then come back and let's figure this out and get back to work." So....he'd go and write and get it all out and then come back and he'd smile and have like a smile on his face. And this child walks around like this all the time (*Mackenzie pulls her hair down over her face, indicating that the child walks around in a somewhat disheveled, dazed state*) and he has really long hair, but he like ran and smiled and I'm like.. (*Mackenzie has a look of astonishment on her face*) "Something so simple... You know... So I felt like that was a success. (*Mackenzie recounted this memory with a look of contentment and pride on her face and with a tone of joy in her voice*)

Talonda: So now was this particular child having problems academically throughout the year?

Mackenzie: Yeah. And he has special needs. And he has a disorder where he pulls out his hair. But I guess academically yes because he doesn't get his work done...not because he's not smart.

Talonda: Did you notice any change in him after writing in his journal?

Mackenzie: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. He would turn more work in. (Personal Communication 11-1-11)

*(Mackenzie squeals in excitement over the fact that she was able to have this measure of success and positive influence over not only the social and emotional, but academic achievement of this particular student).*

Here Mackenzie demonstrated several features of a culturally relevant teacher in urban schools. First, by getting to know this student and recognizing his needs, Mackenzie was able to build and sustain a relationship with him. As Ladson-Billings (1994) asserted,

"Instead of idiosyncratic and individualistic connections with certain students, these teachers work to assure each student of his or her individual importance" (p.66). Ladson-Billings (1994) goes on to say:

Such personal acknowledgements support the students' sense of self--they are seen as "real people" by their teacher.

These small acts of kindness and civility seem ordinary to those who have come to expect them as a fact of life. However, for many inner-city children, this is not the case. (p. 67)

By recognizing the devastating and tremendous impact that his mother's death had on this student and the void he must've experienced as a result, Mackenzie was able to build a connection with her student and provide him with a means of coping with this void through writing to his mother in this notebook. In addition, Mackenzie rejected deficit notions and viewed this student as smart, in spite of his academic challenges. This counters the discourse of special education and African American children (Blanchett, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Milner, 2008).

## **Intersectionalities of Race, Class, & Gender**

### **Personal Family Interactions Regarding Race**

While Mackenzie was very open towards speaking out against racism in many situations, particularly with strangers, she used the distancing strategy of silence when confronted by the racism exhibited by others, particularly, those white people whom were closest to her. Below are three separate accounts of interactions that Mackenzie had with family members and friends regarding race and racism. The first is a story in which Mackenzie tried to have an open dialogue with her father about race:



Mackenzie: For example, several years ago I went home over Christmas and was just trying to talk to my father about some of these issues that I'm seeing in these schools and the conversation ended with..."I didn't raise a racist daughter!" Because White culture thinks that by talking about the issues of race, class, culture, identity, gender...any of those things makes you a racist (Personal Communication 10-24-11).

Mackenzie didn't get far in her conversation with her father because he shut the conversation down by suggesting that simply talking about matters of race implies that one is racist. Another interaction involved Mackenzie witnessing an overt display of racism enacted by one of her cousins:

Mackenzie: There's so many stories. My...I don't ever remember my cousins or anybody like being--or saying racist things when I was younger...and now they all do. And that's my family. Umm...And they--actually, several weeks ago I posted something about Scott Walker being a jerk and my cousin was like, "Well you need to stop teaching in the hood schools and da da da..." And I'm like, "You don't know *where* I teach! I just said I teach in Milwaukee. You have no idea what that means or where!" Now, they all live in Minnesota but he grew up kind of, I guess, in a "not great" neighborhood in St. Paul and umm...he--he is totally racist. And he admits it. And he says, "Yeah--I am!" (slight pause)

Talonda: "Get over it."

Mackenzie.: Yeah, "Get over it." Basically. He owns a bar and umm...I've seen Black people walk in and they're like, "Hey!" He has like a picture of Barack Obama on the back of his wall---I mean, I don't... I've been to the bar for a benefit for my uncle... (Mackenzie begins to chuckle nervously).

Mackenzie: And when I saw umm...two...it was like a couple...A male/female Black couple walk into the bar and there was a picture of Barack Obama with the joker face on...I don't know if you've seen that before, but umm...I didn't notice it until they said something...I was really kind of way far back...and they were like, "That's not cool!" and he was like, "You don't like it--Get out!"

Talonda: Really?

Mackenzie: And they did. They just got up and left. And I'm like....

Mackenzie: So.....In my perspective today, I think it exists and people are more open to saying that they *are* racist then maybe ten years ago. (Personal Communication 10-24-11)

Mackenzie's overall response during the times in which she's witnessed racist behavior by her friends and family is related to the conduct exhibited by several White women in a study conducted by Case and Hemmings. According to Case and Hemmings (2005):

Several White women in their interviews talked about how their parents, grandparents, siblings, and significant others engaged in White racist talk by telling racially derogatory jokes, making blatantly racist comments or using racial slurs especially with reference to Black people. Such talk was much more typical among male relatives and acquaintances than it was among women (p.611).

Case and Hemmings (2005) go on to say:

Several other women recalled the racist talk of White men. Although they were offended by the talk, few did anything to challenge it. They retreated instead into silence. As one of them explained, "You notice. No one addresses it. [You] just ignore it."

By remaining silent in the face of it, the women hoped to silence racism in ways that would allow them to quietly distance themselves from racist White talk and head off potentially explosive confrontations. They suppressed their own antiracist views to avoid social disapproval, or they did so out of fear of what would happen to them if they appeared to be too supportive of, or intimate with, Black people. This was especially true for White women who had relationships with Black men. Such relationships, according to a woman who was dating a Black man, absolutely had to be hidden from White male relatives. (p.611).

Coincidentally (or not), Mackenzie, like some of the women in Case and Hemmings' (2005) study, was also involved in an interracial relationship, in that her significant other was a Puerto Rican male. So what made it possible for Mackenzie and these other women to have the courage to speak out in the face of racism in some cases, but remain silent during other situations? Case and Hemmings (2005) suggest that power dynamics

were a major influence affecting the women in their study. For example, one woman in the study refused to challenge her father's negative stereotypes about Black people, but spoke out when her brother made similar comments. This participant felt that she was on more equal standing with her sibling and thus felt more comfortable speaking out, but felt that her father's viewpoint outweighed her own, because he was her father, and consequently remained silent. This could be a plausible explanation as to why Mackenzie did not confront her male friends and the males in her family with the same vigor she exuded with strangers when confronted with racism.

Here's one final example of an incident involving racism and her father's friends:

Mackenzie: But...I *have* had the argument. Umm...Also earlier this year in June...No, it was like March or something---whenever it was all the...we were protesting and doing all that stuff and I went home and they just totally...I mean, my dad's friends like totally ripped into me. And just said...you know...and I totally stuck up and fought ...and I ended up just leaving, just bawling, crying...because I don't...they just...it was like twenty people against me. Twenty White people against me. (Mackenzie is now speaking in the voice of one of her aggressors) 'And I'm young and ignorant and I haven't learned anything about the world yet. The real world.' (Now back in her own reflecting voice) So... that was really hard for me. And I haven't really talked to any of them since. And like they avoided me...I went home in June with my boyfriend--who is Puerto Rican and umm...I went home with him...and he...they avoided me...completely. They wouldn't talk to me...Any of them. And I grew up with them...Like they *know* me.

Talonda: Do you think that they avoided you two fold: Do you think that they avoided you because of the last fallout so now they know where you stand?

Mackenzie: Umm hmmm...

Talonda: But do you think that...

Mackenzie: Because of \_\_\_\_\_(Mackenzie says the name of her boyfriend)?

Talonda: Yes. Because you had your Puerto Rican boyfriend with you?

Mackenzie: Umm...I don't think so. I think they just wanted to avoid me altogether. They were really...cause even when umm...cause he went out for like a drink with...cause he's also friends with some of my friends...they went out to the bar to get some after hours drinks or something and they still didn't talk to me. They wouldn't talk to me. They just avoided me...completely. So I really think it was just from the past conversations. (Personal Communication 11-1-11)

Mackenzie took on an activist stance in her participatory fight for union bargaining rights at our State's Capital and the recall effort of Governor Scott Walker during 2011.

Although this conflict reflects the gendered position of teachers more so than issues of race, it was a fight between the ideologically warring "haves and "have-nots" and the "deserving" versus "non-deserving" members of our society. Historically, union members have been traditionally liberal, democratic and members of the working and middle-class, whereas those opposed to unions have historically been upper class, conservative, and members of the Republican party. Mackenzie's participation in the fight for union rights demonstrated her willingness to fight against efforts to marginalize and oppress based on gender and socio-economic issues, not race.

### **Towards Progress: An Ally For Change**

Mackenzie expressed not only a willingness to confront her own ideologies about race, but spoke of a strong desire to help other people do the same.

Mackenzie: I wanted to be an urban educator...because I felt like something was missing with my education. Cause I grew up...I went to school with all white kids...and I felt like something was way off. I didn't know what...I couldn't explain it...and I learned after years...I started out thinking that I was going to "save" the poor children in Milwaukee and really...I feel like the opposite. I feel like they saved me. (Personal Communication 10-24-11)

This is another example of Mackenzie's demonstrated growth of her own critical consciousness that she's experienced over the course of her years in Milwaukee.

Mackenzie admitted to initially possessing a paternalistic outlook, by which she believed that through teaching, she could do her part in "saving" the poor, children of color in Milwaukee. Her feelings have since changed, and Mackenzie feels that her students inadvertently "saved" her from the deficit notions she dysconsciously held (King, 1991).

Paternalistic ideologies can have devastating effects because of their demeaning insinuations of pity, treatment of the oppressed as less than, and the taken-for-granted right by the perpetrators to determine how the sufferers should be treated. Furthermore, this savior mentality deflects the attention away from those who may be the cause of such suffering and casts the attention on those to be pitied (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001).

Mackenzie's demonstrated growth beyond her once paternalistic, liberalist viewpoint authenticates her understanding of the impossibility to solve racial issues without effective communication and a willingness to be critical of one's own self. This self-examination and reflection on race is a continuous process, with no end-point. As Milner (2003) pointed out:

Race reflection does not necessarily involve a final destination; rather, it concerns conscious, effortful thinking that invites teachers to continually and persistently reflect on themselves as racial beings in order to better understand themselves in relation to others' racial identities, issues, and experiences and reject commonly held beliefs and stereotypes. This knowledge of process and progress could help teachers fight against injustice and racism, barriers that often stifle the growth and learning of students of color. (p. 176)

As Mackenzie continues in her exploration and understanding of herself and the ways in which her identity and experiences inform her ideologies, she will be able to help others as they embark on this same journey of awareness. As a White ally, Mackenzie wondered whether she would be more useful teaching in a White suburban school,

because, given the larger population of White people, she might be able to have a greater influence. Mackenzie explained it in this manner:

Mackenzie: ... And I almost feel like I should be teaching in a White suburban school where I could actually become more of an influence on----White people.

Talonda: Really?

Mackenzie: Yeah...But...I mean I really love it here so...

Talonda: Explain that to me more.

Mackenzie: Because I feel like I was denied...I feel like a lot of times with my students...maybe it's a city thing, but I feel like a lot of times in Black culture they're really okay...in general...Black culture is very okay with identifying with Black culture and talking about the issues that surround their culture. And for me growing up, that was like..you just don't talk about that.

Talonda: White culture or Black culture?

Mackenzie: In White culture, you don't talk about White culture. And you don't talk about anybody else's culture because it's considered socially wrong--or that you're racist..... So I feel like at this point I *could* be more beneficial in an all White suburban school where the kids come from money like the people I grew up with...to really show them that it's okay to talk about these things...and that it doesn't make you racist...and that talking about them will really open you up and make you understand what really is going on. Because how can you understand the issues of a child living in poverty that is Black...how can you understand that if you don't talk or are not allowed to talk about it in the first place? (Personal Communication 10-24-11)

Just as Mackenzie recognized that the process of race reflection did not begin and end with her, she also understood that discussing issues of race did not begin and end with the Black community. This evolutionary process of change was evident in that there were still remnants of Mackenzie's former paternalistic notions that she must be cautious of in that she wanted to target kids who "come from money" to help them understand the

issues of a "child living in poverty that is Black." Mackenzie's paradigm of viewing race relations through the lens of "the disadvantaged" will only serve to reinforce to the White allies she's in search of, their need to understand race in order to "help" Black people, not their need to understand race as a means of helping themselves.

The savior mentality is dangerous in that it reproduces inequality through the privilege of constructing images of the "other" as deficient, in need of salvation (Thomas, 2007).

West (1993) was explicit in his caveat regarding the dangers surrounding the ways in which discussions of race are crafted when he asserted:

TO ENGAGE IN a serious discussion of race in America, we must begin not with the problems of black people but with the flaws of American society--flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes. How we set up the terms for discussing racial issues shapes our perception and response to these issues. As long as black people are viewed as a "them," the burden falls on blacks to do all the "cultural" and "moral" work necessary for healthy race relations. The implication is that only certain Americans can define what it means to be American--and the rest must simply "fit in." (p. 6-7)

Instead of focusing on naming the problem and how to fix it, the focus needs to be shifted to the cause of the problem and the factors obstructing the solutions (Howard, 1999; West, 1993). Thomas (2007), West,(1993) and Howard (1999) all point to the importance of thoroughly examining the paradigms through which we view race and craft discussions surrounding race and racism in that positing race and racism in certain ways places the onus of change solely on those who have been oppressed, and not those who have been privileged. Furthermore, envisioning one's role as "helping the other," only serves to passively reproduce paternalistic notions by rendering those victimized in need of a savior.

### **Summary**

Mackenzie's earlier experiences with race led her to: question the validity of her upbringing in a monolithic community, question her identity as a White woman living in a racialized country, and become an advocate by speaking out against racism on behalf of her students. In assessing the ways in which her own lived experiences influenced her teaching in an urban school, Mackenzie seemed honest in her quest to examine her ideologies and beliefs with regard to race and racism and in her desire to help others develop this same critical consciousness.

While Mackenzie was willing to speak out in the face of racism in some cases, she had not yet reached the point where her convictions denied her the privilege to remain silent in moments of discomfort. She has yet to reach the point where she is willing to speak the truth and take an anti-racist stance even if it means severing bonds with family, friends, colleagues, etc. What is important is her willingness to be able to self-reflect, create uncomfortable spaces regarding race and racism, question matters of injustice, and fight for equity on a continued basis.



## **Karen's Story-Culturally Conscious, Critically Unconscious**

Karen is a middle class, married, African-American mother of two adult, college-educated children. She and her husband, raised their children in a small suburb on the outskirts of Milwaukee. Although the small town where she currently resides is more racially diverse, it bears a strong resemblance to the small town in which she was raised.

