"Some friends and I started talking...": a participatory action research project to deconstruct white privilege among student affairs practitioners

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“Some friends and I started talking…”—A participatory action research project to deconstruct white privilege among student affairs practitioners

by

Jeffrey Edward Cullen

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:
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Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2008

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My fervent hope is that the next generation is more and better equipped to dismantle white supremacy, white privilege, and racism. Case (2004) noted that “[White people] have not been taught to take racism seriously as something we need to address. This lesson is most often communicated to us as children through the silence and inaction of white adults who remain passive in the face of injustice (p. 79).” With that said, I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my children: Mackenzie, age 7, and Nate, age 4.
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Now I turn from an acknowledgment that is gentle to one that is jarring. Tim Wise, an anti-racist commentator, often begins his public lectures with an acknowledgment that we, as white European-descended Americans, are occupying spaces that once were inhabited by indigenous people. Were it not for those early acts of white supremacy, neither we nor our academic institutions would even exist. That I could undertake a thesis in this way and at this particular place and time is evidence of the enduring nature of white supremacy. I can’t begin to make amends for the violence “my people” have perpetrated and continue to perpetuate, but I can at least name its occurrence and speak it as my truth, lest its omission or my silence be taken as agreement.

There are several People of Color that I regard as mentors—people that encouraged me patiently and lovingly at first and then more persistently as time went on to confront my own participation in the mechanisms of white privilege and white supremacy. Grace Hansborough was my first grade teacher and taught me one of the earliest critical lessons I can remember about the construct of whiteness. Dr. Barbara Love at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst
and Dr. Barbara Pendergrass, now retired from Virginia Tech, both gave me many “gifts,” when they cared enough about my humanity to call me on my privilege. I only hope I can be as generative and life-giving in my critiques as I move through the world. As well, there are many whites that have been or continue to be in my circle of anti-racist, anti-oppression colleagues. Michael Burchell, Craig Alimo, Kathy Obear, Keith Edwards, and Alex Butterfield have enriched my life with their passion and sustained commitment to social justice education. What I know about whiteness and privilege I learned from them—however, any shortcomings in my analysis are entirely my own responsibility. I should also like to acknowledge and appreciate Craig’s willingness to take time out from his own dissertation research to perform a confirmability audit on this research project. Thanks to his diligence, I was able to fill in some gaps in my account of the steps taken in data analysis. Penny Rice, the director of the women’s center at Iowa State and another white ally, was a critical friend and gave feedback on this project from an emancipatory perspective.

I want to acknowledge my parents, who consciously or unconsciously instilled in me values of civility and equity. My father, Bill Cullen also earned a Ph.D. at Iowa State. Indeed, I come from a fairly long (i.e., privileged) line of academic and professional achievement, so it was more a question of when, not if, I would earn a terminal degree. Now that the “when” question appears to have some closure, I look forward to carrying on that tradition of achievement. My mother, Laurie Cullen, is a technical editor by trade and has trained her warmly critical eye on numerous drafts of this thesis. I want to especially appreciate her for the significant time she’s spent to help make my writing more elegant. My in-laws, Terry and Alice Anderson, provided part-time child care and a place for us to live as we transitioned from Iowa to Maryland and that cushion helped immensely over the past year.

I could not have completed this project without the members of my dissertation study group. I was and continue to be floored that Avery, Emma, Kevin, Peyton, and Zach were willing and able to give up 30+ hours of their summer to indulge my research interests. They have all continued to be supportive throughout the analysis and writing phases, and we are beginning to talk about future collaborations. Whether or not they ever choose to shed their anonymity and “come out” as participants, I am deeply appreciative of their altruism. My achievement is integrally dependent on what they were willing to give, share, and accomplish, and I thank them for it.
Finally, I wish to affirm my partner Kristen. She has sacrificed more than can be named and deferred her personal and our shared dreams so that I could sojourn in dissertation-land. I appreciate her support and steadfast loyalty, even when I didn’t make it easy.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this participatory action research (PAR) project was to investigate and deconstruct white racial privilege as one step toward developing an anti-racist professional identity for white students in a student affairs graduate preparation program at a predominantly white university. This study was significant because it furthered the development of a roadmap for whites to use in developing white privilege awareness. An awareness of privilege, generally, and white racial privilege, specifically, are integral for practitioners in the helping professions.

This qualitative study used the approach of PAR, influenced by a critical, emancipatory perspective. Five participants came together for a 30-hour group process that was both dialogical and experiential. Each group member was interviewed before and after the group process, and the transcripts of the interviews and group process formed the core of the data that was generated. Participants also wrote personal reflections in between the PAR group sessions and these reflective writings were analyzed as part of the data. Finally, as an evaluation component and as a method to triangulate data, each participant completed the White Privilege Attitude Scale (WPAS) (Pinterits, 2004) at the beginning and end of the PAR group process.

Several significant moments or categories emerged from an analysis of the PAR group process transcripts. The all-white constitution of the group and the engaged and democratic framework of PAR facilitated the formation of a cohesive dialogue marked by authenticity and trust among the members. The group participated in a series of experiential activities that helped them apprehend the construct of white privilege and begin to problematize its presence in their lives. The group worked through typical responses to white privilege awareness, such as guilt, stuckness, and resistance, and emerged with several critical, action-oriented strategies to contest privilege within their own spheres. They identified barriers to their own willingness to confront privilege and generated personal action plans to deconstruct white privilege.

The core finding of this research project was that all-white anti-racism encounter groups, especially when they are embedded within an engaged, decolonizing methodology such as PAR, can facilitate white privilege awareness among graduate students in a student affairs preparation program. Limitations of this study include the constructed 30-hour time frame that bounded the process, the manner in which participants were selected which limits the transferability of these findings, and the attenuated spiral of planning, action, observation and reflection that occurred
due to the time limitation of the project. This research study has implications for those who engage in social movements around issues of race, racism, and racial privilege. The findings help us better understand the process of coming to awareness of white privilege and serve as a potential roadmap for student affairs professionals seeking to author an anti-racist identity.
PROLOGUE

“Whenever I read about a new humanitarian relief effort—some of which have earned the Nobel Peace Prize—it is always a story of the power of conversation. Somewhere in the description of how it all began is the phrase: ‘some friends and I started talking.’”

(Wheatley, 2002, p. 22)

In the introduction to her volume Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People From Privileged Groups, Diane Goodman cites her dissertation adviser, Gerry Weinstein, as having said, “People usually do research on the issues they’re trying to work out in their own lives” (Goodman, 2001, p. 1). And so it is that I have come to the topic of white racial privilege, admittedly somewhat late in life. I was 25 years old and starting my first post-masters professional position when I was introduced to Peggy McIntosh’s White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack (1989). Now, over 13 years later, I’m still trying to wrap my brain around my privilege and finding instead that my privilege encases my brain. Privilege affects my thoughts, feelings, and actions—or lack thereof—and inhibits my self-authorship of an anti-racist professional identity. I suspect that other well-intentioned people who share some aspect or aspects of my identity—White, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian, middle class, and middle-aged—are similarly frustrated as we attempt to live, work, and communicate authentically with those who are different from us.

But even after the fairly extensive reading on white privilege I did in order to write my review of the literature for this dissertation, I still felt as though I didn’t have the answer to the “Now what?” question. Now that I accept that white privilege exists and I have it, what do I do with it? In order to get more clarity about white racial privilege, how it operates in my chosen profession, and what a practitioner who is concerned about equity and human flourishing can do about it, I decided to seek out some other perspectives.

Initially, I hoped that we might have the kind of discussion and process where the transformative “Aha!” moments flowed one after the other and we collectively created new public knowledge about white privilege to great acclaim. I now see that aspiration as privileged, even arrogant. Instead, what transpired was a simple, honest conversation that nevertheless
changed my life. I drew inspiration from the selfless sacrifices of my co-learners and I came to understand that the local knowledge we were creating was transformative in its own right.

In the pages that follow, I would like to share with you what happened when some friends and I started talking about white privilege.
CHAPTER 1. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

“The simple truth is that social injustice can’t be solved unless people who are heterosexual or male or Anglo or White or economically comfortable feel obligated to make the problem of privilege their problem and to do something about it.”

(A. G. Johnson, 2001, p. 10)

In his dissertation, Saddlemire (1992) asked 30 white, first-year, traditional-age college students, “What special obligation, if any, do you have to help make the campus environment welcoming to and supportive of African American students?” (pp. 597-598). Saddlemire noted that both male and female respondents were consistently astonished by the question. None of the 30 respondents could discern any duty to stand up for a historically underrepresented group different from themselves by race (Saddlemire, 1992, pp. 163-165).

Unfortunately, white indifference with respect to the marginalization of People of Color and the denial of discrimination experienced by People of Color in the United States is not a phenomenon unique to white, first-year college students. Over a 16-year period, D’Andrea and Daniels (2001) interviewed more than 600 white counselors, psychologists, university administrators, educators, and students and found that overt expressions of anger, generalized apathy, and intellectual detachment were the three most common response patterns when whites were challenged to think about white racism. We have a tremendous degree of racial inequality in this country today, yet most white people claim to disavow racism. We have racism, but ostensibly no racists (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

It is not just a handful of hard-core white supremacists that keep the status quo that privileges whites and subordinates People of Color in place. Existing systems of domination are

---

1 The APA Style Manual, 5th Edition, designates that terms that refer to racial groups, such as ‘white,’ should be capitalized. However, that is also a convention of white supremacist organizations. I view ‘white’ as a constructed, contested, and shifting term. For this dissertation, I have opted to de-privilege ‘white’ by not capitalizing it in body text. White is still capitalized in headings, at the beginning of sentences, and when it is consistent with another author’s original intent or capitalization style. A transitional definition of ‘white’ is offered later in this chapter.
abetted by the large numbers of non-racist bystanders who simply do nothing. Karin Case (2004) wrote:

The persistence of white supremacy relies not only on deliberate perpetrators—those who intentionally discriminate, subjugate, or abuse others—but also on the aloofness and detachment of a large percentage of the white population in the face of injustice…Most of us are not intentional perpetrators of racial injustice, yet our lack of awareness, the absence of a sense of pain or outrage, our silence, our indifference to the injuries of racism, and our failure to actively intervene may make us accomplices in the system. (p. 66)

So what to do? Writing from the perspective of training family therapists, Hardy and Laszloffy (1998) identified a series of steps whites could take to increase racial sensitivity. First, whites must become aware that race has continuing significance in contemporary society. Second, acknowledge that real inequities attach to race. Next, enhance and deepen relationships with People of Color, while at the same time exploring the implications of their own white racial identity. We need to analyze how we may, consciously or unconsciously, operationalize a pro-racist ideology in our everyday interactions. Finally, whites must stay engaged with this struggle, even when it becomes uncomfortable (pp. 125-127). Hardy and Laszloffy have provided some detail about how to construct a road map for those in the helping professions who would like to understand how their white racial privilege affects their practice. However, a more precise and particular road map addressing practitioners in a student affairs preparation program needs to be drafted.

Rhoads and Black (1995) have suggested that a transition away from in loco parentis and developmental theory toward a third-wave critical cultural perspective is underway in student affairs work. With respect to race, a critical cultural perspective would help students understand the dominative, normative character of white culture and the concomitant privileging of the white perspective in student affairs graduate preparation programs. While there have been a few tentative efforts to delineate a framework for deconstructing whiteness in a student affairs graduate preparation program (Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000), those efforts are largely theoretical and devoid of a focus on action toward lasting social change.

Four assertions clarify my standpoint and situate my position with respect to this research project. The first assertion derives from the formula posited by Jones (1972) that “power plus prejudice equals racism” (p. 117). Prejudice is the inclination to prejude others on
the basis of limited or distorted knowledge of their perceived social identity memberships, often coupled with an unconscious fear that the Other group threatens “our” privilege. That prejudice would not be so harmful were it not coupled with institutional power. In the United States, white males occupy 80% of the tenured positions in higher education, 81% of the seats in Congress, 90% of the public school superintendent positions, 92% of Forbes 400 chief executive positions, and they make up 99.9% of athletic team owners (Sue, 2003). White-dominated institutions negatively affect life expectancy, infant mortality, income, housing, employment, and educational opportunities for People of Color (D. Bell, 1992; Gregory & Sanjek, 1994). All whites, regardless of their social standing, gender, sexual orientation, or disability, benefit from this overwhelming presence in the corridors of power. In my opinion, if you derive unearned benefits from a system and culture that are infused with racial bias without also working toward the dismantlement of that structure, then you willfully benefit from the privileges of structural racism. If you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem. If you are not on the way, then you are in the way. That is not the end of the story, however. Through reflection and action, we can author an identity as anti-racists, and this study provides an exposition of that process.

The second assertion is that racism is a problem that whites can and must undo. Racism has been principally viewed as a social problem that disproportionately disadvantages People of Color. While this is true, that perspective renders invisible the privileges that accumulate to whites. The capacity to change the white power structure rests principally with white Americans working in allied relationships with People of Color. As Bowser and Hunt (1996b) pointed out, “Change must begin with those who control and have the power to affect this nation’s institutions and belief systems, that is, with white Americans” (p. xiv). In a similar vein, Case (2004) remarked, “The system of white supremacy is created and sustained (not exclusively, but primarily) by white people, and as such it is our responsibility—not ours alone, but clearly ours—to challenge and dismantle it” (p. 83). Either consciously or unconsciously, whites continue to support a common culture that works to their benefit and that disadvantages People of Color (Katz, 1978). Models are needed that would help whites correct this imbalance and foster environments on college and university campuses where students, faculty, and staff of all races can flourish (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).
The third assertion is that racism has a negative effect on whites. To be sure, the benefits that whites glean from this country’s racist system are numerous and disproportionate, but that has the effect of obscuring the negative impacts of racism on whites. Racism and white privilege allow and even encourage whites to be ignorant of the history and culture of People of Color, both here and around the globe (Kendall, 2006). Because of “white flight” from urban areas to the suburbs and exurbs, some whites spend hours commuting to work—time that they might otherwise spend attending to their relationships and children. Wise (2002) identified two indirect ways that racism ultimately has a negative impact on whites. On the one hand, whites benefit from discrimination in the labor market, but on deeper inspection, we come to realize that discrimination divides working people, holds down wages, and creates a surplus pool of workers composed of the “Other” that employers can turn to when [white] workers demand too much in terms of salaries and benefits. The criminal justice system disproportionately incarcerates People of Color, but investments in state prisons ultimately divert public funding from higher education financing, which impacts educational opportunities for many whites. In addition, the residential, educational, and social choices we whites make for ourselves have limited our contact with people different from us by race. As a result, we are ill-at-ease and awkward in our interactions with the racial “Other” (Pettigrew, 1996). This constructed, unnatural situation has implications for whites seeking professional training as managers and leaders in college and university administration.

The fourth and final assertion is that white racism can be at least partially dismantled when whites engage in dialogue, reflection, and action with other whites while taking leadership and direction from People of Color. Racial prejudices and stereotypes are formed in early childhood, often without exposure to people from different racial groups (Allport, 1954). If the learning occurred in a monoracial environment, it can also be “unlearned” in a monoracial environment. Regardless of one’s racial identity, we all possess an implicit capacity to understand how social stratification gets reproduced (Giddens, 1979). If white racism is to end, it will be in part because whites, especially cultural elites and those in positions to leverage institutional change, take action (Feagin & O’Brien, 2003; Helms, 1992). Bowser and Hunt identified the most important lesson from their edited volume, *The Impacts of Racism on White Americans* (1996a):

Any agenda for research or social action that takes as its goal effective and permanent change in the character of race relations in the United States must focus explicitly on
white citizens. It must carefully take into account the causes of racism among them, the benefits and costs to them from it, and the societal constructions that help maintain it. (p. 231)

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this action research project was to investigate and deconstruct white racial privilege as one step toward developing an anti-racist professional identity for white students in a student affairs graduate preparation program at a predominantly white university.

**Research Questions**

The purpose defines the focus and scope of this study and gives rise to the following research questions:

1. How do whites in a student affairs graduate preparation program discover and come to understand the meaning of race privilege?
2. How do theorizing and taking action to dismantle white race privilege in a student affairs graduate preparation program help in understanding the construct itself?
3. How do students’ other dominant and subordinate social identities interact with white race privilege in a student affairs graduate preparation program?
4. How can we explore the construct of white race privilege through the process of white:white anti-racist consciousness-raising in a student affairs graduate preparation program?

**Significance of the Study**

This study was significant because it constructed a roadmap for whites in student affairs graduate preparation programs to use in developing an anti-racist identity. The development of an anti-racist identity is crucial for white student affairs practitioners charged with creating campus environments where all students, regardless of race, can be successful. In her monograph that dealt with educating those with dominant social identities, Goodman (2001) stated:

[People from privileged groups] have access to resources, information and power that can either block or help facilitate change. [Those] who are allies can influence decision making, allocate funds, share needed skills and knowledge, and be role models for other dominant group members to support. (p. 2)
In addition to their work with students, white student affairs administrators also interact with parents, supervisees, supervisors, and other professional colleagues. A consciousness that understands the role that privilege, generally, and white racial privilege, specifically, plays leads to more efficacious practice among whites. Increasingly in the future, student affairs practitioners will be evaluated on the basis of their multicultural competence (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004). Part of being multiculturally competent practitioners is having a keen awareness of how white privilege affects our work product. Scheurich (1997) suggested that:

> We whites need to study and report how being white affects our thinking, our behaviors, our attitudes, and our decisions from the micro, personal level to the macro, social level. We need to make white racism a central, self-reflective topic of inquiry within the academy. We need to become aware of our racial positionality as it affects our intellectual products and then infuse this reflexivity into those products. (p. 127)

Other scholars and activists (Katz, 1978, 2003) have also called upon whites to study and work among themselves in order to have the greatest impact on dismantling racism. Like Hitchcock (2002), I believe anti-racist whites need to “develop ethical clarity, recognize racism, create strategies for change, plan tactics, and live personal lifestyles affirming new values” (p. 155). This study sought to build capacity among white student affairs practitioners who wanted to identify as anti-racist by first deconstructing white racial privilege.

### Theoretical Perspective

There are a variety of research approaches to understanding the construction of whiteness and white racial privilege among whites in a student affairs graduate preparation program. Creswell (2003) distinguished between quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches based on the knowledge claim the researcher makes. Knowledge claims are informed by paradigms or worldviews. There are three fundamental views that inform a choice of paradigm for research (Guba & Lincoln, 2001). There is the ontological view, which addresses the form and nature of reality and how reality can be apprehended by the researcher. There is the epistemological view, which concerns the nature of the relationship between knowledge and knowing and asks what it means “to know.” Finally, there is the methodological view, wherein the researcher provides a rationale, justification, and even a philosophical basis for the use of certain methods. Guba and Lincoln (2001) went on to state that “the answer given to any one question, taken in any order, constrains how the others might be answered” (p. 60).
I am approaching this particular study from a constructivist paradigm, tinged with a critical, emancipatory flavor. In other words, I embrace the view that people’s meaning-making frameworks are socially constructed, but I am adopting a critical and participatory approach in the methodology for this research project. The constructivist belief holds that an individual’s reality is constructed on the basis of particular and local experiences, that the investigators and their findings are inextricably linked, and therefore constructions can only be derived through interaction between and among the researcher and respondents (Guba & Lincoln, 2001). Researchers who adopt the constructivist paradigm typically employ qualitative methodologies because they provide flexibility for identifying and working with emergent themes and findings.

A researcher with emancipatory, critical assumptions believes that those with a constructivist approach have not gone “far enough in advocating for an action agenda to help marginalized people” (Creswell, 2003, p. 9). Emancipatory research helps individuals recognize constraints reified in social structures and in the relationships of power in hegemonic systems (Creswell, 2003). The researcher proceeds collaboratively with the participants to raise consciousness, provide a voice, and identify an action agenda for change.

Action research encompasses a set of practices that are appropriate for a critical, emancipatory research project that aims to investigate and change the status quo. Action research involves repeated iterations of planning, taking action, observing, and reflecting. This approach allows participants to methodically investigate an issue, conceptualize knowledgeable accounts of their circumstances, and develop plans to address the problems at hand. For this research project, I gathered together several white paraprofessionals enrolled in a student affairs graduate preparation program to talk about their perceptions of white race privilege. During our time together, we discussed the implications of those perceptions for our own lives and interactions with others. We were able to create new awareness and begin to author anti-racist identities for ourselves through the project. What I particularly like about critical, emancipatory action research is that it is not simply an “arid methodolog[y]” (Hacker, 1995, p. 63), but has the potential to identify and refine practices that are useful in the struggle to ameliorate the effects of racism.
Delimitations and Limitations

This study involved a specific group of graduate students who self-selected involvement in a participatory project to unmask whiteness and white race privilege. It is important to understand that the findings of this study should not be generalized beyond the particular context of the study. Constructivist qualitative research is not intended to be widely generalizable or transferable to different contexts. The findings of this study are true for these participants at this moment in time and in the particular context in which the study was conducted. I leave it up to the readers to determine which of the findings may be applicable to the setting in which they live or work.

I believe there are many advantages to whites reflecting and acting upon their whiteness with other whites. This is not the typical model of diversity education, however. In one study (McEwen & Roper, 1994), almost 80% of master’s-level students in graduate student affairs preparation programs said they learn best about other races through direct interaction with the Other. However, I think few whites have experience in all-white anti-racism groups, so lack of familiarity with the model may beget a preference for mixed-race prejudice reduction discussions.

I entertained, and then dismissed, the idea of constituting a group that was diverse by race for this project, primarily because I was concerned that the discharge of white racism in a mixed group might be harmful to the People of Color members. I’ve had the experience—more than once—of participating in an anti-racism curriculum where the class was racially diverse. Although everyone in the course ultimately benefited from increased awareness, the learning occurred for whites disproportionatately. I wanted to eliminate the dynamic where whites learn about racism at the expense of learning opportunities for People of Color. Katz (1978) supported the all-white caucus group approach, noting the inherent problem with interracial group processes:

Minorities are placed in the position of teaching white people, being given the same responsibility. . . they have historically been given. Thus the interracial encounter group may often serve as simply another form of exploitation of minorities for white people’s purposes. The benefit seems to be greater for whites than for Third World people. This is contrary to the premise that whites must learn to help themselves. (p. 17)

Further, I think this all-white group was authentic with one another in a way that might not have been possible if members were “walking on eggshells,” trying not to offend their friends and
classmates who happen to be People of Color. However, this opportunity cost imposed a second limitation on the study. Namely, I acknowledge there weren’t People of Color in the room to hold us accountable for our racism or our progress in attempting to undo it.

A third limitation has to do with my leadership of this action research project. As the convener and nominal facilitator, I may not have been capable of recognizing when I colluded with others in the maintenance of white hegemony. I sought to constantly remind myself that I was acting from within the white, male, middle-class privileged subject position that I was seeking to change. Harvey, Case, and Gorsline (2004b) emphasized this sort of limitation when they stated:

As white persons, we are insulated from the harshest impacts of white supremacy. Thus we often understand its pervasiveness, function, and urgency the least…Even in our best attempts to engage anti-racist analysis and praxis, we may unwittingly reinscribe the very things we claim to oppose. (p. 9)

This type of insider work calls for increased reflexivity on the part of the researcher. I will address the research practices I adopted to facilitate reflexive thinking in more detail in a later section.

The task of deconstructing white privilege is monumental, so it is important at the outset to delimit what this action research project did not address. We examined white privilege as it operated within the arena of higher education, specifically for student affairs practitioners. While we considered manifestations of white privilege in the culture writ large, we primarily focused on how we could improve our own practice and change our immediate environment. Likewise, while the macro-level project of interrogating whiteness was appealing, we constrained our primary objective to be the construction of white racial privilege as it operated for us as student affairs practitioners in a university setting.

Definition of Key Terms

anti-racist  “The rejection of racist ideology, practices, and behavior in oneself; the active opposition of all forms of racism in individuals and institutions; and the advocacy of individual conduct, institutional practices, and cultural expressions that promote inclusiveness and interdependence and acknowledge and respect racial differences” (Jones, 1997, p. 517). In other words, anti-racists are focused on all three levels of racism—individual, institutional, and cultural—simultaneously and are committed
to examining the residues of racism within themselves.

People of Color  An umbrella term that refers, in the context of the United States, to the racial groups that are or appear to be non-white. This includes Blacks/African Americans, Asians/Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Latinos/Latinas, and Native American Indians. My use of a pan-racial term connotes my understanding that all non-white people in the United States are subordinated to some greater or lesser degree by institutional and cultural racism.

privilege  Those benefits that flow from a lopsided distribution of power. Privilege enables an actor to set the agenda in a social situation and determine how societal rules and standards will be applied. Privilege allows those who have it to “make judgments about others and have those judgments stick...to define reality...to decide who gets taken seriously, who receives attention, and who is accountable to whom for what. And it grants a presumption of superiority and social permission to act on that presumption without having to worry about being challenged” (A. G. Johnson, 2001, pp. 33-34).

race  “A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance—particularly color—but also ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time” (Wijeyesinghe, Griffin, & Love, 1997, p. 88).

racism  “The systematic subordination of members of targeted racial groups who have relatively little social power in the United States—Blacks, Latinos/as, Native Americans, and Asians—by members of the agent racial group who have relatively more social power, that is, whites. This subordination is supported by the actions of individuals, cultural norms and values, and the institutional structures and practices of society” (Wijeyesinghe, Griffin, & Love, 1997, pp. 88-89).

white  A contested term that refers to those individuals who display the physical characteristics of white Europeans and have assimilated and acculturated into white Anglo-Saxon culture as it exists in the United States in the present day (Helms, 1992).

whiteness  An elusive and fluid term that provides the normative standard against which other aspects of our culture are judged. In and of itself, whiteness has little meaning (Wellman, 1993). It is an unmarked category against which difference is constructed. Because it has been uncritically adopted as the norm, it exists largely unexamined and its dominance is uninterrogated.
white race privilege

“An expression of power arising from the receipt of benefits, rights, and immunities [that] is characterized by unearned advantages and a sense of entitlement that results in both societal and material dominance by whites over People of Color” (Neville, Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001, p. 262). Although whites are not born racist, they do begin to accumulate white race privilege from the moment of their birth into a racist society. Recognizing and renouncing white race privilege or finding ways to distribute privilege to those with less of it are concrete steps to dissolving it.

white supremacy

A term that goes beyond the “activities and ideologies of supremacist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan…[to include] a system of individual, institutional, and societal racism in which whiteness—that is ‘white’ bodies, and cultural and social practices associated with those deemed ‘white’—are seen as normative and superior, and through which white people are granted advantaged status of various kinds” (Harvey, Case, & Gorsline, 2004a, p. 4). In other words, white racial privilege flows from the mechanisms of white supremacy in a U.S. society that is racially stratified.

Discussion of Key Terms

I would like readers to know that the definitions offered here should not be regarded as fixed or determinate. One of the ways that social constructions become our realities is that identities and worldviews that are fluid become crystallized or reified. One major objective of this research study was to deconstruct whiteness and desituate white privilege. I offer these definitions here and now to orient the reader to my current thinking and to further expose my assumptions as a researcher.

Chapter Summary

In this introductory chapter, I have revealed my motives for undertaking this particular research project and clarified the values position that is my starting point. I have identified my overall purpose, enumerated four research questions that this study will attempt to address, and demonstrated the significance of the white anti-racist standpoint. I oriented the reader to my theoretical approach and epistemological assumptions and delineated the boundaries of this study. This section concluded with tentative definitions of some key terms that will have a central role in this research project. The next section surveys the existing literature on white racial privilege and identifies how the current study fills a gap in that literature.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

“People who imagine that history flatters them (as it does, indeed, since they wrote it) are impaled on their history like a butterfly on a pin and become incapable of seeing or changing themselves, or the world. This is the place in which it seems to me most white Americans find themselves. Impaled. They are dimly, or vividly, aware that the history they have fed themselves is mainly a lie, but they do not know how to release themselves from it, and they suffer enormously from the resulting personal incoherence.”

(Baldwin, 1985b, pp. 410-411)

The first part of this review of the literature will define white racial privilege and briefly summarize the chronology of scholarly research on white privilege. The next part of the literature review will delineate the features and processes of white privilege and discuss how white privilege is manifested in interpersonal relationships and institutional settings. The final part of the review of relevant literature will examine the efficacy of white:white dialogue as a strategy to raise awareness of white privilege, summarize recent work in interrogating white privilege and expanding white racial consciousness, and identify the characteristics of both effective training programs and effective trainers who facilitate the work of others to deconstruct white racial privilege.

Defining White Racial Privilege

While Black Americans have studied and written about whiteness since at least the mid-nineteenth century (Roediger, 1998), it is only within the past 60 years that white scholars have contributed to interrogating whiteness. This was largely a product of the belief among race relations scholars that racism could be ameliorated by drawing attention to how much People of Color suffered under it. The lens of social scientists has historically focused on the victims of racism, rather than its perpetrators. Fine (1997) used the rich visual metaphor of “white folks, varied by class and gender…stuffing their academic and social pickup trucks with goodies” (p. 57) to describe the looting which has occurred while scholars were busy studying the impact of individual acts of discrimination on People of Color.

Myrdal, a Swedish sociologist, is largely credited as one of the first whites to name racism as a “white man’s problem” (Myrdal, 1944/1962, p. lxxv). His epic volume, An American
Dilemma, documented racism and discrimination in politics, economics, the criminal justice system, and the mechanisms for social class stratification and concluded that it was the attitudes and actions of white Americans that were determinant for most of the social problems confronting Black Americans of that day. Myrdal’s work foreshadowed the sociological turn that occurred in the 1970s, when scholars began to focus their sustained gaze on the dominant groups in the social hierarchy, such as whites and men.

The first reading I encountered on my personal journey to understand white racism was McIntosh’s “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” (1989). Because it is brief and parsimonious, I believe it is common for this to be the first piece read by many whites concerning the concept of white racial privilege. An extended version (McIntosh, 1988), in which the author linked the phenomenon of white racial privilege with male privilege, was also published. McIntosh’s pioneering explication of privilege provided a conceptual framework for the obvious and concealed benefits that accrue to whites in America.

McIntosh (1989) defined white privilege as a “package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day…an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks” (p. 10). In other words, privilege is a form of cultural capital that helps whites negotiate schools, employment situations, law enforcement and the courts, and health care institutions more efficiently and effectively. Racism in the United States is buttressed by a core ideology of white supremacy and a structural component that has historically allocated more economic, political, and social power to whites than to People of Color (Lucal, 1996). The result is a racial hierarchy that creates a system of social advantages for whites based primarily on race rather than merit. Parker and Chambers (2007) offered a redefinition of McIntosh’s knapsack metaphor. They noted that:

Knapsacks are tidy things, in which items are easily put away and hidden from view. Instead white privilege is a great white elephant...that trumpets loudly over our conversations, knocks over all the furniture that would otherwise provide a comfortable place for us to meet, and sends people of color running for safety. Most important, white privilege is the elephant that white people have agreed through social contract to ignore and usually never mention although the effects on cross-race interactions can be devastating. (p. 10)

The obvious extension of the metaphor being that we collectively need to figure out ways to talk about the elephant in the room.
McIntosh (1988) further identified several other concepts salient to an understanding of white racial privilege. First, McIntosh herself acknowledged that privilege was too benign a word to accurately characterize the effects she was describing. Indeed, Chater (1994) has argued that acquiring basic necessities has become a ‘privilege’ in our unjust world: “Human needs for food, housing, health care, education, bodily autonomy, love, respect and self-determination are regarded as privileges because of their unequal distribution” (p. 102). McIntosh noted that the material conditions she identified in her list (1988) of 46 daily effects of white privilege cause the white racial group to be systematically over-empowered. Thus, whites are conferred dominance (McIntosh, 1988).

A second important concept illuminated by McIntosh (1988) was the idea that privilege could take positive forms that should be shared with others as well as deleterious forms that need to be dismantled. Some manifestations of privilege should be the norm in a conscientious society—for example, that neighbors would be decent toward one another and that race would not count against you in court. Other manifestations of privilege distort the humanity of both the subject and the object—for example, the choice whites have to remain ignorant of the cultures of so-called minority groups. Framed a different way, some manifestations of privilege could be considered positive advantages we could and should work to spread—for example, all children should have access to curricular materials that present an unbiased, accurate, and inclusive interpretation of the contributions of different racial groups to U.S. society. There are also manifestations of privilege that are negative advantages that only reinforce present-day dominant/subordinate hierarchies. For example, “white” almost never gets racialized negatively in the news or entertainment media, whereas “Black” or “Mexican” is more often constructed as dangerous, untrustworthy, or lackadaisical (Cortés, 2000).

A third concept exposed by McIntosh (1988) is that white privilege can take active forms we whites are able to see and embedded forms we are taught not to see. Many whites are able to acknowledge racism when they become aware of an individual act of meanness visited by a white person upon a Person of Color or vice versa. It is less common that whites acknowledge the racism that is perpetuated and reproduced in education, the legal system, and the culture writ large. Whiteness is normative in U.S. society, which makes white privilege difficult for whites to see.
A fourth concept that McIntosh (1988) identified was the silence and denial that envelopes privilege. As she stated, “White privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy” (p. 11). The myth of meritocracy to which McIntosh refers is the durable American ideal that advancement comes from hard work, that “the cream rises to the top,” so to speak. What McIntosh is saying is that whites studiously avoid talking about enduring racial discrimination in hiring, promotion, and college admissions because we fear being seen as frauds. However, one privilege accorded to whites is that being of the white culture frees whites to critically interrogate it.

The publication of McIntosh’s two papers (McIntosh, 1988, 1989) foreshadowed a tremendous growth in the number of scholars attending to white privilege, whiteness, and white identity in journal articles, dissertations, and books (Hitchcock, 2002). However, there were several pioneering scholars who conceptualized the privileging effects of whiteness prior to 1988. Their work is briefly identified and summarized in the section that follows.

Early Scholarly Research on White Privilege

In this section, the scholarly research on white privilege is summarized chronologically. Where appropriate, I have identified various scholars’ methodological contributions in addition to the content knowledge they advanced.

Although McIntosh’s working paper (1988) and article (1989) are cited often in the scholarly literature on white privilege, she was not the first person to map the terrain of the construct. Kovel and Terry authored two books in 1970 that are the cornerstones of the modern white anti-racist movement. Kovel (1970) took an approach to understanding white racism that today would be called socially constructed. He distinguished dominative racists, meaning bigoted and willing to use force to maintain superiority from aversive racists, who simply do nothing overt to counteract white racial superiority. Kovel posited that the history of race relations in the United States yielded symbols and fantasies that undergird racism and that racism would lessen in intensity but fail to be eliminated unless these symbols and fantasies were fully deconstructed. He predicted the rise of what today is known as institutional racism. Terry (1970), meanwhile, again acknowledged racism as a white problem and suggested that whites needed their own agenda for consciousness-raising and action. He decried the notion of colorblindness:
Protestations to deny whiteness eliminate neither the fact nor the problem of white privilege. American culture is color-conscious. We sort people by color, to the advantage of some and the detriment of others. To dissociate oneself from whiteness by affirming humanness ignores what whiteness has done and how we continue to benefit from it. (pp. 18-19)

While Terry (1970) made reference to the phrase “white privilege,” it was Terry’s contemporary Blauner (1972), however, who gave the phenomenon of white privilege its first extended treatment in the literature. Blauner defined privilege generally as an “unfair advantage, a preferential situation or systemic ‘headstart’ in the pursuit of social values” (p. 22). He then cited numerous examples from labor markets and assessments of standards of living to underscore his point that the racial divide had real and negative implications for People of Color and positive implications for whites of his day.

Sociologist David Wellman made an important methodological contribution to the study of white privilege in his landmark book *Portraits of White Racism* (1977). He and his colleagues interviewed 107 white people between 1967 and 1970 and presented five case studies that postulated a phenomenology of white racism. Wellman viewed racism as a structural problem of entrenched white superiority. Through his case studies, Wellman demonstrated that the whites he interviewed had developed sophisticated cognitive strategies to defend white advantage and maintain the racial status quo without appearing overtly racist. He also found that race and class privilege intersected to the paradoxical effect that those with the “least to lose,” meaning middle- and upper-middle-class Americans whose privilege was entrenched and ensured, were the most opposed to militant social change while those most directly affected by Black empowerment were the most receptive to radical social change efforts. Wellman published a second edition (1993) and found that similar ideologies and discursive strategies existed for whites of varying social class standing 20 years later.

Bowser and Hunt articulated an alternative pathway to ending racism with the publication of their edited volumes *Impacts of Racism on White Americans* (Bowser & Hunt, 1981, 1996c). In the introduction to the first edition, Bowser, Hunt, and Pohl (1981) asserted that decades of race-related research revealed little about the impact of racism on members of the white, dominant group. By documenting how whites are simultaneously unfairly advantaged and harmed by racism, the authors established incentives that could be used to motivate whites to own their white privilege.
Feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye (1983), reflecting on her participation in an all-white-women’s consciousness-raising group exploring racism stated “As a white person one must never claim not to be a racist, but only to be anti-racist. The reasoning is that racism is so systematic and white privilege so impossible to escape, that one is, simply, trapped” (p. 126). She had experienced the guilt, defensiveness, and denial that tend to accompany a challenge from a Person of Color, and sought refuge in action. Frye named what, I think, many whites feel when charges of racism are leveled. White guilt can be immobilizing, but attempts made in good faith to unlearn racism can help whites begin to stake out an anti-racist identity. In the next section, the scholarship that was produced after McIntosh wrote her seminal articles (1988, 1989) on white privilege will be summarized.

**Post-McIntosh Scholarly Research on White Privilege**

Frankenberg (1993) extended the method of Wellman (1977) by conducting life history interviews with 30 white women and purposefully foregrounding their whiteness. As the subtitle of her book implies, Frankenberg was concerned with the social construction of whiteness: the varying spatial, temporal, material, and discursive manifestations of white racial identity. She clearly named, from a feminist standpoint, the dominative, normative, and privileged positions of whiteness. The relevance of Frankenberg’s work for this study is in her recognition that the material relations and discursive repertoires of race construct whiteness and can therefore be interrogated as part of a project to deconstruct whiteness and white racial privilege. In other words, research practices that evoke dialogue between and among participants can yield powerful data that reveal how privilege works.