Karen taught for several years in the state of Michigan after graduating from college before she and her husband, a Milwaukee native, decided to move back to Milwaukee. This move was perfect timing, in that, it occurred in the middle of a recruitment initiative stemming from a 1984 lawsuit waged by the Board of School Directors against 24 suburban Milwaukee school districts and the state of Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup> Upon returning to Milwaukee, Karen actually interviewed with 4 school districts, one of which included the Milwaukee Public Schools System. After weighing her options, Karen chose to take a position as an elementary school teacher in one of the suburban school districts. She remained in this particular school and district throughout her entire teaching tenure in the state of Wisconsin and has recently retired after 25 years of service.

### **Colorblindness Vs. Critically Conscious Ideologies about Race**

#### **Maintaining a Strong Sense of Identity and Pride**

Karen practiced the value of maintaining a strong connection to her racial and cultural heritage and instilled these very same values in her own children. She put her children in different activities tied to the African-American culture, such as having her

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<sup>1</sup> This lawsuit declared the public schools in the Milwaukee metropolitan area to be unconstitutionally segregated and ordered the development and implementation of a desegregation plan. Part of the resolution agreed upon involved a minority staff recruitment and retention initiative in which each school district had to make a good faith effort to seek and hire minority applicants for employment.

daughter take African dance lessons for many years. In addition, during the time in which their own children attended school in the suburban town in which they live, Karen and her husband would put on slideshows and presentations for their children's schools, as well as Karen's school, that focused on African-American history and culture. This was very important to Karen and her husband because they recognized the fact that, the rich history and legacy of people of color, particularly African-Americans, was oftentimes completely omitted from the history books and overall curriculum, and the times in which there was any mention made, the focus was solely on slavery and not the rich culture, heritage, and legacy of the African-American people.

While Karen and her husband put on these slideshows and presentations when she initially came to her school, this only lasted a few years because as Karen explained:

Karen: we in our own home...we felt--you feel pride in who you are. And it's not always about slavery. You see slavery, slavery, slavery...but that's not it.

Talonda: It doesn't tell the complete history.

Karen: Right. But the kids would see me. I did Black History Programs in the beginning when I first got there. But then I said, everybody else should be doing it too...so I'm not doing it anymore.

Talonda: Did you feel...I mean, was it a burden at times?

Karen: No because I wanted them to see what I was capable of. And where it could go and what they could do as well.

Talonda: But they just never caught on?

Karen: They did...some of them..the Italian teacher...she did it. She had plays and stuff all the time. Ummm...we would make announcements about ...during Black History Month...some quotes from famous Black authors or artists. Artists were recognized during Art History Month. You know...within the group. It wasn't like a single one, but different ones. Beard and I can't think of them all,

but they were recognized. The librarian did very good about getting books about minorities in the library. They were very conscious of that. (Personal Communication 6-11-12)

While it was clear that Karen wanted to instill a positive identity in her students, some might argue that she also displayed a semblance of colorblindness in that when discussing issues of race, it seemed that she only wanted to talk about the positive contributions of African-Americans and did not want to discuss the abhorrent practice of slavery and racism in America.

Based on the ideologies and sentiments expressed throughout our interview, Karen seemed to render more of a multicultural paradigm, which is in stark contrast to an antiracist paradigm. Based on the sentiments expressed in our interview, it seemed that Karen employed more of a human relations approach to multicultural education. The human relations approach to multicultural education is geared toward fostering positive interpersonal relationships among members of diverse groups in the classroom and strengthening the self-concept of each student (Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Teachers who apply this approach to multicultural education are generally concerned with how students feel and how they treat each other (Sleeter & Grant, 1987). These teachers typically view American society as fair and open and commonly attribute the cause of any disharmony exhibited among people, to untrue stereotypes and misunderstandings between people (Sleeter, 1993). The human relations approach to multicultural education is typically expressed throughout classrooms across the nation as the “food, festivities, and fun” approach. It is uncommon to observe the teachers that use this approach challenging their students to critically examine different cultures with regard to their contributions to this country or their plights within this country (Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Sleeter, 1993).

These teachers are likely to employ a color-blind ideology when it comes to issues of racism-- yet on the surface, they profess to value and celebrate diversity (Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Sleeter, 1993). Further evidence of Karen's human relations approach to multicultural education is provided throughout the remainder of her portion of the paper.

### **Multicultural Perspective**

Instilling a strong sense of pride in one's culture and heritage is contrary to what Karen perceives from many of the parents of her students of color. Karen shared a story about how one student displayed a lack of pride in her heritage. As described above, every year, the fourth graders in Karen's school host a folk festival in which they present and display elements of their cultural heritage. To prepare for this, the students do research which involves them talking to their parents about their culture and their history. One particular little African-American girl, who had a twin brother, did her display on the Native American culture and heritage, while her twin brother's display was on the African-American culture and heritage. While she may, in fact, have Native American ancestral ties, this little girl chose to disregard her African-American ancestry altogether as a means of assimilating and being accepted by her White peers. This young, African-American girl did not want to wear her hair in braids and, unlike her brother, did not want to dress in Kente cloth or African garb. And although this little girl was not in Karen's classroom, Karen still felt the need to step in and ask this little girl about her culture and heritage. Karen told the story in this way:

Karen: I said to her, "Where is your Black History....where is your Black culture?" She said, "Oh, I'm Native-American. I wanted to put the Native American stuff on." And you know ...it starts at home, you know....we can do stuff in school...and the kids would see me get emotional about Martin Luther King...You know, I would cry. And we'd show "Our Friend Martin." And we'd show how the kids did the marching and they put the dogs on them and the hoses.

Because you can make a difference. You know...and that is what I really stressed..that you learn to respect each other in my class...if you don't learn anything else, you will respect each other. So.... (Personal Communication 6-11-12)

Karen's resolve to foster a positive sense of one's self and culture, instill and enforce self-respect and a respect for others, and inspire constructive interpersonal relationships between her diverse student population is another example of her human relations approach to multicultural education. But Karen also reflects an unarticulated view of blackness trumping other racial identities, and her need to defend blackness as a positive identity by choosing it over other racial identity choices.

### **The "Go-To" Woman**

Being that she was the only African-American teacher in her school, Karen had been sought out, from time to time, throughout the years, to assist in settling issues involving race.

There are varying perspectives regarding positing African American teachers in the "expert" role when it comes to racial issues. Some perceive it in a positive manner in which African American teachers serve as cultural conduits (Dixson, 2003) while others consider it as a form of role entrapment (Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). According to Mabokela & Madsen (2003):

Because of intergroup differences, the majority group creates boundaries that impose limits on how minority workers will be defined in the workplace. Because of these boundaries, African Americans become role entrapped. In suburban desegregated schools, where there is a strong organizational culture, teachers of color are expected to serve in the role as the African American expert. European American colleagues fail to understand intergroup differences and instead project narrowly defined roles for these African American teachers. As a result, African American teachers in this study believed that their contributions as teachers were restricted to representing the African American perspective. To

ensure the promulgation of a school's espoused beliefs toward the minority group, the district was apt to hire African Americans who were perceived as safe and less likely to challenge the school's perceptions about African American students and teachers. (p. 108)

While some might have taken offense to being regarded as the "go-to" person whenever there was a racial problem or whenever a "Black perspective" was needed, simply because they were the sole person of color present, Karen did not feel this way. In responding to how she felt about being viewed as the "go-to" person, in an attempt to solve any matters involving race, Karen said:

Karen: That's fine. Because if I wasn't there, who would they go to? And that's fine. I don't care because if they can't solve it and they can't come up with answers...do something about it. And if I'm there, use me. (Personal Communication, 6-11-12).

Dixon (2003) spoke of this role that many African-American teachers take on by serving as cultural conduits:

Similarly, and for the purposes of sensitizing their White colleagues to the needs and behaviors of African American students, African American teachers willingly serve as cultural conduits by sharing their knowledge of African American culture with them. This willingness serves as yet another example of the understated political mission and activism of African American women teachers. (p. 218)

One such example of the way in which Karen's identity played a pivotal role in resolving issues, came when Karen received a call from a concerned parent of one of her students.

Karen: One day when we dressed up in our cultural stuff, he didn't want to wear his dashiki and his hat because he thought that kids were going to laugh at him. And the mother called me and said "What am I going to do?" And I said, "Don't worry, I'm wearing mines. Tell him that Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ is wearing hers." (Personal Communication, 6-11-12).

Karen not only wanted to instill a positive self-image in her students and a pride about who they were and where they came from, she was someone in whom many of her

students could identify with, particularly because she looked like them. This particular student's parent trusted Karen to serve as an "othermother" to her child. Othermothering is a traditional nurturing role taken on by many African American teachers for students of color that serves as a means of cultural transmission and educational support (Case, 1997; Dixson, 2003; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994). According to Case (1997):

In urban elementary-school classrooms today, African American othermothers still play an integral role, not only in the support of the children they serve, but also in the lives of blood mothers, who for myriad reasons depend upon others to nurture their children. (p. 26)

Being that Karen just retired, I asked her what her school was going to do next year and in the years to come, now that she's gone. She said that she has expressed to her school district the fact that they need to hire more teachers of color. She reported that her district has, in fact, been in search for teachers of color and that this was a recruitment initiative that she herself has been personally involved in by reaching out to several schools of education in Milwaukee, however her district cannot seem to attract any teaching candidates of color.

### **Early Life**

Karen was born and raised in a small, rural farming community in the Midwest. As a baby boomer, Karen grew up during a time in American history when racial relations were strained and the fight for civil rights and equality was on. Karen was one of only five African-Americans in her entire high school graduating class of 300 students. After reading the Helen Keller story when she was in the 6th grade, Karen was inspired

to become a teacher for the hearing impaired. Fortunately, she lived in a small town that had a specialty school for the deaf and another for the visually impaired. Karen pursued her initial training at this school for the deaf and later received her Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education with a minor in education for the hearing impaired.

In high school, she was the only Black person in the school's band. The band frequently toured the Midwest, during which time the students would live with residents of the community. This was the first time ever, many of these community residents, came into contact with an African-American. According to Karen:

Karen: Every spring we would take a bus tour and go to all these schools you know and play and stay in people's houses. And they would be farming communities too...And they'd look at you like, "Oh....there she is." But, I don't know....I can't say that it...I was aware of it, but...I had enough confidence in who I was and what I wanted to do. I didn't let it bother me at all!" (Personal Communication 6-11-12).

This recount is pivotal with regard to developing a clearer understanding of Karen's experiences with race and may signify the inception of her progression towards a uncritical, colorblind ideology. Here Karen clearly recognizes the fact that she was "raced" in her experiences as the sole person of color in all White settings, however she deflects any notions of racism and attributes her self-confidence and individualism as ways of dealing with these experiences. Steele (1988) proposed the self-affirmation theory to describe the phenomenon that in the face of a threat, people use self-affirming alternatives as a means of protecting the integrity of the self (Steele, 1988). Perhaps Karen's conscious effort to disregard the salience of race and instead focus on her self-confidence and tenacity was a purposeful defense mechanism that allowed her to cope with her painful experiences of race and racism.



### **Student/Parent Relationships**

Throughout her teaching career, Karen could only recall one time in which she had an issue with one of the parent's of her students. This specific incident happened several years ago when this student, a young, African-American, male, was transferred to her school in the middle of the school year from one of the MPS Charter schools. According to Karen, this particular child had some learning issues as well as some previous health issues that he's dealt with since birth, and these issues consequently, hindered this child's learning ability. After assessing this student's learning needs and seeing that he was struggling academically, Karen decided that this student needed extra help. This meant that some of his elective courses such as Spanish and gym, would have to be cut, in order for him to get the extra help he needed in math and reading. Instead of being grateful to Karen for going out of her way and giving up her prep period to help her son succeed academically, this child's mother was angry. Karen recalled the incident like this:

Karen: And we said, maybe he needed to stay out of Spanish to get extra help in reading or extra help in math. He qualified for Title 1. She was pitching a fit that he doesn't need the extra help and he's missing out on stuff, because he would go home and cry and say that he's missing this and missing that, but our goal was to...you may have to miss a little bit of gym or a little bit of this because we need to get you to grade level.

Here *we* are, trying to work our butts off. She didn't just give me heck...but, then a couple of times he had little tantrums and she "never knew he would behave like that" and "I've never seen that before out of him! It must be something *you're* doing." Because I wouldn't let him get away with it. She wanted him out of my class and the principal said no! (Personal Communication 6-11-12).

This was the only example Karen could recall in which there was a disconnect between herself and the parent of her student. Karen stated that most of the time, the parents of

her students, both Black and White, were appreciative of her standards of teaching, methods of discipline, and overall classroom management. In fact, instead of wanting to pull their children out of Karen's class, several parents have pulled their children from other classes and insisted that their child be placed into Karen's class. On this matter Karen said:

Karen: I had a couple that were very pleased to have me because one child was pulled out...I've had it happen three times ...children were taken out of another teacher's class and put in my class because she couldn't handle them...I mean, they were tossing desks, tossing chairs, sweeping stuff off the tables, hiding under the table...and the teacher couldn't handle them. And the mother said, "I'm glad...now, finally, someone is going to handle my child." (Personal Communication 6-11-12)

From the above example we see that Karen was known to have a different authoritarian approach than some of her other teaching counterparts. Her approach to authority was rooted more in the cultural practices of the African American community. As Delpit (1988) explained:

In other words, "the authoritative person gets to be a teacher because she is authoritative. Some members of middle-class cultures, by contrast, expect one to achieve authority by the acquisition of an authoritative role. That is, "the teacher is the authority because she is the teacher." (p.289)

While Karen didn't elaborate on the race of children that were removed from other teachers' classrooms and placed in her classroom, the parents of these children clearly had a respect for the style in which Karen governed her classroom.

### **Going Above and Beyond the Call of Duty**

Throughout our interview, time and time again, Karen illustrated cases where, during her 25 year career, she's gone above and beyond the call of duty. From putting on Black History Programs and infusing the heritage, culture and legacy of people of color throughout the curriculum, to using her prep period to work one-on-one with students in

need of academic support, to serving as a person with whom, her African American students can identify, by her mere presence. Karen shared one story, of how she and the other staff members pulled together to help a student in need, that epitomized Karen's overall experience of working in this suburban elementary school for 25 years.

Every year, the fourth graders at Karen's school host a folk festival in which they present and display elements of their culture and heritage. One year in particular, one of the students' grandmother passed away, two weeks prior to the folk festival. This loss was particularly devastating for this young student because he was very close to his grandmother. In preparing for the folk festival and talking about his grandmother's memory, he told one of his teachers, "She would've cooked me greens" as his dish to share with the school. Knowing that she did not know how to prepare greens herself, or maybe not in the same manner as his grandmother, the teacher sprang into action and, just like in any other instance in the school in which there was an issue involving race (and in this instance, culture)...she called Karen. Karen said, "Don't worry...I'm cooking his greens." She and this teacher then met together and went to the little boy and told him they had a surprise for him. He was overjoyed to find out that Karen was going to cook him a pot of greens to take to the festival. This was yet another example of Karen stepping in as an "othermother" for her students and further supports the need to have more African American teachers who are willing to maintain African American cultural practices by stepping in as nurturer and "tending their mothers' gardens" (Case, 1997; Dixon, 2003; Dixon & Dingus, 2008; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

## **Intersectionalities of Race, Class, & Gender**

### **Navigating the Color Line**

During our interviews, Karen acknowledged that although she was the only African-American person in her entire school, she felt that she had the respect and support of not only her administrator, but her educational colleagues as well. She described positive working relationships that developed into strong friendships amongst her peers. Being in environments in which no one else looked like her, was not unusual to Karen. However, Karen did not have a close bond with other African American colleagues, or past African- American peers in school. In fact, she remembers being somewhat shunned by her peers. Karen had this to say on the matter:

Karen: Umm....well, like I said, where I grew up, there were only 5 Blacks in my graduating class. And then choices of boyfriends...I wouldn't even go to parties and stuff because they would talk about me because of my hair or...you know, it would be *our* own people that would do it. Not the Whites.

Talonda: Really?

Karen: It would be us. Picking on... us!

Talonda: Okay...even though they too were only one of five?

Karen: And they stuck together, you know...we all...you know...if I wasn't in the band or doing something, why are you in the band? Why do you do that?

Talonda: So did they perceive you as...

Karen: uppity or stuck up?

Talonda: And trying to act white?

Karen: Yes.

Talonda: Really?

Karen: Even when I came here, "Oh, you talk so White!" You do this, you do that. My relatives...not the staff, ...but see, I knew that that was another reason why I was hired because my recruiter said, your speech is fine. It's perfect...it's going to fit right in and blah, blah, blah. So I knew that they were looking for that too. I knew they were. But...there's so many Blacks that are articulate and whatever and I tried to get people to come out there [to her suburban school district]. I was on a bowling league with [Karen names some other Black educators] and they didn't want to come. They made statements like they were afraid to come out there (Personal Communication, 6-11-12).

Because of her speech, her interests, her physical features, etc., Karen was perceived early on by her African-American peers, as not being one of them, or not being "Black enough" and consequently, she felt more accepted by her White counterparts. According to Fordham (2008):

African-Americans who are accused of acting White are inevitably displaced, becoming conscripts in an army of one. Perceived as matter out of place, every American of African ancestry who opts to perform Whiteness, even episodically, is forced to fight to retain citizenship in the Black community while concurrently seeking acceptance by the hegemonic White society (p.231).

Because Karen grew up in a predominately White suburban town, she was able to assimilate rather easily into her mainstream community and thrive academically. Karen acknowledged that her experience of growing up in a town that was predominately White, assisted her in "fitting in" when she came to teach in her suburban elementary school. And while Karen had an easier time navigating the color line and cultural divide at this suburban school because of her earlier experiences, she also managed to maintain a strong connection to her racial heritage and community. Throughout the years, she's taught in summer camps hosted by the National Urban League and has continued to serve as a Sunday School teacher at her church which is comprised of a predominantly Black congregation. Regardless of her ability to readily code switch and navigate the color line

with ease, Karen believed that she would have flourished and would have been successful in her teaching career, irrespective of whether she taught in an urban or suburban school.

During our interview, I observed remnants of the ways in which Karen's identity and experiences as a middle-Class, African American woman, raised in a predominately White environment, shunned by her fellow African-American peers, carried over into her classroom experiences and the interactions of her students. One such example, occurred when Karen shared the story of an incident involving two young, African-American males, who were students in her classroom. She described both of the boys as being very smart. One of the little boys came from a middle-class family, and because his parents were more affluent, he was able to partake in various cultural experiences such as family vacations to various destinations across the country, and was able to participate in an assortment of activities which garnered him a wealth of cultural capital.<sup>2</sup> This particular little boy wanted to become an astronaut when he grew up. One day, the other little African-American boy who, because of his socio-economic status, did not experience the same privileges of the first little boy, began teasing the first little boy about wanting to become an astronaut. After witnessing this exchange between the two little boys, Karen stepped in immediately:

Karen: And I pulled them into the room before lunch and I took the whole class down, made them stay and I made them stay back and I came back and I got on

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<sup>2</sup> Cultural Capital is a concept coined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Tina Wildhagen (2009) employs the description of cultural capital given by Lamont and Lareau (1988), who define cultural capital as "institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high-status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion" (p.174). These researchers contend that it is through this process of distinction that cultural interests and knowledge of the dominant class become institutionalized, that is recognized as legitimate and superior, which transforms them into criteria that are used as a basis for exclusion from jobs, resources, and high status groups. Peter McLaren (2002) defines cultural capital as the "general cultural background, knowledge, disposition, and skills that are passed on from one generation to another. Cultural capital represents ways of talking, acting, modes of style, moving, socializing, forms of knowledge, language practices, and values" (p.93).

them about "You're supposed to support one another...you can't do this!" You know, "You're a smart boy, but you're wasting your time" and just because he wants to be an astronaut--- Who are you?... to say that to him? You know....I would do that kind of stuff. And I would tell the staff..., I'm gonna do my little Black momma role. And I can bust in and out of the language, you know what I mean, when it came time, if I needed to, I would do it. Even during parent conferences...if I needed to talk to parents in a certain way, I would do it (Personal Communication, 6-11-12)

Karen's enforcement of unity between her students and her insistence that they showed one another respect was not only another example of Karen's commitment to fostering positive relationships between her students, a central tenet of the human relations approach to multicultural education, but was also another example of other mothering, typical of African-American women teachers. Dixson & Dingus (2008) asserted:

Along with working diligently to engage students in the curriculum, the work of these teachers is inherently political. On the micro level, these teachers wage daily protests and subversive activities in an effort to dismantle the racist beliefs that harm African-American children. For example, Kathy described conferencing with the handful of African American children in her suburban school. As the only African American teacher in the building, she was sensitive to the negative perceptions of African American teachers by school authorities. She recalled an instance when an African American boy was, "acting up. When I pulled him aside, I didn't talk to him about his books. I talked to him about his color. [I told him his behavior] is what is expected of you,, and that is why you get lost." No matter the venue--school board or faculty meetings--these teachers are committed to making school more equitable for African American children. (p. 825)

Karen, like Kathy in Dixson & Dingus's study felt compelled to pull these two African-American students aside and discuss their behavior, as it related to them being African-American children in a predominately White, suburban school. Karen was reinforcing the need for her students to support one another and she made sure that her one student

understood that he was smart, but that he was not taking advantage of his learning opportunity.

### **Summary**

Karen's earlier experiences with race caused her to develop an uncritical stance with regard to the ways in which racism played out in her everyday experiences. As such, she embraced a multicultural paradigm, and chose to focus on the celebratory aspects of our difference and not the ways in which difference has been used historically to marginalize and oppress. What was very evident from her interviews was the fact that Karen wanted each of her students to be successful and she believed in enforcing a strong sense of pride in her students' cultures and heritages. Karen told several narratives in which her commitment to othermothering was apparent.



## **Nicole's Story-Challenging Myths, Creating Counterstories**

Those who have read *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett or saw the screen play, know that the overall plot of the story focuses on Skeeter, a young, White, privileged aspiring journalist who wants to document the lived experiences of Black maids in Mississippi in the 1960's during the peak of the Jim Crow era and fight for civil rights. In this book, all of the maids were initially apprehensive about sharing their stories with Skeeter, not only because of Skeeter's identity and issues of trust, but because of the dire consequences that were sure to follow if ever their identities were disclosed. In addition to having their job security and livelihoods (for lack of a better word) threatened, the very lives of these women and their families were in danger if ever their identities were exposed.

While the risks and potential consequences were not nearly as extreme for this study as it was in the case of the women from *The Help*, as the interviewer and author of this study, I often felt like Skeeter, in that Nicole, a young, African-American woman who teaches in a suburban school district outside of Milwaukee, and who is one of the participants in this study, was initially very hesitant to speak to me with regard to her experiences. Because there are so few teachers of color who teach in suburban schools around the state, I had to take extra precaution to protect Nicole's identity because of the backlash and dire consequences she is sure to face if her true identity was ever discovered.

The fact that Nicole was afraid to even share her story because of potential backlash, despite the fact that she had been grossly mistreated with regard to many of her experiences, bothered me tremendously and made me wonder-- How many other teachers of color, who teach in predominately White, suburban schools, also have stories to tell,

but are afraid to speak out because of the certain repercussions they are sure to suffer as a result of their identities being revealed?

### **Colorblindness Vs. Critically Conscious Ideologies about Race**

#### **Above and Beyond the Call of Duty--Capitalizing on Teachable Moments**

In her classroom, Nicole has high standards and expectations regarding cultural sensitivity and respect. She has created a cultural sensitivity initiative because she wants all of her students to feel comfortable in her classroom and to have a pride about who they are and where they come from. Whenever she and her students are having a discussion and one of them says something that she deems inappropriate-- be it racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, etc., she or someone else will yell out, "cultural sensitivity class." The student who made the inappropriate comment is subsequently given a detention, administered by Nicole personally, during which, she gives this student a one-on-one lesson about cultural sensitivity and has a discussion about why their particular comment was inappropriate and disrespectful. Capitalizing on teachable moments is an example of Nicole playing a traditional role commonly held by African American teachers as activists for social justice (Case, 1997; Dixson, 2003; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Nicole feels that it is her duty to call out issues of cultural insensitivity, even when other teachers might overlook such issues or remain silent. She is very adamant about doing this in an effort to make her students not only culturally competent, but critically conscious as well.

One such teachable moment occurred in Nicole's class last year amidst the controversy surrounding the investigation into the death of 17 year old Trayvon Martin.<sup>3</sup> Because emotions were so raw and so many people seemed to be affected in one way or another by this terrible tragedy, Nicole allowed her students to express their feelings and sentiments through writing in their journals. Nicole felt that both her Black and White students were lost in that they did not recognize and understand the significance this particular incident had to the historical underpinnings of racism and the tumultuous race relations inextricably tied to the history of this nation. Allowing her students to express themselves freely has been a fine line for Nicole to walk because on one hand, she wants to know exactly how her students feel. She does not want them to tell her what they think *she wants* to hear. Nicole says that whenever she reads their journals, she tries not to give her opinion, but instead tries to challenge her students' thinking by asking them open-ended questions in response to their journal entries as a means of getting them to become self-reflective, to ponder alternative viewpoints, and to become more critically conscious. Nicole tries to navigate this sometimes fine line of allowing her students express themselves liberally, while being culturally sensitive, by teaching her students

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<sup>3</sup> Trayvon Martin, a young Black teen, was gunned down on February 26, 2012 in Standford, Florida by George Zimmerman, a 28 year old male who has both a European and Peruvian background, but who identifies primarily as White. Zimmerman claimed he shot Martin, who was unarmed, during a struggle because he felt that his life was threatened. The struggle and shooting happened as a result of Zimmerman's decision to follow Trayvon, who was returning to the home of his father's girlfriend, who lived in a gated community after making a purchase at a local convenience store in the neighborhood. Zimmerman began following Martin because he looked "suspicious". Although Zimmerman was advised by a 911 dispatcher he was on the phone with, not to follow Martin, Zimmerman did so anyways and the end result was a struggle which subsequently ended with the death Martin who was shot by Zimmerman. The controversy surrounding the case stemmed from the fact that Zimmerman was not initially charged for killing the unarmed teen, due to the Floridian "Stand Your Ground" law, which gives a person the legal right to use deadly force in instances in which their lives are threatened and the role that identity played (both of the victim and the perpetrator) in this entire scenario. This unfortunate case re-ignited a firestorm around the nation surrounding the long fought battle over racism, perception versus reality, power, privilege, and race relations in the United States.

that while they have the right to express themselves freely, they do not have the right to say things that are hurtful and offensive to others.

### **Early Life**

Nicole was born and raised on the Northwest side of Milwaukee. She described the neighborhood that she grew up in as ethnically and racially diverse, comprising mainly of African-American, Jewish, and White families. Overtime, her neighborhood grew more racially and socioeconomically diverse. When her parents first purchased their home, they were one of only two African-American families in the entire neighborhood. The neighborhood is currently comprised of mainly working and middle-class African-American and Jewish families.

Nicole attended Milwaukee Public schools, which she described as being racially diverse, for her primary education and later switched to a suburban school on the outskirts of Milwaukee when she went to high school as a participant in the Chapter 220 program. Nicole first began recognizing issues of race and racism during this time. Her suburban high school was located in a wealthy neighborhood on the outskirts of Milwaukee and was predominately White. Nicole remembers experiencing what she describes as "subtle racism", or micro-aggressions frequently during this time, and because of these experiences, she hated her school. Pierce et. al (1978) defined racial microaggressions as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs' of blacks by offenders (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, p.66)

One incident, in particular, occurred when her social studies teacher, a young, White male, thought it would be a good idea to conduct a project on slavery. This

teacher had his students reenact and debate issues surrounding the practice of slavery with the objective of having them determine whether slavery should have been abolished or continued. Even though she couldn't fully articulate it at the time, Nicole knew in her heart that something was incredibly wrong with having students debate the practice of slavery, particularly due to the fact that there were only a few Black students who were in the class, and the majority of her White peers were in favor of slavery because it subsidized the lifestyles of many Whites in the South. Nicole could not recall any of her White classmates at the time taking an abolitionist stance against slavery. When asked whether she thought that this lesson made her White peers feel uncomfortable, Nicole replied, " No...not that I can remember...I mean that was years ago, but not really. They were pretty adamant about keeping slavery!" (Personal Communication 6-29-12).

Nicole said that anyone who may have, in fact, been against the practice of slavery, was probably too afraid to speak up at the time, being that the majority of her classmates were in favor of it.

During our interviews, Nicole recalled experiencing other micro-aggressions in high school, such as receiving mediocre grades because of her race, in instances where she unequivocally *knew* she earned and deserved better. This left Nicole with feelings of despondency with regard to whether her intellectual capabilities and potential would ever be recognized because of her identity as a person of color in a predominately White school. Regarding this experience Nicole said:

Nicole: you know, and it wasn't until I met a teacher in high school named Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ and I got an A in her English course and I was like, "How did I get an A?" And she was like, "You know, you're a good writer." And that was the first... teacher I felt that didn't look at my race, but really looked at what I was doing and then that made me feel like I wasn't just another Black student who was

in a White class...I felt like she saw me for who I was (Personal Communication, 6-29-12).