Bowser and Hunt (1996c) also identified some general trends in the study of racism and anti-racism. They traced the history of anti-racism and suggested that the period prior to about 1974, coincident with the Civil Rights era, was characterized by action devoid of theory. As the gains of the Civil Rights movement began to be institutionalized, there was a concomitant focus on theorizing the structural and attitudinal barriers to ameliorating racism. In the interval between the two editions of Impacts, the study of racism became overly intellectualized. We are positioned now to couple the well-established theoretical formulations of racism with the methodological turn toward action that has occurred over the past 10 years to develop new theories of action for dismantling white privilege.
Pinterits made an important contribution to the scholarship on white racial privilege with the publication of her dissertation (2004) in which she constructed a metric, the White Privilege Attitude Scale (WPAS), to measure thoughts and feelings related to a person’s increasing awareness of white privilege. In her review of the literature, Pinterits (2004) identified the dearth of empirical studies on white privilege, citing a scant three papers (Ancis & Szymanski, 1999, 2001; Rosenthal & Berven, 1999) that examined the attitudes underlying the construct. Pinterits hypothesized that there were both cognitive responses and emotional reactions that contributed to attitudes toward white privilege. A preliminary WPAS with 54 items was developed, and an exploratory factor analysis suggested a two-factor model. The first factor was termed Support of White Privilege and was bipolar in nature with investment in maintaining white privilege on one pole and willingness to dismantle white privilege on the other pole. The second factor was termed Distressed Acknowledgment of White Privilege and tapped the sense of guilt, anxiety, and “stuckness” of knowing white privilege existed and not having clarity about what could be done about it. The WPAS was normed on 284 students from counseling psychology and teacher education programs where white privilege was included in the curriculum and exhibited strong reliability and validity estimates. While the WPAS would benefit from additional refinement and replication in order to validate the initial findings, it holds promise and could be used as an evaluation tool to measure the effectiveness of the approach used in the present study.

Two recent books by Wise (2005) and Kendall (2006) marked a turning point in the direction of the scholarship on white privilege. Both are primarily practitioners, one a speaker and freelance writer, the other an organizational development consultant, who have turned the lens back on themselves. Their books are largely autobiographical and autoethnographic accounts of how their understanding of white racial privilege evolved over their lifetimes. They included self-critical narratives that exposed times when they made mistakes in thinking or failed to take action to address racism and white privilege. My hope for my own scholarship is that it complements and supplements the work that Wise and Kendall continue to do.

This review of the post-McIntosh scholarship on white privilege will now turn to some of the critiques lodged against white privilege scholarship to date.
**Critiques of White Privilege Scholarship**

One critique of the scholarly discourse on white privilege is that it coddles white people by avoiding discussion of white supremacy. When the scholarship of white racial superiority is insulated from the everyday experience of its effects on People of Color and whites, it ensures that racism stays glued in place. In a convincing article, Leonardo (2004) identified white supremacy as the underlying condition that makes white privilege possible. In his view, a conversation about the state of being privileged is less important than a conversation about the processes that secured that domination in the first place and continue to do so on a daily basis. In other words, we ought not forget our white supremacist history or ignore who is doing what to whom as we discuss the current state of affairs. Leonardo described how systems of white domination are enacted: “Set up a system that benefits the group, mystify the system, remove the agents of actions from discourse, and when interrogated about it, stifle the discussion with inane comments about the ‘reality’ of the charges being made” (p. 148). Related to this critique is the notion that if this generation of whites in the United States reproduce their own superiority, then the attendant white privilege will also be reproduced. Inherent in an action research approach to discussing white privilege was the identification of strategies to contest white supremacy.

A separate article by Leonardo (2002), asserted that whiteness and globalization are linked up through neo-colonialism and that studies of whiteness too often fail to rise above simple, national discourses. I acknowledge that the present project, situated as it was in central Iowa, is delimited in this regard.

Levine-Rasky (2000) critiqued white privilege pedagogy more generally for locating whiteness in the individual rather than focusing on how whiteness gets elaborated in the social order. As a result:

Studies of white privilege are silent on the possibilities for dismantling white privilege at the collective level. If the work consists only of individual whites examining their white-skin privileges, the effect on social change and rectifying unjust social relations is vague. When individuals are signified as the prime subjects in the system of racial power and privilege, a white privilege pedagogy may encounter a debilitating hopelessness among participants. (Levine-Rasky, 2000, p. 276)

In other words, you have to watch out for stuckness. In her conceptualization of white privilege pedagogy, I believe that Levine-Rasky was referring to more familiar, scholarly notions of whites
reflecting and discussing their white privilege. My hope is that a more action-oriented approach will help us to avoid stuckness.

A fourth critique of white privilege scholarship, especially when it has been done by whites, is that it amounts to narcissism (Dyson, 2003). That is, by focusing on the “meanings, identities, practices, anxieties, and subjectivities—and hence the agendas, priorities, and preferences—of The Whites” (Dyson, 2003, p. 123), whiteness gets promoted to the center and racial otherness gets pushed to the margins. Also known as “white fetishism” (Clark & O’Donnell, 1999), this arrangement only reproduces white supremacy, even as it seeks to interrogate it. Closely tied up with this fourth critique is the inherent risk of a group of white folks doing anti-racism work: a presumption on our part that we can establish an agenda and take action independently from the voices, views and needs of People of Color (Harvey, Case, & Gorsline, 2004a). For this research project, an effort was made to garner feedback from a critical outside reference group of People of Color as we discerned the “action” component of our action research project. This helped to ground the project in the needs of the People of Color in the context where this study took place. Having identified some of the critiques of white privilege scholarship, we turn now to a deeper exploration of the nature and modes of action of white privilege.

The Features and Processes of White Privilege

Scholars like Frankenburg (1993) and Wellman (1977, 1993) offered methodological advances in the study of whiteness and white racial privilege. With the conceptual framework so clearly identified by McIntosh (1988, 1989), the number of articles that delineated white privilege in interpersonal, institutional, and cultural milieus has grown exponentially since 1988. A more recent chapter by Neville, Worthington, and Spanierman (2001) collated the disparate scholarship and identified seven core components and processes of white privilege. White privilege: 1) differentially benefits whites, 2) embodies both macro- (e.g., systems) and micro- (e.g., individual) level expressions, 3) consists of unearned advantages, 4) offers immunity to selected social ills, 5) embodies an expression of power, 6) is largely invisible and unacknowledged, and 7) contains costs to whites (p. 262). The remainder of this section will summarize the features and processes of white privilege using the Neville, Worthington, and
Spanierman framework. Pinterits (2004) also used this same approach, so I acknowledge drawing inspiration from her work.

The first feature of white privilege that Neville, Worthington, and Spanierman (2001) identified was that privilege benefits whites differentially. Because human beings are a composite of many social identities such as race, gender, class status, and sexual orientation simultaneously, whites are accorded different amounts of privilege. For example, white men may find that society grants them more privilege than it does white women. Privileged identities are additive, such that wealthy, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian men would likely operate with far more privilege than a working class, white, lesbian, disabled, Jewish woman, for example.

A second core concept of white privilege listed by Neville, Worthington, and Spanierman (2001) is that white privilege embodies both macro-level and micro-level expressions. Structural racism accounts for macro-level expressions of white privilege such as more favorable housing conditions; greater wealth accumulation, which was a byproduct of earlier access to federally financed mortgage loans during the Jim Crow era; and a greater likelihood of continued employment and, hence, access to health care during an economic contraction. Individual racism accounts for the micro-level expressions of white privilege that occur in interpersonal and small group settings. So, for example, white applicants might receive more favorable treatment from an individual home mortgage lender because they are seen as more trustworthy and as less of a risk for loan default. Macro-level expressions of privilege arise from the aggregated effects of many micro-level expressions of privilege.

The aforementioned home mortgage loan example also illustrates the third component of white privilege identified by Neville, Worthington, and Spanierman (2001), that of unearned advantage. After World War II, the Selective Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, also known as the GI Bill, contained provisions enabling honorably discharged veterans to obtain mortgages with no down payment and a low, capped interest rate. However, Jim Crow laws in the South prevented many African American veterans from participating fully (Katznelson, 2005). As an indirect result, housing in America became more rather than less racially segregated. Over several generations, differences in housing equity between racial groups became substantial, with attendant racialized differences in ability to access the highest quality schools (Feagin & McKinney, 2003; L. Parker & Stovall, 2004). So white veterans had an unearned advantage in obtaining favorable mortgages when compared with Black veterans with whom they fought side
by side. The children of those white veterans had an unearned advantage because they were educated in schools that were better resourced than those found in predominantly African American neighborhoods. Myriad additional unearned advantages stem from access to better resourced schooling (Cook & Frank, 1997).

The other side of the metaphorical coin of unearned advantage is immunity from social ills, the fourth core concept of white privilege named by Neville, Worthington, and Spanierman (2001). Perhaps the clearest example of immunity from social ills is the different experiences whites and People of Color have with regard to crime and the criminal justice system. Households headed by People of Color are more likely to be victimized by crime than households headed by whites (Catalano, 2005). There are significant racial disparities between Black, Hispanic, and white offenders in incarceration rates, convictions for violent crimes, and in death sentences handed down in the criminal justice system (Spohn, 2002). Racial profiling results in motorists being pulled over for “driving while Black” (Walker, Spohn, & DeLone, 2000, p. 104). Meanwhile, so-called white-collar criminals involved in the savings and loan scandals of the 1980s made off with $400 billion. A few served minimal jail time, but the money has never been recovered (McIntosh, 2002), although the cost of bailing out the savings and loan industry was borne by U.S. taxpayers of all races.

The fifth core concept identified by Neville, Worthington, and Spanierman (2001), white privilege as an expression of power, goes hand-in-hand with the sixth core concept of white privilege: being invisible and unacknowledged. Wildman (1996) has noted that there seems to be an unwritten rule that dominance does not get engaged, that privilege does not get interrogated. In the past 10 years, however, critical theorists (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997) have increasingly opted to ignore the unwritten rules. Systems of privilege and power, when they are uncontested, tend to reproduce themselves. Part of what makes systems of privilege so powerful is that they are interlocking, so that white privilege buttresses male privilege which reinforces heterosexual privilege. My own experience, having talked with dozens of groups of white people about white privilege, is that a peculiar silence envelops the topic. This silence can be attributed variously to guilt, trepidation, discomfort, lack of knowledge, hopelessness, and a host of other emotions. What is clear, however, is that if we do not talk about white supremacy and white privilege, the status quo will continue.
The final concept that Neville, Worthington, and Spanierman (2001) associated with white privilege is that it contains costs to whites. That discrimination harms the subordinated group, which in this case is People of Color, is self-evident. But because of silence and invisibility surrounding white privilege, the negative effects for whites get obscured. We whites end up with a distorted view of history, we feel a false sense of superiority, we have fewer interactions with People of Color, and we tense up around and even live in fear of People of Color in some situations. From a purely self-interested economic standpoint, we thwart our own national productivity because we suppress members of subordinated groups which takes the energy of the dominant group at the same time it depletes the productivity of those in the one-down position.

The preceding section has elaborated on the core features and processes of white privilege. In the section that follows, the manner in which white racism manifests itself in anti-racism work will be discussed.

**Manifestations of White Racism in Interpersonal and Small-Group Anti-Racism Work**

Anti-racism awareness and education is a topic that evokes strong emotional reactions for participants regardless of race. While white privilege as a construct has not been adequately interrogated, the reactions that whites have during multicultural training are the subject of considerable scholarly attention. D’Andrea and Daniels (1999) have suggested that the apathy and denial that many whites exhibit in response to white racism can be attributed to three factors: a feeling of personal helplessness, a need to distance themselves from the responsibility of having to address white privilege, and the desire to avoid the moral contradiction of having to deal with inequality in our supposedly meritocratic system. Through extensive interviewing and participant observations, D’Andrea and Daniels (1999) identified five psychological dispositions of white racism, which they termed affective-impulsive, rational, liberal, principled, and principled-activistic. The affective-impulsive disposition is characterized by overt racist behavior and cognition and is unlikely to be represented by the graduate-degree-seeking students in the present research project. On the other end of the spectrum, individuals in the principled-activistic disposition manifest abstract, systematic thinking about racism; are committed to building a spiritual connectedness and a deeper sense of moral empathy between people of different racial groups; and have a clear plan of action for ameliorating racism in organizations,
communities, and between individuals. The principled-activistic orientation was found in only about 1% of the practitioners and graduate students that D’Andrea and Daniels (1999) observed and is also unlikely to be represented in the present research project. The remaining three dispositions and suggested intervention strategies will be described briefly in the paragraphs that follow, because they are all likely to manifest themselves in a participatory action research project that engages white racial privilege among students in a graduate preparation program in student affairs administration.

The second typology of white racism identified by D’Andrea and Daniels (1999) is termed the rational disposition. While individuals manifesting this disposition have more knowledge about oppression generally, they still adhere to numerous racial stereotypes and view racial conflicts in essentially dualistic terms. People with rational dispositions are likely to exhibit superficial niceness and will closely guard their true beliefs. D’Andrea and Daniels (1999) suggested interventions to focus on cognitive development such as multicultural enhancement activities that explore unexamined racial myths. Activities that encourage participants to acknowledge alternatives to the zero-sum thinking that whites will have to give up privileges if People of Color are to gain something would be beneficial in working with this group. D’Andrea and Daniels (1999) have observed that the resistance exhibited by white students who manifest a rational disposition can be overcome by explaining the benefits that will accrue to multiculturally competent whites in the more demographically diverse future.

D’Andrea and Daniels (1999) identified a third disposition of white racism they termed the liberal type. Persons manifesting the liberal disposition tended to view racism from a more multiplestic perspective in that they exhibited more respect for different world views. Liberal types still did not willingly delve into whiteness and displayed a generalized apathy and lack of urgency toward engaging white racism. D’Andrea and Daniels (1999) hypothesized that a lack of empathy was the root cause of inaction in addition to the desire to avoid being stigmatized for taking a more radical approach to anti-racism. D’Andrea and Daniels (1999) suggested that students manifesting the liberal disposition be encouraged to explore their subordinated identities as a bridge to understanding how white racism subordinates People of Color. Activities that emphasize action planning may also be particularly effective in working with participants of this type.
The fourth disposition toward white racism identified by D’Andrea and Daniels (1999) was termed the principled type. Participants manifesting this disposition were relativistic thinkers who were conversant in the history and social policy of white racism and had more empathy toward oppressed People of Color. Principled types often exhibited more passion and idealism for doing something about racism but also more pessimism and dispiritedness about the possibility of ending racial inequality. In working with participants of the principled disposition, D’Andrea and Daniels (1999) suggested a focus on skill-building and also sought to bolster their support systems with other white anti-racists. As a means of situating myself in this study, I identify most strongly with the principled disposition.

In this section, a typology of the manifestations of white racism likely to emerge in a group of graduate student practitioners has been introduced. In the next section, a nontraditional model of anti-racism awareness training, that of an all-white encounter group approach, will be explored and justified.

**The Efficacy of White:White Anti-Racism Training**

In the first edition of her landmark handbook for anti-racism training, Katz (1978) succinctly identified the reasons for conducting all-white consciousness-raising groups: so whites could

- establish a climate that focused on the meaning of being white and on developing a sense of whiteness as part of one’s identity,
- explore their racist attitudes and behaviors in a climate of trust and support, and
- accomplish this learning without exploiting minority people as the “teachers.” (p. 27)

The second rationale, the creation of a learning environment of trust and support, was particularly relevant in the population targeted for inclusion in this research project. The ability to express feelings without fear of censure, a willingness to expose meaningful aspects of oneself, and a climate of mutual respect are necessary prerequisites to developing trust in a group process (Corey & Corey, 1997). Because students within a cohort in the student affairs graduate preparation program have an extensive history with one another both inside and outside the classroom, it would be difficult to disentangle intergroup allegiances and press students for honesty. It proved easier with a homogenous group to cultivate group cohesion and identify a consensus project for action-oriented social change.
Katz (1978, 2003) pointed out that a systematic approach to anti-racism training is more likely to produce affective and behavioral change. She utilized a six-stage program that: defined key constructs of racism, examined institutional racism, helped participants resolve feelings that arose from being triggered, explored cultural racism, aided participants in reclaiming a healthy white identity, and developed action strategies that helped individuals continue their growth as anti-racists. The program was delivered to participants over the course of two weekends, totaling 26 hours of instructional time (Katz & Ivey, 1977). The second edition of *White Awareness* (2003) was published 25 years after the first edition and contains a few modest updates. The program recommended by Katz served as a template for the educational interventions embedded in this action research project.

Katz credited dissertation projects by Moore (1973) and Edler (1974) as the basis for her contention that all-white anti-racism projects are effective. The paucity of literature on whitewhite approaches to anti-racist consciousness-raising was a motivation to use that approach in this project. In this respect, the present study fills an existing gap in the literature.

**Characteristics of Effective Training Programs to Deconstruct White Privilege**

Student affairs practitioners have a major influence on the campus environment. They design, modify, manage, and transform many essential elements of the university: residence halls, student centers, advocacy offices, and recreation facilities. “Student affairs staff can directly influence the formation of a multicultural environment, build an inclusive campus environment, and transform institutional structures” (Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991, p. 367). They can also opt not to move in the direction of an inclusive environment and maintain the status quo, which tends to reflect the white normative culture. In addition to managing diverse environments, student affairs professionals can also expect to work as part of interracial work groups, to solve problems for students of all races, and to supervise or be supervised by a person different from them by race. The experiences that individuals have in student affairs graduate preparation programs will shape their professional identities, so an exploration of what students are learning about racial identity/racial consciousness in graduate school is both important and necessary.

McEwen and Roper (1994) surveyed 453 students in 28 different student affairs graduate preparation programs to determine their interracial background and experiences, interracial
knowledge, and perceived skill level related to issues of race. They found that 10% of the respondents had no or very little experience working with students different from them by race, 39% of the respondents did not consider themselves capable of designing a program sensitive to the perspective of students from different racial backgrounds, and 50% felt they were not capable of teaching others about issues of race. Black respondents were significantly more knowledgeable about selected knowledge constructs relevant to working with People of Color than were white respondents $F(1, 428) = 80.8, p < .001$. Fourteen of the 24 knowledge areas were identified by two-thirds or more of the respondents as ones they knew little or nothing about. This study emphasized that curricula in student affairs graduate preparation programs needs to include components that encourage students to consider how their race affects their thinking and their practice.

A greater quantity and more probing studies of the interracial experiences of graduate students have been conducted with trainees in counseling psychology or counselor education programs. Corvin and Wiggins (1989) articulated an early model of anti-racism training for counselor trainees. They contended that white counselors need to recognize, assess, and accept their own worldviews and biases in order to be competent practitioners. They used Hardiman’s (1982) model of white racial identity development as an organizer, collapsing her two earliest stages into a single stage they called Acceptance, and developed training goals to increase self-awareness associated with being white. Neither the training content nor the process is fully summarized in the article, but it appeared as though a dialogic model was used throughout a semester-long course.

Parker, Moore, and Neimeyer (1998) compared the white racial consciousness and interracial comfort of counselor education graduate students in an all-white counseling skills class with those of students in an all-white multicultural counseling class taught by the same African American instructor. The White Racial Consciousness Development Scale (WRCDS) and the Interracial Comfort Index, both developed by Claney and Parker (1989), were the instruments used to assess changes in attitudes. The WRCDS was constructed from Helms’s (1984) white identity development model. The researchers used a pre-test–post-test controlled experimental design, with the limitation that subjects were not randomly assigned to groups. The researchers found that students in the experimental group had significant differences on three of the six scales of the WRCDS—contact, pseudo-independence, and autonomy—and that the
training significantly enhanced interracial comfort. From this study, we can conclude that multicultural training can have a positive impact on white racial identity and interracial comfort, although probably not to a level that could be equated with multicultural competence.

One critical approach to deconstructing white privilege calls for the abolition of whiteness. Ignatiev (1995; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996) and other “new abolitionists” have traced the invention of whiteness and its ties with the rise of U.S. capitalism. The central message of the new abolitionists is the rejection of white identity and white privilege and, ultimately, the eradication of whiteness. This far left perspective is worthy of admiration but may not be intellectually or practically feasible. For example, individual whites can perform acts of treason toward whiteness in one moment and find themselves benefiting from their whiteness the next. Winant (1997) argued against the abolitionist agenda and stated that “whiteness is imbedded in a highly articulated social structure and system of significations; rather than trying to repudiate it, we shall have to rearticulate it” (p. 48).

Sleeter (1995), writing from the perspective of multicultural education, outlined the approach she has used to help white preservice teachers understand racism. She advocated a focus on structural racism—an analysis centered on the institutional and cultural levels—in order to avoid the embrace of colorblindness or the feelings of guilt which tend to emerge when the conversation centers on individual manifestations of racism. Sleeter (1995) had her students read *The Education of a WASP* (Stalvey, 1989), an autobiographical account by a white woman who immersed herself in the struggle for racial equality during the pre-Civil Rights era in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The text concentrates on institutional racism and the media production of stereotypes. Sleeter’s students also played cultural simulation games that explore issues like stereotype formation and how power can be used or abused in group settings. Sleeter (1995) then assigned her students to investigate a local aspect of racism, an approach that would be consistent with an action research methodology. She complemented that assignment with the distribution of statistical information that validates the existence of racial inequality. Sleeter’s approach of validating what students already know, then exploring new territory and immersing them in contradictions before closing with action planning and identifying support strategies mirrors Kegan’s (1982) facilitating environments.

Ortiz and Rhoads (2000) have proposed a theoretical framework for multicultural education that allows white students to reconsider their views on race, culture, and identity with
the goal of promoting higher levels of white racial consciousness and a deeper understanding of privilege. Their framework has five steps: 1) understanding culture, 2) learning about other cultures, 3) recognizing and deconstructing white culture, 4) recognizing the legitimacy of other cultures, and 5) developing a multicultural outlook. Each step has a cognitive goal, and Ortiz and Rhoads have posited a “beginning problem statement” and an “ending problem statement,” along with one or more educational activities that would meet the cognitive goal expressed for that step. Reflecting on and analyzing everyday events, analyzing critical incidents, attending cultural events as an informed cultural spectator and actor, holding an ongoing dialogue with someone of a different race, connecting how cultural attributes contribute to whites’ sense of self and affect how they see the world, and conducting institutional cultural audits are some of the activities Ortiz and Rhoads recommended for advancing through the framework. Their framework is useful in locating the formation of an anti-racist identity in the larger context of multicultural education. The authors called for the collection of evaluative data on the efficacy of different educational activities that deconstruct whiteness, and this project sought to answer that call.

Building on the work of Ortiz and Rhoads (2000), Reason and Evans (2007) suggested that programs and courses are needed to stimulate whites to reconstruct racially cognizant whiteness. Some basic elements of such courses or programs are: a curriculum that critically addresses whiteness, white anti-racist role models, and an invitation to engage an emancipatory praxis around race, white privilege, and white supremacy (R. D. Reason & Evans, 2007). Earlier work by Reason, Scales, and Roosa Millar (2005) identified three developmental objectives for any program to develop white racial justice allies: a cognitive and affective understanding of the constructs of privilege, power, and racism; a positive self-definition of whiteness, and; an encouragement toward action to correct inequities based on race.

In her dissertation research, McIntyre (1995) conducted a prototype of a participatory action research project to deconstruct whiteness. Her study involved 13 undergraduate women student teachers from the Boston, Massachusetts, area who examined what it meant to be white and how the participants made critical meaning of their whiteness in relation to their practice as teachers-in-training. McIntyre used a feminist lens and social constructionist grounded theory to interpret her data, and she identified three emergent themes. Through an analysis of the discourse over the span of the project, McIntyre identified what she called “white talk”: the
myriad verbal locutions whites use to avoid shouldering responsibility for racism in the present
day. The second theme had to do with participants’ constructions of whiteness, which ranged on
a continuum from viewing whites as the all-American norm and keepers of the American dream
to viewing whites as ugly racists. McIntyre noted that the project evoked more questions than
answers in terms of clarifying an identity as an anti-racist educator, but that dialogue helped
group members further elucidate who they were in relation to other teachers and students
(McIntyre, 1997). The third theme that McIntyre’s study reaffirmed is the role that teachers who
uncritically embrace hegemonic teaching practices have in reproducing classroom inequality.

There are some limitations to McIntyre’s (1995) study that this proposed project will
address. The first is an over-reliance on the conscientização, or learning to perceive contradictions
and taking action against the oppressive elements of reality, described by Freire (1993/1970, p.
17) as the consummate manifestation of action research. While Freire’s work is well-known and
oft-cited, the action research literature is broader and deeper. Chapter 3 will explore some of the
ways that critiques of Freire and updates to the literature on action research can be used to
enhance an action research project to deconstruct whiteness. A second limitation of McIntyre’s
(1995) study is the homogeneity of her participants, who identified as middle- or upper-middle-
class white women. The gender, social class status, and sexual orientation diversity of the
population I worked with yielded more nuanced constructions of white privilege. The
participants in this study were older, on average, and had been exposed to white racial identity
development theories. They also aspired to positions of administrative leadership (as opposed to
front-line classroom teaching).

Hytten and Warren (2003) extended McIntyre’s (1995) study by examining the discourses
that emerged in their three-credit, full-semester, graduate-level seminar course on education and
culture that explicitly placed whiteness in the foreground. They found that the “white talk”
(Hytten & Warren, 2003, p. 66) of their students manifested itself in 12 different strategic
discourses of resistance that served to maintain and protect the dominant cultural location of
whiteness. Students in their course tended to make appeals to self, appeals to progress, appeals
to authenticity, and appeals to extremes (Hytten & Warren, 2003). As the present study
progressed, participants were made aware of these discourse strategies, so that we could monitor
their deployment and be more accountable to each other for the privileging effects of whiteness
on our discussion.
Kirshman (2006) recently completed her dissertation research, which was conceptually similar to this project, albeit focused on adult education and working professionals. She employed a critical action research methodology to investigate how the construct of whiteness was understood by professionals working in the field of student affairs. Kirshman used pre- and post-project semi-structured interviews coupled with a 12-hour interactive program that culminated in a focus group during the sixth session. The experiential core of Kirshman’s interactive program consisted of viewing the California Newsreel series *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (Adelman, 2003) and group discussion and selected activities from Katz (2003). Kirshman overtly structured her methods to reflect a cycle of action research. The pre-project interviews represented the planning phase, the 12-hour interactive project was the action phase, the focus group offered an opportunity for observation, and the post-project interviews allowed participants to reflect on their experience. The author identified three overarching themes: (1) race and whiteness—the absent presence, which refers to the way whiteness was an invisible, ill-defined construct that nevertheless hovered over the entire project; (2) learning in action, wherein the author makes the case that an engaged pedagogy like critical action research was successful; and (3) making it personal, which refers to the local knowledge that participants took away from the project and used to improve their own practice going forward.

**Characteristics of Effective Trainers Working to Deconstruct White Privilege**

An exhaustive discussion of the skills facilitators need to conduct anti-racism education programs is beyond the scope of this literature review; however, I will give a brief summary of some of the knowledge, skills, and awareness required of effective trainers in this section. I focus on the facilitation skills required for social justice education, generally, as there is a dearth of literature around facilitation of white privilege awareness specifically. What has been written suggests that a gender-balanced team of co-facilitators is the optimal model for delivering content to a coeducational group (Griffin, 1997a; Griffin & Ouellett, 2007; Katz, 2003). While I concur with this judgment, it was not practical for this research project to employ that model as I did not have a white female co-facilitator with whom to co-facilitate. Griffin (1997a) recommended that facilitators be prepared to situationally adopt different roles like participant, guide, teacher, activist, and change agent when delivering social justice education designs. Effective trainers need to be prepared to address participant resistance, anger, stuckness,
attempts to distance themselves from agent status, and the tendency to embrace content without critically examining it (Griffin, 1997a; Griffin & Ouellett, 2007). Facilitators need to have self-awareness and the ability to monitor themselves (Weinstein & Obear, 1992). I will address my own self-awareness and the steps I took to promote my own reflexivity in Chapter 4.

Effective social justice education trainers should be open to learning from students and demonstrate a willingness to move away from instructor expertise to more participant-centered learning (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007). One way to role model openness to social justice learning edges is for facilitators to be willing to disclose their own stereotypes, concerns, and uncertainties without going too far and making the course their own personal agenda (Griffin & Ouellett, 2007). Of paramount importance is recognizing that, as facilitators, we are all still in a process of “becoming;” we all still work to balance our racist and anti-racist selves (Gannon, 1999). These aforementioned attitudes and skills also happen to be consistent with the democratic ideals of participatory action research.

**Chapter Summary**

This section began by defining the construct of white privilege, foregrounding the seminal work by McIntosh (1988, 1989). The scholarship on white privilege was summarized with special treatment of McIntosh’s work bracketed by the contributions that came chronologically before and after her working paper (1988) and article (1989). The core features and processes of white privilege were reviewed, followed by a consideration of the manifestations of white privilege in interpersonal and small-group anti-racism work. White:white anti-racism awareness training was explored as a vehicle for deconstructing white privilege, and various educational approaches to addressing white privilege and white consciousness were reviewed. Finally, a brief section established the characteristics of effective training programs and trainers who work to deconstruct white privilege. In the third chapter, the methodological approach of participatory action research is introduced and a justification and explication of the methods that were used in this research project is delineated.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

“Howver difficult it is, I believe that the forces of good will, white and black, in this country, can work together to bring about a resolution of this problem. We have the resources to do it. At present, we don’t have the will, but certainly the Negroes and the decent, committed whites—maybe they’re in a minority now, but they’re there—must work together to so arouse the conscience of this nation, and at the same time to so articulate the issue through direct action and powerful action programs, that our demands can no longer be eluded by the government or by Congress or all of the forces in power.”

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1967)

This chapter begins with a justification for the selection of action research as an appropriate methodology for a dissertation research project focused on social justice. Action research is more frequently used to study the social stratification of subordinated groups, so special attention is paid to the appropriate application of action research as a tool for working with members of the dominant group. Next, action research as a methodology will be described more thoroughly, including a brief history and enumeration of the key features of this approach to reflective practice. Action research as a methodology is then situated in the milieu of critical theory and constructivist approaches to understanding issues of race and racism. The particular data collection and analysis procedures that were used for this project are described next. The use of an engaged methodology required that special care and attention were given to the ethical dimensions of the research. Following that section on ethics, there is a discussion of the strategies that were used for validating findings in the project.

Action Research in the Service of Social Justice

Ella Bell noted that, “one of the roots of action research [is] deeply embedded in the progressive research on race” (2001, p. 49), yet race has been largely invisible in the action research discourse in the United States. If we take to heart Lorde’s (1984) insight that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (p. 112) then action research as a nontraditional methodology may hold special promise as a means to investigate white racial privilege. It is worth noting that Rosa Parks, who is credited with sparking the Montgomery bus
boycott, had spent time at the Highlander Research and Education Center, a focal point for participatory action research in the United States (Horton & Freire, 1990).

Action research is often used as a tool for the mobilization of the underprivileged or groups subordinated in the social hierarchy (Gaventa, 1993; Jackson, 1993; Maguire, 1993). However, there is also a call for participatory action research (PAR) techniques to be used in working with members of dominant groups:

Participation is also a process of consciousness-raising or conscientization...This pedagogy of the oppressed, to borrow Freire’s term, must be matched by a “pedagogy of the privileged”: inquiry processes which engage those in positions of power, and those who are simply members of privileged groups—based on gender, class, profession, or nation. We need to learn more about how to exercise power and position legitimately in the service of participative relationships, to find ways in which politicians, professionals, and managers can exercise power in transforming ways, power with others rather than over others. (P. Reason & Bradbury, 2001a, p. 10)

Although whites have situated themselves as the dominant racial group in the United States, the privilege that dominance confers is invisible and largely unacknowledged (McIntosh, 1989). Denial and silence encase privilege and protect dominance. Whites can free themselves from the strictures of privilege by talking about the construct. As Case, writing from a theological perspective, noted (2004)

In order to be effective agents for racial justice, white people must undergo conscientization—a coming to awareness—of the mechanisms of white supremacy...Only when we understand how the system operates and how we are implicated and caught in it can we engage in an informed praxis to disrupt it. For white Christians this means we must develop our own form of emancipatory praxis as white people opposed to white supremacy. (pp. 68-69) [emphasis in original]

The dialogue-based methodology used in this project, participatory action research, fostered the kind of emancipatory praxis that Case referred to.

Race and the manifestations of racism are the subject of much research and intellectual debate in this country. There is a considerable amount of scholarly work done by both whites and People of Color to theorize race, racism, and anti-racism. Scheurich (1997) pointed out that efforts by whites in the academy to talk about their own racism are much less prevalent, “even though prominent academics of color, such as hooks and Spivak have repeatedly said that one of
the most important efforts white people could undertake to address racism would be to examine self-reflectively how white racism works” (p. 119).

Whites in the United States are generally insulated by race privilege from having to address racism or think about how racism works. Yet, in the long run, there are costs to both whites and People of Color when the structures and social patterns that divide us by race go unchallenged:

We must find new ways to dismantle both systemic and social dimensions of racial oppression, while at the same time addressing the interlocking forces of class, gender, and sexual preference...How do I as white person become aware of the privilege surrounding my life? And, in what ways does my status and position, regardless of my race, blind me to those who are less fortunate? (E. E. Bell, 2001, p. 56)

Scheurich believed we are not destined to continue the present inequities. “The key question is, how do we end this tragedy? I suggest that we white academics begin with a white discourse on white racism” (Scheurich, 1997, p. 128). An action research project that investigates the potentialities for all-white anti-racist reflection and action to dismantle white privilege could be of immense value to the white participants. Ideally, participants would develop greater cognitive complexity in their understanding of white privilege and its effect on their practice. Participants would have a deepened consciousness, awareness, and understanding of both themselves and others.

Philosophical Assumptions and Description of Action Research

Reason and Bradbury have edited a Handbook of Action Research (2001b) that begins with a description of the characteristics of action research. A primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in their daily lives. Through this pragmatic knowledge, action research aims to contribute to the well-being of people and communities and to a way of living more equitably and sustainably on and with the Earth. Action research emphasizes working with people in their ordinary lives, mutually seeking liberatory ways of knowing. Reason and Bradbury (2001a) offer this definition of action research:

Action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes....It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally, the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (2001a, p. 1)
There are a number of different threads of action research, including action science, empowerment evaluation, cooperative inquiry, and educational action research. The particular variation of action research that has been adopted for this project is participatory action research. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) identified seven key features of participatory action research (PAR): 1) PAR is a social process that probes how people and groups influence one another; 2) PAR is participatory in that it engages people in examining their own knowledge, skills, and awareness; 3) PAR is a collaborative process in which people explore how they interact with each other and seek to reduce the extent to which these actions seem unjust, ineffective, or isolating; 4) PAR is emancipatory in that participants aim to release themselves from the constraints that limit their development and autonomy; 5) PAR is critical in that people intentionally set out to contest the discourses that interpret their world and their social relationships of dominance and subordination; 6) PAR is recursive—it aims to help people investigate reality in order to change it and change reality in order to investigate it; and 7) PAR aims to transform both theory and practice, by using one to explore and explain the other in continuing iterations of reflection and action (pp. 597-598). Participatory action research explicitly engages power with a goal of transforming hegemonic discourses.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) described the process of action research as “a self-reflective cycle of planning a change; acting and observing the process and consequences of the change; and reflecting on these processes and consequences, and then re-planning, acting and observing, reflecting, and so on” (p. 595). There are several determinants of authentic participation in research: people's role in setting the agenda of the inquiry, their participation in data collection and analysis, and their control over the use of outcomes and the whole process (Tandon, as cited in McTaggert, 2001). In participatory action research, considerable energy is directed at ensuring reciprocity and symmetry of relations. Status and power differentials must be attenuated. Ultimately, action research should be empowering for participants and lead to results they can use in their everyday lives. Through dialogue among participants, checks are made to ensure that the agenda of the least powerful becomes a focus of the group’s work.

McTaggart (2001) also takes care to identify five things that participatory action research is not, as a way to distinguish PAR from traditional, positivistic, and supposedly objective research: 1) it is not what social practitioners usually do when they think about their work— it is more systematic and collaborative; 2) it is not simply problem solving but also problem posing;
3) it is not research done on other people; rather, it encourages people to work together as subjects and agents of change; 4) it is not a method or technique for policy implementation in that truths from the “outside” are tested and examined by the participants first; and 5) PAR is not the scientific method, in the traditional sense of hypothesis testing, as it intentionally seeks to change situations as opposed to simply observing or interpreting them (pp. 272-273). Because PAR is less commonly used in educational research in the United States, the section that follows introduces a few of the leading scholars of the genre.

A Brief History of the Thinkers, Institutions, and Practices of Action Research

Although credit for coining the term *action research* is variously distributed, some acknowledge that PAR as a concept has been around for quite some time:

Participatory research as a practice has always existed, whenever farmers, mothers, workers, the poor, the “pushed out” have struggled collectively to understand their contexts, learn about their worlds and take action to survive or, from time to time, to carve out some gains against the more powerful in our worlds. (Hall, 2001, p. 174)

So instead of being a foreign concept, PAR is an intuitive response to problem-solving that involves systematic reflection and action. The term action research was first used by Collier, a United States Commissioner for Indian Affairs during World War II (McKernan, 1996). He saw the American Indian situation as a field laboratory where anthropologists could study social change and develop public policy in collaboration with local populations (Collier, 1945). Lewin, however, often gets credit for birthing the term action research because it appeared in the title of a journal article he authored (Lewin, 1946) and because his early contributions helped legitimate action research in the larger social science community (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Lewin was an early pioneer of the study of group conflict and cooperation. Greenwood and Levin (1998) gave Lewin credit for the slogans, “Nothing is as practical as a good theory” and “The best way to understand something is to try to change it” (p. 19).

Lewin’s ideas were adapted in studies of workplace democracy carried out in Great Britain, Scandinavia, and Japan after World War II. The Saab engine assembly plant in Skövde and the Volvo car assembly plant in Kalmar were widely praised and emulated for the ways they improved quality by attending to participatory, democratic processes on the shop floor (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). The participatory forms of action research blossomed in Europe
because of the vital involvement of organized labor (Herr & Anderson, 2005), in contrast to the
United States, where industrial action research with less grassroots influence from trade unions
attempted to optimize production by changing how work was organized.

At the other end of the continuum from total quality management, industry-oriented
models of action research lie the more emancipatory forms aimed at helping oppressed groups
identify and act upon hegemonic structures. Paulo Freire is one of the revolutionary thinkers of
modern participatory action research. He stimulated a worldwide movement in the pedagogy of
literacy, beginning with the Catholic Basic Education Movement and the Peasant Leagues in the
northeast of Brazil (Horton & Freire, 1990). Freire (1993/1970) used the Portuguese word
conscientização to describe the praxis of reflection and action at the core of action research:
“learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the
oppressive elements of reality” (p. 17). In the Freirean tradition, research is a form of social
action (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The success of Freire’s populist program of literacy education
was so threatening to the entrenched power structure that he took exile in Chile after a military
coup in his own nation. In 1969, Freire was offered a visiting professorship at Harvard
University and the following year his seminal work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1993/1970), was
translated into English. These two events helped bring Freire’s ideas into the mainstream of
educational philosophy in this country (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2004).