After having to contend with the incessant barrage of micro-aggressions, the daily pressures of having to represent the entire race, and feelings of isolation and exclusion, Nicole and other students of color in her high school, would often gather at the lunchroom table to eat their lunches together. Nicole recalled her and her peers doing this, not in an effort to segregate themselves from their White peers, but as a means of creating a space of solace and comfort amongst individuals who shared their same experiences (Daniel-Tatum, 1997).

The continuous burden of trying to fight racism and survive in an institution in which one does not feel they belong-- all the while having no place of solace to retreat, can cause people of color to become exhausted from racial battle fatigue. This racial battle fatigue carried over from Nicole's high school experiences to her experiences as an African American teacher in a predominately White suburban school. Such racial battle fatigue can have dire consequences not only on Nicole, but on the psychological well-being and the academic outcomes of all students (Stevenson et al., 1997).

### **Life After High School**

After high school, Nicole attended a Historically Black College in the South. She credits this institution for helping her maintain the sense of pride that she has in her heritage in addition to helping her remain connected and committed to the ever-present struggles of people of color and other oppressed people in the United States. Nicole also credits her parents for planting the seeds of critical consciousness in her, early on in life, by sharing their experiences of being born and raised in the United States South during

the Jim Crow Era and Civil Rights Struggle. This consciousness has helped to shape Nicole's identity and the way in which she views the world.

Nicole currently teaches middle school in a suburban school district on the outskirts of Milwaukee. She has always wanted to become a teacher because of her desire to serve and give back to others. Nicole taught for several years in another state before coming back to teach in Wisconsin. It was Nicole's initial desire to teach in an urban school upon returning to Milwaukee, however, after not receiving an interview for MPS, she chose to work in the district in which she received an interview and was offered a position. Nicole was initially nervous and apprehensive about teaching in a suburban school since all of her previous teaching experience had been in an urban school.

### **Student/Parent Relationships**

As a young, African-American woman, teaching in a predominately White school, located in a wealthy suburb on the outskirts of Milwaukee, Nicole believed that she faced backlash on a continuous basis, from various angles, as a direct result of her identity.

One of the contenders responsible for creating the hellacious environment, in which Nicole was expected to work and thrive, was the parents of her students. Surprisingly, this backlash came from both the parents of color as well as the White parents. Nicole was shocked to learn that some of the parents of her students of color disapproved of her because they believed that their child would not get the "suburban school" experience if they were in a class taught by a Black woman. For these parents, having an African-American teacher defeated the purpose of them sending their child to a

suburban school to get a "good education" in the first place. It didn't matter that Nicole was an intelligent, capable, "highly-qualified" teacher. She was still Black and for that reason alone, these parents wanted their children removed from Nicole's classroom.

Nicole remembers feeling shocked and hurt by this revelation. She anticipated potential pushback from one or two White parents, after all, she's had to deal with racism her entire life, but she never expected that she would face discrimination of this sort from her own people! These parents of color would often mask their discriminatory comments with sentimental expressions such as: "Well you taught previously in an urban school district in the South. They're standards are not as rigorous as ours!" These parents phrased their arguments in this manner with the intent of casting the illusion that their demands to have their children removed from Nicole's classroom, were mere matters of educational policy and had nothing to do with Nicole's identity as a Black woman.

The construction of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), is a plausible explanation as to why Nicole experienced so much backlash at her school. As an African-American woman who refused to assimilate, she "tainted" the suburban school's reputation and diminished its status as a prestigious, exclusive (i.e. White), suburban institution. The hostile response Nicole received from some of the African-American parents was a direct result of these parents expecting to "buy-in" to the "Possessive Investment in Whiteness" (Lipsitz, 2006) by way of sending their children to this predominately White, upper-middle class, suburban institution. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) state that "In the case of schooling, to identify a school or program as nonwhite in any way is to diminish its reputation and status" (P.60).



Whiteness as property also functioned in Nicole's experience as a means of exclusion. Because "whiteness is constructed in this society as the absence of the "contaminating" influence of blackness" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), Nicole's mere presence "tainted" the value of the experience that some of the White and Black parents expected their children to receive, although in reality, the Black parent's children also "tarnished" the reputation and status property of the school (as a White, Suburban Institution) solely by their presence, but these Black parents were unlikely to view it in this manner because for some reason, they apparently did not group themselves in the same category as "other" Blacks.

### **You're Not Teaching My Children!**

In addition to the pushback she received from some African-American parents, Nicole also received pushback from White parents who did not want their children in her classroom either. Nicole felt that she was, in a sense, set up to fail as an African-American teacher in this suburban school district because she received no support from her parents of her students nor her educational colleagues. How was it possible for her to flourish and be successful in an environment where people were not ready to accept the fact that their children had a Black teacher? These suburban parents did not judge Nicole by the same standards and expectations they held of her White counterparts. According to these parents, Nicole's practice of being strict was "*too*" strict, even though their children have had stricter teachers in the past. They also pled that Nicole's teaching was "too watered down" even though her students' State test scores proved otherwise. Nicole had this to say regarding this matter:

Nicole: And so the reason why I can't move up in my district, is because they painted me as this sorry, incompetent teacher, before I even knew what was going

on. That happened my very first year with teachers undermining me, you know what I mean, and I would discipline a student and they would say, "No no, he can't handle that!" and then coming in the meetings...and I'm thinking we're all here on the same thing... this is a meeting about *me* and about how *I'm* "too" mean to the students and how *I'm* too strict... and then I would always reference a teacher in the school and I would say, "Well she's strict too." Umm...and the kid's are saying that she's the "*strictest*" teacher. Why is it that they can accept her strictness and understand that that's coming from a good place but then when it comes to me, and I'm not even as strict as her... then it's a problem! (Personal Communication 6-29-12)

Undermining teachers, angry parents...what was the underlying premise surrounding all of this backlash hitting Nicole from all angles? The fact of the matter was that these parents and even some of Nicole's counterparts felt that their children had nothing to learn from Nicole. As a Black woman, what could she possibly teach *their* children? The parents in Nicole's school wrote letters, made phone calls and had meetings, all to have her removed as their child's teacher. Thankfully, Nicole had the support of the Superintendent of her district, and as such, her job security was never completely in jeopardy.

### **Nicole's Students**

When asked how the students she currently teaches compare to her high school peers, Nicole said that her students are better off financially than past students. With regard to race, Nicole spoke of how she believed that this current generation of students, particularly students of color, have been shielded from the reality of race and racism. She believes that today's generation is lacking a strong racial identity and, unlike her parents and parents of past generations, who talked to their children about the realities of racism as a means to prepare them for what they would encounter in the world, the parents of

these students do not talk to their children about elements of race and racism. On this matter, Nicole had this to say:

Nicole: I feel like, whereas, you know my parents taught us about race relations and they taught us about what we would face in the world as far as racism and things of that nature, their parents, in some ways they feel like they are invincible and they will not deal with the same types of problems, even though those problems still exist. And I feel like they're lacking, a kind of...self pride about their race. (Personal Communication 6-29-12).

Because her parents lived through the Jim Crow and Civil Rights Movement eras, they, like many other African American parents of their generation socialized their children on the reality of racism and the struggles they would endure as a result of their race. In addition, these parents believed in infusing a great sense of pride in their children. Nicole observed a lack of cultural pride and racial socialization in her students that wasn't present in her and her parent's generations. Possible causes to this diminished cultural pride and racial socialization could be the fact that in their quest to be accepted by the larger society, many of these parents have negated their racial and cultural identities and adopted an assimilationist paradigm. Nicole provided one such example, describing the ways in which this loss of identity and lack of pride manifested itself within her students.

Each Monday, Nicole and her students usually engage in a class discussion about what they did the previous weekend. She and the students usually talk about the movies they saw, the places they went, etc. On one particular occasion, one of Nicole's African-American female students shared with the class that she and her friends went to the lakefront the previous weekend. This particular student then said, "There were too many Black people at the lakefront. Black people make me itchy" (Personal Communication 6-29-12). Nicole's class found this comment rather funny, as did this student herself.

Later that evening, Nicole called this student's mother to speak to her about this situation. Nicole asked the mother to sit down and have a conversation with her daughter about certain things that should not be discussed in an open forum, particularly, things that may reinforce negative stereotypes, or things which may cause one to form a negative perception about a certain group of people.

The fact that Nicole went one step beyond reprimanding this student by contacting her mother and asking her to have a dialogue with her daughter about her inappropriate comments is evidence of Nicole's firm commitment to combating racism and her dedication to the traditional role of African American teachers as cultural workers through imparting life lessons to her students, their families, and the community at large (Dixson,& Dingus, 2008).

### **Intersectionalities of Race, Class, & Gender**

#### **"I'm Not What You Expected"**

"Dress for the job that you want in life!" This was the advice Nicole received once from a highly successful African-American woman who mentors Nicole and of whom she greatly respects and admires. In taking this advice to heart, Nicole goes to school dressed for success each day. She always dresses in appropriate, business attire, which include high-heeled shoes, and she takes special care to always maintain a very professional look.

Nicole: And it was like, if I had on some heels, it was a problem. As so what I started to learn was, they had painted me as this picture, but the more that I go against that picture, the more angry they become because they're trying to paint me as this sorry teacher. They're trying to paint me as someone who's not professional. And so, it was like, the more and more I do things that go against that, it was like they began to get upset because they can't...you know, they can't

pin me as the person who they're trying to perpetuate me as. " (Personal Communication 6-29-12)

Nicole did not fit into a particular stereotype or model. The box that was shaped out of their ideologies, perceptions, and social constructions. According to Mabokela & Madsen (2003):

The concept of role entrapment means that the African American teachers fit preexisting generalizations that force them to play limited roles within the organization (Kanter, 1977). Thus, they became entrapped as the token, a position that invalidated other contributions with the school and limited their upward mobility to positions of authority. (p. 105)

As a young, intelligent, and very capable African-American woman, Nicole finds that, on a daily basis, not only does she have to fight to tear down the walls and break out of the box in which she finds herself unduly encapsulated, she also has to fight to shatter the idiomatical "glass ceiling." Having to incessantly do battle and go to war simply on the basis of her identity, often leaves Nicole with feelings of hurt, wariness, and utter defeat.

Nicole is slowly proving that she does not fit the negative mode that her colleagues tried to typecast her as--a challenge to the majoritarian notions of Black women as loud, dumb, angry, incapable, and unprofessional (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). And even though she has data reports which provide evidence that her academic effectiveness with her students is not mediocre, but extremely successful, Nicole feels that the training, experience, and the skills that she brings to the table are often overlooked simply because of her identity. She has never been asked to share her strategies of success with other teachers, even though her students continue to have some of the highest test scores, when compared to the other teachers in her school. Nicole perceives that this is, yet another example of her colleagues and the "system" viewing her

as unintelligent and inferior, simply because she is a young, African-American woman, and as such, they feel that she can't possibly have anything to teach them. As Bell (1995) explained:

As history indicates all too well, blacks have suffered greatly as a result of discrimination undergirded and often justified by the general belief in black inferiority. But history shows with equal clarity, though it is less frequently acknowledged, that indications of black success and thus possible black superiority result in racist outrage. (p. 895)

Nicole still has aspirations of climbing the ranks in the educational system and has even set her goal on one day becoming the superintendent of the Milwaukee Public School System, although she is unsure how realistic this goal is-- given the reality of her identity and the barriers it presents. Nicole's identity puts her in a particular conundrum in that although she experiences racism nested in practices of classism, sexism, and paternalism on a continuous basis, she is limited in her ability to fight back because she knows that fighting back could possibly derail any hopes she has for the future. This is a no-win situation as contended by Berlak & Moyenda (2001), "In most cases, if it gets this far, white people stick together and suddenly, my work reviews turn bad and it's time to quit. I'm fired if I fight and abused if I say nothing" (p.133).

Through it all, Nicole has chosen to remain in this suburban district, for several reasons, the main reason being that teaching is still her first love. She enjoys teaching and serving her students. She has a critical consciousness for teaching and views her role as an activist and role model (Dixson, 2003). Despite all of the tribulations and obstacles Nicole has had to overcome and continues to face, she has emerged as a stronger woman and she believes that everything that she has faced and continues to face, was and is all for the purpose of preparing her for her future endeavors.

### **Summary**

As a young, intelligent, capable, "highly-qualified," African-American middle school teacher in a suburban school, Nicole is constantly fighting battles based on her identity alone, a reality she must contend with. While she experiences daily battles with her students' parents, her colleagues, her administrators, the world...she has been fighting alone. Her silence (as a means of job security and not sabotaging her future endeavors) has thus far rendered her powerless.

## **Summary of Findings**

*“We all carry worlds in our heads, and those worlds are decidedly different. We educators set out to teach, but how can we reach the worlds of others when we don’t even know they exist? Indeed, many of us don’t even realize that our own worlds exist only in our heads and in the cultural institutions we have built to support them.”*

--- (Lisa Delpit, 1995, *Other People’s Children*, p.xiv)

Based on the findings of this study, it is my contention that the ideologies espoused by Lauren, Mackenzie, Karen, and Nicole, all evolved from a source of pain, rooted in their identities and their experiences living in a racialized country. The ways in which they reacted, however, made all the difference. Each of the women's identity and their experiences with race, had a direct impact on their ideologies and the ways in which they interacted with their students. At times their experiences led them to operate from an activist stance, rendering them powerful, while at other times, their experiences caused them to function from a source of pain, thus rendering them powerless.

### **The Pain and Power of Identity and Ideologies**

As avowed in Chapter 2, who we are, or rather—who we *think* we are, is based on the intersectionalities of our history, experiences, interpretations, perceptions, and interactions. Birthed from our identities, emerge our ideologies. Ideologies permeate our homes, schools, churches, social circles, and other institutions on a continuous basis. When these identities are not critically examined, they have the ability to mask themselves under the guise of neutrality, fact, and truth. Power resides within ideologies because ideologies can be used as idiomatic weapons of mass destruction. When left unchallenged, ideologies have the power to dominate, oppress, reify existing structures of inequality, and silence people through nonchalant complacency. By the same token,



ideologies also have the power to uplift, generate, cultivate, inspire, challenge, tear down structures of inequality and oppression, and elicit hope. Ideologies are powerful because they can be dissipated with destruction or pregnant with possibility!

Over the course of this study, my participants rendered multiple accounts of the painful role identity played, in some of their experiences with race. Oftentimes, these painful experiences left these women with feelings of powerlessness. For example, in reflecting on Lauren's experience, it was apparent that because she could not fully understand the pervasiveness of racism in our society, Lauren relied heavily on her family's experience of overcoming the barrier of poverty and this experience undergirded her firm belief in the notion of meritocracy. Moreover, because she viewed herself through the lens of poverty, it was difficult for Lauren to come to terms with her identity as it related to being privileged in America. This often led her to see herself as a victim and not as a person of privilege. Like Lauren, the power of privilege was also relevant in Mackenzie's experience, but in a different way. While she was willing to speak out in the face of racism in some cases, Mackenzie had not yet reached the point where her convictions denied her the privilege to remain silent in moments of discomfort. Mackenzie has yet to reach the point where she is willing to speak the truth and take an anti-racist stance, even if it means severing bonds with family, friends, colleagues, etc. While Mackenzie exhibited a high level of critical consciousness throughout most of her accounts, she did not seem to recognize that by way of her identity alone, she has had the privilege to choose to speak out (mostly in situations in which was most comfortable) and that people of color do not have this same privilege of silence.

The ability to be critical and recognize the salience of race was one of the most important themes which emerged from this study. For Karen, her earlier experiences with race caused her to become uncritical to the ways in which racism played out in her everyday experiences. As such, she embraced a multicultural paradigm, and chose to focus on the celebratory aspects of our difference and not the ways in which difference has been used historically to marginalize and oppress. For Nicole, her identity as a young, intelligent, capable, "highly-qualified", African-American woman, teaching in a majority white, middle-class suburban school, caused her to endure daily battles based on her identity alone, a reality she will forever contend with. Her silence in speaking out on personal issues of racism (as a means of job security and not sabotaging her future endeavors) has thus far rendered her powerless.

Each of my participants also shared narratives regarding the ways in which their identities and ideologies rendered them powerful. Lauren, for example, clearly had the best intentions for her students' success. Her desire to teach in an inner city, urban school, demonstrated her loyalty and commitment towards helping students overcome obstacles of poverty, in the same manner as did she. Mackenzie's earlier experiences with race led her to: question the validity of her upbringing in a monolithic community, question her identity as a White woman living in a racialized society, and become an advocate by speaking out against racism on behalf of her students. In assessing the ways in which her own lived experiences influenced her teaching in an urban school, Mackenzie seemed honest in her quest to examine her ideologies and beliefs with regard to race and racism and in her desire to help others develop this same critical consciousness.

Power resided within Karen's experience in that she wanted each of her students to be successful and believed in enforcing a strong sense of pride in her students' cultures and heritages. In addition, Karen told several narratives in which her inherent commitment to othermothering was readily apparent. Finally, Nicole's power lied in her role as an activist, who believed in developing a strong critical consciousness within her students and encouraging within them a sensitivity and respect for all people.

What then, can educators learn, from the narratives shared by Lauren, Mackenzie, Karen, and Nicole, and how can educators use their stories to further their understanding of the ways in which identity, lived experiences, and ideologies about race inform the educational practices, experiences that teachers have with students and families of color, and commitment to teach in urban schools? The following four recommendations were derived based on the findings of this study. Below, each of the four recommendations is outlined briefly, after which, I will expound upon each in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Recommendation 1: Teachers need to develop a clearer understanding with regard to the historical underpinnings of racism, and the ways in which racism is not only a thing of the past, but is ever present in every segment our society, including education.

Recommendation 2: Teachers need to become self-reflective about their identities and the ways it relates to privilege and whiteness. They need to come to terms with the fact that you can simultaneously be a good person and still be dysconsciously racist.

Teachers need to continuously evaluate the ways in which they participate in the system of whiteness and work diligently to counter-act these practices. In addition, teachers need to be able to recognize the ways in which different aspects of their identities lend them particular privileges (privileges to be uncritical/colorblind, privileges of silence)

that others, who don't possess these facets of identity, do not have the opportunity take advantage of.

Recommendation 3: Teachers need to reflect on the ways in which their identities and experiences allow them to perceive the world from a particular standpoint and seek to develop alternative ways of understanding the world, particularly from the perspective of the marginalized and oppressed. In developing this critical consciousness, they will be able to see the ways in which their identities directly affect their interactions with their students, their pedagogical practices, and subsequently the academic outcomes of their students.

Recommendation 4: Teachers, particularly teachers of color, need to continue to counteract majoritarian tales. This means being open to sharing one's stories and experiences and seeking ways to creatively challenge stock explanations that normalize and neutralize oppression. In addition, teachers of color must be committed to forging alliances with White teachers who are committed to participating in the fight for equity, on the world's behalf and particularly on the behalf of all who are oppressed.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

- The Pain and Power of Identity and Ideologies
- Recommendation 1
- Recommendation 2
- Recommendation 3
- Recommendation 4
- From Theory to Practice
- The Point of it All

### **Chapter 5--Conclusion**

In this study, I employed a Critical Race Theory lens to examine the ways in which identity factors such as race, culture, socioeconomic status, and gender work in concession with teachers' ideologies, as demonstrated by their values, beliefs, and perceptions about race, to inform their teaching practices, experiences with students and families of color, and decisions to remain in or leave urban classrooms. The main question this research study sought to examine was: How do teachers' identities and ideologies, as demonstrated by their values, beliefs, and perceptions, influence their decisions to remain in or leave urban classrooms?

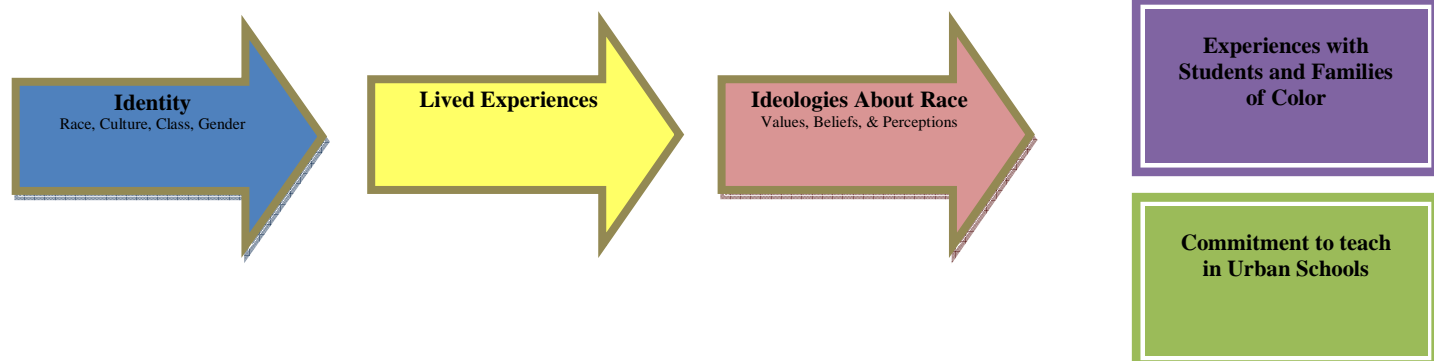
#### **Sub Questions:**

What ideologies do teachers hold with regard to race? How do these ideologies connect to their commitment to teach in urban schools?

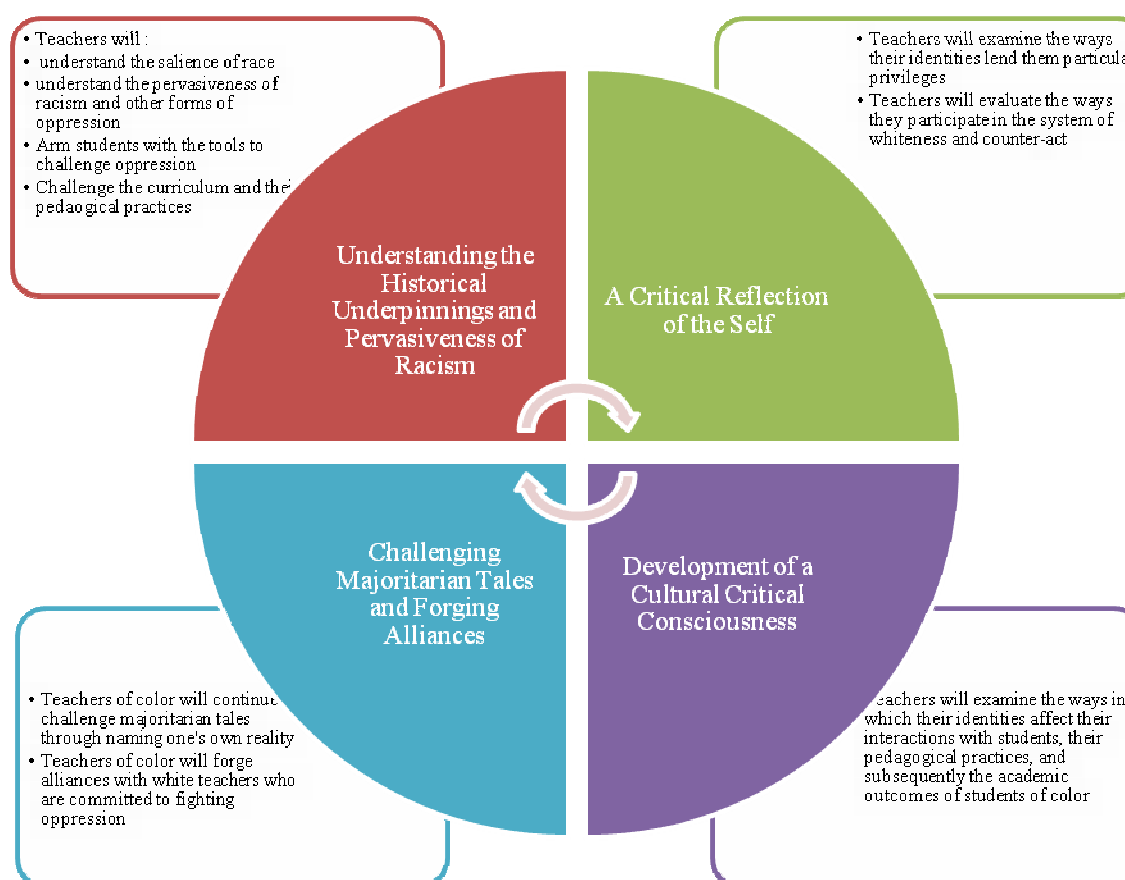
What emotional and physical consequences may be related to teaching in urban schools?

What roles do race, culture, socioeconomic status, and gender play in the participants' experiences with and perceptions of students and families of color?

### Graphical Representation of Main Question From This Study



### Graphical Representation of Recommendations From This Study



Based on the findings of this study, it is my contention that the ideologies espoused by Lauren, Mackenzie, Karen, and Nicole, all evolved from a source of pain, rooted in their identities and their experiences living in a racialized country. The ways in which they reacted, however, made all the difference. Each of the women's identity and their experiences with race, had a direct impact on their ideologies and the ways in which they interacted with their students. At times their experiences led them to operate from an activist stance, rendering them powerful, while at other times, their experiences caused them to function from a source of pain, thus rendering them powerless.

### **The Pain and Power of Identity and Ideologies**

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young, intelligent, capable, "highly-qualified", African-American woman, teaching in a majority white, middle-class suburban school, caused her to endure daily battles based on her identity alone, a reality she will forever contend with. Her silence in speaking out on personal issues of racism (as a means of job security and not sabotaging her future endeavors) has thus far rendered her powerless.

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Power resided within Karen's experience in that she wanted each of her students to be successful and believed in enforcing a strong sense of pride in her students' cultures and heritages. In addition, Karen told several narratives in which her inherent commitment to othermothering was readily apparent. Finally, Nicole's power lied in her role as an activist, who believed in developing a strong critical consciousness within her students and encouraging within them a sensitivity and respect for all people.

What, then can we learn from the narratives shared by Lauren, Mackenzie, Karen, and Nicole and how can we use their stories to further our understanding of the ways in which identity, lived experiences, and ideologies about race inform the educational practices, experiences that teachers have with students and families of color, and commitment to teach in urban schools? The following four recommendations were derived based on the findings of this study.

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Recommendation 2: Teachers should be self-reflective about their identities and the ways it relates to privilege and whiteness. This may mean coming to terms with the fact that one can simultaneously be a good person and still be dysconsciously racist. Teachers should continuously evaluate the ways in which they participate in the system of whiteness and work diligently to counter-act these practices. In addition, teachers should be able to recognize the ways in which different aspects of their identities lend them particular privileges (privileges to be uncritical/colorblind, privileges of silence) that others, who don't possess these facets of identity, do not have the opportunity take advantage of.

Recommendation 3: Teachers should reflect on the ways in which their identities and experiences allow them to perceive the world from a particular standpoint and seek to develop alternative ways of understanding the world, particularly from the perspective of the marginalized and oppressed. In developing this critical consciousness, they will be able to see the ways in which their identities directly affect their interactions with their

students , their pedagogical practices, and subsequently the academic outcomes of their students.

Recommendation 4: Teachers, particularly teachers of color, should continue to counteract majoritarian tales. This means being open to sharing one's stories and experiences and seeking ways to creatively challenge stock explanations that normalize and neutralize oppression. In addition, teachers of color must be committed to forging alliances with White teachers who are committed to participating in the fight for equity, on the world's behalf and particularly on the behalf of all who are oppressed.

**Recommendation 1: Understanding the Historical Underpinnings and Pervasiveness of Racism in America**

In her book, *Witnessing Whiteness: First Steps Toward An Antiracist Practice and Culture*, Shelly Tochluk pondered over her earlier experiences of learning about the history of America. Tochluk reflected on the roles played by pivotal people in her life who were instrumental in her indoctrination of a particular version of U.S. History that inspired a pride in her country. From her fifth-grade teacher Mrs. Pearson who taught about the Pilgrims' survival, Williamsburg, the Founding Fathers, and the colonist' fight for freedom and independence--to her mother who took her to visit these historic landmarks in Washington, D.C., Williamsburg and Mount Vernon--to her other history teachers who gave a sanitized view of U.S. history and crafted the curriculum around historical figures in whom Tochluk and her peers could easily identify because they looked liked them. Tochluk's indoctrination of American history is not unique. Many have heard this particular version of America's history replayed over and over throughout

their educational experience. Missing from this narrative of America is the social construction of race and the ways in which it was influenced by political and economic purposes, the genocide of the Native American people, the brutal enslavement and oppression of the African American people and other people of color, and the construction of the White identity. Because so much of our history as a country is rooted in America being built and maintained on a system of hegemony and racial oppression, racism is an enduring reality. As such, we cannot expect the pervasiveness of racism to go away anytime in the near future, if ever (Bell,1992a). On the permanence of racism, Bell asserted:

I have no celestial credentials to support my distressing message that racism in America is not a curable aberration--as we all believed it was at some earlier point. Rather, it is a key component in this country's stability. Identifying vicariously with those at the top, obsessed with barring blacks from eroding their racial priority for jobs and other resources, most whites accept their own relatively low social status. This acceptance is a major explanation why there is neither turmoil nor much concern about the tremendous disparity in income, wealth, and opportunity separating those at the top of the economic heap and the many, many down toward the bottom.