In putting his philosophy into practice, one of Freire’s central principles has been a
rejection of the traditional authoritarian paradigm of teacher as expert and student as empty
vessel—what he refers to as the “banking system” of education (Freire, 1993/1970; 1998). Freire
instead saw the teacher-student relationship as two learners, each of whom brought knowledge
to the table, engaged in an ongoing dialogue with one another. The purpose of education in the
Freirean tradition is to foster the type of reflection that encourages the learner to examine and
change their own life (Freire, 1998).

Fals Borda is another leader in the participatory action research movement who has
done work with grassroots groups in Colombia. A major focus of his work has been the
legitimization of popular knowledge and its development into “scientific knowledge,” with the
aim of assisting in the development of a “science of the proletariat” with which the masses could
conduct their own struggle for social transformation (as cited in Rahman, 1993).
Yet another early practitioner of participatory action research was Myles Horton, who in 1932 co-founded the Highlander Folk School in an economically depressed county in Tennessee. Horton’s focus was labor organizing, education, and empowerment, although the Citizenship Schools developed at Highlander made a significant contribution to the Civil Rights Movement by training African Americans to pass literacy tests so they could register to vote (Horton & Freire, 1990). In the first Citizenship Schools, trainers worked with the Gullah people of the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia using the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights as a text. This method of learning to read and write the world by learning to read and write the world is also a tenet of Freirean critical consciousness (Freire & Macedo, 2003).

Critical Theory, Action Research, and Constructivism

Lincoln (2001) noted several areas where critical theory, action research, and constructivism converge, sometimes even appearing as one paradigm. All three paradigms require action on the part of stakeholders, a blurring of the distinction between researcher and researched, the development of a new ethic of interactionism, joint cooperation between universities and their communities, a press for social justice, and a renewed commitment to learning how to co-create knowledge together (p. 126). There are also some philosophical and methodological differences between constructivism and participatory/emancipatory action research at the level of commitment and action that should be noted. Participatory/emancipatory action researchers are required to work with groups in an egalitarian manner and to remain engaged over a long period of time. The level, intensity, and duration of the commitment to a community is the primary distinction to be made between constructivism and participatory action research (Lincoln, 2001). Researchers utilizing action research from the constructivist perspective take on a self-critical or self-reflective direction that involves storytelling or writing a personal history. Because the change resides in the individual, there is often no visible systemic change. Over the past 30 years, most qualitative research has been of the constructivist paradigm, but Lincoln and Guba (2000) noted a “turn toward action” on the part of researchers looking to address issues of social change.

Habermas believed that human beings composed their own realities and organized their experiences in terms of three broad categories of knowledge-guiding interests (Kemmis, 2001). The empirical sciences embraced a technical interest in how things worked and believed that
reality could be objectively known and predicted. The cultural or human sciences were oriented toward a practical need for understanding between subjects. Finally, the critical sciences sought to emancipate subjects from their subordination to ideologies that had become reified (Crotty, 1998). “Emancipatory knowledge interests lead to the potential for critical reflection and problematization of current practices as well as one’s own unexamined assumptions,” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, pp. 27-28) so this approach is particularly helpful in guiding educational practitioners toward greater awareness.

Researchers who adopt action research in the critical/emancipatory tradition exercise a more concerted effort to raise collective consciousness through the praxis of reflection and action. Overarching social structures are critiqued, deconstructed, and reconstructed with an eye toward empowerment. Power imbalances in society that marginalize some (or even “most”) are addressed so that the subjects have “voice.” The critical perspective is important in understanding why oppressive social structures are so difficult to dismantle. Despite these perspectival differences, the constructivist and emancipatory paradigms are more alike than they are unalike.

Action research as a methodology is most closely aligned with the critical perspective, although feminist participatory research emerged from the constructivist perspective. Within the action science and industrial action research branches, there has been somewhat of a retreat to a more positivist-aligned technical form (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The three different epistemologies articulated by Habermas (Kemmis, 2001) are relevant to action research because “how we know what we know” justifies our theoretical stance and informs our choice of research questions and our selection of methods. An objectivist researcher with a technical interest in how things work might discern the research question as a problem to be solved and adopt methods such as randomized experimental design or a survey. A constructivist researcher would likely choose dialogical methods such as in-depth interviews or narrative analysis. Researchers adopting a critical lens could use the same methods as constructivists, but their analysis would be more focused on identifying historical patterns and deconstructing dominant ideologies for the empowerment of the subject.

In keeping with its philosophical origins, there have been numerous critiques of critical pedagogy and practice that have a bearing on the content and methods of this project. In a critique of Freire, Ellsworth (1992) stated that concepts such as empowerment, student voice,
and dialogue are “repressive myths” when conscientization takes as its focus a class-centered analysis (p. 91). Various scholars have argued for the inclusion of race-centered, gender-centered, and intersectional analyses in the principles and practices of critical theory (Anzaldúa, 1987; hooks, 1994; Lather, 1991) In this project, the third research question, in particular, was aimed at illuminating the relationship between other dominant and subordinated gender and sexual orientation identities and white privilege awareness.

Carr and Kemmis (1986) identified two aspirations of all action research: improvement and involvement. Practitioners who adopt the methodology of action research are seeking to improve their practice, improve their understanding of their practice, and improve the environment in which their practice takes place. Action research seeks to stimulate involvement because all participants contribute equally to the phases of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (p. 165). In contrast to the interpretivist stance, which examines significant events from the past that shape a present view, action researchers aim to transform the present in order to produce a different future.

Problems and Solutions Pertaining to the Use of PAR in a Dissertation

Attempting to incorporate a participatory action research methodology into a dissertation presents the graduate student researcher in particular with some problematic contradictions. One central question was if or how a democratic process like participatory research could be reconciled with the unilateral formation of a dissertation proposal and the distinctly undemocratic requirements and processes imposed on doctoral candidates. Various authors (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Maguire, 1993; Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002) have addressed the inherent contradictions between true participatory action research and action research in the service of an academic thesis. Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) have demarcated the boundaries between the field work component of a core action research project, where there is relatively more adherence to the precepts of the participatory paradigm, and the thesis components.

One way in which PAR and dissertation research are seemingly incompatible relates to the question of “how to enter.” In pure participatory action research, the researcher is invited into the setting by an intact group who have identified a problem they would like to solve and who desire “expert” consultation. The nature of informed consent for institutionally sanctioned research in the United States requires that I declare a priori who the participants will be and
describe in some depth the research problem and the methods that will be used in the project. Maguire (1993) addressed this problem in her dissertation research with clients in a battered women’s shelter. While her intent was to step out of the organizer role once the project got under way, her participants resisted taking on any sustained responsibility for organizing or facilitating the group process. Ultimately, the best that can be done is to use the ideal participatory action project as a hoped-for model while remaining flexible as a researcher to incorporate different modes as problems emerge.

Related to this first contradiction is the tension between having a program or process worked out in advance of the proposed research versus allowing the program to evolve in a more organic and participative fashion. In subsequent dialogues that clarified his initial ideas, Freire has suggested that teachers will have knowledge of an object and a method in mind for introducing a classroom of students to that object prior to the development of a democratic dialogue (Horton & Freire, 1990; Shor & Freire, 1987). In this research project, I had several lessons designed and available to address predictable reactions like defensiveness, “stuckness,” and guilt. However, the final decision on whether a lesson was deployed or the particular sequencing of lessons was made flexibly once the project was underway. An annotated outline of the activities we engaged in as a group and the rationale for the choice, content, and sequencing of each is included in Appendix A.

A fourth contradiction has to do with the issue of time. The nature of participatory action research projects is that they can extend indefinitely, while there are definite deadlines in place that bracket the potential time frame for a dissertation. McIntyre’s (1995) formal process lasted eight weeks, totaling approximately 16 hours. Once the group process was concluded, she invited her participants to aid in the data analysis, and three accepted her invitation. So one way to extend the participatory action research metaphor is to involve group members in the continuing review of the research data.

**Research Design**

In this section, I will discuss the multiple individual and organizational improvement processes that this research sought to embrace as well as delineate the strategies used to identify and recruit participants.
Changing the status quo as opposed to researching from within it. There were three simultaneous action research processes embedded within this one project. The first was my own process of self-improvement as a white facilitator working with other white people to increase awareness of white privilege. Here, I was positioned as the ultimate insider, seeking to critique and improve my own practice through action research. The second process involved the local knowledge created by the group as they inquired into the construct of white privilege. With regard to that process, I was again positioned as an insider in collaboration with other insiders. The third action research process was the action outcome that we were working toward as a group. There again, we were insiders attempting to influence practice in our own organization. Positionality is an important epistemological issue to address at this stage, because the impressions and taken-for-granted assumptions that insider action research tends to generate must be critically examined. Insiders do not have special insight on “truth;” theirs is simply one truth among many perspectives. The strategies addressing credibility, dependability, and confirmability, as well as the mechanisms for addressing potential bias will be addressed in a subsequent section.

I was also concerned with organizational learning and change, which is unique to action research as a methodology. One variation on action research is action science, the goal of which is the generation of “knowledge that is useful, valid, descriptive of the world, and informative about how we might change it” (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985, p. x). While action science is not the action research tradition I most closely identify with, I found the manner in which Argyris, et al. conceptualized and problematized the status quo to be instructive:

In social life, the status quo exists because the norms and rules learned through socialization have been internalized and are continually reinforced…The interdependence among norms, rules, skills, and values creates a pattern called the status quo that becomes so omnipresent as to be taken for granted and to go unchallenged. (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985, p. xi)

Applying that general statement to this specific project, white privilege is a form of dynamic conservatism that pulls whites back toward the status quo. One technique to interrupt the status quo is confrontation: where “social actors are forced to come to terms explicitly with their own defensive reactions to changes and perceived threats by inquiring into the causes of those reactions and analyzing the consequences of giving in to them” (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 224).
Participants. The participants for this project were identified purposefully using snowball sampling (Patton, 2002), and they ultimately self-selected to take part. The initial group targeted for participation were members of the rising second-year cohort in the Iowa State University Higher Education master’s program. I made an initial appeal for participants when I was an invited guest lecturer on the topic of white privilege and white identity development in a student development theory course during the spring semester of 2006. This informal solicitation netted two potential participants. Reputational case selection (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was employed, as when members of my Program of Study committee recommended several potential names to me. These individuals were contacted directly via electronic mail and invited to participate. A mass electronic mail message, a copy of which can be found in Appendix B, was sent out through the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) Department. I requested time to make a presentation during a student diversity in higher education course to seek potential participants, and at least two individuals who would later become participants in the group responded. In one instance, an individual whose schedule prevented her from participating identified and recommended a second potential member, who subsequently agreed to participate. In another instance of purposive sampling (Guba, 1981), I reached out via electronic mail and then followed up in-person with Kevin, a male doctoral student, because of the gender diversity he would add to the group. Four students expressed interest in the project but had work or internship commitments that precluded their participation. However, availability and interest were the only qualifying criteria for selection—I did not turn away anybody who wanted to participate and could meet within the time constraints of the study.

That individuals self-selected to take part was significant. Potential participants knew in advance that the time commitment for this project would approximate 30 hours spanning the first and second summer semesters of 2006. Their willingness to set aside a substantial block of time during a compressed academic semester to take part indicates a predisposition to want to learn about racism and white privilege.

All participants were invited to read and sign an informed consent document. A copy of the informed consent document can be found in Appendix C. Because dialogues about racism are often laden with emotion, all participants were advised of the risks associated with this type of project and the specific steps I was taking as researcher and facilitator to ameliorate those risks. Although the group meetings were intense at times, I never had an indication that any
member experienced a dramatic, negative emotional reaction to the project content or process. Once the project was under way, a modification was sought and obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that allowed participants to receive up to two graduate credit hours in exchange for their participation. All of the participants signed new informed consent documents—the one in Appendix C—that included a reference to this development. The credit was applied for the subsequent fall 2006 semester and all of the credits were graded “satisfactory,” so there was a shared understanding that there was no academic grade tied to participation or non-participation in the project and that participants would not be evaluated critically if they made contrarian remarks. I asked Emma an admittedly closed-ended question about this aspect of the project during the post-project interview:

Jeff: OK. There was the piece where we introduced that you could earn some credit for this. Did that serve at all to affect the level at which you may have self-censored, knowing that there was some stake in it?’

Emma: No, not for me, I mean…there wasn’t a grade attached to that, it was we did it and we got credit for it, so I mean I trusted that…You had said that…what we said was never a stake in that and so I trusted that, so I don’t think for me it really did. I figured if anything, it was just an incentive for me to keep showing up. (Emma/2nd/125-131)

Although this credit-for-participation arrangement replicated the way traditional classroom dialogues about race and racism are constructed in some respects, the other “pedagogies of liberation” (hooks, 1994; Shor & Freire, 1987) we practiced helped participants be more authentic with each other.

Initially, four women and two men, all of whom identified racially as white agreed to participate in the project. At the first group meeting on June 21, 2006, participants identified by consensus six additional times they were willing to meet, with the final session to occur on July 25, 2006. The group met for a total of 30 hours, and an accounting of those meeting times and places appears in Appendix D. One woman, who attended three of the first four group meetings, eventually stopped attending and disengaged from the project. She later indicated that time commitments with her summer job had interfered with her ability to participate. She also

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2 For a complete explanation of transcript codes, please refer to Appendix P
felt that because of her recent and not-so-recent life experiences that she would be interacting with other members in a quasi-therapeutic relationship and she didn’t want to interfere with the purposes or outcomes of the project (“Chelsea,” personal communication, August 17, 2006). Her departure did not have an observable, detrimental effect on the group or on any individual member, although her valuable perspective was lost.

While I was a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and the participants in this project were master’s- and doctoral-level students in the same program, we were not highly enmeshed with each other. I had not spent significant time in interaction with any of the master’s degree students and had only a few occasions to talk with the one doctoral student participant, so I believe that the action research project was not confounded by dual role conflicts at the outset. However, it was important to carefully and professionally balance the various roles I adopted as the project progressed: experiential educator, consultant, mentor, and friend. A commitment to address conflict and clarify areas of confusion through dialogue helped to proactively address problem areas before they became so significant as to threaten the continuation of the project.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The research protocol for this study was approved by the IRB at Iowa State University. A copy of the IRB approval can be found in Appendix E. The initial IRB application for Human Subjects Assurance was met with consternation, as the committee had never reviewed a participatory action research proposal before (D. Anderson, personal communication, May 25, 2006). Because the Office of Research Assurances was short-staffed, the application took more than six weeks to be approved, and I underwent additional scrutiny by the chair of the review committee who sought to clarify my research intent. I was asked to submit curriculum designs as examples of what I planned to cover in the participatory group meetings. It is my perception that I was being evaluated as to my competence and professional judgment in carrying out the intended project. In the end, the project was approved without too much difficulty, but I mention the experience here as a cautionary tale to other action researchers who may follow. Herr and Anderson (2005) provided an excellent resource for researchers contemplating the ethical imperatives of an action research methodology.
Qualitative data for this project were gathered primarily through making an audio record of our group process, interviewing participants, and collecting written records. As participants engaged with one another, we made an audiotape of our conversation that was transcribed for further study. This transcription of our group dialogue served as the primary source of data for the project.

Participants were interviewed twice during the course of the project, and those interviews were also recorded and transcribed. Pre-project interviews enabled the principal investigator to get to know each participant and gain an understanding of how his or her prior life experiences might influence his or her participation in the group. Post-project interviews offered an opportunity to debrief the participants, assess their development, and attempt to identify any changes that may have occurred as a result of their participation.

A third source of information from the project was the artifacts and other written records produced by the participants over the course of the study. Participants were asked to formalize their observations and reflections in WebCT, an interactive courseware tool. Following most of the group meetings, participants were given an open-ended question or prompt and asked to complete a reflection in WebCT. During some group meeting sessions, participants produced written artifacts such as the results of nominative group brainstorming sessions and these were also collected. These written records were coded and analyzed along with the individual interviews and group process transcripts.

As the research proceeded, I maintained field notes detailing my reactions to individual participants, the content of our meetings, and to the group process as a whole. At the same time, I was writing analytic memos to chart my thinking about the group process. I took particular note of times I was triggered by the process or content and how I responded. One benefit of participatory action research is the leveling effect between the researcher and the participants. There were several moments where I asked for and received authentic feedback from the group related to how the process was going.

Interviewing. Social constructionists believe the best way to understand the perceptions held by individuals is to visit with them and gather information in person. When a researcher conducts an interview from a constructivist perspective, there is an understanding that the interviewer and participant are jointly constructing a story and unraveling that story’s meaning (Patton, 2002). Constructivist social researchers then interpret the co-constructed interview or
story to deduce their findings. Rubin and Rubin (1995) likened qualitative interviewing to a guided conversation where the interviewer listens “so as to hear the meaning” of what is being conveyed (p. 7). As the title of their volume implies, it is a particular art to hear the data that emerge in an interview setting (Rubin & Rubin).

My decision to utilize interviewing as a methodological tool was a pragmatic one. Participant observation was out of the question because I lacked the third eye that would be necessary to facilitate the PAR group while also observing the group and myself. An initial interview before and an exit interview after the PAR group seemed like an appropriate way to bracket the experience, evaluate changes in the participants, and to cross-check findings. Taken together with an analysis of the discourses that occurred during the PAR group and an analysis of the reflections that participants wrote about in WebCT and other project artifacts, the interviews gave me a more complete picture of what had transpired during the course of the research.

The initial interview. Once I had confirmed the definite interest of each participant, we arranged a mutually convenient time and place for the initial interview. I suggested locations that would permit the participants some degree of privacy to express their views. Three of the interviews were conducted in the library on campus. One participant suggested we meet in his office after normal business hours. A final interviewee suggested we meet over lunch, and we utilized a conference room attached to a campus dining facility. All of the initial interviews were conducted from June 13 through June 19 of 2006, in-person on the Iowa State University campus in private or semi-private environments. Participants were given a copy of the Informed Consent Document (in Appendix C), and key sections were explained verbally. After any questions were answered, I asked participants if I could begin tape-recording our conversation and we proceeded with the initial interview.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggested that interviewers develop 10 to 12 main questions based on their review of the relevant literature, but to also include probes that encourage interviewees to clarify and expand on their answers and follow-up questions that elucidate what has been implied by an interviewee’s response to a main question (pp. 145-146). The guide that I developed for the initial interview contained 19 questions and can be found in Appendix F.

I utilized a standardized interview guide where the content and sequencing of questions was determined in advance (Patton, 2002). I felt like this approach would facilitate analysis of the
data with respect to the first and third research questions which had evaluation overtones. The interview questions were open-ended, which is consistent with a constructivist approach (Warren, 2002). The initial interview began with several introductory questions (Kvale, 2001) that gave me some insight into how participants made sense of themselves as racial beings as well as their lived experiences with racial difference and diversity training. I asked some open-ended opinion and values questions such as “What does it mean for you to be white?” and “How would you define racism?” Sprinkled throughout the initial interview were probes that asked participants to reflect on their earliest memories of racial differences, the level of racial homogeneity or heterogeneity in their family and friendship groups, and the feelings participants experienced when interacting with people different from them by race. Approximately half way through the initial interview, I shifted to a series of knowledge questions (Patton, 2002) to determine what each participant “knew” about racial equality in the United States and his or her understanding of politically loaded terms like “reverse racism” and “affirmative action.” My purpose here was to ascertain whether participants had deep or only surface-level knowledge of these openly ideological terms. The content of the questions I asked in the initial interview was guided by a review of the literature (Eichstedt, 2001; Katz, 2003; O’Brien, 2001; Thompson, 2001).

Throughout the initial interview, I sought to remain flexible and open, using the interview guide as a structure but with the latitude to change the sequencing of questions, add emergent questions, or drop questions completely. It occurred to me in an early interview that I might want to know how each participant viewed her- or himself on a continuum of risk-taking and the degree to which they embraced or avoided conflict in group settings, so these questions were added. My preliminary interview guide contained a final question asking interviewees about their other social identities besides their whiteness. After asking the first person I interviewed, I determined that this question was too “high-risk” given the limited rapport and trust that had been developed thus far, so I dropped this question from subsequent initial interviews.

The exit interview. The approach for constructing the post-project interview was similar to that used for the initial interview. A standardized, open-ended interview guide was used, a copy of which can be found in Appendix G. The guide included introductory questions and follow-up questions to prompt participants to reconstruct their experience (Seidman, 1998). For example, the exit interview started with the introductory question “Have your views about white privilege
changed since the beginning of the project?” and was followed-up by asking “Has your increased awareness caused you to question your privilege more?” Some of the exit interview questions were created specifically to induce participants to talk about one of the four research questions. For example, I asked participants about reactions to the group being composed of only white people, which bears directly on the fourth research question. I made greater spontaneous use of probes and specifying questions (Kvale, 2001) in the post-project interviews in order to elucidate more precise descriptions and examples of changes that participants perceived in themselves as a result of their involvement.

The post-project interviews were conducted approximately four-and-one-half months after the conclusion of the group process meetings, at the close of the Fall 2006 semester. By this time, participants had ample opportunity to reflect on the experience and implement plans of action. On the other hand, the lapse between the end of the PAR group meetings and the post-project interview may have allowed the energy and enthusiasm of participants to wane or particular commitments to be forgotten. I was compelled to conduct the post-project interviews via telephone because I had moved to the east coast at the conclusion of the PAR project, and in-person interviews were not feasible logistically. I acknowledge the drawbacks of telephone interviews (Shuy, 2002): they lack contextual naturalness, which may have affected the interviewees’ comfort; they exaggerate the unequal distribution of power, which may have inhibited interviewees from making authentic responses; they create a potential for less thoughtful responses; there are technological issues that affect transcription quality; and, as the interviewer, I was not able to see facial expressions and other non-verbal cues that may have helped to contextualize an interviewees’ response to the interview questions. To obviate some of these concerns, the post-project interview continued to utilize open-ended questions, which were sent to each participant prior to the interview. This encouraged more deliberative, thoughtful, reflective responses. By this time, the participants and I had developed a good rapport, which may have encouraged them to formulate more authentic responses. The post-project interviews had the quality of an in-depth interview because we were talking as close friends (J. M. Johnson, 2002). Verbatim transcriptions were made of both the initial and post-project interviews and these were subjected to analysis using the methods described later in this chapter.
The White Privilege Attitudes Scale. The WPAS is a measure developed by Janie Pinterits as part of her dissertation research (2004). It consists of four factors which purport to measure willingness to confront white privilege, apprehensions that flow from addressing white privilege, denial of white privilege, and feeling bad about having white privilege. The WPAS was undergoing a second round of construction and validation at the time of this research project, which resulted in an 81-item measure being pared down to 28 items. Each member of the group completed the instrument at the conclusion of his or her first interview and then again at the conclusion of the group process. The WPAS was a useful evaluation benchmark that provided a triangulated source of data regarding whether and how participant attitudes changed over the course of the project.

Participatory action research group meetings. The most methodologically difficult part of this research project was designing and facilitating the PAR group meetings. Components had to be developmentally appropriate, rich in content, sequenced properly, and facilitated with excellence. When the PAR group began, I wasn’t sure I had enough material to fill up 30 hours. I quickly discovered everything takes longer than you anticipate when participatory and democratic goals are emphasized and actualized.

The PAR group represented an emergent design—we were examining white racial privilege “in the field” in a dynamic process that unfolded before our eyes. In contrast to ethnographic studies where the researcher tries not to be manipulative, participatory processes are collaborative, engaging, and action-oriented. We were trying to identify a plan to change white privilege even as we investigated the construct itself. A participatory design emerges as the process itself emerges (Patton, 2002). At the third PAR group meeting, I introduced the “parking lot” as one example of how we could manage an emergent design. In a reflection, Zach had expressed concern that we were “allowing ourselves to go on tangents at will and not always keeping focused” (R2/5). I encouraged all of the participants, including myself, to acknowledge when our discussion had deviated onto a tangent and write it on a separate sheet of paper I referred to as the “parking lot.” In this way, we could identify topics of interest that we wanted to explore further while still allowing for closure with the topic at hand. We listed topics such as “identifying and responding to triggers” and “how the media influences our views of racism and privilege” on the parking lot. These tangential topics were then taken up in later discussions.
Activities for the PAR group were selected and sequenced with attention to several precepts (L. A. Bell & Griffin, 1997). For example, we did lower risk activities like brainstorming definitions for key terms before higher risk activities like locating ourselves on a continuum of ally development. Participants in the PAR group had ample time to talk about issues with a personal focus before delving into issues with an institutional focus. Students engaged the project curriculum on their own in the WebCT reflection space, in diads or triads when discussing an activity, and as a large group. A more thorough description of the various activities we worked on and a rationale for content and sequencing decisions can be found in Appendix A.

**Organization of the Narrative**

Action research consists of planning to make a change, carrying out an action, gathering data that describe and document the effects of the action, and then reflecting and assessing progress. Ideally, there would be iterative cycles of systematic planning, acting, observing, and reflecting that lead to process improvement or mastery of a skill. For this research project, I entered the action research cycle at the point of reflection: my own sense that awareness of white privilege was a key component in developing an anti-racist identity and that an all-white consciousness-raising PAR group would be an effective format for facilitating white privilege awareness. Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005) recommended the development of a data collection plan that maps research questions with methods and the data that we perceive might address the research questions. The methods and data probes utilized in this project were spaced out intentionally so that a chronological narrative would depict growth over the course of the project. The methods used and their respective contribution to the narrative are presented in Table 1.
Table 1. Methods Utilized and How the Data Contribute to the Narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Contribution to Narrative</th>
<th>Data Appears In:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-project interviews</td>
<td>Situated the knowledge, skills, and awareness held by the participants prior to the PAR group process</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcripts of PAR group process</td>
<td>Documented the PAR group content, process, and significant moments</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPAS Pre-/Post-Project Survey</td>
<td>Treated as an evaluative questionnaire, data from which would be used to triangulate with qualitative findings</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WebCT reflections</td>
<td>Indicated reflective, as opposed to in-the-moment, awareness of individual and group outcomes</td>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-project interviews</td>
<td>Indicated the achieved outcomes of the PAR group process with respect to the research questions</td>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Establishing a Relationship with the Participants.**

Seidman (1998) advocated not allowing the “I–Thou” interviewer–interviewee relationship to become a “We.” However, participatory research strives for greater camaraderie between researchers and their co-participants. In the early stages of our relationship, I emphasized confidentiality and other ethical protocols as a way to express the seriousness with which I approached our task. As Seidman (1998) suggested, I sought to demonstrate “respect, interest, attention, and good manners” (p. 81) as we progressed through the initial interview. I offered my own experiences and views when it seemed relevant to an interviewee’s response to an interview question. One of the very first tasks we worked on in the PAR group was to discuss the norms and guidelines we wanted to operationalize in the service of creating a safe learning environment. Because the PAR group met over the traditional dinner hour five times and during breakfast on two occasions, I brought in meals when it was feasible. Eating before meeting also created opportunities for fellowship and group bonding.
As an interviewer, I was aware of some of the potential pitfalls of interviewing across identity differences (Rhoads, 2001; Seidman, 1998; Warren, 2002). I had become sensitized to this challenge when, in a previous research project, I had conducted 12 ethnographic interviews of professionals who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. When interviewing across gender lines, I was conscious of attempting to soften my overbearing style. Throughout the process, I sought to maintain a consciousness about sexism and heterosexism, even as we focused mainly on issues of racism and racial privilege. Having reflected on the initial interviews, I do not detect that gender differences affected my rapport with any of the female interviewees. In fact, the two most robust initial interviews were both with female respondents.

Making Manifest the Ethical Concerns with Participant Portrayals.

Values and ethics have a central place in both qualitative research and the constructivist inquiry paradigm, particularly with regard to the potential for researchers to misuse their power as they proceed to craft textual representations of their participants (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). In constructivist social research, we start with the participant’s values constructions, which are gathered and passed through the researcher’s lens and ultimately written up for the reader, who also evaluates findings using his or her own lens. The dialectical nature of the constructivist methodology contains a built-in mechanism to safeguard against deception (Guba & Lincoln, 2001). That is to say that in qualitative research, readers get to see the raw data of interviews and can judge for themselves whether a researcher’s interpretations or conclusions ring true. However, the researcher should anticipate issues related to the confidentiality, anonymity, and self-worth of research participants.

Engaged methodologies such as action research expose new ethical challenges for the researcher (J. Rowan, 2001). Whereas detached, objectivist research accepts the Helsinki Protocols as sufficient, interpersonal ethics and care become more important as the principal investigator and other participants become more deeply immersed with one another (Noddings, 1997). The parsimonious framework for ethics in student affairs delineated by Kitchener (1985) is a model that guides my work with students, peers, and supervisors. Kitchener’s framework includes respecting autonomy, doing no harm, benefiting others, being just, and being faithful.

One of the first steps in bringing together a group of participants for this action research project was to identify the common objectives, sentiments, ideals, and norms that would be used
to guide our democratic dialogue. Stringer (1999) encouraged action researchers to conduct their projects in ways that are conducive to community:

- Relationships should be equal, not hierarchical;
- Conflicts should be resolved openly and dialogically;
- Communication should be truthful and sincere;
- Participants should listen attentively to one another;
- Significant involvement should be enabled; and
- Support should be provided as participants learn to act for themselves. (pp. 29–34)

At the outset of the project, the participants and I negotiated a code of practice that encompassed these community norms and others that the participants felt were important. A copy of our agreed-upon group norms appears in Appendix H. For the purposes of this project, I viewed my role as that of consultant and facilitator, attempting to assist people rather than control them. Because participatory research as a practice was a new methodology for me and for the other participants in the project, how we clarified and operationalized our roles was a topic we revisited several times as the project evolved.

**Data Management and Analysis Procedures**

In the following section, I offer my scheme for managing and analyzing the more than 400 pages of double-spaced transcripts the interviews and PAR group process generated. An outline and timeline of the data analysis activities is found in Appendix I.

*Theoretical approach to data analysis.* Qualitative researchers analyze data by organizing it into categories on the basis of concepts or themes. This organizing process is referred to as coding. Coding consists of two simultaneous activities: reducing data into manageable chunks and categorizing the chunks into themes (Neuman, 2000). On one end of the continuum of coding strategies is a priori coding, where codes would be identified prior to fieldwork from research questions or a review of the literature. On the other end would be purely inductive coding of the sort used in grounded theory research. For this project, I selected an intermediate approach whereby I generated some codes from the research questions and a review of the literature and identified other codes that seemed to emerge from the data itself (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The first pass through the data is known as open coding. Axial coding, in which initial codes are examined and organized in terms of key concepts, occurs on a second pass through
the data. In a final pass through the data, qualitative researchers may use selective coding to identify core generalizations that can be used to organize their analysis. After patterns are identified, they can be interpreted using a lens of social theory. In so doing, the qualitative researcher moves from a particular social milieu to a more general interpretation of meaning.

Pragmatic approach to data analysis. I began analyzing the data for this project by reading each interview transcript, PAR group process transcript, and WebCT reflection. On a separate sheet of paper, I made note of particular occurrences, issues, and concepts that seemed important. During this early phase, I tried to set aside my hypotheses, biases, and assumptions. I then randomly chose one of the PAR group process transcripts and used that transcript to generate specific codes, which I wrote in the margins. I read with deliberation and continually asked myself what the subject of each particular paragraph was, what themes or ideas were being explored, and what difficult question the participant was answering directly or indirectly (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Some of the codes that I had determined at the outset—like “resistance”—were present in this transcript, but there were additional codes and subcodes that emerged as well. For example, variations on the words “guilt” and “stuck” were mentioned several times, and usually in close proximity, so these became codes and I sought to remain mindful of the potential connection between them. I used this evolving coding scheme as I continued to read other transcripts, adding additional codes and then recoding as necessary. Some codes became obvious only after I had seen them in multiple transcripts. An early iteration of my codebook had 75 different first-level codes. Codes were merged or deleted and new codes arose, so that a later iteration of the codebook had 70 unique codes. Once a final coding structure was determined, all of the transcripts were again reviewed to ensure consistency of application.

I collected the codes and coded passages in one document and then read within coding categories to ascertain consistency and between coding categories to determine where similar ideas may have been given different names. Patton (2002) referred to the first step where you want data to “dovetail in a meaningful way” as internal homogeneity and the second step where the “differences among categories are bold and clear” as external heterogeneity (p. 465). This concluded the open coding phase of data analysis.

Determining significant moments or categories. The next stage of analysis was to organize the data in ways that would enable me to identify key ideas, clarify concepts, and link together those ideas and concepts that seemed to provide some manifest description of white privilege. Neuman
(2000) elaborated, “during axial coding, a researcher asks about causes and consequences, conditions and interactions, strategies and processes, and looks for categories or concepts that cluster together” (p. 423). Because the substantive part of this research was a 30-hour group process, it seemed useful to look at how coding categories ordered themselves chronologically. I used different colors of shading in the document in which my coding categories were collected to denote which PAR group session each code came from. This gave me a quick, visual way to see concepts that clustered together and consequential links between categories. In this manner of axial coding, categories arose and patterns became evident. A timeline and description of data analysis activities can be found in Appendix I.

**Strategies for Validating Findings**

Guba and Lincoln (1989) have identified criteria for judging the quality of qualitative research that align with the criteria for judging the quality of quantitative research. Table 2 identifies some of the correspondences between criteria for judging the two types of research.

### Table 2. Criteria for Judging Quality in Quantitative and Qualitative Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative Criteria</th>
<th>Qualitative Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal validity</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External validity/Generalizability</td>
<td>Transferability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Dependability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>Confirmability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The credibility of qualitative research is measured by the degree to which a respondent’s perception of social constructs aligns with the researcher’s rendering of that respondent’s viewpoints. Credibility can be enhanced by evidence of prolonged engagement and observation in the field, peer debriefing, progressive subjectivity, member checks, and triangulation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 237-240). Creswell and Miller (2000) also advocated staying in the field for a prolonged period of time to solidify evidence by comparing interview data with group process data. It is worth noting that for insider research, prolonged engagement in the field may not necessarily help the researcher to see taken-for-granted aspects of the research setting or practices therein. One of the hazards of qualitative research is that the a priori biases of the
researcher can get in the way of “discovering” authentic findings, so the twin processes of peer
debriefing and progressive subjectivity are used to enhance credibility. Peer debriefing refers to
carrying out an external check of the research, a concept that parallels interrater reliability in
quantitative research (Ely, 1991). Peer debriefers are expected to ask researchers tough questions
about their methods and meaning-making. The technique of progressive subjectivity (Guba &
Lincoln, 1989), in which the researcher keeps a log of how his or her hypotheses and thinking
evolved, helps alleviate the problem of foreclosing too quickly on a conclusion. Member checks
involve, “taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that
they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2001, p. 290). Qualitative
researchers can establish credibility for their claims by using multiple sources of data, a technique
known as triangulation.

In post-positivist research, there is an emphasis on generalizing from the views of a
sample to the views of the population at large. In constructivist research, the emphasis is on
portraying the viewpoints of respondents in enough detail that readers can determine for
themselves whether the research findings are transferable to other contexts. Transferability can
be enhanced by using thick description (Denzin, 2001; Geertz, 1973) which can be defined as
dense and detailed accounts that give context and meaning. Using thick description, the author
of an account can transport the reader into the setting of the study.

In the post-positivist paradigm, reliability means that a measure or finding is stable over
time. In the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm, it is expected that constructions or
interpretations will evolve. In order for qualitative studies to be dependable, it is incumbent on
the researcher to document how the process emerged over time.

In the post-positivist paradigm, objectivity is achieved by distance and detachment from
respondents. In an engaged methodology like PAR, detachment is not desirable. However, it is
important that findings can be confirmed as something other than a product of the researcher’s
imagination. Confirmability implies that an outsider should be able to identify how a claim is
supported by the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

For emancipatory methodologies like action research, there are additional criteria for
judging quality. Herr and Anderson (2005, pp. 54-57) proposed five concepts that could be used
to evaluate PAR projects that I have restated in Table 3 below. Outcome validity refers to whether
or not action steps were taken that addressed the problem being studied. Problems aren’t always
solved; rather, researchers might uncover data that lead them to reframe their research questions in more complex ways leading to further iterations of the cycle of action research. “Process validity asks to what extent problems are framed and solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system,” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 55) and stipulates that the researcher must address the cooperativity they cultivated with their co-learners. Democratic validity refers to the notion that research proceeds collaboratively involving all of the stakeholders in any given problem. One aspect of democratic validity is the degree to which the researcher and participants developed a reciprocal relationship based on trust, mutuality, and generativity. Catalytic validity builds on outcome validity and suggests that both researchers and their co-participants should be energized to change the status quo based on the new awareness that came from their participation in the project. Finally, dialogic validity refers to a form of peer review that is developing in and among the global community of action researchers.

Table 3. Anderson and Herr's (2005) Goals of Action Research and Validity Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of Action Research</th>
<th>Quality/Validity Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The generation of new knowledge</td>
<td>Dialogic and process validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The achievement of action-oriented outcomes</td>
<td>Outcome validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The education of both researcher and participants</td>
<td>Catalytic validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results that are relevant to the local setting</td>
<td>Democratic validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sound and appropriate research methodology</td>
<td>Process validity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methodological Limitations

The preceding discussion on criteria for judging the quality and validity of participatory forms of research has identified some of the methodological limitations of this type of project. Personal bias on the part of the researcher could improperly influence the interpretation of participants’ constructions and contributions. This is a particular problem with the type of insider research that this study represented—as true believers in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program and practice, we may have been tempted to overlook the program’s flaws. Similarly, participants may have experienced a pull to portray themselves in the best possible light instead of speaking their authentic truths about white privilege and racism. By bringing in third parties as “critical friends” (McNiff, 2002, p. 22), I created opportunities for
myself and other participants to practice reflexivity and counter the hegemonic impulse. More information about the critical reference group of People of Color can be found in the following chapter.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have discussed how participatory action research conforms to my values, epistemological orientation, worldview, and research questions. Action research was generally defined and the knowledge interests that guided my selection of a critical, emancipatory methodology were justified. The research design and data collection, management, and analysis strategies were described in detail. This chapter concluded with a consideration of the strategies that were used to ensure that the outcomes of this research project would be viewed as credible and trustworthy. In the chapter that follows, I further introduce readers to the participants, my own situation as a facilitator-participant, and the context in which the study took place.
CHAPTER 4. SITUATING THE PARTICIPANTS, RESEARCHER, AND RESEARCH SETTING

“Do [y]our first works over... To do your first works over means to reexamine everything. Go back to where you started, or as far back as you can, examine all of it, travel your road again and tell the truth about it. Sing or shout or testify or keep it to yourself; but know whence you came.”