To be honest, I am more surprised than pleased that--aside from a few outraged members of the middle class--most black people agree with my thesis that racism is permanent. (p. x)

This declaration by Bell over 2 decades ago was validated by the short lived "We are the 99%"/"Occupy Wall Street" movement in America during the fall of 2011 in which there was a short protest regarding the wealth disparity of the 1% at the top and the 99% at the bottom in this country. While this movement was about social class and not race, the brevity of the movement offers possible credence to Bell's notion that "most whites accept their own relatively low social status" because they are able to identify

vicariously with those at the top via their racial priority which renders them a certain amount of power and privilege that is commonly shared by those at the top. It is my contention that before one can begin to challenge racism and other systems of oppression, they must first have the ability to recognize it. Teachers should have a clear understanding with regard to the historical underpinnings of racism and other forms of oppression, and the ways in which racism is not only a thing of the past, but is ever present in every segment of our society, including education (Bell, 1992a, 1992b). In having such knowledge, there will be a historical anchor in which to ground one's understanding of the ways in which racism and other forms of oppression continue to impact the educational system by way of: the curriculum, distribution of resources, pedagogical practices, and educational policy--all of which have a dire impact on the educational outcomes of students of color. According to Kailin (2002):

For educators, race awareness and whiteness theory have particular relevance, since most white teachers have not been educated about how the history of white supremacy has affected and continues to affect racial assumptions and norms that percolate throughout the culture of all institutions, including schools. (Kailin, 2002, p.62).

This acquisition of knowledge will not be obtained over a short period of time, but rather through the embarkation on an extensive, devoted, genuinely invested journey.

Embarking on such a journey is essential and rewarding for several reasons. First, in gaining an intellectual understanding of racism and the ways other "isms" work in our society, teachers are more likely to challenge such systems of inequity rather than reproduce them (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter, 1992; Nieto, 1999; Ziechner & Hoeft, 1996). Furthermore, in having a historical understanding with regard to the construction of racial hierarchies and other systems of oppression, teachers

can begin to understand the ways in which these constructions were not established out of mere hatred, but rather for political and economical gains. For example, if Lauren had a foundational understanding of the social construction of race and the subsequent social construction of Whiteness, she would have understood the property functions of Whiteness (Harris, 1993) and the ways in which they correlate to the educational disparities she observed between her students of color in urban schools and students who attend schools in the suburbs that are predominantly White. She would have understood the ways in which budget cuts incurred by schools in the inner city impact the opportunity to learn with regard to the intellectual and real property afforded to students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In addition, a knowledge of the historical underpinnings and pervasiveness of racism would have challenged Lauren's firm belief in the notion of meritocracy. She would have understood that what one has in this country is not necessarily a measure of their struggle and how hard they've worked, but rather, could be the result of privileges and opportunities afforded to some groups and not others. In addition, Lauren would have understood the ways in which the white identity was constructed to pride itself on the values of hard work, autonomy, individualism, purity, morality, delayed gratification and capitalism--which is in direct juxtaposition with the social constructions of non-white identities as savage, lazy, stupid, dirty, hypersexual, hedonistic, immoral, and communalistic (Allen, 1997; Bell, 1992a, 1992b; Haney-Lopez, 1996; Ignatiev, 1995; Kincheloe, 1999; Morrison, 1992; Tochluk, 2008).

In addition, by having a historical understanding of racism and oppression in America, teachers are able to arm their students with the tools to challenge these forms of oppression. For example, because Mackenzie had a clearer understanding of the

historical underpinnings of racism in America, in explaining the reality of their double-consciousness, she was able to help her students understand the world, how they were perceived in it, and offer ways to challenge these negative perceptions. Ladson-Billings (1994) provided credence to the importance of instilling this reality in students of color when she asserted:

African-American children cannot afford the luxury of shielding themselves with a sugar-coated version of the world. When their parents or neighbors suffer personal humiliations and discrimination because of their race, parents, teachers, and neighbors need to explain why. But, beyond those explanations, parents, teachers, and neighbors need to help arm African American children with the knowledge, skills, and attitude needed to struggle successfully against oppression. These, more than test scores, more than high grade-point averages, are critical features of education for African Americans. (p.139)

Finally, this historical understanding of racism and oppression allows teachers to recognize it and challenge racism and oppression by way of the curriculum via the curricular structures, processes, discourses, and their pedagogical practices so that they do not inadvertently normalize and reify these systems of oppression in their teaching (Ladson-Billings, ; Yosso, 2002). According to Yosso:

Indeed, one of the first mistakes most often made by many educators and policymakers is to look at the inequalities of student outcomes and blame students without looking at the conditions, such as the curricular structures, processes, and discourses that create unequal outcomes (People Who Care v. Rockford, 2001). (p. 94)

In order to get to this point of being able to challenge the curriculum and one's pedagogical practices, teachers must first embark on the journey of gaining a foundational understanding of the historical underpinnings of racism and oppression in America.



## **Recommendation 2: Reflecting on the Self**

Teachers need to know who they are as people, understand the contexts in which they teach, and question their knowledge and assumptions. Such knowledge and understanding are arguably just as, or even more important than their mastery of techniques for instructional effectiveness (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Teachers need to have a deep understanding of their own identities (both individual and collective) and the ways in which such identities shape their perceptions and ideologies *before* they can become effective teachers of students in urban and suburban schools. Teachers must explore their personal identities, attitudes and understandings of the ways in which their racial ascription and social positioning inform their actual practices and interactions with students (Solomon et al., 2005).

Moreover, teachers should be self-reflective about their identities and the ways they relate to privilege and whiteness. This might mean having to come to terms with the fact that one can simultaneously be a good person and still be dysconsciously racist. In this self-reflective process, teachers need to continuously evaluate the ways in which they participate in the system of whiteness and work diligently to counter-act these practices. In addition, teachers need to be able to recognize the ways in which different aspects of their identities lend them particular privileges (privileges to be uncritical/colorblind, privileges of silence) that others, who don't possess these facets, do not have the opportunity take advantage of.

This process of self-reflection should be on-going, in which teachers continually problematize the existence, privilege, and devastating effects of whiteness. Just as Lauren's narrative revealed, being able to distinguish between having a skin color that is

white in appearance, and the construct of “whiteness,” is imperative in having teachers examine their identities. According to Solomon et al. (2005):

This conflation of whiteness and white skin (Levine-Rasky, 2000) makes it difficult for students to move beyond feelings of anger and frustration to develop a clearer understanding of the way in which whiteness is also a constructed category, and one that comes with significant forms of capital that is seldom afforded to marginalized groups” (p.159).

Coming to terms with the fact that they may have inadvertently participated in the system of whiteness by way of unearned privileges and advantages based on their collective identity can elicit anger and frustration, however this is precisely why teachers needs to problematize the existence, privilege, and devastating effects of whiteness because if it is not problematized, it is normalized, and made invisible, thus allowing it to continue. Challenging teachers to perform a critical examination of the self is not a simple task to accomplish particularly because of the fact that in coming to the realization that one’s previous conception of the self and one’s position in society is based on a social construction can be unnerving. The goal of challenging teachers to perform a critical examination of themselves is not to blame or attack teachers because of their race and culture, nor to make them feel guilty or ashamed, but rather to examine the ways in which the ideologies along with the racial and cultural experiences of teachers is influenced largely by their identities. As Solomon et al. (2005) contended:

The knowledge that their ancestors, using various tools of domination and oppression, have created a society in which their benefits and privileges have been amassed at the expense of other racial and ethnic groups, elicits a sense of confusion about the legitimacy of their own position. This new information that challenges their personal, cultural and ideological underpinnings forces them to grapple with seemingly incongruous positions” (p.154).

The contention that one may have involuntarily participated in the system of white supremacy when it goes against the very notion of everything in which one values and stands for, can be quite perplexing in that it interrogates the very nature of who one understands him or herself to be. However, challenging such systems of oppression and the ways in which one has been a participant, either actively or unintentionally, is the only way these systems of oppression can be dismantled.

It's important to highlight that people do not have to be white to participate in the system of whiteness. As T. Howard (2010) noted:

One of the missing elements from the discourse on race and racism in schools has been the way that individuals of color can adopt, maintain, and promote many of the same racial ideologies and racialized deficit views of students of color that frequently are purported to be held only by Whites (Derman-Sparks, Phillips, & Hilliard, 1997; hooks, 1995). (p. 107)

Bell (1992a) contended:

True awareness requires an understanding of the Rules of Racial Standing. As an individual's understanding of these rules increases, there will be more and more instances where one can discern their workings. Using this knowledge, one gains the gift of prophecy about racism, its essence, its goals, even its remedies. The pride of this knowledge is the frustration that follows recognition that no amount of public prophecy, no matter its accuracy, can either repeal the Rules of Racial Standing or prevent their operation. (p. 125)

The internalized racism that teachers embody can have long lasting, devastating effects on the academic outcomes of students of color and it further divides people of color from the unified fight against racism (Berlak & Moyenda, 2001). Thus, the self-reflection process is critical for all educators--white teachers and teachers of color alike.

Howard (2003) posed the following five questions that are instrumental in helping teachers during the reflective process:

1. How frequently and what types of interactions did I have with individuals from racial backgrounds different from my own growing up?
2. Who were the primary persons that helped to shape my perspectives of individuals from different racial groups? How were their opinions formed?
3. Have I ever harbored prejudiced thoughts towards people from different racial backgrounds?
4. If I do harbor prejudiced thoughts, what effects do such thoughts have on students who come from those backgrounds?
5. Do I create negative profiles of individuals who come from different racial backgrounds? (p.198)

Reflecting on these questions could be a meaningful experience for teachers because in self-reflecting, they become cognizant of the ways in which their earlier experiences with race may have shaped their present thoughts and interactions. For example, each of the participants in my study were asked how frequently and what types of interactions they had people from different racial backgrounds. Nicole had the most diverse experience of being surrounded by people of different racial backgrounds. She attended diverse schools throughout her primary and secondary schooling experience and she lived in a diverse neighborhood. For Lauren, most of her interactions with people of diverse backgrounds occurred when she was very young, during the time that she lived with her birthmother. She did not construct any positive feelings from these experiences, in fact, she harbored negative feeling regarding the mud throwing incident because she believed the incident occurred because she was White. Growing up in a relatively monolithic White community, in which only one African American student was in her entire graduating class, Mackenzie also did not have any meaningful interactions with people of color. She constructed a negative profile for people of color that carried over into her adulthood

based on the one experience she could remember in which during a trip to Minnesota, she witnessed her parents locking the doors to ensure their safety, after seeing a group of Black people. For Karen, her entire childhood and adolescence was spent living in a small town in which her family was one of only a few families of color. For Karen, some of her experiences and interactions with her own people were not pleasant based on the fact that she was perceived by her other classmates of color of assimilating into the White culture. These experiences could have been the impetus behind Karen's decision to teach in a predominantly White, suburban school, although she had also been hired to teach in the Milwaukee Public School District. Reflecting upon these questions may have been beneficial for the participants in my study in allowing them to examine the ways their earlier experiences with race, may have played in shaping their perceptions, ideologies, and interactions with their students.

### **Recommendation 3: Developing a Critical Consciousness**

Teachers need to reflect on the ways in which their identities and experiences allow them to perceive the world from a particular standpoint and seek to develop alternative ways of understanding the world, particularly from the perspective of the marginalized and oppressed. In developing this critical consciousness, they will be able to see the ways in which their identities directly affect their interactions with their students, their pedagogical practices, and subsequently the academic outcomes of their students. The goal of promoting a cultural critical consciousness in educators is to move the teacher from a position of uncertainty to an outcome in which people—previously informed largely or exclusively about race by (White) mainstream US culture, come to rely upon a larger, more historically grounded viewpoint that permits appreciation of

contemporary forms of oppression. Rich & Cargile (2004) describe this place of self-awareness and affirmation as “White Identity Transformation. As Rich & Cargile (2004) assert:

In this context, ‘White’ does not refer to one’s ‘racial’ classification, but rather the standpoint from which s/he views the world. Thus, we do not seek to transform all White people and no persons of color. Instead, we seek to move any person naïve to the ways in which power operates in a racialized manner within the US. More specifically, White identity transformation is an abdication of ‘colorlessness’ coupled with an intent to work toward social justice (p.361).

In moving teachers to White identity transformation, they will be able to recognize the ways in which race and power have operated in society, both presently and historically and they are able to critically examine and counteract the ways in which they have been participants. Lauren, for example, may have benefitted from this transformation in critically examining and challenging her meritocratic viewpoints and her tendency to view issues primarily from the perspective of class rather than race.

In helping teachers become self-reflective and develop a critical consciousness, Milner (2003) offered a Critically Reflective Chart About Race to use as a tool in which he poses several questions that may have proved beneficial for some of the teachers from my study to reflect upon in enhancing their critical consciousness. For example, Lauren may have benefitted from reflecting on the ways in which her race influenced her work as a teacher with students of color and the way in which her students' racial experiences influenced their work with her as the teacher. Lauren was particularly defensive about the way some of her students of color perceived her (based on her collective identity of whiteness). Critically examining the ways that her race influenced the way in which her students initially perceived her, based on their individual and collective racial

experiences, may have helped Lauren isolate the way in which her students perceived her individually versus collectively.

Miner (2003) suggests that teachers question power structures and the ways in which they situate themselves in the education of others as a means of consciously guiding the ways they plan and enact lessons. Nicole's high school teacher may have benefitted from this in reflecting on the ways in which he as teacher, situated himself in the education of others and how he negotiated power structures around race before designing his slavery debate lesson-- a lesson which consequently marginalized and demoralized Nicole and the other students of color in his class.

Milner (2003) also suggests that teachers question their willingness to "speak out on behalf of those who might not be present in the conversation both inside and outside of school" (p.178) and question their willingness to "express the injustices of racism in conservative places" (p.178) as a means of challenging teachers to not separate their personal and professional philosophies. Mackenzie and Lauren may have benefitted from this process in reflecting on their willingness to speak out about race and the injustices of racism in conservative spaces. While Mackenzie was able to openly challenge racism in the educational realm in the instance with the tour guide on the field trip, she, like Lauren, was not so open to challenging racism in conservative spaces with her family and friends.

The purpose of encouraging this exploration, development, and enhancement of a cultural critical consciousness, is to have both White educators and educators of color alike, benefit from examining their racial identities and understand the ways in which their experiences influence how they view themselves and others, the academic outcomes

of students of color, and their commitments to teach in urban schools. According to L.A. Bell (2002):

Part of the multicultural education of white teachers should be an awareness of their own racial position, providing language to help them come to own a race cognizant discourse through which they can acknowledge and appreciate the diverse cultures, including their own represented in their classrooms. Teachers of color will benefit from white classmates who can be counted on as allies because they understand their own self-interest in developing an anti-racist perspective. Together, they can then critically analyze curriculum, practice culturally responsive teaching, and develop strategies for creating schools and classrooms reflective of equality, social justice, and multicultural democracy (L.A. Bell, 2002, p. 242).