(Baldwin, 1985a, p. xix)

This brief chapter will function as an introduction to the participants in the project, an introduction to the researcher, and a description of the setting where the research took place. The incorporation of a critical reference group of People of Color will also be described and justified. This additional context is intended to transport the reader into the milieu of the study and allow them to make meaning of the phenomenon of whites engaging with other whites to deconstruct white privilege. In this chapter, I have intentionally situated the participants in the foreground, while also acknowledging several critical moments that may have shaped my analysis of the data for this project.

Situating the Participants

As a social constructionist, I recognize that each participant entered the project with a different understanding or reality about the nature of whiteness or white privilege. In large measure, participant’s realities were formed and influenced by the family, school, and community environments in which they were socialized. In the paragraphs that follow, I will introduce the participants alphabetically, using mostly material from the pre-project interviews.

Avery. Avery is a white woman from a small town in Iowa. She has one sibling, a sister, who is a year younger than her. Avery’s parents divorced when she was four, which she indicated was a critical life event for her. Avery cited her grandparents, with whom she lived for a period of time, as influential to her values formation: “I think because of that, I was really raised with a lot of awareness” (Avery/PAR1/94–95) even though she did not have much contact with racial difference during her formative years. Both of Avery’s grandparents were college-educated, which is atypical for the era in which they lived. Her grandmother, who had a college degree in social work, maintained an active interest in social justice issues and invited Avery to facilitate a white racial privilege discussion among her friends and family after the
project had concluded. Avery also mentioned in the course of the first interview that one of her uncles is married to a woman of Chinese descent, and they have two children, so Avery has some diversity in her family, one generation removed.

When her mother remarried, the family moved to a town with a significant Scandinavian population, so Avery was marked as an outsider because she didn’t have blonde hair. She attended primary and secondary school—from the 2nd grade through the 12th grade—in the same building. There was one student of African American heritage that attended Avery’s high school for a period of time, as well as a Japanese foreign exchange student that Avery’s family hosted. Avery illustrated her lack of familiarity with the lifeways of People of Color with an example from her first year of college:

I was in another [resident adviser’s] room and I was going to pick up her curling iron to do my hair, and she was a black woman and she said, “Oh, my God. Don’t touch that! You’re going to burn your hair off.” And I was like, “What the hell is she talking about?” I had no idea that even our hair had a texture difference that would require different products for us. That’s how unencompassing my background was at that point.

(Avery/1st/61–66)

Avery is employed full-time in the criminal justice field and has been very frustrated with the negligible amount of diversity training she has received in her work. She felt as though her efforts to introduce diversity issues in her workplace through a grassroots approach had been stymied by a culture that conforms to traditional, hierarchical command structures. When Avery was working in her field, she sometimes had occasion to observe individuals fulfill racialized stereotypes, so she talked about continually challenging herself to resist the urge to profile someone based on their race. She was completing her master’s degree in ELPS part-time, so although she was near the end-point of the program, she had taken courses out of sequence, and had not enrolled in the student development theory class that covered racial identity development theories at the time of the project. However, Avery did credit the ELPS program with doing an excellent job of incorporating a discussion of diversity issues into almost every course.

Avery is partnered with an African American male and they have a young child together, so although she had never had any formal education about white privilege prior to the project, she was encountering the ebb and flow of privilege in her everyday life as a partner and mother of a biracial child. More than any other member of the group, Avery has had opportunities to
immerse herself in Black culture during gatherings of her extended family, and this had a strong influence on the perspectives she brought to the PAR group. Avery described her increased level of awareness as a “get-it” factor (Avery/2nd/389). She has encountered paradoxical reactions because of her involvement in an interracial relationship. Other whites assume that Avery gets it because she is involved with a Black man, but Avery acknowledges there’s a lot of stuff she does not get (Avery/1st/257-276). On the other hand, Avery encounters resistance from People of Color who assume as a white woman that she does not understand the African American experience and yet, by virtue of her relationship with her partner, Avery gets it more than most. As a new mother of a biracial child, Avery felt a sense of urgency to address racism and white privilege and had increasingly found herself pushing up against people’s comfort zones:

I tend to really push people, especially I think in my workplace’s boundaries on things. I’ll say things that they’ll be like, “I can’t believe you just said that.” And I respond, “Why wouldn’t we talk about this, or why wouldn’t we say this?” …I’ve learned and started to feel more comfortable when I started talking about things. So I’ll challenge a lot of things that people tell me, just at face value. (Avery/PAR1/520–525)

Beginning with the pre-project interview, Avery demonstrated a strong understanding of white privilege and racism. She had encountered the Peggy McIntosh article (1989) and was able to see how her access to resources created a systematic advantage:

I loved the article about the white privilege backpack…when the backpack is not available to everybody, we can’t improve. I came to college with a whole bunch of stuff supporting me. When you have that many people in your family educated, I took for granted things like I knew how to do…I knew the system… I think white privilege is a lot about knowing how to play the game, knowing the rule[s]…having the rule book. And I think, it’s a terrible, terrible analogy, but …we don’t publish the rule book. And then we kind of give points to people who have it and take away points from people that don’t. (Avery/1st/314–332)

Even despite her advanced understanding of the privileging effects of whiteness, Avery was still developing a language and skill to be able to talk to others about diversity issues from a place of knowledge and confidence. Her life experiences and her talkative nature propelled Avery into a role where she contributed often in the PAR group.

Emma. Of the five students recruited for the project, Emma grew up surrounded by the greatest amount of diversity. She is from the suburbs of a large, Midwestern city, where there were substantial Latina/Latino and African American populations. Emma identified several
teachers who were People of Color that were role models or mentors. Having these positive influences in her life enabled Emma to counter negative stereotypes acquired through “normal” socialization (Emma, personal communication, June 17, 2007).

Emma acknowledged that her friendship group growing up was mostly white. However, she did develop a friendship in middle school with a classmate who was of African descent but who had been adopted by white parents. Because of her friend’s white-defined identity, this was a safe relationship for Emma at the time:

I remember noticing this difference early on but not really being sure how to make sense of it. My mother knew her parents well and had explained to me that she had been adopted. Although I grew up in a fairly diverse area, she was one of my only—if not the only—non-white friend and this probably had something to do with the fact that she was raised by white parents and therefore, “acted white.” Why I had never connected with other Black students who were raised in Black families is an interesting question. As time went on, I remember that she eventually began hanging out with groups of students who were predominantly Black rather than white. This was my first introduction to the reality that society creates racial differences and can often force people into feeling as though they should behave/socialize a certain way based on racial identity. (Emma, personal communication, June 17, 2007)

As Emma’s middle-school friend encountered her own Blackness, she adjusted her social circles accordingly, and the social construction of race relations in the United States created a barrier that discouraged two young girls from forming an enduring bond of friendship.

Emma has one younger sister and both of her parents are employed in the helping professions. Here, Emma spoke to the positive influence that having parents occupied in the helping professions had on her acquisition of social justice values:

I think helping professions tend to emphasize the need for social justice more, simply because of the nature of the work, if for no other reason. (Emma, personal communication, June 17, 2007)

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3 Due to a technical mishap with the operation of the recording equipment, Emma’s pre-project interview was not audible. Based on my written notes of the interview, I developed follow-up questions that probed Emma’s initial responses. She replied to these questions in an e-mail on June 17, 2007.
Emma identified as a religious minority and at the time of the research was in an interfaith relationship. As early as the pre-project interview, it was clear that Emma had spent time engaging her whiteness through the lens of her subordinated status as a religious minority. More so than other participants, Emma demonstrated a willingness to hear People of Color and accept their accounts of oppression as fact rather than arguing the point.

Emma identified her first year in college as an undergraduate as having a dramatic influence on her. A floormate in her residence hall came out as a lesbian, which helped Emma ground her generalized social justice values in her lived experience.

Prior to college, I had known a few men who had come out to me as gay, but never any women. I remember this friend coming out to our floormates—we were all very close friends at the time—as part of a residence hall program about LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] issues during which she sat on a panel. That was her way of coming out to us. She had indicated that she was worried that we would all treat her differently if we knew, which was why she had waited until November of that year to tell us. My first reaction was one of surprise, but then I remember being sad and thinking: “How can you think we would treat you any differently? You are our friend!” However, in the weeks that followed, I was faced with realizing my own stereotypes of lesbians and debunking each one as I realized they did or did not apply to my friend. (Emma, personal communication, June 17, 2007)

In the preceding passage, I perceived that Emma is recounting a struggle with privilege—heterosexual privilege in this case. Doing this kind of work readied Emma to engage issues of white supremacy and white privilege in this project.

Emma’s bachelor’s degree was in psychology and secondary education and she did her student teaching in another Midwestern urban school district, which further exposed her to issues of diversity in education. Ames, Iowa, was the most racially homogenous environment Emma had ever lived in. At the time of the study, Emma was a rising second-year student in the ELPS program.

Kevin. Kevin was the only doctoral student in the PAR group, other than myself. During the participant recruitment stage, I specifically reached out to him in part to add gender diversity to the group. He and his sister, who is younger than him by four years, were both adopted as infants. Both Kevin and his sister were first-generation college students. During his adolescence, Kevin shuttled back and forth between a predominantly white state in the upper Midwest and a predominantly white state in the mountain West. He described the prevailing ideology in both locations as dominated by cultural conservatism, and his peer group did not have very
sophisticated views of race, gender, or sexual orientation issues. Even though he graduated from a fairly large high school in the state capital where he lived, Kevin said “my culture and my background is [a] very white, heterosexual type of background. I… didn’t have a lot of exposure to differences” (PAR1/326–327). Kevin later clarified that there was a fairly sizeable Latino/Latina population in his high school and subsequent work environments (Kevin, personal communication, September 18, 2007). Kevin talked about his father viewing the world through a stereotypical and reactionary lens when it came to social issues. However, Kevin was able to resist his father’s conscious and unconscious biased beliefs:

How did I end up where I am? In regard to a lot of this racial stuff… Part of me thinks it’s my counseling training. But I think it started before then, and I don’t know if that came from my mom. She’s a very caring person. Really would do anything for anybody, so to speak. So maybe partly from my mom, there was a balance there. (Kevin/1st/107–111)

The combined influence of his counselor education training and his mother’s compassionate streak may have counterbalanced the effect of peer and paternal influences. Kevin also cited his uncle who had a more worldly view and was a positive influence on him (Kevin/1st/91-94).

The environments Kevin grew up in were racially homogenous:

I’ve never had much opportunity or exposure or, just haven’t been around people of different races. Even, people of different cultures [assenting yes], but definitely not of different races. My background, or my experience, or my relationships with People of Color has been very limited. (Kevin/1st/26–29)

Following high school graduation, Kevin stayed in the same mountain West state for college and a master’s degree in counselor education. He then worked for four years as a counselor in the corrections system, where he took note of the disproportionate incarceration of People of Color. Kevin also worked as a counselor and adviser at a community college for a period of time before returning to school for his Ph.D. His first significant exposure to people of different races came from living with African American basketball players in his undergraduate residence hall and from a summer work experience on a construction team in Virginia.

Kevin’s graduate training in counselor education did not include a formal class in multicultural counseling:

There was a lot of talk that there should be, and, I think, very well-meaning intentions to include some sort of diversity in the curriculum for every class. But there was no specific
class….Some instructors did that more effectively than others, but overall, on a scale of 1 to 10, my diversity training was probably about a 4, for multicultural topics training. (Kevin/1st/70–74)

Reflecting back, Kevin was able to increasingly grasp how his whiteness had made his life easier:

[I’m] realizing more and more how my whiteness has made things more easy for me. I mean, it’s just easier to be white when you grow up [where I did]. Certain things are just assumed, certain things that I didn’t think about, were based on being white. You fit in easier…like I can go and hang out at a bar and just go in and feel pretty comfortable no matter where that is. Because I look like everybody [there]…So I never really felt out of place…I think there is definitely a lot of privilege that comes along with that. (Kevin/1st/144–153)

When he contemplated the future for white males in student affairs administration, Kevin expressed both concern and hope. He wanted for there to be a level playing field for women and People of Color but acknowledged that might come at the expense of opportunities for himself. Kevin acknowledged that his whiteness had probably privileged him in his previous work environment and he was able to identify his feelings that flowed from his privilege:

So, looking back on that, I’m like, “Why weren’t you more aware of it?” That’s my feeling right now. Kinda being a little bit angry, maybe at myself, and at my culture…It just feels more free to be aware of it…So I think I feel a little bit of resentment, a little bit of anger, and a little bit of guilt. Because I did take advantage of things. But on the other hand, honestly, I can say, I didn’t even know I was taking advantage of it. I just didn’t know. I just assumed that’s the way things were. (Kevin/1st/212–222)

Kevin had just completed his first year in the doctoral program at the time this project occurred. He had developed a favorable impression of the program’s efforts to attract a diverse student body and address diversity issues in the classroom. The racial diversity Kevin encountered in the program helped him to see that there were different worldviews besides the ones he had been socialized into previously:

Actually this program [referring to ELPS] has exposed me to more racial diversity than I’ve ever been exposed to in my life, which I am very thankful for. And I think those things that I’ve, talking to people of color, just asking them about their experiences or hearing their experiences, or understanding better their experiences, is helping me to realize that we still have a ways to go. (Kevin/1st/182–185)
However, even despite initiating some authentic conversations with People of Color, Kevin still experienced trepidation when dialoguing across the racial divide:

> I don’t want anybody to think that I’m this racist, white suprem[ac]ist person from [the mountain West] that doesn’t have a clue about that and is insensitive to it. The consequence of that is, that I don’t ask them the critical questions maybe that would help me to better understand my white racial identity and my white privilege and also racial issues that are going on, if that makes sense. I just don’t ask some of the sensitive issues or the sensitive questions for fear of offending somebody. (Kevin/1st/287–292)

Kevin was getting better about not walking on eggshells as he became more comfortable with the other people of color in his cohort and the office where he worked.

> Peyton. Peyton is also from a small town in Iowa, coincidentally about 15 minutes away from where Avery grew up. Her small town also had only one person of color living there during the time she was growing up—a boy who had been adopted. Peyton is in her twenties and has one sister who is a year older. Peyton’s father worked in a factory in a nearby town which has seen a growth in the number of People of Color living and working there in recent years. Seeing People of Color in her father’s place of work was the earliest memory of encountering racial difference that Peyton could identify (Peyton/1st/14-17).

She, along with her sister, is a first-generation college student. Peyton was an athlete in high school, but opted to get involved in other facets of student life in college. She joined a sorority and majored in business as an undergraduate. She was the project manager of an entrepreneurship club that founded a small business in the town where her college was located. In between earning her baccalaureate and matriculating in the graduate program, Peyton worked for two years in sales. At the time of the study, Peyton was also a rising second-year student in the ELPS program.

As an undergraduate student, Peyton had minimal exposure to courses or experiences that would have constituted formal diversity training. As a graduate student, she volunteered to facilitate small group discussion at the Multicultural Leadership Summit, an annual one-day event sponsored by the Student Activities Office. In preparation for this event, there is some brief training-of-trainers that occurs to help facilitators understand themselves as training instruments.

For the most part, racism and racial difference were “out of sight, out of mind” for Peyton during her formative years. Within the ELPS program, however, theories of social
identity development were explicitly discussed. In the passage that follows, Peyton discussed her trepidation at the outset of those discussions:

I was nervous going into it. I heard it was a highly emotional class. And like purposely to do that to get people to talk, to get them to realize more things. Just looking ahead at the syllabus, I didn’t expect much to come up, because my cohort is really close, and so I thought, well I kinda know these people and I don’t foresee any major things going on. But as different identities would develop in people, you see how emotional they do get, or defensive, or how I would notice myself, double checking what I would say before I said it. Not wanting to say the wrong thing, not wanting to get on anybody’s bad side. And really kind of censoring, even just not to make waves. (Peyton/1st/97–104)

Peyton indicated in both her first interview and in the first meeting of the PAR group that she had a tendency to self-censor her comments when talking about loaded issues such as racism and white privilege, especially in mixed-race groups.

I am definitely afraid of, for example, if I’m in a situation where it’s me and someone of a different race, I am so censored into what I say… I don’t say anything that I…in any way think might be offensive to someone. (Peyton/PAR1/498-501)

Eventually, Peyton got fed up with her own and others’ self-censoring and determined that for her own learning, she needed to ask and get answers to politically incorrect questions that were motivated not by malice, but by a genuine naïveté about issues of race and racism. This seemed to win her the support from People of Color in her cohort who appreciated that you sometimes need to “break a few eggs to make an omelette:”

Within this program, a lot of my really close friends are people of different ethnicities. The blunt honest[y] that they use with me, is that I’m finally at the point, I think to where I can say, “I don’t get, you know, why does your culture do this?” and not be afraid that they are going to think that I’m being attacking by it, and they volunteer, “I know you don’t understand this, so here.” And explain it. It’s been extremely positive. The main relationships that I have had have all been like that, especially with the people in my cohort. (Peyton/1st/146–151)

Peyton also articulated a frustration with the vacuousness of whiteness:

It just seems like there isn’t much of a description, besides, “Okay, you’re not one of these other groups, so you’re white.” You don’t have any strong ties with different ethnicities, so it’s just the white or Caucasian…It was just that we were talking about all the different theories and all the different racial identities and different ethnic groups…They all have some sort of, or some part of oppression that has been caused by, you know, my culture. “Your culture is the one that did this to so many different
races, and this is the way you guys are, and this is the way you are perceived.” And, you just got to learn to come to terms with that. And it was just really hurtful, but I wasn’t here when that was going on, and I don’t agree with it. (Peyton/1st/162–180)

In that passage, Peyton conflated her frustration at a lack of pride in her white racial identity and the liberal guilt that accompanies the bad acts that whites have perpetrated on People of Color groups throughout history with her frustration at the negative impacts of the melting pot on white ethnic identity groups. This is a conceptualization that Peyton would return to again as the PAR group progressed.

Zach. Zach is a white male from what would, in Iowa, constitute a medium-sized town. He recalled one African American family from his hometown and estimated the population of Latinos/Latinas who mostly worked in the local factories at approximately 10%. Zach comes from a well-educated family, many of whom attended Iowa State, so it was expected that he would come to Ames, too. Zach came out as a gay man in the first PAR group meeting which, in my view, may have set an expectation for authenticity and emotional honesty for the rest of the group. He has three brothers who are significantly older than him. Zach, aged 17 at the time, was the only child still living at home when his father passed away, so he was thrust into a position of greater responsibility.

Zach earned an undergraduate degree from Iowa State in the performing arts and had just recently completed his first class in the ELPS program at the time this research project was conducted. Zach stated in the pre-project interview that he held at least two jobs during most of his time as an undergraduate student, in addition to out-of-class activities that were expected of students in his major. He was chronologically the youngest member of the group and had not had much formal exposure to student affairs practice at the time the PAR group first convened.

Similar to Avery, Zach talked about parental socialization to be tolerant toward people who were different, despite living in a fairly homogenous community where there wasn’t much opportunity to try out tolerance in practice:

It was kind of a “try to have a positive attitude, without any experience,” you know? It was to have a thought of acceptance at all times. But no venue to practice that acceptance…In that I definitely wasn’t taught intolerance. Or, wasn’t brought up to be racist in any way, shape or form. But, there was no chance for me to kind of see any different culture than mine.
Many of Zach’s early impressions of racial differences were formed from watching portrayals by People of Color on situation comedies like *Webster* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. Zach admitted that these portrayals were often blatantly stereotypical (Zach/1st/51–57).

In the pre-project interview, I asked Zach whether he had any formal diversity training previously, to which he replied that he had not. I was somewhat surprised that, as a performing arts major, he had not received instruction on the techniques of Augusto Boal (1979) or the use of the theatrical arts as a form of social protest or social critique. Zach responded “I mean, we learn about diverse populations. We learned about how they express themselves in a performance attitude, but we don’t really learn about culture, an incredible much, or religious rights, things like that” (Zach/1st/33–35). Toward the end of the first interview, Zach did mention that he had recently taken a course on Native American spirituality, and he vocalized strong feelings about how that group had been treated by the government throughout history.

Zach identified an African American undergraduate student as one Person of Color who had a significant, positive impact on him:

Very intelligent man. Very smart, very interesting thoughts…He was very interesting because he recognized racism…he kind of accepted it as just a fact of living on campus here. He kind of took it from a lighter point of view. We produced a TV show here on campus for years. A sketch comedy show, and, several sketches that he wrote, he would be the central character. And would deal with racism around campus. And it would take it from a very light hearted point of view. (Zach/1st/64–73)

In the same vein, Zach voiced an appreciation for the satirical comedy of Dave Chapelle, an African American man who often lampooned whites and white racism as a central theme on his show.

Perhaps because of his lack of formal diversity training and his relative newness in the ELPS program, Zach had not given much thought to his white identity. When I asked Zach what it meant for him to be white, he responded:

It means that I’m of the majority, obviously. I don’t consider it a defining point of my character. [Long pause]. I don’t know. That’s a very interesting question. It means I’ve probably, I would assume had better opportunities than someone else would. But directly, I can’t think of how it’s affected me. How it’s affected my upbringing or my education or career opportunities that I’ve had. I can’t think of a specific instance where the overwhelming factor of me achieving something was my race. (Zach/1st/77–83)

He gave a similar response when asked whether being white had privileged him:
Not directly, that I can think of. [long pause] I’m trying to think of reasons of why I am privileged. Of jobs I’ve held, of titles I’ve had, of things of that sort. And when I think of other people in that position, it is a diverse background, or a diverse field, so it’s not, I don’t personally think it’s privileged me, thus far. (Zach/1st/110–113)

In this respect, I believe Zach was focused on how hard he had worked to earn advantage based on his own merit, which blinded him to the larger institutional and cultural effects of white racial privilege.

Within the PAR group, Zach exhibited an interpersonal boldness that was not characteristic of other group members. His voice always came through loud and clear on the audiotape of the group process, where other members’ speech was sometimes garbled or trailed off. Zach could typically be counted on to inject humor into the discussion when he contributed to the group process. This may have been a defense mechanism for his lack of theoretical knowledge or for dealing with intra-group conflict, which Zach talked about in this exchange:

Jeff: When you think about times that you’ve been a part of a group in which there has been conflict, what is your reaction to that conflict? And how do you respond to conflicted situations?

Zach: I generally try to be a peacemaker. In that, I don’t enjoy conflict. When I don’t see reason for conflict a lot of times, so I try to give everyone equal, try to level the playing field, as best I can. (Zach/1st/171–175)

He denied experiencing any trepidation when interacting with others different from him by race, whereas the other four group members all talked about their self-censoring tendencies to some degree.

**Further Situating the Researcher**

I will take this opportunity to further situate myself in the study by identifying what I’ve learned about myself as a facilitator with white, male, middle-class privilege doing anti-racism work. Additional demographic information about me can be found in Appendix J, a copy of which was shared with the project participants during the early phase of our group’s development. I brought substantial training and experience with facilitating anti-racist education to the role of principal investigator. At the University of Massachusetts–Amherst, I co-facilitated a one-credit anti-racism course. At Iowa State University, I was involved as a co-facilitator with the credit-bearing Dialogues on Diversity project for three semesters. I was on the steering
committee for the Multicultural Leadership Summit for three years. I have also attended the Social Justice Training Institute, a four-day trainer development workshop with an immersion experience addressing racism. I have been reading and reflecting on the topic of critical white studies and white privilege for 10 years.

However, I did not and still do not consider myself an expert facilitator. As a white male, I am aware that I am not fully aware of my privilege. I have not fully unlearned my racism and have tried to take this into account as I attempted to facilitate others toward an understanding of racism and foster their development as anti-racist practitioners (Ellsworth, 1992). This project represented an opportunity for me to further develop my skills as a facilitator of anti-racist education. This goal was consistent with the aim of action researchers which is to “improve their own educational practices, their understandings of these practices, and the situations in which they practice” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 180).

The researcher as research instrument. In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument for data collection. The knowledge, skills, and awareness that I brought to the table—or failed to bring to the table—were “an important part of the inquiry and critical to the understanding of the phenomenon” of white privilege (Patton, 2002, p. 40). It is therefore incumbent on me to be clear about my biases, assumptions, and beliefs so that the reader can better judge the credibility of this research. In the opening chapter, I made some assertions that framed the formation of my topic and the subsequent development of the research questions. In this section, I will use my field notes and early contributions to the pre-project interviews and PAR group meetings to further expose my stance with regard to white privilege awareness and anti-racism.

My approach as a facilitator was to engage other participants in Freirean consciousness-raising: “through dialogue, reflecting together on what we know and don’t know, we can then act critically to transform reality” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 99). A Freirean critical teacher asks provocative questions and encourages students to develop their own questions. “Through problem-posing, students learn to question answers rather than merely to answer questions” (Shor, 1993, p. 26).

Kvale (2001) noted the asymmetrical power dynamic between interviewers—who typically choose the location for the interview and determine the content and sequencing of questions—and their interviewees. I recognized this power imbalance during the pre-project interviews and sought to correct it by posting a copy of my own responses to the initial
interview questions in the WebCT courseware site after the first PAR group meeting. Indeed, in qualitative research, the interview of another viewed reflectively and reflexively can teach us a great deal about our own meaning-making systems (Warren, 2002). Publishing my responses to the interview questions allowed participants to see areas where my views converged or diverged with theirs. It also underscored the democratic aspirations I had for our PAR project, which in turn boosted my credibility as a facilitator, I believe (Gillespie, Ashbaugh, & DeFiore, 2002). An unedited copy of my responses to the initial interview questions can be found in Appendix J.

In group settings, I tend to be more process-oriented than goal-oriented. This came up in the first PAR group meeting when we were processing a team-building exercise that had gone over the allotted time:

And that will probably be reflected in my leadership of this group as well…if I have an outline and if I think this will take 30 minutes and this will take 60, and the thing that I thought will take 30 minutes is really productive and we’re still going at it at 45 minutes, I’m not going to cut it off just because I thought it would take a shorter amount of time. I’ll rearrange the schedule and as long as we’re producing good stuff, I’m going to let that keep going. (Jeff/PAR1/486–493)

Later in the processing of the same team-building exercise, I commented about my level of comfort with procedural ambiguity and vision:

I think that’s a nice metaphor for what I would like to accomplish with this project if that’s possible, is to say, “Here and now, the seven of us in this room aren’t real clear about where this is going to end up, but it will end up. And hopefully, we can leave behind something that gives the people that comes after us a little bit clearer of a vision about what can be accomplished. In my dissertation proposal, I refer to sort of a roadmap. You hear about “roadmaps to peace in the Middle East.” Well, I’m hoping for a roadmap to ending racism. And I’m not sure that one has been clearly mapped out, but I think that we can certainly attempt that. (Jeff/PAR1/567–573)

These twin characteristics of process orientation and tolerance of ambiguity can be frustrating for those who are more task-oriented, so I tried to monitor the group’s reaction to my facilitation style as the project progressed.

Assumptions and beliefs held by the researcher. One assumption that I make is that white people want to be more self-aware about privilege and white racism and that there is a genuine desire on the part of whites to want to learn how to enact equity and equality in human relations. I further assume that the five white participants wanted to be a part of this project and were
participating with pure motives. As an interviewer, I assumed that people were generally inclined toward telling the truth, but I also maintained a healthy skepticism about what they shared.

I believe that we developed rapport over time and that the participants could and would share their impressions with me, especially if they felt like the project wasn’t going well. I believe that whites can benefit from fellowship with other whites around the topic of anti-racism and that a progressive anti-racist movement can be built from many coordinated grassroots efforts. I believe that white caucus groups engaging in anti-racism work have the potential to get off track and perpetuate self-serving and even damaging “solutions” if they fail to ground themselves in the expressed needs of People of Color as identified by those People of Color. Harvey, Case, and Gorsline (2004b) encouraged us to bear in mind that there is a “tendency endemic to white supremacy: namely that white folks presume that we can set an agenda and act autonomously, independent of the perspectives and agendas articulated by communities of color” (p. 28). I was aware of this tendency and sought to address it during this research project.

Biases of the researcher. Being honest about my biases allows readers to make informed judgments about the credibility and reliability of this research. This is especially true for evaluating the efficacy of a PAR approach to addressing white privilege. In this section, I’ll address those specific biases which came into play as I facilitated our group process.

My deep learning on the topic of my own biases as an anti-racist trainer came from participation in the Social Justice Training Institute (http://www.sjti.org) in December 2002. In the context of an immersion experience around the issue of race, I had the opportunity to contemplate events that “trigger” me when I am conducting anti-racism workshops. My tendency is to become defensive and competitive when I am triggered. These tendencies are manifested when I distance myself from other whites who I perceive are “not as far along as I am” or when I cite scholarly authorities with the result of shutting down rather than opening up dialogue. Chater (1994) refers to this as the “flight from white” effect. I am sometimes guilty of competing with other whites in the room for the prize of “most anti-racist white person.” Obear (2000) suggested other strategies that facilitators can use to respond more effectively to triggering events like using empathetic self-talk, restructuring irrational beliefs, engaging resistance by asking for more information, and utilizing the self-as-instrument.
Demographic Overview of the Entire PAR Group Membership

In this section, I will provide a descriptive overview of the entire PAR group, including myself, so readers get a sense of the collective diversity of the members. The group was composed of four women and three men, including myself, all of whom self-identified as white. Zach was the only participant to come out as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender during the course of our conversation. Peyton, Zach, and Kevin came from working-class or lower middle-class backgrounds, while the other three group members came from families that were more solidly middle class, middle income. Avery, Emma, Peyton, and Zach are in their mid- to late-twenties, while Kevin and myself are in our late thirties. Avery and Zach had undergraduate degrees from Iowa State, Emma and Peyton earned baccalaureate degrees at other institutions within the state, and Kevin and myself attended different institutions in the mountain West. Other than myself, all five of the participants were born and raised in the Midwest. I was born in Iowa, but grew up in Maryland. Zach was just beginning his first year in the ELPS program. Emma, Peyton, and Avery were rising second-year master’s students, although Avery had taken courses out of sequence, so her curricular experience straddled two cohorts. Both Kevin and myself were enrolled in the doctoral program. Kevin had just completed his first year, and I had been on campus for five years. In terms of functional backgrounds, Avery worked full time in the criminal justice field, Emma and Zach worked in academic support, and Peyton, Kevin, and I had worked as research assistants during the preceding academic year.

While an exhaustive exploration of white identity development (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984, 1990, 1995) or white racial consciousness (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994) is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it seems appropriate to attempt to situate participants with respect to these models. Rita Hardiman was the first researcher to conceptualize a model of racial “identity” development that focused on the dominant group—that is to say, white Americans (Hardiman, 2001). The term “identity” is placed in quotation marks because critics of both the Hardiman and Helms models maintained that these constructs were less about a white person’s true essence or self-definition in relation to the white racial in-group and more about definition in relation to others (Behrens, 1997; Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). Hardiman’s model of White Identity Development consisted of five stages, termed Naivete, Acceptance, Resistance, Redefinition, and Internalization (Hardiman, 1982). According to Hardiman, the Resistance stage is characterized by, “an individual questioning the dominant paradigm about race and
resisting or rejecting [their] racist programming...[and] by embarrassment about one’s Whiteness, guilt, shame, and a need to distance oneself from the White group” (Hardiman, 2001, p. 111). This accurately described the members of the PAR group at the outset of the project.

In Helms’ model of White Racial Identity Development (Helms, 1990a), there are two phases, each composed of three stages, that Helms later (1995) referred to as “statuses.” The first phase involves abandonment of racism and consists of the statuses of Contact, Disintegration, and Reintegration. The second phase is termed “defining a positive White identity” (Helms, 1990a, p. 55) and includes the statuses of Pseudoindpendence, Immersion/Emersion, and Autonomy. Some characteristics of whites in the Pseudoinddependent status are: begins to question the notion of white superiority, accepts more responsibility for racism, and still looks to Blacks as teachers concerning the topic of racism (Helms, 1990a). As whites transition into the Immersion/Emersion status, they tend to be searching for positive aspects around which to build a “new” white identity. Characteristics of whites in the Immersion/Emersion status include: participates in racial awareness groups and an intellectual quest to better understand the journey of other anti-racist whites (Helms, 1990a). Members of the PAR group espoused attitudes and behaviors that I would consider to be consistent with late Pseudoindpendence or early Immersion/Emersion.

Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) proposed an alternative to white identity development models which they termed white racial consciousness. They defined white racial consciousness as “the awareness of being White and what that implies in relation to those who do not share White group membership” (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994, p. 133). Their model is not developmental, as they emphasize that whites may possess a cluster of attitudes that change in response to environmental factors and not in any set sequential order. Both the Helms (1990a, 1995) and to a lesser extent the Hardiman (1982) models have been faulted for focusing exclusively on white-Black relationships, while the White Racial Consciousness model (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994) goes beyond this binary to consider attitudes that whites hold relative to People of Color, generally.

Building on the work of Marcia (1966) and Phinney (1990), the White Racial Consciousness model divides the constellation of attitudinal types with regard to race issues into two main categories: unachieved and achieved (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). Unachieved types of attitudes are characterized by a lack of personal exploration of racial issues, or a lack of
commitment to some position on these matters, or both (LaFleur, Rowe, & Leach, 2002). Attitudinal types in the “achieved” status of white racial consciousness are termed Dominative, Conflictive, Reactive, and Integrative and are characterized by both exploration and commitment (LaFleur, Rowe, & Leach, 2002). Characteristics of the Reactive type are an awareness of racism in U.S. society, an intellectual acceptance of other racial groups, and feelings of guilt about being white (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). Attitudes held by members of the PAR group bore the most similarity with the Reactive type of White Racial Consciousness.

**The Research Setting**

This research project took place at Iowa State University, a public, coeducational, land-grant, research-extensive institution located in Ames, Iowa. Ames is a rural community of 50,000, including students, near the geographical center of the state and approximately 30 miles north of the capital city of Des Moines. Students come from all 50 states and more than 100 foreign countries, but the majority are from Iowa and the surrounding states (Office of Institutional Research, 2005a). Previous graduates of Iowa State include African American plant scientist George Washington Carver and suffragette Carrie Chapman Catt. The undergraduate enrollment is 20,732 of which 8.8% are domestic Students of Color and an additional 3.1% are international students of all races (Office of Institutional Research, 2005b).

The ELPS Department is large compared to programs at peer institutions, with 14 core faculty members (Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, 2006). The Higher Education Program, from which participants for this project were drawn, enrolls approximately 24% Students of Color in the doctoral program and 12% Students of Color in the master’s program (Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, 2004). Issues of diversity and social justice are included in most classes that students take in the Higher Education Program. The program faculty recently approved a social justice concentration that will be available starting Fall 2007 (Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, 2006). For master’s students, the required Student Development Theory II class includes units on Black and white identity development, Native American identity development, and gay/lesbian identity development, among others. Three of the six participants in the project, including myself, had taken this course prior to the project. When I took a student development theory course in my master’s program 15 years ago, there was little coverage of social justice in the curriculum.
While the dissertation research project was approved by a Program of Study committee composed of College of Human Sciences faculty, there was no formal connection between the study group and the department or college. Although the PAR group discussed activities aimed at transforming department structures or processes, I never coordinated those activities with faculty in the program. The project was “loosely coupled” (Weick, 2001).

Despite its racial homogeneity, Iowa has somewhat of a reputation for progressive populism. As voters in the first-in-the-nation presidential caucus, Iowans tend to be politically aware and active. This research project was conducted in the summer of 2006, prior to the mid-term Congressional elections, when political sentiment regarding the conflict in Iraq was shifting and there were active anti-war voices amplifying their message in the local community. Even so, Iowa State University is considered more conservative than its in-state rival, the University of Iowa.

After our initial gathering in a room in the student union and by consensus agreement, the remainder of our PAR group meetings were held in conference or interview rooms in space assigned to the campus police department, an arrangement coordinated by one of the group members. The conference room allowed us ample space to work uninterrupted, as most of our meetings occurred after normal business hours. On one occasion, a misunderstanding about a reservation caused us to have to meet in a smaller room, usually reserved for police interrogations. Although we joked about the session being secretly videotaped through a two-way mirror, no member seemed distressed by our location in a law enforcement environment.

The Critical Reference Group of People of Color

There was another group of participants who had a transient but critically important role in this research project. As the PAR group process progressed, I detected a yearning on the part of the white participants to engage in dialogue with People of Color. By the midpoint of the project, I felt we were ready to move from the theory to the practice of PAR around white privilege. I recruited four People of Color from the ELPS program and they met with us for the first 90 minutes of the fifth PAR group session on July 18. The purpose of this encounter was to gather input from People of Color on potential action research projects we whites could engage
in to combat white privilege. The PAR group had brainstormed some ideas in the previous meeting. Having a group of “critical friends” or a validation group⁴ (McNiff, 2002, p. 22) was important because efforts to deconstruct racial privilege ultimately need to be accountable to the communities of People of Color most affected by institutional and cultural racism. The critical reference group of People of Color also helped avoid the problem of privileged folks “speaking for” less privileged others, a form of advocacy that ends up further silencing the voices it intended to empower (Roman, 1993).

One of the themes to come out of that meeting was our desire to focus on institutional-level change and a consensus among the critical reference group that we should continue to work on ourselves and our own level of awareness. Avery acknowledged that our focus on institutional-level change may be a by-product of our privilege:

So I kind of reflected and I started thinking about how my privilege was probably playing into that experience, because I was saying “But I want to fix it.” And what I was hearing was a lot more about people’s feelings and about people’s mental states. What I really came to terms with in that short amount of time was the group we were speaking with put a lot of emphasis on the growth as facilitators that we would need to make in ourselves, or individuals in the ELPS program would need to make before any change could really take place, and… this whole time I’ve been thinking…we’ll have this new class or we’ll have this new whatever, and I really heard from them, “No, it’s going to have to start further back than that.” I personally was missing that piece prior to that conversation. (Avery/PAR5/38–48)

Hytten and Warren (2003) have also noted the tendency among whites to engage in a discourse of “fix it,” which can have the effect of reifying the white-dominated status quo. It was good to be reminded of this by our colleagues who are People of Color.

Kevin named what he perceived as a trust deficit that influenced how deep our conversation could go as a second theme of the conversation:

I don’t know why I just keep thinking, because even during that meeting, and I know it was a short time, but I know the four people fairly well as I said in there, but there was still a little bit of a level…of “Can I trust these people?” (Kevin/PAR5/103–106)

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⁴ Functionally, the People of Color that were invited to participate operated as both a validation group and a collection of “critical friends.” McNiff discusses the distinctions between these two complementary functions. For the sake of brevity, I refer to them as “critical friends” throughout this document.
Three other group members immediately confirmed Kevin’s intuition, and he then continued:

Everything that I heard them saying, “It doesn’t really matter what you do, or what you say, it’s just ‘Are you genuine?’ and ‘What are your motivations?’ and ‘Are you really dedicated to this?’” It’s almost like when one of the persons was saying “Consistency,” I wondered if he was almost more saying, “Are you dedicated to this?” (Kevin/PAR5/110–114)

Having our dedication questioned was somewhat difficult to hear, but it also served as a reminder that one privilege of being white is that we can give up the anti-racist struggle at any point we choose, whereas People of Color don’t have the same luxury.

One final theme that came up in this intergroup dialogue was the differing feelings of satisfaction toward the ELPS program. The whites in the PAR group felt like the program was doing great things around addressing issues of racial diversity. The People of Color from the program weren’t so sure, as Peyton noted:

Every once in a while, we’d be talking about how we think it’s great, and they wouldn’t even have to say anything, it’s just like the expressions on their face, one would make a point, all of them would just be like, you could see that recognition...I think some of us are coming in this with, “Well, we are making such great progression throughout all of this,” but I wonder if we are really seeing the whole picture here. Maybe there are some huge issues out there that we are not exposed to, so we’re not going to address them. But maybe that’s where real change could take place. Because we don’t have to deal with them, but they do. (Peyton/PAR5/177–187)

This also served as a good reminder that there were multiple truths about the ELPS program and that we needed to avoid taking a myopic, privileged view about what might need to change as our discernment of an action research project progressed.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced each of the participants by describing some of the key influences on their socialization, focusing on both the common and contrasting elements of their social histories to date. I also focused on myself and described some of my preferences, assumptions, and biases, so that the credibility of the findings and conclusions that come next can be better evaluated by the reader. I described the research setting of Iowa State University and some contemporaneous events that may have influenced the group. The chapter ended with some information about a critical reference group of People of Color with whom we met. In the
next chapter, I have summarized the significant moments and categories that emerged from the PAR group discussion.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

“There is no talking cure for racism. As white activist researchers, we have a responsibility to link our theory and practice, reflection and action, talking and doing.”

(McIntyre, 1997, p. 139)

From the group process transcripts, I was able to identify categories, significant moments, and emergent ideas that told the story of both the action research project itself and the stories of the individual participants. The categories that emerged from the data provided a framework for a narrative that portrayed the first steps on an individual and collective journey toward deconstructing white racial privilege and establishing an anti-racist professional identity. In the sections that follow, I have grouped the significant categories according to the approximate chronology in which they materialized. In social justice education, sequencing can be as important as process or content (L. A. Bell & Griffin, 1997), so a chronological depiction will aid the reader who is interested in how the PAR group progressed through the curriculum in this project.

Significant Moments or Categories That Emerged During the First PAR Group Sessions

The first two PAR group meetings were used to cover some of the foundations of social justice education. We discussed community learning norms and guidelines, developed consensus definitions of key terms, and talked about the different levels and types of racism. In ways both explicit and implied, group members established norms of disclosure and moderate risk taking. We squarely confronted some of our stereotypes and their origins. One member made the important point that the amount he could potentially learn about himself was contingent on the commitment of others in the room to their self-learning. Another group member had a watershed emotional moment that sparked a sense of greater group cohesiveness. Finally, we began to have more applied conversations about how we might manage and live more equitably with our white privilege.

Members initiated both an explicit and implicit dialogue to identify group norms. The first PAR group session began with a structured experience where participants had five uninterrupted minutes to introduce themselves to the rest of the group. Even without an explicit invitation to
model authenticity, group members used their time to begin defining a norm of disclosure. Two-thirds of the way through her introduction, Avery—who went first—discussed her status in an interracial relationship and how she was on the learning edge as the mother of a biracial child:

My boyfriend is a Black male, so I have a lot of learning to do about what it’s going to be like, the challenges of raising a child that visually comes from backgrounds that people may or may not accept. So that’s what I’m kind of worrying about. (Avery/PAR1/107–109)

Avery set the tone for other introductions by verbalizing the concerns she was thinking about and naming what motivated her to want to be a part of the group.

Three other participants introduced themselves, and then Zach took a risk by coming out to the group as a gay man:

I went through some rebellion issues. Had some trouble with alcohol, things like that, typical small town things, especially with teenagers. So then, by the time I was 18, I had started coming out to some of my friends, which was difficult for me. Because I knew no other homosexuals at that time, at all. I didn’t meet my first homosexual until half way through my first year of college. Just to show you how, so I didn’t know what I was doing, I just knew I was different. And so it was hard for me to relate and to adjust. (Zach/PAR1/293–299)

Zach was new to the ELPS program and was meeting most of the group members for the first time, so his decision to out himself was somewhat striking to me. As the facilitator, I did not detect any negative reaction among the group members to the disclosures made by Avery and Zach. While it was unspoken, I believe these two early examples helped us to establish a norm of emotional intimacy and honesty.

In his introduction, Kevin explored an aspect of his socialization that he was troubled by:

The culture that I come from, honestly, I hate to describe it as a redneck culture, but we love to hunt and fish, and that’s what we do. And we chew tobacco and we drink beer, and we’re crude and rude. But the part about it that I didn’t like is that we were crude and rude in not such good ways, too. And I grew up around that. (Kevin/PAR1/335–339)

Here Kevin offers a personal example of how stereotypes may sometimes contain a kernel of truth. Kevin identifies as coming from a so-called “redneck culture” and acknowledges that the stereotype is true for him, except that he dislikes that aspect of stereotypical “redneck culture”
that is intolerant and close-minded. Shortly thereafter, a team-building activity generated a teachable moment that inspired the group to discuss the origin of stereotypes.

In the homogenous environments in which some group members were raised, misinformation contributed to distorted stereotypes. Many of the participants in this project came from rural communities with little racial diversity. Deprived of the opportunity to directly encounter people different from them by race, group members found it commonplace to rely on images from the mainstream media to inform their opinions about other races. We accessed this issue indirectly, as we processed an experiential team-building activity where one group member unintentionally transmitted a piece of disinformation. I asked the group (Jeff/PAR1/605–606) about the role that misinformation or disinformation had in the perpetuation of racism:

It’s huge, especially in small, rural communities that don’t have a lot of access to different cultures. People say, “Oh, I know this person because of this, or I know this person because I’ve seen people like him on TV, or things like that, and that’s how stereotypes and then racism develops. (Zach/PAR1/612–615)

While Zach was addressing this from a third-person perspective, Avery gave a personal example of how this was true for her. Avery shared a particular incident that occurred when she visited the predominantly African American urban neighborhood where her partner grew up. She emerged from the house to find a group of African American men from the neighborhood congregating on the sidewalk. Avery admitted to the PAR group that she felt an unanticipated physiological response in the moment that involved her heart racing and a feeling of fear:

I had never been in that position before, so why did I feel that way? And the only thing I could possibly attribute it to is false information, I had seen something on television, or heard something. It was so impacting to me that it actually caused me to have a physiological reaction on a complete lack of information…I think it’s extremely powerful. (Avery/PAR1/632–635)

For Avery, this was a bewildering reaction since she was partnered with an African American man, but it nevertheless underscored the power of stereotypes to be determinative in our reactions to encountering difference.

Kevin also gave the example of how a single bad—or good—incident can become a stereotype that one might apply to an entire class of people:
In my culture that’s true. They have a few bad experiences with people, or else they had one good experience and they said, “See, I’m not a racist, I have Indian friends, I go fishing with them.” (Kevin/PAR1/620–622)

My sense is that the group members had received some academic instruction in past ELPS classes or other courses they had taken about the origins of stereotypes and were open, in the context of this project, to having their misinformation corrected.

A structured activity that introduced the foundations of a learning community was a vehicle to discuss the role of trust. Once the PAR group had enacted a norm of disclosure and had a candid conversation about the impact of stereotypes, we turned to a discussion of the role of trust and mutual commitment to the success of our endeavor. In one example, Kevin articulated that he was committed to being an active part of the group, but that in order for the group to really push forward, that commitment needed to be mutual:

I think [us having a mutual sense of commitment is] an important part of fostering the community. But the trust piece is probably more important to me than anything. Even with any relationship that I have with people, you have to have that trust as a foundation. I don’t think that necessarily means in our group that we have to know everything about each other to trust each other to the greatest extent, but to trust each other at least to the point that we can feel free to be open and honest and committed to this process. Because the reason that I’m here isn’t necessarily just to help Jeff out with his dissertation, I mean I’m a nice guy, but I’m not that nice! [laughter] It’s not just free food, but it is about me learning for myself and if I don’t have trust and commitment, then that would be hard for me to learn about myself and I want to do that through this process, so I think trust is important. (Kevin/PAR1/657–666)

Kevin named a key point—that his self-learning would be enhanced if others in the room were mutually committed to their self-learning, as well. Kevin invited group members to trust one another. The structured activity primed the pump for a free-flowing discussion of the guidelines that group members wanted to use as an agreed-upon framework for the remainder of our discussion. The group norms and expectations we came up with are listed in Appendix H.

A structured activity that sought to define common terms highlighted the elusive constructs of race, ethnicity, and cultural identity. We began the second PAR group session with an activity that asked group members to pair off and define nine key terms: race, ethnicity, white, racism, prejudice, white privilege, oppression, whiteness, and white supremacy. This activity uncorked a great deal of energy within the group, at times coupled with confusion. An activity that I had envisioned would last 60 to 90 minutes ended up taking more than three hours.
Because of his socialization in a culturally conservative environment and the lack of information or misinformation imparted to him, Kevin viewed racism as a global term that encompassed bad actions based on gender, sexual orientation and other subordinated social identities. The definition Kevin—who had paired off to discuss the term with Avery—offered for “race” was tentative and not well-formed:

I don’t really know how to define race, or even why we do it, or why it’s present. Avery brought up some things that I don’t think I’ve thought about with race before. How it sort of separates people right from, just the term race sort of separates people based on just physical appearance. (Kevin/PAR2/10–13)

In previous conversations Kevin had around diversity issues, race was treated as a binary—that is Black vs. white—issue and the conversations tended to be polarizing. As we explored the term in greater depth, the dialogical contributions of others in the group helped Kevin to get clear about a more accurate definition of racism. Avery had recently developed an awareness of race as a social construction but was still integrating this new cognition with information from her everyday experience.

With a class that I took last semester. I kind of see it like time, kind of a manmade thing, like different places in the world it means different things. [In] some countries you can be 20 minutes late and that’s not disrespectful. But in the United States that’s very different. That’s kind of how I see race. We kind of put a lot of power in it, but I don’t even know that it really exists. I don’t know what the actual definition is [chuckles]. (Avery/PAR2/17–21)

I would tend to agree with the view that race is a social construction but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. In a racialized society, the effects one experiences on account of race are real, even if the construct of race itself is a “sincere fiction” (Vera, Feagin, & Gordon, 1995, p. 297).

We continued with the other eight terms, teasing out the definitions, problematizing our current conceptualizations and, in the process, clearing up our fundamental misinterpretations. The discussion of some terms became quite involved. For example, the transcript for our conversation around the term race went on for five double-spaced pages. The discussion allowed us room to branch out and explore related concepts. For instance, Zach brought up how multiracialness troubles existing definitions of the term “race”:

I think it’s becoming a term that’s getting harder and harder to define, because the world is becoming such a melting pot, that it’s so hard to differentiate. It’s getting to the point
where a lot of people can’t say I am 100% this or 100% that because I have this Native American influence way back here, I have this African American influence way back here. (Zach/PAR2/25–29)

This was a notably profound contribution from Zach early in the group process, as he tended to speak up infrequently.

We next turned to an attempt to define the word ethnicity. Avery hit upon the notion of the emptiness of white ethnic identities when she said, “I don’t know if it’s just me or if it’s everyone, but that white is somewhat blank, and ethnic has to do with everyone that doesn’t look white” (Avery/PAR2/153–154). This captures the idea that many white ethnics surrendered their ethnicity in the so-called melting pot, while People of Color groups have declined or resisted or been dissuaded from assimilation and thereby retain some ethnic flavor.

Peyton also bemoaned the vacuity of her whiteness:

I felt like “Okay, I’m white.” I don’t have an ethnicity just because we look at traditions when we looked at heritage. When you look at ethnic food, what’s an ethnic food for America? Is it like cheeseburgers? Or you look at like the religious traditions, there is nothing really concrete. This is my heritage, this is what I can cling to, whereas it seems like when you refer to somebody as being ethnic, they do have that. So I know I struggle with that a lot. It’s like I don’t have an ethnicity because those traditions, that food, that heritage, anything like that is not there. (Peyton/PAR2/168–175)

Peyton had not yet come to grips with her own ancestry and the factors that led her ancestors to assimilate, presumably voluntarily. This early discussion of the white race and white racial identities set the stage for a profound situation.

As Avery engaged the definition of whiteness, she had a watershed emotional moment. It was in the second PAR group session that we encountered and worked through what I believe was a seminal moment for Avery as well as the rest of the group. In the following passage, Avery discussed how her interracial relationship transgressed the norms of whiteness. She perceived that she was viewed by others as “less white,” but she also viewed herself that way.

We were kind of talking about how my whiteness was really in jeopardy when I chose to date a Black man and have a child with that person. Because I became, I don’t know, what the word…something about straying away from the purity of all whiteness made me less white to some groups. But I also started to have a huge difference in my own identity, with my own whiteness. I don’t feel white in the same way that I did before. (Avery/PAR2/751–756)
I perceived that Avery might be letting herself off the hook to some degree, so I asked Avery permission to use her case to illustrate an example of the durability of whiteness—and also Blackness—in our racially stratified society.

Avery: I know my partner has also experienced that he’s not, his Blackness is in question because he is with a white person. So I think your colorness can also be, it’s a normative type of…

Jeff: Okay, I hope you don’t mind me using you and [Avery’s partner’s name] as an example.

Avery: Oh no. Go right ahead.

Jeff: If [Avery’s partner’s name] was to go out into the Black community and begin interacting with other people of African descent who maybe didn’t know his relationship situation, would he get all of his Blackness back? And if you were to go to the mall where nobody knew you have an African American partner, a biracial child, would you get your whiteness back?

Avery: Oh I definitely think I’d get my, that’s why I said, it really changed my identity of my whiteness. Because I feel a need now to let people know that information. Because otherwise I know, this is emotional for me, I know that people are going to assume something about me. And they are not going to know the other half of my life. [getting more teary-eyed] That’s really hard. (Avery/PAR2/771–782)

Avery was having difficulty living authentically with her whiteness. She was—and is—proud of the choices she has made with her family, but she recognized that when she walked the streets of whiteness, she was considered a full member of the white club, and she was not comfortable with the unearned advantages that society granted her. One effect for Avery of parenting a biracial child is that she became more acutely aware of her whiteness. When Avery comprehended she was benefiting from privilege, she was also simultaneously acutely aware that her partner and child could not expect to receive the same treatment in society.

_Avery’s watershed moment opened the door for others to talk about their hidden identities._ Following immediately on the heels of Avery’s emotional exchange with me, Emma and Zach brought up parallel examples of the “segmenting” (Reynolds & Pope, 1991, p. 179) or “splitting” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 109) they felt compelled to do with respect to their hidden subordinate identities.

I think it’s an issue of identity because actually this weekend, as I’m trying to find someone who will officiate at our wedding, [the question came up] how we were going
to raise our children. And we said we want them to have aspects of both of our heritages and cultures. And me thinking of [my religion] as a culture and ethnicity and not even thinking about the ideological perspective. And he said, “Well you can’t do that. They won’t know who they are. They won’t know what their identity is.” And I thought, “Do you ask children [who are] biracial to choose which racial, I mean, which ethnicity they’re going to inherit in their home?” (Emma/PAR2/962–967)

This reveals the painful dilemma that people with hidden identities encounter: to elect to pass or gloss over difference, ignoring or subjugating part of who they are or to bring all of themselves into the room and have their identities potentially be marginalized or disrespected. All of us have multiple social identities and we should not be forced to choose which parts of ourselves we will embrace and which we will renounce. Unfortunately, society tends to embrace an either/or rather than a both/and formulation when it comes to historically subordinated identities. Zach experienced a similar segmenting pressure with respect to his identity as a gay man:

I act differently when I’m around my gay friends. You know, we have our own culture. I feel like when I go home, I barely ever visit because I have to give up that culture. You know, even though all my family knows, and I’m completely out, I have to give up that culture…I never would have considered that to affect my whiteness, if you will. (Zach/PAR2/912–917)

Zach is fairly comfortable outing himself and does so purposefully so that he can avoid the pain of segmenting (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). This discussion prompted the realization for Zach that his whiteness privileges him and enables him to avoid the double-consciousness (Du Bois, 1999/1903) that People of Color are obliged to maintain.

Our first tentative exploration of how we might work with our white privilege. Bracketing this discussion of segmenting was a conversation about how to be a race traitor (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996). Kevin had asked what he thought was a rhetorical question, “I mean what do I do when I’m pulled over and get a warning, do I say, ‘Give me a ticket instead?’” This gave me an opportunity to introduce the concept of being a race traitor. Avery then had the language to be able to identify how people had been treating her once she “came out” in an interracial relationship and as the parent of a biracial child:

Do you think that biracial children, interfaith marriages, anything like that, is that kind of a giant race trait to people? Because people are thrown off and confused by something that’s not set in the regular track of life, so it’s kind of like throwing a giant, “Oh, you must assume that I am white,” type of comment to people. That helps give me some clarity on why people react that way, because maybe it’s a confusion thing or a check and
balances. Maybe it’s a “Oh crap, I totally assumed that you were both Catholic and now I have to realize that in myself I made an assumption that was probably pretty cruel.” Or, unfair…(Avery/PAR2/1059–1066)

Chelsea, the participant who dropped out midway through the project, also had experience as a “race traitor” and felt that her whiteness was diminished in the eyes of others because she had been in deep relationships with People of Color.

We feel like we’re breaking the rules because the choice we made, we don’t get the benefit that everybody else gets. But if you think about the construct, okay a man and a woman must be married in order to get these benefits. So the social construct that is saying only a man and a woman of the same faith get married together, or the same color or whatever, and that’s the only thing that’s right. And that’s the only way you can get all those benefits. Everything else is wrong. Is it really wrong or is it just what the dominant culture has said is right and wrong? (Chelsea/PAR2/1101–1107)

We did not explore this topic fully because we were still in the middle of trying to define key terms, but we had clearly deepened the conversation by moving from a discussion of surface-level topics to more deeply meaningful and applied ones, like techniques for being a race traitor.

**Significant Moments or Categories That Emerged During the Middle PAR Group Sessions**

The move toward more nuanced and sophisticated conversations about racism and privilege occurred at the end of the second and beginning of the third PAR group sessions. In my field notes at the time, I indicated that I sensed a transition taking place. In the first and second sessions, the group was being taught through structured experiences facilitated by me, but in the third session and thereafter, group members were coming up with valuable input on their own. As the activities became more open-ended, democratic, and participative, the group members came into their own as knowers.

One activity involved identifying examples of the levels and types of racism. As we worked through the middle phase of the project, we encountered feelings of guilt and stuckness—which are typical for people from privileged groups to experience—but we did not encounter much in the way of resistance, which is atypical for people from privileged groups. We found that we had to address the false construct that diminishing white privilege is a win-lose dichotomy. Then, in the central activity of the entire project, we began to really focus our analysis of white racial privilege.
Group members participated in an open-ended activity to brainstorm examples of the levels and types of racism. At the end of the second PAR group session, participants were asked to brainstorm examples of conscious and unconscious attitudes and behaviors for the three levels of racism: individual, institutional, and cultural. This type of activity was important at this point in the process because many whites typically are able to comprehend the individual or interpersonal level of racism but have a more difficult time discerning the institutional and cultural levels (Goodman, 2001). I include myself among the whites who have a hard time understanding the institutional and cultural levels of racism because I had to begin the third PAR group session with a mea culpa regarding my halting and confusing mini-lecture on levels and types of racism at the end of the second PAR group session (Jeff/PAR3/4–11).

Despite my flawed presentation, the PAR group members were able to accomplish the task I gave them, which was to brainstorm additional examples of the levels and types of racism. A sample list of what they came up with appears in Table 4.

Table 4. A Sample List of Attitudes and Behaviors that Undergird Racism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conscious and Unconscious Attitudes and Behaviors That Exemplify the Levels and Types of Racism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different means less than (Emma/PAR3/27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of stereotypes (Emma/PAR3/28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of connection to the Other (Emma/PAR3/30–36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using racist slurs (Peyton/PAR3/37–38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing that which is comfortable rather than stretching our comfort zones (Peyton/PAR3/38–43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using words that have been racialized without recognizing their hurtful impact (Peyton/PAR3/44–47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical prohibitions against race-mixing (Zach/PAR3/358)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising that plays on racial notions targeted towards niche racial markets (Zach/PAR3/361–363)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The normative attitude that only People of Color can be multicultural (Zach/PAR3/363–365)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Arab bias (Avery/PAR3/385–387)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banning styles of cultural expression or dress (Avery/PAR3/387–391)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making assumptions about intelligence based on race (Avery/PAR3/391–393)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I noticed on reflection that the examples they came up with were most representative of the interpersonal and cultural levels of racism, so in the ensuing conversation, I encouraged the
group to think about institutional level examples. For example, we discussed how the fight or flight physiological response we experience when we encounter differences we perceive as threatening could be influenced by images in the institutional media (Emma, Avery, Zach, Peyton/PAR3/105–126). The list in Table 3 is significant because the group came up with it entirely on their own. In previous activities, I found myself clarifying misinterpretations and correcting misunderstandings. In this activity, I did not need to do that.

*We encountered guilt and stuckness, which are typical for people from privileged groups.* It is common for members of privileged groups to feel immobilized because of guilt or a sense of powerlessness (Griffin, 1997a; Swim & Miller, 1999). This was true for our PAR group as well, and manifested itself in varied ways. In the passage that follows, Emma is recounting how she has heard from People of Color that “she needs to recognize that she needs to recognize [her privilege]” (Emma/PAR3/291–292). However, once she “got it,” a feeling of guilt set in:

> We talked a lot about that as the first step, and you start to hear that over and over and over again. And then it’s like, “OK, I got it.” Now I just feel awful. (Emma/PAR3/295–296)

Because of work Avery had done within her family system around addicts and addiction recovery, the word “guilt” was a trigger that she was hesitant to associate herself with:

> I have struggled with that through this whole process of I do not feel any emotional attachment to my privilege, that I feel I should own in a negative sense. I also don’t believe that that keeps me from wanting to move myself and others forward. I don’t necessarily feel like I have to feel the pain and guilt associated with the society that we’re in to recognize that it’s not good. (Avery/PAR4/525–528)

One characteristic of people from privileged groups is that they exhibit a lower tolerance for allowing themselves to feel shame or guilt (A. G. Johnson, 1997), so it was unclear in the moment whether Avery was demonstrating resistance. However, after a meeting with our critical reference group of People of Color, Avery did acknowledge a sense of confusion and feeling of stuckness:

> This conversation today opened up my eyes to a lot of assumptions or a lot of privileges that I’ve had in this program, and I feel now like I can’t take action because I’m back here going, “I don’t know now.” I got a lot of conflicted messages during that conversation in terms of how to go about attending events and how you’ll be perceived. So I feel more hesitant...about taking a step and I think that’s where I get caught or stuck and I see that happening a lot on our campus like people kind of push a
barrier…Before I was like, “Yes, let’s make a training manual!” and now I’m thinking, “Well, what if we don’t get the wording right and what if we put something in the training manual that doesn’t make sense and then I get caught in this whole, “Well, we’re not going to move forward because I’m afraid of offending someone,” and that’s what they just got done telling us not to do. (Avery/PAR5/228–242)

The conversation with the critical reference group of People of Color enabled Avery to check out some of her assumptions, particularly with regard to relationships in and the health of the ELPS program, and to receive information she had not attended to previously. Avery perceived that some of the feedback she heard contained conflicts and contradictions. For Avery, it was important to “do the right thing” and be perceived by others as “one of the good ones.” During this conversation, Avery became more aware of some of the complexities involved in doing anti-racism work.

During the fourth PAR group session, I facilitated a mini-lecture on the levels of ally development, ranging from an ally for self-interest to an ally for social justice. This was followed by a self-diagnostic activity where we each assessed our growth as allies. A picture of our self-assessments of where we stood on a continuum of ally development can be found in Appendix K. Emma, who was familiar with this model of ally development (Edwards, 2006), said that a desire to become a better ally permeated her thinking, and she expressed a yearning to understand more deeply the impact of racism and white privilege on white Americans (Emma/PAR4/468–470). As we continued to process this activity, there was an interesting exchange between Peyton and Zach in which the root causes of stuckness were explored. Peyton initiated the exchange when she hypothesized that perhaps her reluctance to act was due to being improperly motivated by liberal, white guilt. In other words, Peyton was choosing inaction instead of acting under what she termed “self-interest(ed)” pretenses:

Just within the last year, I’ve been struggling a lot with the whole guilt part of it and that stuckness. And I think what keeps me from moving—I can see all the positives, I can see I want to go towards social justice—but what’s keeping me back is that I’m wondering, “Am I doing this or do I believe this just because I want to resolve that guilt within myself,” which I see as being a self-interest. (Peyton/PAR4/429–433)

A great deal of ink has been spilled, especially by conservative commentators, impugning whites for supporting anti-racist policies and programs out of an abundance of liberal white guilt (Steele, 2006), and Peyton did not want to be perceived as being motivated by guilt. After a long pause (PAR4/439), Zach replied with this insight:
I look at the social justice [perspective], and I think, “This is where I need to be, but this is where I am.” Not to justify...that feeling of stuckness, that feeling of guilt, that feeling of recognizing the problem, but not knowing...not having a clear resolution. Yeah...and not always recognizing my own privilege, my white privilege. (Zach/PAR4/440–445)

Zach owned that he, too, experienced stuckness but attributed it to not being able to grasp a clear plan of action. Zach then made what I thought was a very insightful reflection—that it was a privilege to be or feel stuck. Zach and Peyton were seeking to understand why stuckness can be a barrier to dismantling the construct of white privilege: it can feel overwhelming. Once one becomes aware of privilege, there is an ethical pull to “do the right thing” and correct the imbalance. However, knowing what to do or how to do it, or with whom, may seem overwhelming.

For Avery, being in an interracial relationship meant that she was continually pressed to own her privilege, especially in the management of her own household affairs.

I probably have a little bit more unique perspective than some people. I get to push myself further in a lot of areas toward becoming an ally because I live with people at home every day...it’s so close to home that it’s not an us versus them type of conversation...In some ways, I can be stuck at work, but I can’t be stuck at home, because [Avery’s partner’s name] will call me on things that don’t make sense to him. And I’ve had to learn to move [toward becoming an ally for social justice] very quickly because I can easily become ...I can see my privilege in my relationship even, and because I’ve had all this experience, I’m right and he’s wrong about things.

Here, Avery was articulating an important recognition of the role privilege plays in negotiating the myriad decisions that partnered couples make in their everyday lives.

In our discussion about the different models of ally development, Avery articulated another common sticking point for whites working with other whites to end racism.

And wanting to be like, “I get it and you don’t” kind of attitude a little bit. And I definitely feel stuck at times, and I just want to scream, like “How can you not...how can you sit there in all of this wonderful life that you have and not have any clue about other people than your own self or your own current situation!” And then that makes me kind of stuck at times. I think I’m really aware I need to move more this direction [toward being an ally for social justice], which is kind of why I positioned myself a little bit more toward that. (Avery/PAR4/418–423)

What Avery said resonated with me, because it was an example of how I have been seduced into stuckness in the past. Even though critiquing other whites whom we perceive are
“not as far along” in the development of an anti-racist identity as we ourselves might be seemed like a useful strategy, Avery correctly identified this attitude as representative of a veiled form of stuckness.

To my surprise, we did not encounter much resistance, which is atypical of people from privileged groups. In addition to guilt and stuckness, we also dealt with the issue of resistance, albeit obliquely. In the third PAR group session, we were discussing the physiological reactions we have to being triggered and what we can learn about ourselves when we notice we are on the “learning edge” (Griffin, 1997b). Kevin adopted what I was saying and worked through an example:

So you have to let yourself experience the emotion of it all the way through. At least, that is what I hear you saying, and maybe I’m personalizing it. Rather than, and maybe for me if I have a reaction to something or a situation or a person, rather than say, “Oh, that’s [expletive], I shouldn’t have that feeling, to really maybe embrace it and say, “What’s going on for me right now?” Feeling-wise, instead of intellectualizing it and trying to stop it, because all that does is push it away, and then I don’t deal with it, so the next time it happens, I’m just like, “Oh [expletive], there it is again,” but I’m going to push it away. And I don’t know...that’s the way I deal with it. But I don’t know if that is helpful to me, to try to overcome it. To...because it’s still there. (Kevin/PAR3/262–270)

Instead of immediately going into a resistant mode, Kevin heard me correctly when I said that an alternative response would be to notice you are feeling triggered and allow yourself to feel triggered as opposed to tamping those feelings down. Kevin wasn’t quite convinced that approach would work for him, but he seemed willing to suspend his disbelief and give it a try.

Throughout the PAR group process, I marveled, mostly to myself, about the lack of resistance that the group exhibited toward this difficult topic. In the spirit of participatory action research, I reflected this back to the participants (Jeff/PAR4/446–457). Avery responded that she was experiencing some resistance but processing it self-reflectively and introspectively.

I think there are a few things that I kind of, have not necessarily disagreed with or been resistant to, but there [are] some things I don’t necessarily know how I feel about yet. And so, I kind of try to think about this stuff outside of class and go back over my notes, do a lot of reflection about it. (Avery/PAR4/503–506)

Avery’s reaction was atypical, based on my experience as a participant and co-facilitator. Most racism trainings that I have been a part were marked by a high level of emotion, polemical debate, accusations, and counter-accusations. Avery’s approach to managing her triggers may be an indicator of ways in which this PAR group was unique.
In reaction to the same prompt about whether or not the lack of resistance in our PAR group was an indicator that we might be moving too languidly through the topic, Chelsea, the student who withdrew from the project, suggested that perhaps we weren’t pushing at the issue hard enough (Chelsea/PAR4/478–484). This was the one piece of critical feedback about the process offered during the span of PAR group meetings.

Emma stipulated that she had experienced resistance when she expressed her own views as a religious minority. It was out of her awareness of her lack of privilege in one subordinated dimension of her identity that she tried to keep her resistance in check as we explored her dominant, white identity.

My awareness of my own minority status in a different sense, not a racial sense, has always made me very cognizant of these issues. So for me, I’m here because I want to get to that next level, so I guess I’m trying…I don’t want resistance. I’ve had that, I’ve been there. (Emma/PAR4/462–465)

Indeed, I would agree that Emma did not exhibit resistance during the project and consistently demonstrated a thoughtful awareness of white privilege during our discussions.

Avery allowed that even though resistance was not manifesting itself in our small group, that didn’t mean that the project content wasn’t challenging:

So I’ve thought a lot about if this same exact activity would go on with my coworkers right now. You would get resistance like you would not even know what to do with. And you’ve had people straight out say, “I don’t think I have privilege, I have no idea what you are talking about.” And would even maybe take offense at their own intellectual ability being questioned. (Avery/PAR4/512–515)

Avery makes an important point here, which gets at the transferability of a project like the one we conducted. There are particular features about our group—its size and level of education—that made it unique. The lively discussion we had could not be replicated in some environments.

Initially, some of the participants saw the solution to white privilege as a win-lose proposition. One sticking point that we had to work through was the notion of white privilege as a zero-sum game—that in order for there to be equity or fairness, whites would have to give up some of their privileges. Kevin had pondered the ramifications of this construction out loud during the pre-project interview (Kevin/1st/155–168). He gave voice to a common fear among whites, even those who have anti-racist inclinations: that whites will have to give up their privileges in order for People of Color to achieve equity. Although the frame of “if disadvantaged People of Color
are to achieve equity, whites will have to give something up” is distorted and dualistic (D’Andrea & Daniels, 1999), it nevertheless fosters stuckness for many whites. Feagin and Vera (1995) observed that conceptualizing privileges as a scarce commodity was a “paralyzing calculation” (p. 191).

It was a topic the whole group grappled with when Avery brought it up during the fourth PAR group session:

I also struggle with the idea that if there’s an advantage for one person, there has to be a disadvantage. And I get that the person with privilege, that means you are higher than someone else, so obviously someone has to be below you. Maybe I’m too naive or idealistic, but I wish that we could all come to this level [motions with hands to show People of Color coming up to have the privileges of whites] instead of…like there have been times in this experience that I’ve felt like the only way that we will ever do away with white privilege is by bringing whites down. And I don’t necessarily agree with that, so I don’t know where I’m at with that whole process, either. Can everybody be on a [level] playing field, or do we all have to go low in order to get…the other time we talked about having to give things up. Give up what? (Avery/PAR4/571–579)

Avery would like for “the rising tide to lift all boats” which, in fact, may be an achievable result, but she perceives that anti-racists are called to surrender some of the privileges of whiteness in the interest of equity, and she wants to know exactly what benefits are going to be taken away. Avery had the cognitive complexity to hold two competing ideas in her head: the abundant evidence of racial discrimination and a rejection of the notion that her advantage was holding someone else down, but they were preventing her from seeing solutions.

I accept some of the responsibility for the dualistic thinking of the participants during this early phase of the process. Participants may have conceptualized a 1:1 correlation between white advantage and the disadvantage experienced by People of Color because the activity I had introduced—and that is described in the next section—framed it that way. In answer to Avery’s question of “Give up what?” I offered several examples to the group of white privileges that could be ameliorated if we approached the problem with an abundance mentality rather than a scarcity mentality. For instance, in the situation where whites are represented as heroes and culture makers in textbooks, the way to minimize white privilege is not to remove those pictures but to add in more pictures of heroes and culture makers who were People of Color (Jeff/PAR4/594–617).
In the third and fourth PAR group sessions, we began to really focus our analysis of white racial privilege. For our next activity, we took each of the 46 privileges that McIntosh enumerated in her working paper (1988) and adapted them to fit our local and lived experience, thereby personalizing what might otherwise feel like abstract concepts. We then spent most of the fourth PAR group session extrapolating costs to People of Color from white privilege, based on work by Mann (1997). A chart that documents our work on these two linked activities appears in Appendix L.

One impact of “localizing” the benefits of privilege to reflect our experiences in Ames, Iowa, and at Iowa State University is that the group was compelled to confront squarely their perceptions of the ELPS program. At this point in the project, PAR group participants had favorable views of the culture of the ELPS program. Avery initially perceived that diversity was thoroughly and effectively infused into the ELPS curriculum:

I think a lot of people would say ELPS here is not where they need to be [but] for me, it was the first time issues of diversity have even been addressed across the curriculum. For example, when I took a history class this summer, every single class period, the issue of diversity or white privilege was brought up. I took a class on the current college student and issues of diversity. That never happened in my undergraduate experience. When I look and reflect on ELPS, I [have] this “They’re doing very well in this area,” kind of opinion, just because everyone else is doing so poorly. (Avery/PAR3/476–484)

Avery recognized that the ELPS program was not perfect but felt as though it was better than most about addressing diversity and multiculturalism in the core courses. Emma gave the example that most of the theories that constitute the canon of student affairs were developed by men and women who identify racially as white:

I can be sure that we could find curriculum materials in the higher ed program that testify to the existence of [our, white] race. Even in Higher Ed, some of the materials, I mean they were white men that wrote them, so even in that instance. (Emma/PAR3/493–499)

Kevin took a somewhat more critical view, expressing the perspective that the ELPS program does a good job of naming the problem as a race, gender, or sexual orientation issue but may not be as effective at diagnosing root causes to problems or suggesting policy-oriented solutions.
I think some of the diversity stuff is fluff, not intentionally fluff of like, “We need to do these things,” but nobody really knows what exactly to do. I think it’s great and I know the class you’re talking about, because a lot of American higher ed history is white, privilege, and comes from that. But just throwing it into the curriculum or discussing it in class once in a while or saying, “Well, yeah, this is the way it was.” For example, going through a class and talking about the number of African American males, the number started decreasing. We say, “OK, that’s a problem.” But I don’t know that we really discuss it. I don’t know that that happens even in the higher ed program, and I think the higher ed program does a really good job of trying to do that, but I just don’t think overall that we discuss it much. We talk about the problem, but I don’t know if we really get to the meat and bones of it. (Kevin/PAR3/570–580)

Avery took the conversation in a different direction by suggesting that units within the Business and Finance Division of the university constituted a significant fraction of the institution’s personnel, but were underserved in the level of diversity education they received.

What type of services do we provide to change the environment as a whole? That’s something I think about. Doing this project, I’ve thought a lot about it. This is about environment in a lot of ways, and I think sometimes we miss the people that might actually be the folks that are dealing…you know we think about custodians, they’re in every residence hall, every single day. And almost every student is going to have a relationship with that custodian, because I knew who mine was in my building, we saw her every morning. (Avery/PAR3/601–606)

Avery worked in the Business and Finance Division and felt as though that area of the university was sorely lacking in diversity education.

*The PAR group identified costs to People of Color and costs to Whites that flow from white privilege.*

We had spent time in the third PAR group session trying to personalize and localize the benefits that accrue to whites as identified by McIntosh (1988), because apprehension of those privileges can be fleeting. The results of that project can be found in the second column of the table in Appendix L. The next step was to try to gain a better understanding of the costs that People of Color experience due to white racial privilege. For this, we drew from and expanded upon the work of Mann (1997). As a final step, we sought to discern the costs of white privilege for whites. It seems counterintuitive that a benefit would also entail a cost, but indeed there are intended and unintended consequences that whites experience as a result of their unearned privilege. The results of our group brainstorm appear in the third and fourth columns of the table in Appendix L. An abbreviated version appears in Tables 5 and 6.
Table 5. Costs of White Privilege to People of Color

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs to People of Color</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always wondering whether white people’s motivations were genuine or contrived. (Emma/PAR4/147)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly fighting an uphill battle to be heard. (Jeff/PAR4/152–153)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling compelled to support another Person of Color when you don’t agree with their position. (Zach/PAR4/159–162)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always second-guessing whether slights from institutional authorities were racially motivated. (Emma/PAR4/165–172)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to live with negative stereotypes and attributions of deficit. (Jeff/PAR4/175–176)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility on social issues is lessened because others might perceive they are speaking in their own self-interest. (Zach/PAR4/183)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not feeling validated. Feeling isolated, ostracized, marginalized. (Jeff/PAR4/199–208)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly fighting uphill battles, “raging against the machine.” (Jeff/PAR4/213–215)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expending greater time or resources to accomplish basic life tasks. (Jeff/PAR4/223–226)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress of having to learn the roles and rules of the dominant group as well as those of one’s own group. (Jeff/PAR4/245–248)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having every mistake, flaw, or bad habit be attributed to race. (Chelsea/PAR4/253–258)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty identifying mentors when you are “the only” or a pioneer. (Peyton/PAR4/290–294)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that the PAR group were “outsiders” when it came to our attempt to identify the costs of white privilege to People of Color—our ideas were guess work, at best. However, group members may have relied on “overlapping approximations” (O'Brien, 2001, p. 25)—in which they related to their subordinate social identity as a woman, a gay person, or a person from a working-class background—to make analogous and empathetic connections to the indignities of racism. This part of the activity set the stage for a dialogue we would have with a group of People of Color in the subsequent PAR session.