Teachers of color must be committed to forging alliances with White teachers who are also committed to the fight for equity, on the world's behalf and particularly on the behalf of all who are oppressed. Everyone will benefit from this process ultimately because while the permanence of racism and other systems of oppression may not ever be fully eradicated from our society, we can all do our part individually by uniting and dismantling these collective systems of inequity in the educational realm with the hopes of creating a better future for the next generation and generations to come.

#### **Recommendation 4: Challenging Majoritarian Tales and Forging Alliances**

Teachers, particularly teachers of color, need to continue to counteract majoritarian tales. This means being open to sharing one's stories and experiences and seeking ways to creatively challenge stock explanations that normalize and neutralize oppression.

Challenging majoritarian tales is important because according to according to Ladson-Billings (1998):

Finally, naming one's own reality with stories can affect the oppressor. Most oppression, as was discussed earlier, does not seem like oppression to the perpetrator (Lawrence, 1987). Delgado (1989) argues that the dominant group justifies its power with stories, stock explanations, that construct reality in ways



that maintain their privilege. Thus, oppression is rationalized, causing little self-examination by the oppressor. Stories by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism (p.14).

The pervasiveness of racism will continue as long as stock stories go unchallenged because through majoritarian tales, racism remains hidden through its embedment in the normalization of whiteness. By naming one's own reality, teachers of color bring the systemic issues of race and racism down to the personal level by challenging the majority to critically examine and counteract the ways in which they have individually participated in collective systems of domination and oppression. Therefore, naming one's own reality is essential in developing alternative ways of understanding the world, particularly from the perspective of the marginalized and oppressed. The ultimate goal is to challenge teachers to critically reflect upon and understand the ways in which their identities directly inform their interactions, pedagogical practices, and subsequently, the academic outcomes of their students.

### **From Theory to Practice**

The findings of my study leads me to consider the possible ways in which my recommendations may be turned into practice useful for teacher education programs.

#### **Classroom Practices**

With regard to my call for teachers to be self-reflective and critically conscious, Gay and Kirkland (2003) propose several ideas for teacher education programs to initiate learning climates in which on-going self-reflection and the development of a critical consciousness are normative components which are expected of student teachers. With regard to this expectation Gay and Kirkland (2003) state:

In our classes students are informed from the very beginning that they are expected to "think deeply and analytically," and to "check themselves" about the topics they are studying; to carefully examine their feelings about what they experience; and to work diligently at translating the knowledge they are learning into instructional possibilities for use with the students they will teach. They are to think about both the personal and professional ramifications of their newly acquired knowledge-- how it impacts them as human beings and classroom teachers. (p.184)

In addition to having on-going inner dialogues with the self through reflection, teachers also need to have these dialogues with others. In their teacher preparation classrooms, Gay and Kirkland (2003) have incorporated the opportunity for their students to have critical conversations regarding racially and culturally diverse dilemmas in education. One such opportunity involves having students work together to construct position statements on multicultural education in which they examine the power of language to perpetuate racism, cultural hegemony, and marginalization. Gay and Kirkland (2003) also suggest using various forms of expression in order to dramatize these dialogues including the use of role-playing and simulation, poetry, the use of metaphor, and the use of visual representations. According to Gay and Kirkland (2003):

These different discourses are important because of the camaraderie they provide, and the support and confidence students gain in confronting issues of educational equity for ethnically diverse students. Furthermore, teachers talking with each other about their individual and collective thoughts, insights, and instructional actions is an essential part of being reflective practitioners (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Richert, 1992). (185)

The professor/instructor plays a pivotal role in facilitating and fostering the learning environments in which students learn to become self-reflective and to develop a critical consciousness. Gay and Kirkland (2003) have found the use of modeling to be an effective technique which demonstrates self-reflection and critical consciousness with

regard to teaching behaviors. The authors detail the use of a debriefing method by which they periodically interrupt a substantive discussion and use the process of debriefing to focus on what is going on. They initially guide the first few debriefing sessions in which through the use of conceptual, analytical, and interpretive descriptions, as well as pointing out textual and functional shifts in the discourse, Gay and Kirkland explain to the students what just occurred. During this process, Gay and Kirkland name the different types of communication and information used, reveal where within the discussion they expressed personal feelings and biases, share their own introspective thoughts, questions, and insights provoked by the discussion; and assess the adequacy of their instructional delivery. Gay and Kirkland then assist their students through this debriefing process, guiding them until they reach the point in which they are able to perform reflective analyses of their own, their instructor's, and their educational peers' pedagogical conversations (Gay and Kirkland, 2003).

Milner (2003) offers a Critically Reflective Chart about race that could prove helpful to teacher educators who have their students self-reflect regularly through the activity of journaling. The questions in Milner's (2003) chart can be used to challenge prospective teachers in various ways. First, Milner challenges teachers to see themselves from multiple perspectives--from that of raced individuals who bring a particular set of experiences into their teaching practices based on identity to that of their students who may have similar or different experiences based on their identities. In addition, Milner (2003) challenges teachers to consider the roles privilege and power play in the negotiation of knowledge, experience, and expertise. Finally, Milner (2003) challenges the teacher to reflect upon whether there is a congruence between their personal and

professional philosophies about race and to consider whether their actions and behaviors are indicative of these philosophical beliefs.

### **Programmatic Recommendations**

In connection with potential ways through which teachers can develop a deeper understanding with regard to the historical underpinnings of racism and other forms of oppression, teacher education programs can begin by immersing their students into the cultures and communities of people of color. This call for racial and cultural immersion is predicated on the following assertions: The short visits in which student teachers are placed in the field can be very shallow and can serve to reinforce stereotypes (Cross, 1995); student teachers need to understand through experience that the cultures of people of color are not static or monolithic, but rather rich and diverse (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2001; Solórzano, 1997); and being immersed within a culture will better inform teaching practices as well as help to build relationships between teachers, students, parents and the community overall (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2001).

### **Using Field Observations to Mediate the Gap**

We cannot expect teachers to teach what they don't know and the most effective way for teachers to know is by way of their own experiences (Howard, 1999). Teachers cannot come to value the languages, cultures, and families of their students by reading about it in a textbook, nor can they do so by spending short, non-contextualized time periods in the field. So how then, do we immerse teachers into communities of color without expecting that they live in these communities, give up their personal time to participate in these communities, and without creating an experience similar to the

television show "Survivor" in which student teachers are dropped into these foreign communities and expected to fend for themselves?

One possible way to help mediate this transition into communities of color is for teacher education programs to collaborate with leaders of the community to create partnerships that are advantageous to schools of education as well as the community overall. Forging community partnerships and conducting teacher education courses in various places located within communities of color including churches, primary and secondary schools, community centers, etc. is one way to immerse students enrolled in teacher preparation programs into communities of color and is also a potential way to recruit more teachers of color from these particular communities. "Bringing the college to the community," is also advantageous in that it allows community residents the accessibility of college in the comforts of their own communities.

The reciprocal partnership formed between the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) and the Bilingual Education Program at Chicago State University is one example of a successful teacher education program in which the participants are immersed in communities of color. Founded on LSNA's core belief that members of their community can and should serve as resources in schools, Project Nueva Generación (New Generation) was initiated as a Grow Your Own initiative to recruit and prepare community members to become teachers (Skinner, 2010). Project Nueva Generación is the model for the Grow Your Own teachers initiative in Illinois which is a consortia of community based organizations, colleges of education, and school districts. At the time in which the article was published in 2010, between 60 and 70 neighborhood residents had the opportunity to attend college and work toward a bachelor's degree and teaching

credentials. Many of these residents had already worked in the community as teacher assistants, school volunteers, and community leaders (Skinner, 2010).

The students enrolled in project Nueva Generación took all of their classes at a local elementary school located within the Logan Square neighborhood. This particular elementary school was transformed into a community center during after school hours in which community members took various classes including: English as a second language (ESL), GED, karate, folkloric dance, homework help and sewing. This community center also had on-site child care in which both the community residents as well as the project Nueva Generación students taking evening courses could access (Skinner, 2010).

In another article, Ladson-Billings (1999) described several teacher education programs across the nation which utilize immersion experiences as one means of challenging the myth of "public schools way back then" and of disrupting what teacher candidates perceive as the norm. This is done mainly through fostering disequilibrium experiences in which pre-service teachers begin to view the world through social inequities. One of the programs Ladson-Billings highlights is at Santa Clara University (SCU), located in the midst of Silicon Valley in California. Ladson-Billings (1999) describes the teacher education program at SCU as:

one designed to cultivate 'informed empathy' rather than a sense of 'sympathy' where well-meaning students 'feel sorry for' or pity others. The program's goal is to help prospective teachers 'feel with' people they regard as different from a position of knowledge and information about how they and others come to occupy particular social positions. (p. 234)

The notion of informed empathy is important in that in "feeling sorry" for others, students can fall into the trap of objectifying people they regard as different, creating a savior mentality or might resort to blaming the victim for circumstances in which they do not fully understand. The students enrolled in the teacher education program at SCU begin

their process of informed empathy by embarking on a week-long immersion experience in which they visit soup kitchens, homeless shelters and other facilities designed to serve the poor and dispossessed in an effort to get a broader perspective of the human condition as they commence upon their inquiry into social inequity. This week-long immersion experience has since been expanded into a field-based course in which students have the opportunity to continuously reflect upon their community-based experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Ladson-Billings (1999) also highlights the Teach for Diversity (TFD) initiative at the University of the Wisconsin-Madison which, according to Ladson-Billings (1999) "was designed as a 15-month elementary certification program where prospective teachers begin to understand what it means to teach diverse learners by starting in the community" (p.237). As such, the students begin this 4-semester long program by embarking upon a 6-week assignment in which they spend 10-12 hours per week in a community-based agency such as a neighborhood center, Salvation Army Day Camp, city-sponsored day camp or enrichment program. This community immersion experience is further supplemented by having the students take two courses, "Teaching and Diversity" and "Culture, Curriculum, and Learning." The students then process and debrief their community placement experiences with an 8-week follow-up seminar (Ladson-Billings, 1999). The next semester, students are then placed in one of three elementary schools for an entire year in order to student teach, during which time they are expected to maintain their community service commitment. The TFD program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is structured to build upon several valuable themes. According to Ladson-Billings (1999), "The truncated nature of the TFD program means

that a few themes are emphasized and repeated throughout the preparation year. One such theme is that schools are community entities and teachers must better understand the communities in which they teach"(p. 238). Schools are indeed community entities and in order to gain a deeper, broader understanding of the community and the school itself, one must actively situate oneself within the community.

Situating oneself within the community is vital because for many prospective teachers, the field observation experience is the first time they have the opportunity to interact with people of color. Because teachers are in the field for such a very short time and may have no contextual experiences which to support their experiences (besides the inaccurate depictions of people of color they may have observed and subsequently internalized from the media or other aspects of society) the limited understanding they obtain about people of color while they are in the field, can be used to perpetuate stereotypes and reify oppression and inequities (Solorzano,1997). Moreover, many White, pre-service teachers enter their field experience with little or no awareness of the historical underpinnings of racism and colonialism in America, and with an insufficient amount of knowledge of the past and present strengths, accomplishments, and resources of the communities of color in which they teach (Ladson-Billings,1999, 2000, 2001; Swartz, 2003). This lack of knowledge in addition to the lack of relationships established with people of color can cause these pres-service teachers to see themselves as wardens, "great mediators", saviors, or missionaries and can eventually contribute to the high rate of teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2000, 2001; Swartz, 2003).

Cross (2003) provided one such example of the negative implications ephemeral experiences in communities of color can have on teacher candidates. The pre-service



students in Cross'(2003) investigation indicated not only verbally, but through their actions as well, that they were not adequately prepared to teach in urban schools. Cross (2003) spoke to the superficial and potentially harmful nature of field experiences when she made the suggestion that “field experiences potentially teaches passivity toward culture and should be modified beyond clinical observation to skill and knowledge competence to teach racial minority students” (Cross, 2003, p.207). Instead of using the field experience to learn how to better inform their teaching practices, many teachers use this experience to “observe” students as if they were objects or worse yet, foreign creatures to be studied (Cross, 2003). Rather than use the time they are given in the field to become members of the community, many prospective teachers put up an invisible wall and consequently refuse to view the lives and experiences of their students from a positive perspective (Cross, 2003). As such, students should be immersed in the lives and cultures of their students for prolonged periods of time. Teacher preparation programs might consider the immersion experiences described by Ladson-Billings and Skinner as models to pattern these opportunities for learning after (Ladson-Billings,1999; Skinner, 2010). The intended outcome of this extended time in communities of color, is for prospective teachers to come to understand that their students do not belong to a static, monolithic group, but rather to a rich, diverse community.

### **The Call to Recruit and Retain More Teachers of Color**

In order for teachers of color to continue to counteract majoritarian tails that normalize and neutralize oppression, an ongoing recruitment and retention initiative must be established amongst teacher education programs throughout the nation. Grow your own initiatives similar to that of Project Nueva Generación could be used as a model to

recruit teachers of color from urban communities (Skinner, 2010). Recruiting and retaining potential teachers of color from urban communities could prove valuable in that these potential teachers would serve as leaders, giving back to their communities in addition to bridging the gap as they serve as allies to student-teachers who are less familiar with communities of color (Dixson, 2003, 2008; Foster, 1995, 1997; Lynn, 2002). Because there is a such a lack of diversity throughout the educational arena ranging from teacher educators to potential teachers, there is a need to recruit more teachers and professors of color who are critically conscious on both the local and national level as a means of providing multiple perspectives(Dixson, 2003, 2008; Foster, 1995, 1997; Lynn, 2002). If we do not have these multiple perspectives, it can prove very difficult to sustain conversations surrounding diversity and equity in education.

In conclusion, a deeper look into each of these programs and similar teacher education programs which incorporate prolonged immersion experiences into their curricula can be useful in establishing meaningful opportunities for teacher candidates in which they can come to value the language, culture, and experiences of communities of color through personal experience as well as establish positive relationships between the students, their parents and the community overall.

### **The Point of it All**

The ugly pattern of racism has been inextricably woven into the very fabric of our society and who we are as a country. This is an abhorrent past and present reality that we cannot divorce from ourselves. As Lawrence (1987) asserted:

Americans share a common historical and cultural heritage in which racism has played and still plays a dominant role. Because of this shared experience, we also inevitably share many ideas, attitudes, and beliefs that attach significance to an individual's race and induce negative feelings and opinions of nonwhites. To the

extent that this cultural belief system has influenced all of us, we are racists. At the same time, most of us are unaware of our racism. We do not recognize the ways in which our cultural experience has influenced our beliefs about race or the occasions on which those beliefs affect our actions. In other words, a large part of the behavior that produces racial discrimination is influenced by unconscious racial motivation (p.322).