The process of brainstorming the costs of white privilege to white people was revelatory in the sense that we, myself included, had all failed to see these costs, which were hiding in plain view. Once we began identifying the costs, they figuratively began spilling out of us with ever-increasing energy. That discussion led us to explore several tangential topics that were highly informative and educative for the entire group: false reporting of crimes that single out Black men as perpetrators, reifying stereotypes of disproportionate criminality (Avery/PAR4/788-803), how “white flight” increases commuting times thereby decreasing the amount of time white workers can spend with their families (Emma & Jeff/PAR4/822-845), and media
constructions of heroes and sheroes of the Middle East like Jesus Christ and Cleopatra as white people.

Table 6. Costs of White Privilege to Whites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs to Whites</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social distance causes whites to miss out on deep relationships with People of Color. (Jeff/PAR4/753–756)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing out on opportunities to collaborate with People of Color which might make our workplaces more innovative and profitable. (Emma/PAR4/759–760)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having as well-developed a set of cross-cultural communications skills. (Jeff/PAR4/762–763)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having adequate health care for some inherently causes us all increased risk. (Avery/PAR4/765–768)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you’re always “comfortable,” you’re not on the learning edge. (Zach/PAR4/782–784)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being paranoid of People of Color individually or collectively whom we’ve never learned to trust. (Emma/PAR4/785–787)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“White flight” causes some to have longer commutes to work, thereby missing out on family time. (Jeff/PAR4/835–840)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are scared to travel, eat, and seek out entertainment in ghettos we had a hand in creating. (Avery/PAR4/847–859)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We miss out on opportunities to be enriched by cultural events organized by People of Color. (Avery/PAR4/993–1001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being ignorant of the history and contributions of People of Color is embarrassing. (Peyton/Emma/PAR4/1008–1012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We repeat the same mistakes over and over because we edit history and choose not to learn from it. (Avery/PAR4/1035–1040)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We missed out on the creative contributions of those who were enslaved and prohibited from becoming literate. (Avery/PAR4/1131–1137)</td>
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Significant Moments or Categories That Emerged During the Final PAR Group Sessions

By the end of the fourth PAR group session, we had been together as an all-white caucus group for 18 hours. Our final task for the fourth PAR group session was to brainstorm a list of potential future actions we could take to ameliorate white racial privilege. The resulting list, which consists mostly of institutional-level interventions, appears in Appendix M. In reflecting on the list, Avery summarized a sentiment that several others in the group echoed:

Will there ever be a time when we have an opportunity to talk about some of these things with people that are not identifying as white? (Avery/PAR4/724–725)
In the intervening week between the fourth and fifth PAR group sessions, I identified four graduate students who were People of Color and who were willing to spend some time in dialogue with us. I began the conversation by giving a brief overview of PAR and then delineating the tone and content of our process to date. As the convener of the two groups, I very tentatively worked to bring about some consensus regarding the process our inter-group dialogue should take. Out of respect for the time our “critical friends” (McNiff, 2002, p. 22) had agreed to give us, I took a more directive role as a facilitator to curb discussions that threatened to take us down tangents. In other words, I sought to minimize the back-and-forth, comment-rebuttal-counter rebuttal pattern in favor of staying on task. The stated purpose of the meeting was for the People of Color to give their own ideas about appropriate interventions to address white racial privilege. The list of interventions our critical reference group of People of Color came up with, which is fairly evenly split between interpersonal-level and institutional-level interventions, can be found in Appendix M. The next three subheadings reflect significant moments that emerged as a direct consequence of our inter-group dialogue.

A conversation with People of Color sparked a recognition among PAR group members of the privileging effects of privilege. “Privileging effects of privilege” refers to the idea that people who are privileged rarely have to think about their dominant status. We take privilege for granted and it therefore tends to be invisible. One of the privileging effects of privilege is to want to fix that which we perceive as broken. This “fix-it” impulse was one that Avery grappled with, as evidenced in this passage:

Part of it’s being a white person that has been privileged—I want to fix it. For me to think that, although my heart’s in the right place, that’s a real privileged way of handling it, let the white person come in and show you how we do it. (Avery/2nd/434–439)

Avery was reacting to having witnessed brokenness and addiction among her partner’s extended family (Avery/2nd/405–433). This discourse of “fix it” is a common reaction on the part of whites (Hytten & Warren, 2003), who occasionally fall into the trap of seeing themselves as “the great white hope.” To Avery’s credit, she was aware of her impulse to “fix it,” correctly recognized it as a discourse borne of privilege, and sought to keep the impulse in check.

In this next example, Avery is processing her reaction to having met with the critical reference group of People of Color. In this context, Avery encountered her sincere desire to just fix what she perceived was broken juxtaposed with People of Color telling her that more self-
work and interpersonal work was necessary before institutional-level changes could be implemented:

I was trying to make sense of that while we were sitting there, because I found myself being very frustrated. I wanted to say, “No, no, no, but we want this….” So I kind of reflected and I started thinking about how my privilege was probably playing into that experience, because what I was saying is, “But I want to fix it, and I want this piece, this block that I can…a program that we can just do.” And what I was hearing was a lot more about people’s feelings and about people’s mental states…. And I think what I really came to terms with in that short amount of time was the group we were speaking with put a lot of emphasis on the growth as facilitators that we would need to make in ourselves, or individuals in the ELPS program would need to make before any change could really take place. (Avery/PAR5/37–42)

Avery was conscious of her inclination toward a quick programmatic fix and instead opened herself up to try to truly hear what the People of Color in the room were saying.

Another of the privileging effects of privilege is that we maintain the belief that our motives for doing anti-racist work are pure. Kevin, perhaps correctly, discerned that our “critical friends” (McNiff, 2002, p. 22) doubted his motivations.

It was like this sense of almost not trusting our white…Why are white folks really… “Do you really want to be involved with this, and if you do, what is the motivation for it?” Then I started thinking, “What is my motivation?” [laughter] You know what I mean? Truly, I could tell people, “I just want the world to be a better place. I just want us all to get along.” And I think I really mean that, but I don’t know what my motivation is. And sometimes it’s easy to lose that motivation (Kevin/PAR5/116–121)

Kevin, who has graduate training in counselor education, did a good job of monitoring his own emotions and triggers throughout the PAR group process. He demonstrated an ability to monitor his own progress or lack thereof as the group explored various facets of white privilege. In the example that follows, Emma also displayed the ability to be self-reflective as she explored the tension between working on her “own work” versus engaging in inter-group dialogue:

Then you get to that point where you’re like, “OK, I’m doing this, but for me to do my own work, I need to be reaching out and talking to other people, communicating. I was thinking that to talk to people that are closest to me, in my mind, is part of doing my own work because, internally, all I’m doing is just flipping things over in my mind. Then there’s that struggle of going, “OK, but now am I being selfish by wanting to go out and work with other people? Am I totally missing it? Am I privileged?” But what if I keep doing this internally am I really helping anything? (Emma/PAR5/242–251)
After Emma spoke, two other group members concurred with her observation.

Avery touched on a third privileging aspect of privilege when she commented on the diametrically opposed assessments of satisfaction with the ELPS program made by our white caucus group compared with the critical reference group of People of Color.

I just got this sense that there was a big disparity between kind of the us versus them group in satisfaction with the program. I got the sense that our group feels like the program’s doing really good things and moving in the right direction and I didn’t get that sense from that group. (Avery/PAR5/172–176)

I will explore some of the critiques of the ELPS program that emerged from this discussion in a subsequent section.

There were qualitative differences in the list of potential interventions brainstormed by the PAR group and the critical reference group of People of Color. Zach took note of the qualitative difference between the two lists that were generated:

It seems very interesting looking at the two lists how they differ. A lot of the things we came up with seem to be more on a feeling of larger social changes and the things that they came up with seem to be the little things, like they said those small things that add up. That kind of we didn’t even think about. (Zach/PAR5/55–60)

Zach noted that our “critical friends” (McNiff, 2002, p. 22) displayed a depth of emotion when talking about the psychic energy that dealing with the cumulative effect of frequent, small indignities required. This was something that hadn’t even been on the PAR group’s radar screen.

Toward the end of the meeting with the critical reference group of People of Color, a spirited exchange took place in which members of both groups remarked that more conversations like the one we were having needed to take place. Some of the ideas that were generated included attending activities of the “other” group, conversations around shared readings, immersion experiences, making a public commitment to learn about others, speaking up and “bearing witness” in class and interpersonal conversations, and seeking to find out what you don’t know. Emma described the synergy of that conversation thusly:

Emma: That is interesting, that at the end of our discussion, we all started to like, “Yeah! Yeah!” And we were sort of realizing that we were having similar experiences when it came to the conversation or the dialogue that was taking place in our program. That to me, I was like, “Wow. We’re all sensing this.”

Avery: [emphatically] Same here!
Emma: That to me said something, like there should have been a light going off, that we're all saying about this dialogue…between groups we're all sort of having this similar observation, maybe experiencing it differently, but observing the same thing. (Emma/PAR5/61–68)

It was affirming to Emma and Avery that there were at least some views shared by members of both groups and those shared viewpoints seemed to increase the level of energy and commitment among members of our PAR group to take responsibility for fostering future inter-group dialogues. Peyton detected one other area of overlap between the lists the two groups had brainstormed separately:

Both groups said it in very different ways, but I see a connection between our point we had on there about a segment on ally development, how-to, what to do, how to grow. What they were talking about, how it’s kind of the “in” thing to do to say that you want to diversify, and knowing how to, and how to teach other people how to play that ally role rather than just how to portray that role. (Peyton/PAR5/76–82)

Peyton made an important distinction between being a true ally and merely portraying a desire to be an ally without really putting any effort or risk into it.

Participants from both groups felt that learning would be enhanced with more opportunities for inter-group dialogue. One result of the conversation with our “critical friends” (McNiff, 2002, p. 22) was that Kevin realized he was missing out on the context of important conversations.

This is my own journey and I’m figuring that out more and more, that I need to do that, but there’s always that time when I’m around People of Color as a white person when they look at each other and they’re like, “Uh-huh.” And I want to know what that means, but I’m afraid to ask, almost like I’m intruding on their privacy, or their space. But there’s a part of me that really wants to know more about that. Because they just know, I mean somebody will say something or they’ll make a comment or something that happens in the world or in society and they’ll just say, “Yup.” And I’m like, it would totally go over my head. (Kevin/PAR5/189–195)

Kevin connected an observation he made during the inter-group dialogue with his sense of the everyday—that People of Color sometimes share a wink or nod that symbolizes a collective understanding of racism or white privilege that whites simply don’t comprehend. Kevin opined further that while he wanted to understand the context better, he was not sure what he would do with that new knowledge.

Peyton also felt that merely having more opportunities for inter-group dialogue within the ELPS program would be helpful.
I heard a couple of them say that just having this conversation, getting together, talking about [it] was very important and that it doesn’t happen enough. [We should try] providing a venue or providing situations where that conversation does take place. You know, ask the questions and let the discussion happen and see what goes on from there, just to heighten that awareness. Because I learned a lot of stuff going in there today and just listening to them. (Peyton/PAR5/287–294)

Peyton concurred with Kevin that the lack of intentional, structured forums for inter-group dialogue represented a missed opportunity to develop community and trust within the ELPS program.

Hearing from People of Color prompted the white students to begin to ask critical questions about the ELPS program. Approximately two months before this project began, the ELPS department had approved a Social Justice concentration within the doctoral program to begin during the 2007–2008 academic year. As the PAR group moved deeper into a discussion of what sort of action-oriented intervention to deconstruct white privilege they could identify, they began to examine and critique the culture of the ELPS program. Emma took the lead in identifying what for her was a disconnect:

“We hear a lot of talk and not a lot of act.” Like we hear a lot of “this is the cool thing to talk about, but the actions don’t reflect it.” I just kept hearing those conflicting messages. (Emma/PAR5/301–305)

Emma felt like her peers in the program were conversant in all the right things to say, but bemoaned the lack of action to back up lofty ideals. Emma also felt that despite an espoused value of authenticity, there were some conversations that were discouraged or off limits.

We can’t go up to people that we feel close with and we can’t say “I don’t understand this, why do you feel this way or why…” or just asking questions. Maybe the culture within the program is not as open for the conversations that need to take place as it could be. (Emma/PAR5/350–353)

In Emma’s view there was an invisible, unmarked boundary that defined the limits for conversations about difference in the program. The inter-group dialogue we had just had demonstrated the value in going deeper, and Emma wanted to explore the cultural norms that kept that from happening on an everyday basis.

Kevin wondered whether there was a difference between the espoused values and the actual values in the ELPS program:
I feel like it’s an open program…or I feel like we say that we’re open but is it really a place where people feel comfortable talking about the real issues that are going on? Or are we just sort of glossing over it? I don’t think it’s intentionally done…I mean the people that I’ve met anyways, people really are concerned about things, but I just wonder, is it a place to be open, to have open discussions. And if we’re not, why aren’t we? (Kevin/PAR5/355–360)

The dialogue with the critical reference group of People of Color had opened the PAR group members’ eyes to where they could critically examine their taken-for-granted assumptions about openness within the ELPS program.

Peyton then took this critical exploration a step further. She opined that there was a strong culture of political correctness in the program and that the consequence for deviating from an espoused social justice norm would be ostracism by one’s peers. Peyton was quietly skeptical about the progress being made to address social justice issues in the ELPS program and was just beginning to feel more confident about critiquing the status quo.

In our program, I think that if you didn’t just come out and say, whether you meant it or not, that you were all for social justice...If you at any point showed any waver in that, you wouldn’t be long in this program and everybody would let you know it. It’s not an option to not be that and be in this program. And so I wonder how many people are just really, I’m going to say “at this level” because I know if I deviate or question that at all, that I’m going to be a complete outsider from everybody in whatever cohort, in whatever class, because that’s not what’s expected of this program. So that might be the culture, where it’s just expected…you’re going to be like that so you just program yourself, “Well, that’s how I am.” As long as I say I am and kind of act like that around the right people, then that’s fine. (Peyton/PAR5/361–371)

In this passage, Peyton is referencing her perception of a culture within the ELPS program that avoids difficult conversations and where members “talk a good talk” about social justice issues in order to meet with social approval and as a way of masking their true attitudes or feelings. Even though Peyton alternated between first- and second-person, I suspected that she was really talking about herself in this passage.

Avery picked up on Peyton’s idea and offered a specific example. In Avery’s opinion, there was a taboo against verbalizing strong faith convictions, that there was a belief shared among some cohort members that adherence to fundamentalist religious principles indicated a lack of critical thinking ability.
I see that issue sometimes with religion. I almost feel like there’s a sentiment in this program if you buy into any formalized religion, you’re an outsider, because you are not thinking on your own. All of those pieces keep people really confined to their “don’t say anything” rule. But I do think that what will be key in moving us forward in any of these areas is really wondering, “What are people coming in thinking, and if they’re not allowed to…” We’re so afraid we’re going to hurt another person’s feelings that we don’t ever debate anything, we don’t ever [ask critical questions of one another].

(Avery/PAR5/407–413)

Emma, who was spirituality grounded in an historically oppressed faith, concurred with Avery:

I’ve heard that sentiment, too, about the organized religion or just having perspectives just from other people. I’ve heard those conversations, not within the classroom, like “Am I free to say how I’ll really feel, then I’ll be perceived that I’m this, this, this, and this.” (Emma/PAR5/432–434)

It is worth noting that, according to Emma, these conversations were happening outside the classroom but the outcome of the conversation clearly influenced what would or would not be talked about inside the classroom. Emma then brought up a salient point:

Sometimes, just that feeling of, “Well, I want to ask a question or make a statement to get a response or to hear another perspective because I think that’s how I can grow and how we can grow as a group,” but wondering if then I was going to be perceived as having that sentiment. We have all these conversations within our program about, “Well, the people that you meet now and the connections that you make, they’re going to impact your career forever.” So you start to think, “If I make a statement, is someone going to remember that 10 years down the road?” when really it’s an opportunity to grow and to have that conversation, but we stop it because we’re afraid.

(Emma/PAR5/438–446)

According to Emma, the well-intentioned guideline to “not burn bridges” because student affairs is a small field and you never know who among your current classmates might be in a position to help your career 10 years hence may have had an unintended chilling consequence of shutting down conversations. Advice that was intended to be helpful professionally may have had the effect of curtailing classroom learning opportunities.

The PAR group members began to coalesce around some ideas for action-oriented interventions. Following the conversation of how the culture in ELPS may foster or inhibit certain discussions from happening in the classroom, the PAR group members began a more focused brainstorm about what action-oriented intervention they might take. It is noteworthy that it was another
Avery and Emma suggested setting up an anonymous question box that might facilitate asking and answering taboo questions.

**Avery:** I’m wondering if we could work with fostering… once a semester, “the questions you didn’t ask and wanted to know” box, or something [laughter] and have an opportunity to talk about those issues.

**Emma:** Maybe that’s like a [Higher Education Graduate Student Organization—HEGSO] project. In trying to implement this huge social change, I think of something that’s within our control like the HEGSO student organization. Maybe anonymity is the way to start and saying, “What do you want to know, what questions do you wish you had asked during class, put them in a box, and then putting them out there for dialogue purposes or something.

**Avery:** I would even be interested, if we compiled a list of the people in this room of all the things we wish we would know, or the things that have been brought up in our minds through this project and get a bunch of perspectives from various people all over the campus on what their response was to some of those things. I think that would be interesting to learn from, too. (Avery, Emma/PAR5/455–463, 466–469)

Avery suggested an idea, and Emma volunteered a manageable process and format to bring the idea to fruition. Avery then built upon that idea, suggesting a “knowledge database” of different ideas to foster transgressive thinking.

Emma and Avery continued to feed off one another’s energy as the brainstorming phase continued. Emma suggested that a grassroots campaign of activism be launched to make Ames a more livable city for People of Color.

**Emma:** I just had this thought about this whole idea of it being difficult to live in Ames and thinking what can we really do. Maybe this is too broad and maybe that’s my privilege of what can I do to make a change. But, you know, I think about the power of our whole student body within the Ames community because this is a very strong proportion of the revenue for this city. So I wonder what if a few people decided, “You know what, we want the stores in Ames to carry these products.” Like a Hy-Vee and we started a letter-writing campaign. I can almost guarantee that if you get enough students from Iowa State to write and request these things, it would have strong impact. We need to start doing things beyond just saying we want to attract more people by actually making it a reality in our community, but I may be thinking too big again, getting really excited…

**Avery:** Has there ever been a list done asking Students of Color or international students, “If you had to list your top 10 things about the city of Ames or this environment, regarding food, or cosmetics, or medical care, any of those things that you’d like to see...
brought here, what would that be?” Has there ever been anything like that? (Emma, Avery/PAR5/540–550, 553–560)

Avery supported Emma’s idea and broadened the scope beyond grocery items to include other quality-of-life issues. At this point, group members were seeing connections between the list of potential future actions brainstormed by the PAR group and the list identified by the People of Color with whom we met.

*The group identified barriers to changing our behavior related to our willingness to confront interpersonal-level racism or white privilege.* Members of this PAR group all intended to enter or reenter the professional ranks of student affairs administrators after they finished their graduate degrees. One concern shared by multiple group members was how to challenge colleagues in the workplace with regard to white privilege—how to work with the tension between maintaining collegial relationships and being an activist. Avery was comfortable confronting people in her closest circle of family members and was even OK with confronting hard-core racists but found it difficult to be true to her ideals in the workplace.

The folks in committed relationships…intimate relationships for me, I kind of put up into this category [of people I feel comfortable confronting] because those are the folks that I feel like I can call out, because I know they’ll do the same for me, but I also know, there is like an unconditional kind of love with that group, like a trust. And I could call out the group down here [referring to unreconstructed racists], too, pretty easily, because I don’t care what they think. So, the middle group [referring to average, non-racist people] is what would be difficult for me. People I don’t know real well. I think my big problem is in my colleagues, in my professional environment. And that’s where I worry about it, or interactions with people at the bank, or at the mall, or…anywhere I’m going to have to see [them] again, continually, but I don’t love that person. (Avery/PAR7/384–393)

From a social justice standpoint, the social awkwardness or ostracism that whites experience when they speak out about racism and white privilege is a small price to pay compared to what People of Color frequently experience.

Peyton expanded on Avery’s point of concern:

It’s that fear of jeopardizing that relationship, like working with colleagues. You’re less likely to call them out on something, even though you might disagree with it, just because they’re going to view me as this…so how’s that going to affect my professionalism, how would they view me, so I can definitely see that. (Peyton/PAR7/394–398)
Here, Peyton expressed worry that being too much of an activist would carry professional consequences, which is certainly true. This is a question that activists need to constantly ask themselves: how much am I willing to risk for equity and justice?

In a similar vein, Kevin was experiencing a tension between the traditional canons of counseling and his inclination to be more of an activist or advocate. There are times when counseling clients say really biased, bigoted things, and the counselor is compelled to choose whether to address the offending language in the moment or defer a compassionate confrontation until later when a stronger mutual relationship has been built.

I have found in counseling where somebody says something. Maybe I’m just using it as an excuse to say, “I’m going to address that after I’ve established a relationship more.” Even in my friendships or my family life or something, it just doesn’t feel like…this just isn’t the right time to confront that. Maybe it will be later. Part of me feels like you’re just pushing it away and you’re ignoring it, but another part of me thinks, “How do you know when it’s a teachable moment? How do you know when it’s going to be even useful to bring it up to that person.” Or if you confront, if you walk into a room as a police officer, you don’t care if it’s teachable or not, you’re just going to say don’t do that and then you forget about it, but if it’s with a group of friends, and you don’t want to push them away, or it might be handled better later on down the road. And sometimes I think I use it as a way to avoid it, but other times I really wonder, “How do you know when it’s a teachable moment, or when it’s going to be at least, when it’s going to make a difference?” You know, I don’t know when that is. (Kevin/PAR7/443-452)

Kevin was ruminating on whether his choice to defer a social justice–oriented confrontation was in the interest of fostering a therapeutic relationship or whether he was merely rationalizing taking an easier, non-confrontational path.

Emma shared a concern that she was quick to judge others who slipped or who were not as far along in their development as a social justice ally:

My problem I always deal with is “meeting people where they are without making a judgment,” and I realize that in myself so much lately, and it’s horrible… (Emma/PAR7/401–404)

Having patience and empathy is a significant issue for trainers, teachers, and facilitators of social justice education (Goodman, 2001; Obear, 2000). It can be difficult when someone says something offensive and we are triggered to remain level-headed. It is incumbent on trainers to learn how to manage their triggers so they can effectively meet their obligations as educators. Over the course of the program, there were several skills we identified that we’d like to work on,
managing triggers being one of them. It is one of the shortcomings of this study that we didn’t spend more time skill-building, because that might have helped with the overall sustainability of the project.

One of the final activities the group discussed was to generate action plans for the next week, month, and year. An integral part of social justice education is to develop concrete plans of action (Goodman, 2001) and to make those plans public for the sake of accountability. Each group member was asked to identify an action plan for the coming week, month, and year. The PAR group members developed action plans that ranged from simply maintaining awareness, to incorporating white privilege into curriculum designs, to getting more involved with multicultural groups on campus. A complete list of the action plans that PAR group members committed to can be found in Appendix N. The post-project interviews, which occurred four-and-one-half months after the final PAR group session, presented an opportunity to check on each member’s progress with regard to her or his action plan, which was mixed. A discussion of the outcome validity, or the degree to which the PAR process stimulated action-oriented outcomes, appears in Chapter 6.

Another final activity was to identify support systems that we perceived could sustain our work. Awareness of one’s support systems is vital to sustaining social justice over the long term (L. A. Bell & Griffin, 1997). Kevin raised the question of how to identify systems of support early in the seventh and final PAR group session:

How do you find those support systems? I mean, I feel supported in this group, but part of the reason I feel supported is because we’ve talked about a lot of this stuff from the beginning and kind of gone through that together. So how do you find that group? (Kevin/PAR7/83–86)

In response, I pointed out the obvious but often overlooked answer: ask for what you need. I pointed out that I was able to recruit this PAR group of volunteers simply by reputational sampling, sending out an electronic mail invitation, and following up with those who expressed interest. Sometimes the support we need or want exists all around us. It is important for social justice educators to get past the myth of scarcity, to see that there is an abundance of support for our work. Our potential allies may simply need to be empowered with an invitation to join us.
PAR group members identified a variety of potential support systems. Kevin identified his current friends within the program and also the other members of the group:

My friends, my white friends, my friends of color. Join certain organizations and use those as support systems. One thing that you said tonight Jeff was, just talk to more people, ask more questions, try to engage people in conversation. I probably should include my family in here, but I don’t know that they would be a support system right now, and not because they don’t care about me, but it may just create more anxiety and tension than I want to deal with right now. Then also I wrote down the group members in this dissertation group. I really do feel that way, that sharing this experience with all of you will be, if I ran into you in the hallway, I can say, “Hey…” and I would feel very comfortable talking to you about stuff…I do feel that way, so I think I would use this group as a support system. (Kevin/PAR7/621–630)

Kevin also held out hope that one day his own family might be one of his support systems for social justice work, but he felt as though that might require a significant investment of energy in the present. Avery, on the other hand, was in a unique position to rely upon her African American extended family as well as her activist biological family for support:

I have my family…I think my family generally has been and will be very supportive, but I’d like to ask some questions about the topic and get more educated myself. I think that would be supportive for me, to just keep reading on the topic and keep thinking about it, because that makes me feel like I’m moving in the right direction. (Avery/PAR7/631–635)

Avery also recognized the value of continuing to work on her own awareness, that an over-reliance on People of Color to teach her was a privileged position.

Most of the PAR group members identified their cohort in the ELPS program as a source of support for continued reflection and action around social justice topics. Even Zach, who hadn’t met his whole cohort, seemed optimistic that his cohort would be “on the right track” with regard to anti-racism:

I put down my cohort, actually. I think I have a unique perspective since I haven’t met my cohort yet, but just the idea of the program, the level of thinking that’s required to be a member of this program, almost it’s required that you’re in line with these issues and that we’re on the right track. So, we’re all kind of working towards this anti-racist goal and so I think I will be able to draw a lot of support from that group, when I meet them. [laughter] (Zach/PAR7/653–658)

Emma also mentioned finding like-minded colleagues at professional conferences, which is a support system that none of the other members of the PAR group had identified.
One thing I put down that I probably should work a little bit harder at is meeting people at conferences and trying to find support networks there. (Emma/PAR7/665–669)

Even though the PAR group members had not attended very many conventions, they were beginning to recognize that they could derive support from professionals outside the static limits of their ELPS program cohort.

**Interpretation of the White Privilege Attitude Scale Results**

Each of the participants in this project completed an 81-item version of the WPAS (Pinterits, 2004) at the conclusion of the pre-project interview and also near the end of the last PAR group session. The WPAS instructions direct participants to respond using a six-point Likert scale with anchors that range from 1—strongly disagree to 6—strongly agree.

Concurrently with this project, the WPAS was undergoing a second round of construction and validation (Page, Szerlong, Patel-Stamp, Magelky, & Pinterits, 2007). An exploratory factor analysis (n = 250) yielded 28 items that resolved into a four-factor solution. The four-factor structure accounted for 65% of the variance, which implies that these are the most conceptually meaningful factors. For three of the four factors, a higher score represented a more desirable outcome. The first factor, termed *Confronting White Privilege*, accounted for 43.5% of the total variance and consisted of 12 items that probed the respondent’s intention to address and begin the process of eliminating white privilege. For example, one item states, “I plan to work to change our unfair social structure that promotes white privilege.” The second factor, designated *Apprehension About White Privilege*, accounted for an additional 10.5% of the variance and was composed of 6 items that examined individuals’ anxiety about losing privilege. An example of an item in this factor would be, “I am worried that taking action against white privilege will hurt my relationship with other whites.” The third factor was named *Denial of White Privilege* and was composed of 4 items that accounted for an additional 6.4% of the variance. This factor contained items that capture a respondent’s belief in equality of opportunity, such as “Plenty of People of Color are more privileged than whites.” A higher score on this scale represents a less desirable outcome. The fourth factor, termed *Feeling Bad About Having White Privilege*, consisted of six items that accounted for 4.6% of the total variance. One of the items in this factor states, “I am ashamed that the system is stacked in my favor because I am white.” The Cronbach’s alphas for the four factors were 0.89, 0.81, 0.84, and 0.91, respectively. Five of the 28 items were
reverse-scored so as to minimize potential response bias. The earlier version of the WPAS with 81 items that was employed as a pre- and post-project questionairre was used with the author’s permission (E. J. Pinterits, personal communication, April 27, 2006). A copy of the current, revised White Privilege Attitude Scale with the 28 items that emerged from the factor analysis can be found in Appendix O and also appears with the consent of the author (E. J. Pinterits, personal communication, May 29, 2008).

Pre-test and post-test means for each of the four WPAS factors for all five PAR group participants appear in Table 7 below. For the sake of comparison, the means from the larger sample that the instrument’s author used for confirmatory factor analysis appear in the last row of the table (Page, et al., 2007).

**Table 7. WPAS Pre- and Post-Test Scale Scores as Compared to Sample Means**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Factor I Mean</th>
<th>Factor II Mean</th>
<th>Factor III Mean</th>
<th>Factor IV Mean</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Sample Means (N = 242)</td>
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One limitation of the use of the WPAS in this project was that variance on account of social desirability was not assessed among the participants with whom I worked. Therefore, a participant’s response may reflect a need to be perceived as “one of the good ones,” rather than a true measure of attitude change as a result of participation in the project. Also, the participants were not randomly selected, which confounds any inferences that could be drawn between the small PAR group sample and the larger sample used in the construction and validation of the WPAS. Nevertheless, a comparison of pre- and post-project outcomes on the WPAS provides another source of data that can be used to triangulate the findings from this study.

For this project, I treated the WPAS like a questionnaire, which is consistent with the epistemological paradigm that guided this study. WPAS questions where the participant’s pre- and post-project responses differed by two or more anchor points on the Likert scale were of particular interest and will be discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

How Avery’s understanding of white privilege changed. When Avery’s pre- and post-project WPAS scores are compared, there are marked differences on 8 out of 28 items, the most of any group member. She indicated an increased intention to work towards dismantling white privilege and an increased concern that taking action would hurt her relationship with other whites. In her pre-project response, Avery indicated slight disagreement with the statement, “White people have it easier than people of color,” while her post-project response was to “moderately agree.” Correspondingly, she indicated stronger disagreement with the statement “Plenty of people of color are more privileged than whites.” That Avery would have more polarized responses to these items in the post-project administration is unsurprising, given her comments about the profound impact the project had on her worldview (Avery/R5/1-3).

On the fourth factor of the WPAS, termed Feeling Bad About Having White Privilege, Avery’s pre- and post-project scores exhibited marked differences on four out of six possible items. Before the project, Avery moderately disagreed that she was angry about her continued benefit from white privilege, while after the project she moderately agreed with that statement. She indicated a similar change of stance with respect to the statement, “I am angry knowing I have white privilege.” Somewhat paradoxically, Avery was more ashamed of her white privilege, but less ashamed “that the system is stacked in [her] favor” because she is white. This goes back to Avery’s refusal to be made to feel guilty for institutional white privilege, while still accepting some measure of responsibility for her personal privilege (Avery/PAR4/525-528).
How Emma’s understanding of white privilege changed. Emma’s pre- and post-project scores differed markedly on only 2 of 28 items, the fewest of any participant. She went from moderately disagreeing with the statement “I feel awful about white privilege” to slightly agreeing. This quantitative finding mirrors Emma’s comments from the third PAR group session regarding how her awareness of race privilege contributed to feelings of guilt and stuckness (Emma/PAR3/288-293). She also became more concerned that speaking up against white privilege might cause her to lose friends. This second concern about potentially losing friends if you challenged them on their privilege is also reflected in Emma’s comments during the seventh PAR group session where she felt deskilled in a social situation where an acquaintance used an oppressive speech term (Emma/PAR7/399-413). This is a common issue that social justice educators face: how to challenge attitudes among acquaintances or family members without jeopardizing the relationship.

How Kevin’s understanding of white privilege changed. Kevin’s pre- and post-project responses to items on the WPAS were markedly different for 5 of the 28 items. He went from moderately disagreeing with the statement, “I plan to work to change our unfair social structures that promote White privilege,” to expressing strong agreement. This was the most dramatic change among all five participants on any of the 28 items. Prior to the project, Kevin agreed that he took his white privilege for granted and it remained uninterrogated, while after the project, white privilege was something that he thought about daily (Kevin/2nd/10-19). More so than other participants, Kevin also articulated a sense that his newly acquired awareness of white privilege obligated him to take action (Kevin/2nd/54-64, Kevin/2nd/229-233).

Kevin also indicated a greater likelihood to take action against white privilege with people that he knew. It was clear from the post-project interview that Kevin felt as though he had developed a language and a set of skills for talking with other whites about privilege without coming across as defensive or angry (Kevin/2nd/234-242). Some initial conversations with other whites had gone well and Kevin felt ever more inclined to talk with white people that he knew about white privilege (Kevin/2nd/242-245). Before the project, Kevin responded with slight disagreement that he felt awful about white privilege and that he was ashamed that the system was stacked in his favor, while after the project he expressed slight agreement with both statements. Like Emma, Kevin expressed a moderate concern that he would lose friends if he spoke up against white privilege.
How Peyton’s understanding of white privilege changed. Peyton’s pre- and post-project responses to the WPAS differed markedly on 5 of the 28 items. Four items were grouped in the WPAS factor termed Confronting White Privilege. Peyton went from expressing slight agreement to indicating strong agreement with two forward-looking items that assessed “wanting to begin the process of eliminating white privilege” and “looking forward to creating a more racially-equitable society.” Peyton also responded with strong agreement that she “accept[s] responsibility to change white privilege” in the present. By the time of the post-project interview, Peyton had come to the realization that there was a significant gulf between the experiences of white students and Students of Color and Peyton was beginning to feel the ethical pull to do something about this inequity (Peyton/2nd/22-59). Before the project, Peyton expressed slight disagreement that she took action to dismantle white privilege, while after the project she answered with moderate agreement to that same statement. After the project, Peyton did not feel as awful about white privilege, while two other members of the group expressed markedly more agreement that they indeed felt awful. This dichotomy could be interpreted a number of different ways, and the role that guilt plays in mobilizing or immobilizing action related to white privilege and racism will be discussed in the chapter that follows.

How Zach’s understanding of white privilege changed. In comparing Zach’s pre- and post-project WPAS responses, he differed markedly on just three items. Zach was more inclined to believe he had done something about white privilege after completing the project. Prior to the project, Zach expressed moderate disagreement that in addressing white privilege he might alienate his family, whereas after the project, he expressed moderate agreement with this notion. He was less likely to agree with the statement, “I am ashamed that the system is stacked in my favor because I am white.” Again, the significance of this project to evoke shame, guilt, and stuckness and the implications of those feelings will be explored more in the next chapter.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, 21 significant moments or categories that emerged over the span of seven PAR group meeting sessions were introduced and explored. I purposely took a descriptive and chronological approach to allow the reader to see how the process unfolded over time. In the early sessions, group members developed a norm of authentic sharing and began to develop a sense of trust. Various brainstorming activities created a space where participants could offer
ideas or perspectives, receive feedback, and work out ambiguities. The participants disclosed how some of their hidden identities affected their views of white privilege. During the middle PAR sessions, the participants began to take more ownership for the group process. Collectively, we began to struggle with the guilt and feelings of powerlessness that often accompany an increase in awareness of white racial privilege. We examined white privilege with a critical lens, including conversations about how the ELPS curriculum and both in- and out-of-class experiences helped to either deconstruct or reify white racial privilege. The final PAR group sessions included an opportunity to meet with a critical/validation group of People of Color, which further awakened the participants to an awareness of the effects of white privilege. This awakening stimulated the PAR group members to identify some additional actions they could take to ameliorate white privilege locally.

Also in this chapter, the pre- and post-project results of the White Privilege Attitude Scale for each participant were compared and discussed. The WPAS results suggested that the participants made uneven gains in coming to an awareness of white privilege. Peyton did not feel as awful about white privilege after the project, whereas two other group members felt more awful. There was not one WPAS factor where all of the participants scored higher, all scored lower, or all scored the same. As one might expect, a lengthy intervention affected different group members differently. In the chapter that follows, I analyze the conclusions and discuss the implications I have drawn from this research study.
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

“So I keep thinking, if everybody goes through something like this and then they do something and then those people do something, maybe we can change some things. I don’t know, but that’s my goal.”

(Avery/2nd/719–721)

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate and deconstruct white race privilege among white students in a student affairs graduate preparation program at Iowa State University. In the introductory chapter, the following four research questions were posed:

1. How do whites in a student affairs graduate preparation program discover and come to understand the meaning of race privilege?
2. How do theorizing and taking action to dismantle white race privilege in a student affairs graduate preparation program help in understanding the construct itself?
3. How do students’ other dominant and subordinate social identities interact with white race privilege in a student affairs graduate preparation program?
4. How can we explore the construct of white race privilege through the process of white:white anti-racist consciousness-raising in a student affairs graduate preparation program?

In this concluding chapter, I will address the learning that occurred over the course of the project with respect to these four research questions. The retrospective views and opinions expressed by the participants during their WebCT reflections and post-project interviews will be offered as warrants to bolster my conclusions.

It should be pointed out that the participants did not make uniform gains in their awareness of white privilege. The curriculum we engaged affected different participants differently. After the project had concluded, Kevin used skills that we had practiced to continue conversations with People of Color from the ELPS program and experienced the gift of deep, authentic dialogue across racial difference. During the project, Emma utilized her subordinate status as a religious minority as a lens through which she could better understand her dominant white racial identity. Avery took advantage of her somewhat unique status as the partner of an African American man and mother of a biracial child to share her awareness of how privilege...
operated “in the field.” The participants shared the items from their respective white privilege knapsacks with one another, each taking what they could use.

As I proceed through the research questions, I will situate what we learned in this project in the context of what other scholars have found. The procedures that were used to assure the qualitative goodness of this report, with respect to both qualitative research, generally, and action research, specifically, will be identified. I discuss the difference between local knowledge and propositional knowledge. The chapter concludes with a summary of the implications, limitations, and future avenues for research that flow from this study.

**Main Findings Related to the First Research Question**

The first research question asked, “How do whites in a student affairs graduate preparation program discover and come to understand the meaning of race privilege?” The participants in this project didn’t *discover* white privilege any more than Christopher Columbus discovered America—and to be clear, there are at least nine legitimate claims to having “discovered” the Americas that pre-date 1492 (Loewen, 1995). White privilege existed and was well documented, especially by African Americans (DuBois, 1920), long before any of us were born. Nevertheless, participants—regardless of how well-versed they were with regard to white privilege at the study’s outset—became significantly *more aware* of white privilege over the course of the project. They expressed an openness to explore the issue of white privilege awareness and to consider potential actions they could adopt for personal and organizational change. All of the participants, including the principal investigator, came to understand and appreciate the significance of white privilege in new ways as a result of our work together. The very process of discovering or uncovering white privilege in and of itself galvanized us to take action.

The participants in this research study passed through three sequential steps as they encountered and deconstructed white privilege. First, they implicitly and explicitly fashioned norms that facilitated an authentic, democratic dialogue. Second, they engaged an emancipatory praxis to enable themselves to better understand the mechanisms of white privilege and white supremacy. Third, they developed both a confidence and a competence to engage in difficult dialogues. These three steps were critically important to the overall success of the project and each will be accounted for in greater detail in the paragraphs that follow.
Participants discovered and came to understand white privilege through their collective commitment to an authentic, democratic dialogue. In the opening sections of Chapter Five, I discussed some of the activities and significant moments that occurred for our group during the first PAR group sessions that contributed to an atmosphere of trust and authenticity. Without needing to be explicitly invited, participants opened the project by introducing themselves making moderately risky disclosures (Avery/PAR1/107-109, Emma/PAR1/200-205, Zach/PAR1/293-299). Using an experiential icebreaker activity as a discussion starter, participants began to share accounts of times they succumbed to racial stereotypes (Kevin/PAR1/616-622, Avery/PAR1/623-635).

Next, we talked about our personal interpretations of some foundations for social justice learning communities, that are part of the curriculum for the Social Justice Training Institute and we engaged in a nominative brainstorm to identify and define our own group norms (see Appendix H).

Diversity educators often facilitate consensus conversational guidelines intended to create so-called “safe spaces” in the belief that this fosters equitable dialogues (Arao & Lonardo, 2006). Wise (2004), however, believes that “safe spaces” almost always serve the purpose of making members of the dominant group feel safe. “Whites in these dialogue groups…are often nervous, afraid of saying the wrong thing, and convinced that people of color will yell at them for a slip of the tongue” (Wise, 2004). Instead, in this project, the democratizing principles of PAR and the all-white composition of the group facilitated an environment where participants could discard their masks and engage with one another from the heart. Kevin bears witness to the authenticity of the PAR group conversations, which enabled the group’s discourse to transgress the ordinary:

I just think things were more real…it was more of a genuine experience. It was more of people being able to share gut reactions, rather than sort of screening what they said before they said it…It felt like you could be more genuine [italics added] or maybe go with your gut reaction more to certain things based on the discussion, rather than trying to say the right thing or follow the script exactly [italics added], or do the right thing. We could go outside the boundaries, I guess, a little bit. (Kevin/2nd/83–90)

Kevin is suggesting that there are prescribed norms in some traditional classroom settings that discourage authenticity and that the democratic structure of the PAR group created space for truth-telling and meaning-making. Even so, in the post-project interview, Kevin admitted that he didn’t “keep it real” all the time:
I don’t think I completely discarded my mask…that would take a long time for me to do, I mean that’s just my personality, number one. But I definitely discarded more of it than I ever have regarding an issue. But, sure there were times when I held back. I didn’t feel like I was doing that often or a lot. Sometimes it was just maybe the mood I was in at the moment, I just didn’t feel like sharing. But for the most part, I was pretty mask-off. But not completely. (Kevin/2nd/206–212)

That Kevin would own up to this with me is a mark of the authenticity that existed within the group and between the group members and me. For Peyton, the disinhibition that was a hallmark of the PAR group process carried over into life after the project: she was less guarded about initiating conversations across racial lines (Peyton/2nd/377–381).

To be sure, the PAR group differed from a typical course in several significant ways: it was smaller, with six to seven total members; all the PAR group members identified racially as white; and although I was the nominal facilitator, the group did not have an acknowledged expert in the paradigm of a typical faculty member. These three factors combined to create a space where participants felt they could be more authentic than they tended to be in traditional classroom settings. The innate structure and the intentional steps we took to establish an authentic dialogue enabled the PAR group to more easily discover and come to understand the meaning of white racial privilege.

Over the course of the project, participants engaged an emancipatory praxis that enabled them to better understand the meaning of white privilege and the mechanisms of white supremacy. Each of the participants entered the project with a different level of awareness of white racial privilege. Both Zach and Peyton had grown up in rural, racially homogenous settings and had received little formal diversity training before embarking on this project. Kevin had received somewhat more sensitization to diversity issues as a result of his graduate degree in counselor education, but he was also working to overcome his socialization in a conservative family environment. Emma and Avery, in my judgment, had the highest levels of white privilege awareness at the project’s outset. Emma grew up in the most racially heterogeneous environment of any of the participants and had a well-developed sensitivity to social justice issues because of her status as a religious minority. Avery had more of a practical sense of white privilege, owing to her lived experience as the intimate partner of an African American man. By adopting an emancipatory praxis predicated on an authentic, democratic dialogue we all came to a fuller understanding of white racial privilege.
Karin Case (2004) defined emancipatory praxis and the steps required for whites to achieve it:

Emancipatory praxis—the process of action, critical reflection, and learning—makes it possible for us to loosen the clutches of white supremacy and to become part of a movement for social transformation…The steps of emancipatory praxis enable us to understand the mechanisms of white supremacy, perceive the injuries it inflicts, scrutinize our own participation, and make strategic choices to disrupt it. These steps need to include:

• Breaking our silence on issues of race and racism
• Recovering memory
• Confessing the limits of our understanding
• Opening ourselves to being changed
• Seeking accurate information about the mechanisms and harms of white supremacy
• Listening respectfully and humbly to the voices of those who are harmed by white supremacy, receiving and integrating new information on both cognitive and emotional levels
• Analyzing and confessing our own participation in the system of white supremacy
• And taking action against white supremacy.

Beyond these initial tasks, of course, there are many additional steps needed for establishing relationships of genuine mutuality with peoples of colors and building strategic coalitions to disrupt white supremacy in all of its manifestations. (pp. 72-73)

With the exception of “recovering memory,” our PAR group process included each of these steps. Certainly, our 30 hours together afforded us ample opportunity to break our silence on issues of race and racism. There were numerous times when individual group members acknowledged the limits of their understanding (Kevin/PAR2/9-14, Avery/PAR3/903-905, Jeff/PAR4/530-533). The lack of resistance demonstrated by the group suggested that they had opened themselves to being changed and receiving new information. Our discussion of the costs of white privilege to People of Color and whites (see Appendix L) is evidence that we were able to discern, in a limited way, the injuries that white supremacy inflicts and to acknowledge our own participation in the system. Our dialogue with our “critical friends” (McNiff, 2002, p. 22) allowed us a space to listen humbly to People of Color and receive new information on both cognitive and emotional levels. We ended the PAR group by developing short- and medium-
range action plans for ameliorating white privilege, although, admittedly, these were only partially realized.

The white racial hegemony that holds sway on predominantly white campuses permits most white students to avoid any serious exploration of their own race (R. D. Reason & Evans, 2007). The emancipatory praxis we engaged enabled us to create an environment within the context of the PAR group where our white privilege became salient. Reason and Evans (2007) described racially cognizant whiteness in these terms:

The process [of becoming racially cognizant] involves an active exploration of what it means to be White in American society and likely results in a transition from White as “the color of my skin” to an active reconstructing of a racialized sense of self. A racially cognizant sense of Whiteness encompasses an understanding of guilt, power, and privilege yet avoids the paralysis and victim perspectives that some Whites assume. It involves the translation of this understanding of Whiteness into positive action....A racially cognizant sense of self seems to be a prerequisite to Whites engaging in the fight for racial justice. (p. 71)

Again, the PAR group adequately addressed these basic elements. An emancipatory praxis that deconstructs white privilege and decenters white supremacy has the potential to provoke action on the part of student participants (Pence & Fields, 1999).

As the participants reflected back on their experience, they were able to articulate ways in which the project enabled them to “lift the veil of whiteness” (Hitchcock, 2002) that obscured their vision. In the following exchange, Zach provided evidence of his new insights when it came to awareness of white privilege:

Zach: It’s just helped me see the world in a way I didn’t see it or I didn’t want to see it before, so it kind of helped me realize that that other side is there and realize that it’s a problem that needs to be addressed.

Jeff: OK. For me, that was an interesting choice of words that you just used, the way that you…you didn’t see the world that way before or you didn’t want [italics added] to see the world that way before?

Zach: Yeah, I think didn’t want [italics added] to would be the way to approach it….Because, I mean, a lot of the privileges that we went over and things like that are things that are very visible if you’re open to them, but like I was seeing with some of my students this semester, if you don’t want to be open to them because of…your guilt, or because of whatever, then you can stay ignorant to them. (Zach/2nd/114–124)
As a result of his participation, Zach was better equipped to engage racism and white supremacy with his eyes wide open.

All of the participants, to some greater or lesser degree, professed that their awareness of white privilege grew over the course of the project, although paradoxically, two participants (Peyton/2nd/5–7, Zach/2nd/5–8) both stated that their views about white privilege did not change. In the post-project interview, Peyton reiterated a stance from the pre-project interview that she could not identify a concrete example of a way she had benefited from white privilege (Peyton/2nd/338–342). Similarly, Zach, in his second interview, acknowledged that while society defined him by his whiteness, he did not see whiteness as central to his self-definition (Zach/2nd/141–153). Other researchers have documented whites being reluctant to identify specifically the ways they’ve benefited from their whiteness, perhaps out of a desire to continue to buy into the idea of a meritocracy (Willey, 2002). Perhaps it is a matter of personal pride for these participants who want to believe that they entered the project with highly progressive views about racism and white privilege, and therefore their views and standpoint did not have room to mature as a result of their participation. Peyton and Zach evidenced the ultimate white privilege—the ability to acknowledge privilege exists and whites benefit from it and the inability to name specific ways they, as individuals, have benefited (Alcoff, 2000).

Participation in the project enabled participants to feel more competent and confident about engaging in difficult dialogues. The scholars that conceptualized the White Racial Consciousness model postulated that recent, intense life events could instigate movement from one type to another (Rowe, Bennett, & Atkinson, 1994). As this project progressed, participants began to exhibit characteristics consistent with the Integrative type: they took stronger moral stances on white privilege, they had greater comfort with their whiteness, and portrayed a more nuanced understanding of the sociopolitical factors that impinge on race and racism. Kevin, who entered the project with a strong inclination to self-censor when interacting with people different from him by race (Kevin/1st/276–304), grew more confident that he had the knowledge, skills, and awareness to successfully facilitate a conversation about white privilege. He experienced less anxiety or trepidation entering into difficult dialogues (Kevin/2nd/21–27).

Avery described her growth paradoxically. On one hand, she felt more empowered. She had developed a framework and language for thinking and talking about white privilege and a critical awareness that gave her more insight into everyday occurrences.
I have thought about this quite a bit since the ending of our formal meetings. I definitely feel much more empowered than I felt before. I feel like I have some tools for conversation and more importantly, I am finding myself dissecting many situations that I have passed by in my life thus far and looking at the deeper reason for things. (Avery/R4/1–4)

However, she also felt overwhelmed and saddened by the current state of race relations (Avery/R4/5–20). How Avery and other participants wrestled with the tension between feeling overwhelmed and taking action will be addressed in the next section.

In another example of how participation in the project enabled group members to feel more confident about their white privilege awareness, there developed a norm of authentic interaction with one another which in turn facilitated a more open, less guarded discussion. Peyton found herself less reticent about entering into conversations focused on racism and privilege (Peyton/2nd/227–231). Coming as she did from a background with limited exposure to People of Color and issues of race, Peyton was self-reflective enough to realize that she had a significant gap between what she needed to know and what she already knew with regard to social justice issues (Peyton/PAR5/424–428). Rather than accepting her own socialization as a white woman as “normal,” Peyton suspended judgment until she could gather more information. Participation in the study helped Peyton develop a better grasp of the language and more confidence to be able to talk about issues of race and white privilege (Peyton/2nd/227-231, Peyton/2nd/377-381).

The level of challenge and support within the room provided an environment where more multiculturally complex views could emerge (P. King & Shuford, 1996; Sanford, 1967). As a result, the participants in this project felt more confident about taking what they had learned out into the world. This corresponds with Kincheloe’s assertion that critical pedagogy calls for a cultural reassessment, where:

White people get over their discomfort discussing how they appear to non-Whites, they learn to listen to African American, Latino/a, and indigenous people’s perception of them as people not to be trusted, and they begin to rethink their lives and worldviews accordingly. (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 184)

Emma also found herself having conversations she might not have had, were it not for having participated in the project. This was evidenced when I asked Emma about any connections she may have made with other whites who identified as anti-racists. Emma felt a
particular kinship toward the other students who had participated in the group (Emma/2\textsuperscript{nd}/340–344). For Emma, the PAR group was the impetus for continued learning and reflection on her own and with other alumni of the group process.

For this group of whites in a student affairs graduate preparation program, the process of discovering and coming to understand the meaning of race privilege started with a collective commitment to an authentic democratic dialogue. The process continued as the group engaged an emancipatory praxis and was evidenced by the increased competence and confidence of group members to initiate and sustain difficult dialogues. That, however, was just the prelude. The next section will detail how the PAR group considered the praxis of reflection and action as a means to deepen their understanding of white race privilege.

**Main Findings Related to the Second Research Question**

The second research question asked how theorizing and taking action to dismantle white race privilege in a student affairs graduate preparation program helped in understanding the construct itself. In retrospect, I believe the second research question is not very well-worded because it is so similar to the first research question. My intent with the second research question had been to assess the utility of using PAR to deconstruct privilege. I am particularly intrigued by the recursivity dimension of PAR—that you can investigate white privilege in order to change it and simultaneously seek to change white privilege as one means of investigating it. It is difficult, however, to disentangle the awareness that occurred with our initial discovery of race privilege—those findings related to the first research question—from the understanding that occurred when we attempted to theorize and take action to dismantle race privilege, as per the second research question.

Nevertheless, as we moved deeper into the PAR group process, our conversation did become more nuanced and sophisticated. As we sought to engage privilege and take action to dismantle it, we grappled with the privileging effects of privilege and dialogued about how we could manage our white privilege with our humanity intact. As participants developed a deeper level of critical consciousness, they became more inclined toward action and concurrently became more aware of their “stuckness.” Finally, one participant found that his greater sensitivity to issues of privilege and racism led to deeper relationships with colleagues who were People of Color.
In the course of theorizing privilege, we came to terms with the privileging effects of the construct that prevent many whites from apprehending, comprehending, or taking action to dismantle it. The phrase “privileging effects of privilege” refers to the idea that people who are privileged rarely have to think about their dominant status. Because privilege is the social norm and whites can ignore oppression, privilege is rarely seen by those who have it (Wildman, 1996). Johnson (2001) referred to this effect as “epistemic privilege” or “the luxury of obliviousness” (p. 24). White privilege is “unmarked and unremarked upon” (Eichstedt, 2001, p. 454) in the lives and activities of most white people.

This was the first extended discussion of white racial privilege that any of the participants had engaged in, so their views on the topic were not well-formed. In our initial interview, Avery exhibited a tentative understanding of the nature of race privilege.

I’ve often wondered, what does that word privilege mean? Well, privilege always comes at the expense of someone else. If you have a privilege, someone else has to not have it, or else it wouldn’t be a privilege. (Avery/1st/345–348)

As the project progressed, group members became increasingly aware of the moral dilemmas that emerged once they acknowledged their privileged status. During the first PAR group session, we had dissected the meaning of the phrase, “Existing oppression is not our fault, but we must accept responsibility,” which is a stumbling block that many whites encounter and ultimately fail to clear (Griffin, 1997b). During the discussion, Avery initially had difficulty with the notion of accepting responsibility for acts she hadn’t committed. I shared with the group my understanding of the implications of taking ownership of existing structures of domination and subordination (Jeff/PAR1/742–751). Avery came back for the second PAR group session having reflected on the matter further:

I thought a lot about that this week and reflected on it and I think what it comes down to for me is, part of accepting white privilege is having to know that I reject parts of it, and that’s a very uncomfortable spot to be in. To feel like I want to reject something that I did not ask for. And I’m not sure how to deal with that sometimes. How do I reject everything that this institution stands for, when I’m also benefiting from it? (Avery/PAR2/854–857)

Even though Avery hadn’t asked for unearned advantages, she was the recipient of them and wanted to learn how to manage those complexities.
At one point in the PAR group process, we had a discussion about the idea that People of Color don’t have the luxury of not having to deal with racism when it didn’t suit them, as they get constant, uninvited reminders of their subordinated status. We talked about this being an important learning edge (Griffin, 1997a) for whites, especially when “the going gets tough.” Emma recalled this discussion and used this strategy to manage her emotions regarding difficult dialogues (Emma/2nd/14–28). Learning to deal with the impulse to just walk away from anti-racism work when it gets difficult or anxiety-provoking is an important step in addressing the privileging effects of privilege.

Another aspect of coming to terms with the privileging effects of privilege is the consideration of how to reenter the mainstream with a dramatically different level of awareness about the social problem of racism. Avery had begun to reflect on reentry following the sixth PAR session:

There is no doubt that this experience changed my life. I can honestly say that I will think about this project every day for the rest of my life. It is really hard to walk out of something this powerful. I find myself looking at everything differently. What is interesting to me is that the folks in our group were there because they wanted to be and had a sense of their privilege. How will I be with the climate that is more mainstream. One comment I could make is that although I have reflected a lot about the privileged lifestyle that I have led, but the more I learn the less of a privilege it really is. (Avery/R5/1–8)

Because of white hegemony, whites get “stripped of self-knowledge” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 163). Increasing our collective awareness of our own white privilege is the kind of emancipatory praxis that counters the privileging effects of privilege (Kincheloe, 1999).

*The tension between our inclination toward action and our stuckness helped to further illuminate the praxis of theorizing and acting to dismantle white privilege.* In addition to the discursive consideration of white racial privilege, participants also turned toward action in an attempt to complete the cycle of action research. Kevin had strong feelings about how to balance the tension of wanting to live with integrity as a white man and having a greater awareness of his unearned privilege:

I was saying, “OK this is all really interesting and I’m glad this has come into my conscious awareness,” but along with that the anxiety of “OK, now what the hell do I do with this? Where do I go with this?” I’m kind of like, “[Expletive], now I’m aware of it, so now I have more responsibility.” Talking about it was cool, and processing that, and figuring all that out. But thinking about, “Now what am I going to do with this?” is probably the toughest part. (Kevin/2nd/54–64)
The anxiety that Kevin experienced stemmed from his new awareness of privilege. This is similar to the “Now what?” question that I posed in the Prologue. Four months after the project, he was still experiencing this feeling of anxiety, which could be a sign of healthy tension looking for an appropriate outlet in the form of considered action.

Whites experience cognitive dissonance as they become aware of a social system that provides them unearned benefits at the same time that it disadvantages People of Color (Howard, 1993; Levine-Rasky, 2000). For some whites, this cognitive dissonance may manifest itself as resistance, as when whites deny the existence of inequality or blame individual People of Color for their failings rather than acknowledging the impact of persistent, systemic racism. Resistance is a form of defensiveness that helps some whites avoid feelings of guilt (Tatum, 1994). For other whites, race-related guilt is a common emotion they experience (Helms, 1990b) when they first develop a critical awareness of white racial privilege. Race-related guilt can be defined as an emotion that surfaces when whites become aware of the moral injustice of unearned privilege. Whites may experience feelings of personal guilt if they can apprehend something that they, as individuals, have done wrong: observing racism and saying nothing or allowing stereotypes to taint their assessment of a candidate for employment or promotion.

Social psychologists have also identified a group-level collective guilt that parallels personal guilt and comes about when whites acknowledge white privilege and white responsibility for the unfair treatment of others (Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005). Antecedents of collective white guilt include: a greater belief in the existence of white privilege, greater estimates for the prevalence of discrimination, and lower levels of prejudice against African Americans (Swim & Miller, 1999).

When whites experience race-related guilt personally or collectively, they tend to want to do something about it. Personal guilt is associated with a desire to make reparations or apologize (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003). One consequence of collective white guilt is greater support for compensatory affirmative action programs (Swim & Miller, 1999). It is important to differentiate between feelings of guilt—which can be characterized as “I have done something bad,” versus shame—which is the belief that “I am bad” (Swim & Miller, 1999). Individuals recognize that they have a locus of control over feelings of guilt but accede to an external locus of control with regard to feelings of shame.
Overwhelming race-related guilt coupled with no clear sense of what can be done to remedy racial inequities may result in a feeling of stuckness. Research has also demonstrated that when whites who experience collective guilt perceive a low sense of efficacy to bring about social change, their action-taking may be undermined (Wohl, Branscombe, & Klar, 2006). It seems, then, that there exists a sweet spot where anti-racist action plans that are realistic and achievable can help assuage feelings of white guilt. Arminio (1995, 2001) conducted phenomenological interviews with white graduate students in a counseling and student affairs preparation program and observed: “All of the participants noted that the pain of race-related guilt stimulated learning, growth, and change, not only because it would alleviate the pain but also because it was the right and just thing to do” (Arminio, 2001, p. 246).

An understanding of the interplay between guilt, stuckness, and action-taking helps explain the seemingly contradictory outcomes reflected in the pre-project and post-project comparisons of responses to the White Privilege Attitudes Scale (WPAS, Pinterits, 2004). Emma and Kevin expressed increased agreement that they felt awful about white privilege, but Peyton expressed decreased agreement with the same statement. Avery and Zach were less ashamed that the system is stacked in their favor because they are white, while Kevin was more ashamed. Despite feeling awful or ashamed, four of the five participants believed they had “done something” about privilege during the project or were planning to work for change in the future.

Taking action to ameliorate white privilege can also help assuage white guilt. Making public your struggles and small victories with regard to increasing white privilege awareness is one path to minimizing feelings of shame as others come to see you as “one of the good ones.”

In the passage that follows, Peyton accurately captures my aspirations for this study—to develop an emancipatory praxis that coupled reflection and action:

It seemed like the goal of this research project was to get us not only to open up and talk about it, but to develop ideas about how to work through this and how to deal with it, rather than just learning about it. (Peyton/2nd/146–148)

Emma, too, was right on the cusp of moving from awareness to action as she reflected on what the PAR group had produced following the sixth session:

I think that we have produced ideas and a way of thinking necessary to combat racial privilege. I think that we have produced a safe space for discussion regarding issues of
race in the U.S. For me, it would be nice to next discuss what we as a group will do with the ideas we have produced. I think that will benefit the group as well. (Emma/R5/1–4)

We did, in fact, work on identifying action plans during the subsequent PAR group session.

Even though Avery worked in a setting that was majority white, participation in the project helped sharpen her awareness of the different perspectives that so-called “minorities” bring to everyday events.

I realized during this project, everything has to do with race. Especially if you’re in a [subordinate] position, because you become very sensitive to your race. In issues like that in my workplace, I will call people out much more than I would have…and when I say call out, I just mean bring attention to it or say, “This is a possibility,” much more readily than I would have a year ago. (Avery/2nd/115–119)

Avery had the knowledge, awareness, and skills as a result of her participation in the project to be able to challenge coworkers to consider the role white privilege played in shaping their “realities.” In the three preceding examples, Peyton, Emma, and Avery demonstrated a willingness and a readiness to move from inaction or stuckness toward taking concrete steps to decenter white racial privilege.

As Kevin gained greater awareness of his white privilege, his relationships with People of Color deepened. In the post-project interviews, one member had done more than any other to reach out to fellow students who were People of Color. Kevin was able to continue the conversations we began when we met with our “critical friends” (McNiff, 2002, p. 22). The stepwise approach of being in an extended white caucus group before entering into dialogue with People of Color facilitated a space where Kevin could work through some of his anxieties and then approach People of Color more authentically.

After the project, Kevin was more confident about what he could contribute to a conversation about racism with a Person of Color. He started off slowly and had not talked with as many People of Color as he had wanted to (Kevin/2nd/118–125). However, Kevin’s participation had an unintended consequence of signaling to People of Color—at least the four students from the program who were part of our critical reference group—that he was a “safe” person with whom to dialogue. The more he talked with People of Color, the more comfortable he became. Kevin was getting more out of the conversations, whereas before, important concepts would go over his head (Kevin/2nd/275–279).
There was one student in particular that Kevin was able to bond with after having participated in the project.

She’s actually one of the people who offered me, you know, like, “You can ask me about my experience. I mean, don’t be afraid to ask me if you want to.” I think because she knows that I was doing this project, it increased her level of trust with me, that I’m not just about talking the talk, but I really am interested in it and I really am interested in her and her experience. I think she knows that I am genuine about that. (Kevin/2nd/302–311)

I would infer from this comment that Kevin’s dialogue counterpart also enjoyed a deeper relationship with a well-intentioned white person. She appreciated his sincere effort to “do the work.”

By exploring the privileging effects of privilege, pondering the factors that contributed to a sense of stuckness or motivated a course of anti-racist action, and initiating and deepening relationships with People of Color, participants in this project practiced both theory-making and action-taking to dismantle white privilege.

**Main Findings Related to the Third Research Question**

The third research question was aimed at understanding the mechanisms through which participants engaged their other dominant and subordinate social identities in interaction with their whiteness. Croteau, Talbot, Lance, and Evans (2002) have noted that there exists within individuals an interplay between their subordinated identities and their dominant identities. This interplay can either facilitate or impede individual and group progress towards coming to white privilege awareness. As my coding of the interview and PAR group process transcripts progressed, I realized that there was scant evidence related to this research question. Reflections of the participants after the project concluded demonstrated that they more readily acknowledged the dominance of whiteness. In other words, heightened awareness of their white racial privilege enabled participants to connect the dots and make meaning as they came into contact with other dominant social identities. Two participants in particular offered evidence that they had engaged other aspects of their social identities as a hook to better understand white privilege.

*As group members began to get in touch with the dominance of their whiteness, they were able to link up with and make meaning of other dominant social identities—their own and those belonging to others.* In the fourth PAR
session, I asked the group to discuss the resistance that is typically a prominent feature when people from dominant groups talk about privilege and oppression. Emma was the first to respond, and she indicated that, having witnessed resistance through the lens of her subordinate status as a religious minority and as a woman, she wanted to avoid the same reaction as she processed through her whiteness (Emma/PAR4/462–465). Previous to this project, Emma would become indignant when others exercised Christian privilege or male privilege, but her experience with her own privileged status—her whiteness—helped Emma to have more empathy with her oppressor.

In her post-project interview, Emma recognized that she was able to temper her outrage about Christian privilege exhibited by others because she accepted to a greater degree the dominance of her own whiteness.

Because I’m more aware of my own white racial privilege, I don’t think I’m so defensive about when I don’t have my religious privilege because I understand what it’s like now to go, “Oh, I didn’t even realize maybe I was doing things that were oppressing other people.” And so I don’t get angry at people as much for that. (Emma/2nd/60–64)

Having compassion and the skill of being able to relate to other people from privileged groups, as opposed to being triggered by them, will help Emma as she moves through the world.

In this interchange between Avery and me, she references a bracelet that we all put on during the final PAR group session as a symbol of our commitment to follow through with our awareness of white privilege and action plans we each created for ourselves.

Jeff: Do you think that you are questioning your own privilege more now as a result of participating in the project?

Avery: Definitely. In all honesty, there has not been a day go by that I have not really thought about at least some aspect of things we talked about in our class. I wore my bracelet until it could no longer be worn and then I replaced it with a permanent bracelet, so I have that on all the time. (Avery/2nd/16–20)

Avery asserted that she engaged her privilege on a daily basis. In Kevin’s post-project interview, I reminded him of feelings of “resentment, anger, and guilt” he encountered in himself from his minimal awareness of white privilege at the beginning of the project. In his response, he went immediately to owning his privilege and taking accountability for acting with integrity.
I think there is a responsibility that comes along with that because…a responsibility to be number one aware of it, but a responsibility to make other people aware of it, a responsibility to do something about it, to make things even in the world. To understand how white privilege plays into racism or sexism and all of those things…So I don’t feel guilty or angry as much anymore and I don’t feel resentment anymore. And that really has decreased and…I mean it’s partly because of being involved in the project, or not partly, probably a lot of it had to do with being in the project. (Kevin/2nd/229–237)

Kevin moved beyond mere awareness to a sense that he needed to share this new information with others and that he was motivated to take anti-racist action to “make things even in the world.”

*Emma tapped her subordinated status as a religious minority to better understand racism and white privilege.* During the second PAR group session, we conducted an activity where we discussed the definitions of various words including “race” and “ethnicity.” This was a sticking point for Emma, because people of her faith have been racialized throughout history as a means of Othering. Even though Emma appears phenotypically to be indisputably white, she still struggled to disentangle how race might be defined differently than ethnicity. Even so, Emma was able to see race as a construct (Emma/PAR2/303–305).

In the third PAR group meeting, Emma articulated a more nuanced understanding of how her subordinate religious culture–ethnicity interfaced with her dominant white racial identity.

I think that [people from my religious faith] in America have become very much assimilated…whether that’s positive or negative is a different discussion. And I also think that for many [of us], it’s easy not to be identified as separate from being white, which is why I came to this saying I’m white. And because of that difference, I think it is a different kind of racism. (Emma/PAR3/213–217)

In this comment, Emma demonstrated a recognition that, although people from her religious faith had been racialized throughout history, they enjoyed the benefits of assimilation into the dominant category of whiteness in the United States. Emma owned her whiteness, despite historical racial animus towards her people. She was still sensitive to that history and was concerned about history repeating itself in the future, but was prepared to take responsibility for being a member of the dominant white racial group in the present.

In the fifth PAR group meeting, we were processing our discussion with the critical reference group of People of Color. One point they emphasized was that living in Ames as a
Person of Color is not easy. Emma was able to empathize by drawing on her experience as a religious minority.

Sometimes I think that I understand, and then I worry that if I’m making some assumptions…But I don’t know what they’re feeling like, and then I get that bit of confusion where I go round and round in my head, “Am I relating or am I putting words into their mouths?” And that’s an internal struggle that I’m having with that whole, “Yeah, I understand.” But do I understand? (Emma/PAR5/203–211)

My take is that Emma did understand. She used the lens of her subordinated religious culture-ethnicity and was not far off in her assessment of how People of Color felt about life in Ames, Iowa. I think it was healthy for Emma to be skeptical about whether her experiences paralleled those of People of Color. Too often, whites assume they know what People of Color have experienced, which—taken too far—is culturally arrogant and privileged. Emma proved adept at drawing on her experiences of her subordinate identities as a woman and religious minority in order to empathize with People of Color and also to act with integrity in the dominant sphere of her whiteness.

_Avery drew significant meaning from her standpoint as a partner in an interracial relationship._ Of all the PAR group members, Avery was the one best-positioned to take our discussions out of an academic realm and apply them to her everyday experience by virtue of her relationships with her partner, an African American man, and the biracial child they were raising together. In her interviews with white women, Frankenburg (1993) noted:

Primary relationships with people of color are a context in which white women become much more conscious of the racial ordering of society. As the parents or partners of people of color, the women I talked with witnessed and experienced the effects of racism much more directly than most other white people. (p. 135)

In certain circumstances, Avery found that her whiteness diminished. In other situations, Avery found herself wishing her white privilege away but having it come back to her anyway.

I didn’t know that Avery was involved in an interracial relationship when she was first recruited for the project, and Avery was halfway through her pre-project interview (Avery/1st/209) before she mentioned it. However, Avery was only a few minutes into her introduction to the PAR group before she disclosed her relationship as a significant motivating factor for her involvement (Avery/PAR1/107–109). Avery wanted to go so far as to wear a T-shirt advertising that she was in an interracial relationship (Avery/PAR2/807–811). In the post-
project interview, Avery gave an animated description of how her partner calls her to account for her white privilege:

I know I was the one that needed to do the work and I’m the one that has changed, I guess, in some ways. We’ve had some discussions where he laughs, “Like, no [expletive], Avery. Duh!” He’s done that to me many times. Like, [with sarcasm] “Oh, you’re freaking kidding me, you mean Black people have been oppressed?” you know, or whatever. And so, in terms of our dynamic or our relationship will go in a different direction than maybe it would have in terms of understanding each other. But right now, the big change has been with me. It’s like I’m getting caught up to where he’s at on these things. (Avery/2nd/345–352)

Avery was remarking on the significant personal growth that had occurred for her in the project and her view that her growth would be helpful as her relationship with her partner and her child matured over time. As a result of her white privilege awareness, Avery had what she described as a “get-it” factor that would enable her to look at her relationship and her life choices going forward through a new set of lenses (Avery/2nd/386–393). While Avery did not use the word “transformational” to characterize her own learning, I believe it is appropriate to say that Avery’s awareness about white racial privilege was significantly transformed over the course of this project.

Perhaps it should not be surprising that participants in this project had difficulty articulating the interplay between their dominant whiteness and their other dominant and subordinate identities. Indeed, both researchers and participants in the Croteau, et al. (2002) study had difficulty with this articulation, also. As the facilitator of the group, I could have seeded this discussion by specifically asking about it or coming up with an experiential activity that engaged that praxis. This is another topic that might have received greater attention if we had allocated more than 30 hours to the PAR group process.

Although there was scant evidence from the dialogical portions of the project, some participants were able to make connections and see the interplay between whiteness and other dominant social identities—their own or those belonging to other people. In particular, Emma was able to draw on her experience as a religious minority in order to better understand racism and white privilege. While the literature does not classify ‘being the white person in a multiracial family’ as a subordinated status, Avery was able to utilize her standpoint as a person in an interracial relationship to leverage deep, meaningful learning about white racial privilege.
Main Findings Related to the Fourth Research Question

The fourth research question considered whether all white caucus groups are effective frameworks for exploring the construct of white race privilege. Beginning with the participant recruitment phase, continuing during the pre-project interviews (Peyton/1st/100-109), and again during the PAR group processes (Jeff/PAR1/846-850), I explained my rationale for choosing an all-white format for this project. In this section, I will again discuss the key concept of authenticity, which is critical to the success of any encounter group (Corey & Corey, 1997). A key predicate of moving from awareness to action is the ability to develop and sustain a support network of anti-racist allies, which participants in this project began to do. I will also address the drawbacks of using an all-white approach that were perceived by me and other participants.

The white:white approach facilitates authenticity. In her post-project interview, Emma noted that the all-white format created an environment where participants didn’t feel as compelled to censor their feelings, questions, or observations.

I thought it was actually a fairly effective way to have an open conversation. And again, not to have that self-censorship. I think once we became comfortable with each other, I think there was still a self-censorship piece at the beginning, but as time went on, I think it was sort of…we’re essentially all, or at least metaphorically all in the same boat, and so there was more openness. (Emma/2nd/140–144)

Kevin also felt like he was “in the same boat” as Emma. Instead of feeling anxiety or insecurity about how little he had to contribute to a conversation about race when benchmarked against the lived experience of People of Color, Kevin found a sense of fellowship among his fellow participants (Kevin/2nd/97–105). While this point is debatable, I believe the merits of having a dialogue with greater authenticity outweighed the disadvantages of excluding People of Color from the PAR group.

The project helped participants make connections with other whites who could be anti-racist allies. In post-project interviews, Zach and Emma both spoke about the relationships they had established with other anti-racist allies after the project ended. Zach found that the rapport created within the boundaries of the project carried over to a relationship with a co-worker (Zach/2nd/201–204). Zach developed a level of competence and confidence about privilege and anti-racism that enabled him to have a more profound relationship with his coworker, who was also white. Emma found herself having conversations she might not have had, were it not for having participated in the project (Emma/2nd/336–339). After the project ended, Emma and
Zach were able to identify small but growing networks of anti-racist allies, a step that Tatum (1997) believed was critical in the formation of allies for racial justice. White anti-racist role models can assist in unraveling complex ideas or relationships and provide help clearing hurdles that might otherwise be impediments to action (Broido, 1997; O’Brien, 2001). My own experience has been that now that I have the language to be able to identify other anti-racist whites or people with progressive ideologies, they are easier to pick out in a crowd.

This project represents a roadmap for white people to work together on anti-racist ally development. Kevin, in particular, took several steps on the road to developing as a white, anti-racist ally over the course of the project. He found he was able to engage with white peers and family members (people he would have previously discounted as close-minded) and have thoughtful conversations with them about white privilege. Instead of approaching conversations with trepidation because of the emotions it would have stirred up for him and the other party, Kevin was more comfortable in his own white skin:

I don’t feel like I’m intentionally or unintentionally talking down to people. I’m talking to people about it, and that’s a big difference of not being defensive about it. But also just saying, “I understand it, and I may say the wrong thing or I may say something the wrong way or I don’t get it totally, but I’m working on it.” And sometimes I’ll make a mistake or sometimes I won’t explain it exactly right, but at least I’m working on it, at least I’m talking about it. So, I feel a lot more comfortable in my own skin than I’ve ever been. (Kevin/2nd/248–256)

Emma became more comfortable with her identity as a white woman, more accepting of the stereotypes ascribed to whites, and more willing to let her actions speak for themselves.

I see it as being ingrained on a much deeper level. It goes a lot further than just perceptions and stereotypes. I mean I think that there’s just so much history attached to the identity that sometimes it might have nothing to do with me and I just kind of have to accept that. (Emma/2nd/257–260)

Rather than becoming defensive, Emma was prepared to accept those things she could not change about herself and try to be authentic in her anti-racist stance.

Drawbacks of the white:white approach. There were, however, drawbacks to utilizing the all-white format. Although we spent 90 minutes in a lively conversation with a group of “critical friends” (McNiff, 2002, p. 22) who were People of Color, some group members yearned to
spend even more time in inter-group dialogue. Kevin spoke to this aspect in the post-project interview:

Maybe one of the drawbacks is just you don’t get feedback from People of Color. It sort of scratched the surface on that and it would have been nice to dig deeper into that and see their reactions to the process that we were going through. It would have been good to show “Well, I wonder what People of Color think about this topic? I wonder what People of Color think about a bunch of white folks sitting around talking about white privilege. Do they appreciate it? Do they respect it? Do they think ‘Why are you even doing that?’” (Kevin/2nd/107–114)

Group members individually and collectively had a strong desire to get feedback from People of Color to get affirmation that they were on the right track. In the latter part of his post-project interview, Kevin was able to identify individual People of Color that he had follow-up conversations with about the awareness that came from our all-white caucus group meetings. So Kevin was able to get the feedback he sought after the fact. If the PAR project had extended beyond the scheduled 30 hours, it is likely that successive iterations of PAR would have involved checking in with People of Color more often as our planning, acting, observing, and reflecting continued.