The goal of this research was to examine the ways in which the racial and cultural experiences of teachers influenced their identities and ideologies about educating students of color and their commitment to teach in urban and suburban schools. This is essential because teachers' identities directly inform their interactions, pedagogical practices, and subsequently, the academic outcomes of their students and teachers undoubtedly have the responsibility to contribute to the academic success of all of their students regardless of race, class, sex, religion or ability. Based on the findings of my study, it is my contention that teachers wishing to take a proactive stance with regard to examining the ways in which their identities inform their ideologies and experiences and subsequently their interactions with students of color may do so by: Understanding the historical underpinnings and pervasiveness of racism in America, embarking on a critical reflection of the self, developing a critical consciousness, challenging majoritarian tales and forging alliances.

## **Appendix A**

### **Interview 1**

(These general/background questions are intended to allow me to get to know the participant).

1. Tell me something about yourself. When and where were you educated?
2. Why did you choose to become a teacher?
3. How long have you been teaching in your school?
4. How did you come to teach at an urban school? Is this the first and only urban school that you've taught in?
5. What did you think about MPS and urban schools before you were a teacher in one? Did this view change once you actually taught in an urban school?
6. What were the reactions of your family and friends when they learned you would be teaching in an urban school?
7. How did you respond to these re-actions?
8. Describe the students that you've taught over the years.
9. Do you feel that you've been successful as a teacher over the years? Why or why not?

## **Appendix A**

### **Interview 2**

(These questions are intended to examine the participant's ideologies about race as demonstrated by their values, beliefs, and perceptions. Some of these questions are intended to examine the participant's commitment to teach in urban schools.)

1. Describe the neighborhood/community of which you grew up in. How was it (the neighborhood) with regard to race? Socioeconomic Status?
2. How frequently and what types of interactions did you have with individuals from racial backgrounds different from your own growing up?
3. What are your earliest experiences with race? What memories have you constructed from these experiences?
4. What emotions rise to the surface when you re-visit these memories?
5. How do the students that you teach in your school compare to the children you grew up with?
6. Describe the neighborhood/community you live in now. How is it with regard to race and socioeconomic status?
7. How have you come to internalize/understand the past and present race relations in the United States?
8. Does your understanding of such relations influence the way that you teach? Please give an example.
9. Do you consider yourself colorblind? Why or why not?
10. In what ways have your life experiences affected your teaching in an urban school? In a suburban school?
11. Can you recall an incident involving racism or racial insensitivity that you've either witnessed personally, heard about, or experienced in your work in schools? How did you feel about this incident and how did you respond to this incident?

## **Appendix A**

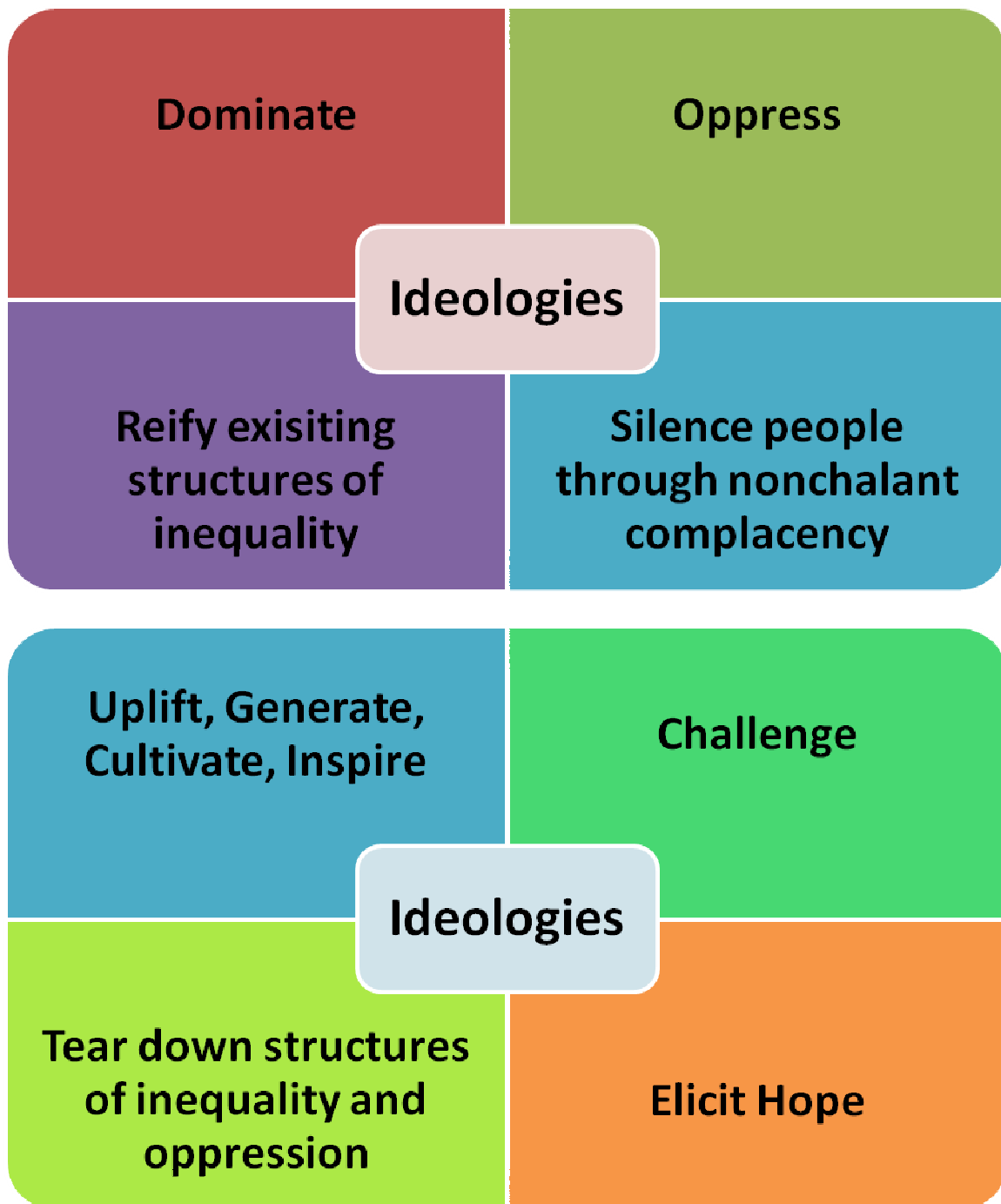
### **Interview 3**

These questions are intended to examine the educational experiences of the participants including the participant's perception of the students and their families as well as the perceived emotional and physical toil of teaching in urban schools.

1. Can you recall a specific situation in which your identity had an influence on your interaction with one of your students or with a group of your students?
2. Tell me about some of the things that you've done in your classroom to facilitate the academic success of students of color.
3. As you are probably aware, there is a gap in academic achievement between students of color, particularly African American students and their White counterparts. To what do you attribute this gap in achievement?
4. How much of what you know about teaching students of color did you learn as a result of teacher training, either pre-service or in-service?
5. How do you handle discipline? Are there special things that teachers of students of color should know about discipline?
6. What kind of role do you believe parents play in the success of African American students? How would you describe the kinds of relationships you've had with parents of students you've taught?
7. Do you think the schooling experiences of students of color in urban schools differ from the schooling experiences of White students in middle-class communities? Please elaborate.
8. Why have you chosen to leave/ stay?
9. a: (For teachers teaching in Urban Schools)----Given the same conditions such as salary and benefits, if you had the opportunity to leave your school and to teach in a suburban school system, would you? Why?  
  
b: (for teachers teaching in Suburban Schools)---Given an increase in salary and the same benefits you receive now, if you had the opportunity to leave your school and return to teach in an urban school system, would you? Why? How much would your salary have to increase in order to return to an urban school? Would you return to an urban school if there was no increase in salary?
10. With respect to your career, where do you see yourself in the next 3-5 years?
11. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would like to tell me?

## APPENDIX B

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK DIAGRAM



## **Appendix C**

### **Questions Used in the Partial Pilot-Study**

1. Can you start by telling me which race and social class do you identify yourself as?
2. Can you tell me about some of your life experiences with people of diverse races and cultures?
3. Why did you decide to teach?
4. How long have you been teaching in your school?
5. How did you come to teach at an urban school?
6. Is this the first and only urban school that you've taught in?
7. How do the students that you teach in your school compare to the children you grew up with?
8. In what ways has your life experiences affected your teaching in an urban school?
9. What do you think about the students that you teach?
10. How do you feel about the students that you teach?
11. How do you think your students feel about you?
12. Given the same conditions such as salary and benefits, if you had the opportunity to leave your school and to teach in a suburban school system, would you? Why?
13. With respect to your career, where do you see yourself in the next 3-5 years?



## **Appendix D**

### **IRB FORMS**

Please refer to the attached documents for the following IRB forms:

- New Study Form
- Protocol Summary
- Informed Consent

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# TALONDA MICHELLE LIPSEY

Place of Birth: Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Educational Institution: University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee

## EDUCATION

- 2008—Present. Ph.D. Candidate in the Urban Education Doctoral Program  
Specialization: Curriculum & Instruction, University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee. Anticipated Degree Conferral: May, 2013  
Dissertation Title: A Qualitative Case Study on Teachers' Identities, Ideologies, and Commitment to Teach in Urban and Suburban Schools
- 2006-2007. M.S. Curriculum & Instruction, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee  
Master's Seminar Paper Topic: Teacher Attrition
- 1999—2003. B.S. Biology, Marquette University

## EMPLOYMENT

- 2010--Present Advanced Opportunity Program Fellow, UW-Milwaukee
- 2008—2010 Milwaukee Graduate Assistant, Department of Curriculum & Instruction, UW-Milwaukee  
As a Graduate Assistant, I had the privilege of being a part of the research group of Distinguished Professors Dr. Martin Haberman and Dr. Linda Post. The primary focus of their research examines teacher quality and the characteristics of “Star Teachers”. I also have the privilege of working with another group of UW-Milwaukee professors on a project examining the assessment of teacher quality through supervision and field placements.
- 2005-2008 Harold S. Vincent High School---Teacher, Milwaukee, WI  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade Physical Science  
9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Grade Biology

## RESEARCH

- I've served on a research project headed by the late Dr. Martin Haberman and Dr. Linda Post at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, assisting with their continued research on Star Teachers.
- I served on a research project headed by Dr. Thandeka Chapman at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, examining the experiences of students of color in suburban schools.

### PEER REVIEWED PRESENTATIONS

- Chapman, T.K., Lipsey, T., Hartlep, N., Joseph, T., Vang, T. (2012). “FUBU<sup>4</sup> (For Us By Us) Style: Researchers of Color Documenting the Lives of Students of Color in Majority White Suburban Schools.” Critical Race Studies in Education Annual Conference. Teacher's College, Columbia University. New York, New York
- Chapman, T.K., Lipsey, T., Hartlep, N., Joseph, T., Vang, T. (2012). "Revisiting the Double-Edge Sword of Curriculum." AERA. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
- Chapman, T.K., Lipsey, T., Hartlep, N., Joseph, T., Vang, T. (2011). “FUBU<sup>5</sup> (For Us By Us) Style: Researchers of Color Documenting the Lives of Students of Color in Majority White Suburban Schools.” AERA. New Orleans, Louisiana
- Chapman, T.K., Lipsey, T., Hartlep, N., Joseph, T., Vang, T. (2011). Students of Color Surviving Majority White Multi-Racial School Contexts: A CRT Analysis of Student Identity. AERA. New Orleans, Louisiana
- Chapman, T.K., Lipsey, T., Hartlep, N., Joseph, T., Vang, T. (2011). “Researchers of Color Documenting the Lives of Students of Color in Majority White Suburban Schools.” International Qualitative Congress. Urbana, Illinois

### ADDITIONAL PRESENTATIONS

- Presenter at University of Wisconsin 2010 Ph.D. Research Forum entitled Demystifying the Dissertation: The Process, The Communication, The Politics--October, 2010.
- Speaker at Marquette University to students in the Educational Opportunity Program--July, 2010.
- Keynote Speaker at Vincent High School's National Honor Society Induction Ceremony--May, 2006.

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<sup>4</sup> The term Fubu originated as an acronym of “Five Urban Brother United” but quickly adopted a secondary meaning of “For Us by Us” that represented the uniqueness of an urban clothing line designed and owned by African American entrepreneurs for African American youth in inner city areas. Since its inception, the clothing line has expanded and become inclusive of all urban clothing consumers.

<sup>5</sup> The term Fubu originated as an acronym of “Five Urban Brother United” but quickly adopted a secondary meaning of “For Us by Us” that represented the uniqueness of an urban clothing line designed and owned by African American entrepreneurs for African American youth in inner city areas. Since its inception, the clothing line has expanded and become inclusive of all urban clothing consumers.

## PUBLICATIONS

### Peer Review Articles

- Chapman, T. Hartlep, N., Joseph, T., Lipsey, T., Vang, T. (2011). “FUBU<sup>i</sup> (For Us By Us) Style: Researchers of Color Documenting the Lives of Students of Color in Majority White Suburban Schools.” *Qualitative Research*. Under review.

## HONORS

- I had the distinct honor and privilege of representing the Division K section of AERA as the Senior Representative of the Graduate Student Council for 2010-2011. I had the opportunity to represent Division K during the Annual Brown Lecture and Coordinated Committee Meeting held in Washington, D.C. in October 2010 and at the AERA Annual Meeting in April 2011 in New Orleans, LA.
- I had the distinct honor and privilege of representing the Division K section of AERA as the Incoming Junior Representative of the Graduate Student Council for 2010-2011. I had the opportunity to represent Division K during the Annual Brown Lecture and Coordinated Committee Meeting that was held in Washington, D.C. in October 2009 and at the AERA Annual Meeting in April 2010 in Denver, CO.
- I had the distinct honor and privilege of being featured in an UW-Milwaukee Ed Line article showcasing passionate and committed educators. *New Educators Bring Diverse Backgrounds, Experience and Enthusiasm to the Profession*. Ed Line Spring/Summer 2008, Volume 12, Number 2 edition.

## LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

- American Educational Research Association Division K--Graduate Student Council, Senior Representative (2010-2011)
- American Educational Research Association Division K—Graduate Student Council, Incoming Junior Representative (2009-2010)
- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, Milwaukee Alumnae Chapter, Member (2004-Present)
- Student Council Advisor at Vincent High School (2006-2008)
- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, Kappa Eta Chapter past Vice-President, Secretary, Chaplin (2002-2004)
- Marquette University Upward Bound Mentor (2002-2003)



**PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, Member (2002-Present)
  - American Educational Research Association, Member (2009-Present)
  - University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee Multicultural Graduate Student Alliance, Member (2009-Present)
-