There are several features of all-white caucus groups that make them a good structure for promoting awareness of white privilege. Several of the participants noted in their initial interviews that they felt as though they were “walking on eggshells” with regard to discussions about race and racism. This parallels the experience of Ruth Frankenberg and her white feminist colleagues who found “the issue was also terrifying, in the sense we constantly felt that at any second we might err again with respect to racism” (Frankenberg, 1993, pp. 3-4). The white caucus group approach gave us a space where we could ramp up our knowledge, skills, and awareness before we sought to engage with People of Color, which proved immensely helpful. Participants learned skills to be able to discern other white anti-racist allies. The project as a whole provided evidence of the efficacy of all-white PAR groups as a means of raising awareness of white privilege. In the preceding section, I also identified some of the drawbacks of an all-white approach.
Judging the Quality and Validity of This Action Research Project

Critics of the qualitative research paradigm point to the potential for “rampant subjectivity” (Lather, 2001, pp. 352-353). That is, in the absence of safeguards, it can be difficult to discern what actually happened in a qualitative narrative from that which may have sprung from the imagination, general impressions, or false consciousness of the author. Relevance without rigor is no better than rigor without relevance (Guba, 1981), so safeguards are necessary to ensure trustworthiness, regardless of paradigm. For this study, I felt it was important to demonstrate adherence to the best practices for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. I also recognize that the field of social science research has undergone both a crisis of authority and a crisis of representation such that these traditional discourses of validity are no longer adequate to a more action-oriented task (Lather, 1993). In that spirit, I have also sought out emergent criteria for judging the quality of action research.

Standards of quality for qualitative research, generally. The goodness of qualitative research is judged by the degree of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability exhibited in the written report of the project (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In this section, steps that were taken to bolster qualitative “goodness” (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002) in each of these domains will be discussed in turn.

One procedure for enhancing the quality of analysis is evidence of prolonged engagement in the research setting. Prolonged engagement enables the researcher to build rapport with the other participants and develop an informed basis for detecting misinformation. For this project, the amount of time spent in the field was negotiated by the researcher and the participants, approximating the 30-contact-hour duration that had been approved by the researcher’s Program of Study Committee during the dissertation proposal meeting. A thorough accounting of this time spent in the field can be found in Appendix D. I also spent significant time “sitting with the data” during the analysis phase. The 11-month time period dedicated to analyzing data is described in greater detail in Appendix I.

Another technique for improving the goodness of qualitative research is peer debriefing. The peer debriefer or external auditor acts as a devil’s advocate, asking critical questions about the researcher’s methods and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this project, I engaged peer reviewers with experience as qualitative researchers, anti-racist activists, and “critical friends” (McNiff, 2002, p. 22). Craig Alimo, a doctoral student at the University of
Maryland, performed a confirmability audit for this research project during the spring of 2008. He has substantial experience with anti-racist intergroup dialogue programs and performed a similar function for another qualitative research dissertation (Edwards, 2007). I gave Craig a list of 15 questions or guidelines drawn from Guba (1981) and Rowan/Huston (1997) to look for as he conducted the confirmability audit. Based on Craig’s feedback, I added additional detail, clarity, and transparency to my explanation of data analysis activities in the third chapter. By the time this study is published, it will have been through two levels of peer review, once with auditors chosen by the researcher and a second time by the researcher’s Program of Study committee. Peer review enhances both the confirmability and dependability of an account of qualitative research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified member checks as “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). The process of member checking creates an opportunity for participants to review, revise, and critique findings and interpretations. Member checks were conducted for the interviews in this project. Participants were asked to review transcripts and were invited to clarify and expand on any of their comments. The methodology of action research also advocated that participants be involved in subsequent analysis of project outcomes and tentative conclusions, which added a second iteration of member checking. Participants were given draft copies of the fourth and fifth chapters and invited to clarify and comment. Even so, Guba and Lincoln (1981) noted that, as a result of hegemonic socialization, we all are constrained by meanings we have taken for granted, so the degree to which member checks can be used to ascertain validity may be limited.

As one concrete example of how the member-checking process proceeded, Kevin and I corresponded after he had a chance to read a draft of the fifth chapter. In one draft, I had critiqued Kevin’s definition of racism as “tentative and not well-formed” and further opined that there was no logical reason for Kevin to define racism in those terms. Through the member check process, Kevin was able to help me understand more about his cultural background and patterns of socialization, particularly the schooling which informed his meaning-making about systems of oppression. After this project, Kevin enrolled in a critical race theory course, which was a new offering in ELPS, and emerged from that experience with new tools for making meaning. One measure of the goodness of critical qualitative studies is the degree to which researchers and participants are able to collaborate in unearthing the historical artifacts that
inform our current views (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002). The member checking process created a structure for Kevin and me to engage a critical praxis as I developed and refined the participant portrayals. The heterogeneity that emerged from the member checking process is a form of paralogic validity (Lather, 1993) that ruptures the colonizing gaze of the researcher.

The term triangulation refers to the use of multiple data collection techniques in order to address the dilemma caused by competing explanations for the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002). In this study, transcribed data from the group process and individual interviews were checked for consistency against data from reflective participant self-reports as well as field notes written by the researcher, a technique called triangulation of sources (Patton, 2002). I also utilized the White Privilege Attitude Scale (WPAS) as a questionnaire. A comparison of the results before and after the PAR group project shed some additional light on how participant’s thinking evolved as the project progressed. This technique is known as methods triangulation (Patton, 2002).

Thick description (Denzin, 2001; Geertz, 1973) is a term of art in qualitative research that refers to writing in a rich and detailed manner that conveys the reader into the context of the study, with all of its nuances and complexities. In this research report, I attempted to use thick description to introduce the participants in the fourth chapter and then to chronicle the PAR group process in the fifth chapter. I also chose the chronological approach to reporting data as a means of telling the story of this project and the participants with both depth and particularity (Patton, 2002). Taken together, a chronological account that utilized thick description will help the reader to determine the transferability of this research report to their own context.

Another index of qualitative goodness is the dependability of the report, a concept that parallels reliability in the quantitative domain. Those who read qualitative research reports need some assurance that the raw data has been codified and categorized in ways both precise and robust. The audit trail should provide evidence that methods and analysis intertwine in substantial ways. I previously addressed the philosophical and practical approaches that were used with regard to the analysis of data for this project in the third chapter. Further, as a means of indexing the location of direct quotes by the participants in the interview and group process transcripts and WebCT reflections, I created a system so readers can be assured that claims are warranted. That system is described in detail in Appendix P.
Standards of quality specific to action research. Recognizing that the validity criteria that have been proposed for action research projects are fluid and tentative (Herr & Anderson, 2005), it is still worthwhile to examine what the current project did and did not accomplish with respect to these emergent indicators. **Outcome validity** makes an evaluation based on the quality of the action that results from the project and the quality of data upon which that action was based. In this regard, the current project fell short of expectations. Some might say that even having a group of white graduate students meet to talk about white privilege in their own lives is “action enough,” but I feel as though I/we did not go far enough. While we generated useful data about potential actions we might undertake in concert with a group of “critical friends” (McNiff, 2002, p. 22), we ran out of time within the 30-hour framework of the project to complete an action and observe and reflect on its consequences. As the facilitator, I take primary responsibility for this shortcoming. I relocated away from the site of the project three days after the last group meeting and other group members soon became involved with the start of a new academic semester. My presence on-site as a consultant and source of technical assistance might have improved the likelihood of a successful action-oriented intervention.

**Process validity** requires that group members assess the level of cooperation that emerged from the project. Our group certainly stands as testimony to an approach that facilitated ongoing individual and collective learning. At least in word, the participants seemed to have the capacity and desire to continue to think about and act to deconstruct white privilege, as evidenced by statements like these by Emma, Avery, and Kevin:

I do think I will always be trying to incorporate it in some way. Somewhat because of my own background. Even if it’s just in small ways, like I said, having conversations with students and trying to at least start people thinking about these sorts of things and trying to keep my own knowledge up in some way. (Emma/2nd/392–399)

Oh, I think it will be a part of my life [un]til I die. Out of necessity, but also out of an interest and a commitment to it. (Avery/2nd/701–702)

I think the big thing right now is reading some of the literature and becoming more aware of that...And going out and taking baby steps...I feel a lot more comfortable asking questions, so though I haven’t done it as much as I would like, I think I’m going to continue to feel more comfortable understanding. And I think I’m going to keep doing what I’m doing... (Kevin/2nd/374–380)
There were even periods where we exhibited reflective thinking (P. King & Kitchener, 1994) as we paused to problematize our own learning, although perhaps we could have done this more frequently throughout the project.

According to Herr and Anderson (2005), *democratic validity* “refers to the extent to which the research is done in collaboration with all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation” (p. 56). The primary stakeholders for the purpose of this project were the participants themselves, deconstructing white privilege as one step toward developing an anti-racist professional identity. It was very important, however, that we engaged in dialogue with a critical reference group of People of Color as we sought to identify an appropriate action for our action research project. For me, it was an important value to ground whatever intervention we might attempt in the actual needs of People of Color, as identified by those People of Color. We only spent 90 minutes together, which was not nearly enough time for our collaboration to be either broad or deep. Had the project continued through several more iterations of action research, we might have developed a fuller collaboration with the critical reference group of People of Color or identified additional stakeholders to bring into the conversation of how to ameliorate white privilege within our graduate program and surrounding communities—ELPS faculty members, for example.

*Catalytic validity* turns on whether or not participants embraced recursivity—in this case, the notion that they could come to know white privilege if they attempted to transform it. In this reflection submitted after the final PAR group session, Kevin speaks to the ways in which he was energized to take action as a result of his participation:

I believe we have produced a great deal in a short period of time. If nothing else we have deconstructed our own notions of racism in a safe environment where discussion was encouraged. It’s definitely a great first step and simply talking about racism with other white folks was both enlightening and in some ways comforting because it helped me realize that I am not the only one who experiences anxiety when it comes to this issue. So, we've produced a process where people can get together and talk about how they are thinking, feeling, and experiencing the issue of racism in our world today. I guess it’s a model others could use to get started in the future. We also have some ideas about future plans that might help our program more effectively address and confront white privilege and racism… I do hope our group can continue on with this in some capacity in the future, including following through with some of the plans we have come up with to address the issue of racism and white privilege in our program. I would also like to see us involve others in the process to raise awareness and start conversations. In my opinion
we all need to talk more about this and not avoid it because it’s a difficult thing to discuss. (Kevin/R5/1–25)

The reflections that participants wrote in the WebCT interface following the PAR group sessions enabled them to monitor both changes within themselves and with the dynamics of the group. The WebCT interface provided a private space where I could debrief the participants. For most of the posted reflections, I would respond back and attempt to help the participants to make meaning or place their experience in context. King and Shuford (1996) have noted that a pedagogical approach that includes journal reflections and feedback from an instructor helps promote reflective thinking.

Finally, **dialogic validity** requires that the goodness of action research projects be evaluated by peer review. When action research utilizes collaborative inquiry, as this project did to some degree, that functions as one form of peer review. Another form of peer review is allowing one’s work to be appraised by a “critical friend” (McNiff, 2002, p. 22). I asked Penny Rice, the director of the women’s center at Iowa State and also my former supervisor, to critique my portrayal of the project and participants. Penny adopts a feminist standpoint in her sphere and has done a significant amount of work as a white woman to unlearn racism. She was awarded the 2007 Outstanding Teacher, Trainer, or Mentor Award by the American College Personnel Association Commission on Social Justice Education. Penny’s feedback was generally affirmative. She thought that the portrayal of the people and process was robust and “felt like [she] was present with the PAR group” (P. Rice, personal communication, May 26, 2008).

Other, more familiar means of peer review include a Ph.D. candidate’s thesis committee or publishing results in a scholarly journal. In these respects, the dialogic validity of this project has yet to be confirmed, but at each decision point along the way, I have consulted the existing participatory action research scholarship to discern what would be an appropriate course of action. Table 8 summarizes my subjective view of what this project accomplished with respect to these five validity criteria.
Table 8. Evaluating This Project with Respect to Action Research-Specific Validity Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality/Validity Criteria</th>
<th>Evaluation of What This Project Accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome validity</td>
<td>Did not accomplish. Generated useful data, but did not accomplish actions we had identified in the service of our goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process validity</td>
<td>Accomplished. Over time, we developed a high level of cooperation between and among the group members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic validity</td>
<td>Accomplished, in part. We involved primary and secondary stakeholders, but not to the degree desired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalytic validity</td>
<td>Accomplished, in part. Participants became increasingly critical and reflective thinkers as the project progressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogic validity</td>
<td>In progress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there are few hard and fast rules for goodness in qualitative research, Lather (2001) suggested that we be as transparent and trustworthy as possible in our treatment of data and the pathways we follow in analyzing it. In the preceding paragraphs, I have sought to engender trust in the credibility and authenticity of this research report.

**Local Knowledge and Propositional Knowledge**

In some ways, participatory action research is heretical to the traditional academy which values public, *propositional knowledge*, such as the articulation of a new theory or model. Instead, PAR as a process facilitates *local knowledge* that is useful to the setting in which it was created. In other words, our project did not result in the creation of some Grand Universal Theory of White Privilege, but it did dramatically impact how the six of us understood our whiteness and the impact of our privilege on our practice. In that regard, this project informs the knowledge base of the field of whiteness studies and will help future scholars to turn from theory to action in their work to deconstruct white privilege and reconstruct an emancipatory form of whiteness.

In a reflection she wrote following the sixth PAR group session, Peyton summarized the local knowledge that she feels has been produced:

> When you say produced, it makes me think of an actual product...but I also think that we have produced something that is not tangible. I think/hope that each of us has a better
understanding of white privilege but also the drive to do something with what we have learned. On a personal level, I have been struggling with learning about this but feeling like there isn’t something that I can do right away about it. It’s that jumping to the action part that we have talked about people often wanting to do. It’s just been a little frustrating to learn about this, then start seeing it more and hearing about it and not knowing how to channel what I am feeling and do something productive with it. The more I look back on our discussion, however, the more I think that just having these conversations is the key to all of this. It isn’t so much finding that solution to how to “fix” this, but finding a way to get others to come to this realization that change needs to be made. Basically I am trying to say that we have produced something that is within each of us I think. You may not see it or be able to touch it, but it is there.

(Peyton/R5/1–13, 33–35)

It would be satisfying to know that my 30-hour dissertation project produced activist and action-oriented revolutionaries, but that is not realistic. I do, however, believe that Peyton and other group members are primed for their next exposure to anti-racist ideas. As a consequence of our emancipatory praxis, they are ready to “take it to the next level.” Writing from the post-modern anthropological perspective, Marcus and Fischer (1986) noted that, “In periods when fields are without secure foundations, practice becomes the engine of innovation” (p. 166). I believe this to be true for the shifting, interdisciplinary field of whiteness studies, as well, and this project represents one innovative approach to white privilege awareness.

Another category of local knowledge that accumulated during the project involved participant’s opinions of strengths and limitations of the ELPS program. In traditional classrooms, students may guard politically incorrect opinions for fear it could affect their course evaluation or professional reputation (Spanierman & Poteat, 2005). The students in this project identified a cultural norm in the ELPS program to speak diplomatically and avoid burning bridges with their peers. While this may be sound practical advice in a profession where reputation matters, for the students in this project it had the unintended consequence of quelling dissenting viewpoints and preventing students from freely unpacking their own biases and correcting distorted understandings. One policy or practice recommendation that flows from this dissertation project is for the ELPS department to consider conducting an assessment of the taken-for-granted assumptions held by students with respect to cultural norms or expectations for classroom dialogue that may facilitate or hinder deep learning about privilege.
Implications for White Privilege Awareness and Anti-Racism Training

This project has pedagogical implications for efforts to teach all-white groups about white racial privilege. The results obtained in this project also suggest that PAR can be used to help other people with privileged social identities learn to exercise their power more equitably. In this section, I also discuss the implications the project had for me as a white male.

Implications for the methodology, content, and process of white:white anti-racist awareness trainings. One implication of PAR with respect to white privilege awareness and anti-racism is that it results in practical, local knowledge. PAR is not an “arid methodology” (Hacker, 1995). If allowed to proceed without the arbitrary temporal boundaries imposed by a Ph.D. candidate, PAR in the service of white privilege awareness and anti-racism has the potential to yield targeted actions to contest white racial hegemony in the context of a student affairs graduate preparation program.

A second implication that readers should take note of is that different whites respond differently when they come to an awareness of white privilege. Some feel guilty and remorseful, some feel angry, some become mired in inaction, still others are motivated to want to “fix-it.” There is not a one-size-fits-all solution that will bring all whites to an awareness of white privilege and an acknowledgment of white supremacy. However, as a result of this project, I have come to believe that the model of a democratically organized space where whites can be co-learners in deconstructing their own privilege holds great promise.

A third implication is that, to be successful and sustainable in the long run, any program to deconstruct white privilege should provide both cognitive and emotional support (R. D. Reason, Scales, & Roosa Millar, 2005). Roybal Rose (1996) noted that if anti-racist education only tapped white participant’s cognitive domain, they tended toward politically correct rigidity and self-consciousness. She believed that the abandonment of old paradigms and the process of coming to an awareness of oppression involved significant grieving and that the affective domain should be embraced instead of avoided. Kincheloe (1999) also concurred, stating “A key feature of a whiteness pedagogy, therefore, involves developing both theoretical and emotional support systems to help courageous white people through this complex transition” (p. 186). This project was very cerebral—we did a lot of talking and thinking. There were a few flashes of emotional intensity, but not as many as I had anticipated.
PAR was an effective methodology for deconstructing white privilege. In hindsight, I believe that participatory action research was a good choice of methodology for this project. It had a democratizing effect on our conversation, which left participants like Peyton feeling empowered.

I definitely felt that each of us had a chance to really contribute to it and decide where we were going to go as we went through this, and that is much different than any other time... This was actually our input, what do we think would work, what do we think would be effective. And it really is bouncing ideas off of each other and deciding where we were going to let this study take us. I felt we definitely had that, and [it] was very effective. (Peyton/2nd/115–121)

As hooks (1994) has noted, students who are accustomed to traditional modes of teaching and learning do not adapt readily to a more participatory model. There was less certainty about where we were headed, and it took us longer to get there, as Avery attests in this passage:

I think it was one of the more challenging things about the process, but I think it was challenging in a good way. Because I know there were several times where there were these pauses where we looked to you, like “Are we right? Is that right? Is this the correct answer?” And I think that’s just socialization, we’ve all been educated that way for so long, for us to feel comfortable in our own feelings we had to be validated. What I liked about the process that we did, because we didn’t get validation, it made our answers more honest, but it also made our quest for the knowledge more honest. We had to make sense of it ourselves and then bounce it off of other peers in the group rather than “I’m the hierarchy and I tell you what to do and that’s the end of it.” And especially with something as complex as privilege and all the different factors that go into there. I think in order for us to actually move from one place to another we had to have that democracy in place. Otherwise, it would have just been let’s give the right answer so we can get to the next thing. (Avery/2nd/125–136)

White privilege is the kind of topic that provokes resistance and defensiveness among white learners (Levine-Rasky, 2000). In particular, it is noteworthy that we were able to talk honestly about white supremacy and our role in reproducing it, without participants become defensive or engaging in denial. Participatory action research is the kind of decolonizing methodology that can defuse resistance and foster a learning community that is ready to embrace social justice.

Implications for the researcher as a white male concerned about white privilege and white supremacy. As a result of my participation in this participatory action research project, I came to appreciate the significance of white privilege in new ways. The task of ending racism truly is the work of a lifetime (Kendall, 2006; Wise, 2005). I tried to role model this during the project by suggesting that even though I had been a part of numerous trainings, I was still a relative neophyte, and I
needed to continue to work on myself and my racism in order to become a more effective anti-racist practitioner. As Tim Wise suggested with respect to racism, “[People of Color] have forgotten more about [racism] since breakfast than I will likely ever know” (Wise, 2005, p. 10). Because white supremacy and white privilege are normalized and therefore invisible to most whites (Goodman, 2001; Wildman, 1996), learning about it is difficult, painstaking, life-long work.

Before, during, and after this project, I have continually been confronted with my own hypocrisy. Here I stand, a white male, instructing others to move beyond theorizing to taking action toward dismantling white privilege. I feel fraudulent in the sense that I have not done enough and am not doing enough to end racism. My own inaction speaks louder than my words. At some level, this dissertation research project serves as my request to People of Color to forgive me for my sins of commission and omission with regard to racism. In recent weeks, I have approached the pastor of my local Black church about initiating a dialogue to help me identify potential partners and projects for anti-racist action locally. It has been suggested that:

White people must “forgive themselves” of the misteaching they have learned, but they must also become responsible for behaving consistently with new attitudes…A gesture of asking for forgiveness is necessary to heal the guilt and to assist in eliminating oppression…One such gesture is committing oneself to an open dialogue. (Arminio, 2001, p. 249)

This project has helped me to renew my own commitment to dialogue about white racial privilege.

The Case of Avery’s Transformation

Frankenburg (1993) has identified the “rebound effect” (p. 110) that racism has on the white women and men who are partnered with People of Color. This project enabled Avery to hone her awareness of the effects of white privilege and develop skills to be able share that awareness with relatives and colleagues from work.

For Avery, in particular, this project had transformative implications. Avery developed a new awareness over the course of the project, an awareness of privilege that gave her added insight and sensitivity into how she could support her partner and infant son. Even as early as the second PAR group session, Avery remarked:
I feel like if I walked out of this project right now, I would [have] changed. I feel pretty impressed by that, I guess. I just feel like I would not have been able to come to a lot of [these] conclusions. (Avery/PAR2/1164–1165)

In a quote cited earlier in this chapter, Avery saw anti-racism work as something she would be committed to for the rest of her life, both from a sense of commitment and from necessity, given her interracial family. This finding parallels research by Stoddart (2002), who found that white women with partners or children who were People of Color had a deepened capacity to deconstruct their own white racial identity. Here again, Avery testifies to the impact of the project on her worldview and intra-family relationships.

I think…a whole lot of thought about it, just because it was a pretty life-changing experience for me, [for] a lot of reasons. Because I could personalize a lot of it, and really see how it was going to benefit my family and the growth that needed to take place there. (Avery/2nd/6–8)

The implications of this project for Avery were clear. She has a motivation that touches her heart and as a result, she has the passion to sustain her on the journey towards social justice. Gillespie, Ashbaugh, and DiFiore (2002) found that white students who were or had been in interracial relationships had unique perspectives on white privilege that, when shared in group settings, could help engage students who were otherwise resistant. Avery’s insights may have helped motivate other students in the group to take greater responsibility for their white privilege.

**How This Study Fills a Gap in the Literature**

The present study adds to the literature in several significant ways. First, this project provided additional evidence that white:white anti-racism training was workable and effective. We created an atmosphere within the PAR group where members could engage with one another authentically. We kept each other honest and accountable. We utilized a democratic discourse to steer clear of the roadblock of resistance. We developed a critical discourse and examined our taken-for-granted assumptions about our own white privilege, the barriers that prevented us from self-authoring more active anti-racist identities, and the environment for social justice in our own department. Anti-racism training using a white:white approach exclusively is not the answer, but it is one solution worthy of continued study and refinement.
This research project also demonstrated that PAR holds promise as a methodology for investigating “pedagogies of privilege” (P. Reason & Bradbury, 2001a). While participatory action research is widely used to address poverty, violence against women, environmental racism, and unemployment/underemployment (Gaventa, 1993; Jackson, 1993; Maguire, 1993), there is a dearth of literature applying PAR in service of the conscientization (Freire, 1993/1970) of members of dominant groups—men, heterosexuals, those with economic privilege, and whites. This research project has demonstrated that PAR is practical and effective in that regard.

Third, this project is an exemplar of a new way forward to address racism in higher education. In a university setting, the overwhelming majority of educational interventions for graduate students take a similar form: a course that meets weekly for one to three graded credits. Many graduate programs are so saturated with requirements that there is little room for electives. Institutions that receive federal funding may be discouraged or barred from offering programs restricted by race, like all-white caucus groups discussing racism. Most faculty still utilize a traditional “banking model” of education (Freire, 1993/1970; hooks, 1994). In this project, participants answered an open call for volunteers, they engaged an emancipatory praxis with informed consent, and the group met frequently and for longer durations—allowing for discussions that were more intense and focused. We created an incentive for continued involvement without the potential coercion of grading student’s participation. We interacted with each other authentically and democratically, which may not always happen when students “perform” for their peers or instructor in traditional classroom settings. Offices, departments, colleges, and universities might consider the utility of different models for sponsoring and facilitating emancipatory educational interventions.

Limitations

The project was not without its limitations. The 30-hour time frame represented an arbitrary, albeit necessary, boundary for the group. While this duration was longer than other anti-racist, PAR dissertation projects (Kirshman, 2006; McIntyre, 1995), the project could have continued, and perhaps the subsequent action outcomes would have been more robust. One possible limitation of this study is that the present-day attitudes proclaimed and the future action plans expressed in this study do not reflect the actual beliefs or intent of the participants. In other words, participants may not have been entirely truthful about how they felt or what they
intended to accomplish in the future. Of course, this is a limitation of social science research, generally, which relies on “truthful” and reflexive self-reports for data. Even if participants were truthful about their intention to continue to learn and change their behavior, they may not have developed the level of self-directedness necessary to follow through on their action plans without external support.

Gillespie, Ashbaugh, and DeFiore (2002) recommended the incorporation of role-playing activities and assignments that required students to undertake community action into anti-racist curriculum in order to stimulate post-project action-taking. Their view was that when role plays and “outrageous acts” could be supported by peers and faculty within the classroom, it empowered students and increased the likelihood of sustained action after the course was completed (2002). Indeed, the process of debriefing role playing scenarios and coming up with alternative interventions is a type of action research or action learning. However, this study represents a single case that incorporated only one cycle of action research. As such, it is not an exemplar of the utility of PAR as a tool to deconstruct white privilege. If I had the project to do over again, I would have consciously built in more opportunities for the group to experience how action research could transform an idea into a deliverable—indeed, into the best deliverable we could conceptualize and implement in the moment.

A third limitation of this project is that the participants were not randomly selected. Indeed, participants self-selected to participate in a project revolving around white privilege knowing that they were entering into a 30-hour-plus time commitment. This may have served as a filter that deselected potential participants who were not committed, resulting in a group of participants who were unusually motivated to explore white privilege awareness. Administration of the WPAS as a pre-test suggested, albeit not with statistical certainty, that the five participants in this project were very aware of white privilege to begin with. In other words, the five students who participated in this study are not representative of students in graduate preparation programs—there may be typologies of white students in the general population who would respond to a participatory action research project to raise white privilege awareness in many different ways.

There were several extended periods in our PAR group discussions where the participants demonstrated their autonomy and took the conversation in directions they wanted to go. However, for the most part, the participants relied on the principal investigator to
structure and facilitate the discussion. All of us in the group, including myself, were bounded by our own whiteness. In meeting with the critical reference group of People of Color, we sought to shrink our so-called “blind spot,” but in the end, we don’t know what we don’t know—and this represents the most significant limitation of this kind of insider research.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the outcomes for this project, there are several other directions for future research that are indicated. PAR methodologies could be adapted to consciousness-raising projects with other dominant groups, like men, heterosexuals, temporarily able-bodied people, and economic elites. In a similar vein, the white:white pedagogical approach and curriculum used with matriculants in a student affairs graduate preparation program could be utilized with other groups, such as white undergraduate students or preparation program faculty or in other disciplines such as counselor education or sociology.

It would be interesting to conduct more extended research, either a longitudinal study following these participants or a more open-ended project that didn’t have a defined end point. This project had boundaries in order to accommodate a doctoral candidate’s schedule and time horizon for research. In my future research endeavors, I would like to run a group like this again that could continue indefinitely.

Finally, one of the research questions in this study received insufficient attention. That was the third question having to do with how participant’s white privilege interacted with their other dominant and subordinate social identities. That being of privilege obscures awareness of that same privilege has been well documented (Ellsworth, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993). Social justice educators have also observed that whites are often more conscious of their subordinated identities as opposed to their racial privilege (Adams, Jones, & Tatum, 2007). On the other hand, oppression as a woman, religious minority, disabled, or queer-identified person may allow individuals to comprehend their racial privilege in different and powerful ways. If, as the facilitator, I had spent more time attending to Zach’s experience as a gay man or Peyton’s working-class background, they may have felt more engaged in the project and their respective contributions might have been more dynamic. Future research could probe the intersection of white privilege and other dominant and subordinate social identities to a greater degree.
Contributions and Closing Comments

There have been examples throughout U. S. history of anti-racist whites who put their lives on the line to fight racial injustice (Aptheker, 1992; McAdam, 1988; Thompson, 2001). However, because racism is a constantly evolving construct, visible and contemporary role models are needed. As Case (2004) pointed out,

There are many justice-minded white people who are perplexed about how we…can work against racial injustice, ignorant about the precise dynamics and effects of white supremacy, and lacking the personal and organizational connections with peoples of color necessary for meaningful relationship and strategic coalition building. (p. 65)

In this project, we tackled these complexities head-on and sought to deconstruct the role that white privilege played in our lives. While the participants in this project were exceptional, they are not unusual. There are white graduate students in student affairs preparation programs all across the country thirsting for an opportunity such as the one we constructed for ourselves. This project provides an outline of how to critically engage white racial privilege that may be informative for white caucus groups in other settings.

While PAR holds great promise for bridging the gap that all-too-often exists between reflection and action, the clock stopped on this project before we had an opportunity to truly engage that praxis. Any serious discussion about white privilege and white supremacy needs to include how power and resources can be reallocated today, not at some point in the future. As Roman (1993) put it, “homeless people cannot eat discourse,” and the dehumanizing aspects of white supremacy are not made right by the knowledge that a group of white folks engaged in happy talk for 30 hours. Patai (1991) put it another way when she stated, “The world will not get better because we have sensitively apologized for privilege” (p. 150). White anti-racists must press for action, the first step of which is to give up white inaction (Trask, 1986), and while this project was an exercise in decentering the white status quo, the commitments obtained from the participants were fleeting and unsustainable. Hopefully future efforts—mine and other people’s—will take this limitation into account and create sufficient time, space, and technical assistance so that more meaningful anti-racist action can occur.

Nevertheless, as a result of participating in this project, participants became more conscious of their white racial identity and white privilege and its impact on our professional practice. White privilege was exposed and interrogated in the interest of establishing approaches
to student affairs work that were more just, more self-aware, and more concerned with advocacy. As the study progressed, we became more clear about the best practices for mapping the terrain of white privilege. The roadmap that we now leave behind is an important artifact that traces the route we took and identifies the ‘shortcuts’ and ‘speed bumps’ that we encountered. We hope to meet many more fellow travelers on our journey toward an anti-racist professional identity.
APPENDIX A:
ANNOTATED OUTLINE OF PAR GROUP ACTIVITIES

Wednesday, June 21, 2006, 4:30-9:30 PM

Who Am I?
Each participant was asked to introduce themselves to the group, speaking uninterrupted for five minutes. While initially, participants were skeptical they could share for that long, all ended up being cut off by the timer. I put this activity first as an icebreaker out of the belief that we aren’t often given an opportunity to tell our stories without interruption. Five minutes gives us the opportunity to break through superficial barriers and speak authentically about our journey.

Tinker Toy Activity
The group was given the Tinker Toy materials and a picture of a structure to build which resembled a house. They were told they would have two minutes to plan and then five minutes to build the structure while blindfolded. This activity enabled us to focus on our individual roles within a group process, to discuss the tension of task vs. process, and to talk about how there was no coherent vision for anti-racism in this country at this moment. Other topics that came up in the discussion included how we do/don’t take risks, how we deal with adversity, how disinformation or misinformation plays into our understanding of racism, and how we tend to censor ourselves in conversation when we’re not sure we have good information. This experiential activity was a vehicle for participants to become more aware of their preferred role(s) in group settings and the preferred roles of the other participants.

Discussion of Action Research
I gave a brief lecture about action research to familiarize the participants with the concept. None had previously participated in a project that explicitly used action research. It seemed important to share this information so that all the participants would hear the same thing at the same time.

Learning Community Foundations
This handout came from the Social Justice Training Institute (SJTI). We each took a turn reading one of the foundations (e.g. We don’t know all there is to know, Conflict and discomfort are often a part of growth) and then saying what it meant for us. This enabled us to deepen our discussion about some of our taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of difficult dialogues and what each of us brings to that conversation.

Norms and Expectations
We engaged in a nominative process to identify some group norms, teasing out each with some group discussion. These are reproduced in Appendix H. This enabled us to particularize the Learning Community Foundations to this project and engage in a discussion about how we mutually envisioned the project proceeding.

Hopes and Fears
Each participant was given an index card and asked to write one hope they had for the project and one fear. These were then compiled and shared back out. This activity allowed group members to speak their authentic hopes and fears, get validation that other group members felt similarly, and hear from the facilitator that there was a plan in place to help them realize their hopes and avert their fears.

Intro to WebCT Component
I gave a brief demo of the online course and showed participants how to create and submit their reflections.

Coming to Consensus on Future Meeting Times
We compared calendars and came up with 25 additional hours that we were prepared to meet together as a PAR group.
**Tuesday, June 27, 5:00–9:30 PM**

**Discussion of Tracking**
I passed out a sheet that discussed the term “tracking,” also part of the SJTI curriculum. This is a skill to notice and name what is happening in group dialogues. I encouraged group members to utilize tracking during the next activity and to “keep it real” with one another as the project proceeded into more difficult terrain.

**Definitions of Key Terms**
The group broke down into diads and were given the following nine words to attempt to define: race, ethnicity, white, racism, prejudice, white privilege, oppression, whiteness, and white supremacy. In a large group, we then discussed each definition, clarifying as necessary. We allowed for the discussion to go into tangents, for example how biracial/multiracial people trouble conventional definitions of “race” or how Jewish people have been racialized throughout history. Attempting to define these terms gave us a shared language upon which to draw and also revealed how much or how little formal knowledge we had with respect to these key concepts.

**Levels and Types of Racism**
I gave a short lecture on the levels (interpersonal, institutional, cultural) and types (attitudes and behaviors that are both conscious and unconscious) of racism, attempting to give an example of each. Participants then broke down into smaller groups to generate examples of the various manifestations of racism. I felt this was an important piece to cover at this time, because whites often get “stuck” seeing only the interpersonal level of racism.

**Human Knot**
We ended with this teambuilding activity where the group joins hands to form a knot and then works together to unravel the knot. We talked about the parallels between an activity like this and trying to unravel racism.

**Friday, June 30, 9:00 AM–1:00 PM**

**Levels and Types of Racism, cont.**
We continued our discussion of the examples of levels and types of racism that the participants had identified, exploring tangents like the physiological reactions we have to encounter the racial Other, how children inherit stereotypes and biases from adults, and how we manage triggers.

**Translation of 46 Privileges to a Local Perspective**
We took each of Peggy McIntosh’s 46 manifestations of white privilege (1988) and tried to make it local and particular to our own experiences. The outcomes can be found in the second column of Appendix L. After this first step in the activity, we discussed various tangents such as our impressions of our own academic department, the effectiveness of multicultural curriculum requirements, the tokenization of minorities on a predominantly white campus, how to make the campus and community more appealing to minority students, and what the tie-in is for whites to want to be concerned about issues of white privilege. This activity was sequenced here so that participants would have an opportunity to really grapple with the manifestations of white privilege.
**Tuesday, July 11, 5:00–9:30 PM**

**Aspiring Ally for Social Justice Identity Development Model**
We discussed the three levels of this model (Edwards, 2006), giving examples of behaviors that might manifest themselves at each level. We did this activity here so that we could have an opportunity to consider where each of us were located on a continuum of ally development and to consider what activities might help us move to the next higher level.

**Translation of 46 Privileges to a Local Perspective/Costs to People of Color, cont.**
Using the work of Mann (1997) as a starting point, we revisited the 46 white privileges and tried to identify the consequent costs to People of Color. The outcomes can be found in the third column of Appendix L. Afterwards, we discussed each one and the feelings that might attach to each cost (loneliness, not feeling validated, an internalized sense of self-doubt, not being trusted, being pissed off all the time). This activity helped the participants to understand that the privileges of whiteness were not merely esoteric, but had real consequences for People of Color.

**Aspiring Ally for Social Justice Identity Development Model**
We each placed a Post-it note arrow on a diagram of the continuum of Social Justice Ally Identity Development indicating where we felt we were with regard to the model. The outcomes can be viewed in Appendix K. We did this activity here so that we could have an opportunity to consider where each of us were located on a continuum of ally development and to consider what activities might help us move to the next higher level.

**Translation of 46 Privileges to a Local Perspective/Costs to Whites, cont.**
Using our previous work, we tried to identify the costs to whites of maintaining a system of white privilege. The outcomes can be found in the fourth column of Appendix L. This activity was sequenced here so that participants could get in touch with their motivation for wanting to ameliorate white privilege.

**Brainstorming Possible Action Steps**
We engaged in a brainstorming process to try and identify tangible action steps we could take to address white privilege on campus, in our department, and in the local community. The list we developed can be found in the first half of Appendix K. This activity prepared us to meet with our critical reference group of People of Color.

---

**Tuesday, July 18, 5:00–9:30 PM**

**Dialogue with Critical Reference Group of People of Color**
We met with four Students of Color from the ELPS program to get a better sense of their views and feedback on our work thus far. Primarily, we sought their ideas with regard to an action that we could/should undertake to address white privilege. The feedback from our group of critical friends can be found in the second half of Appendix M. I felt it was important that we ground whatever action we might undertake in the real needs of People of Color as expressed by them.

**Discussion About the Discussion**
The participants then convened to debride the discussion we’d had with our critical friends. Topics of note included: the notable differences between our two lists of possible action steps, noting that our critical friends placed more emphasis on micro-level, personal action steps to address the smaller indignities they encounter regularly, a perception that the other group was questioning our motivation/authenticity, differing perceptions of the health of the ELPS program around the issue of race, recognizing that there was a lot of information that we were unconscious of—that our whiteness obscured for us, and how political correctness operates in and out of the ELPS classroom.

**Trying to Identify An Action Plan**
Ultimately, our previous discussion moved to an applied level of trying to identify a consensus action that we could all get behind.
Friday, July 21, 9:00 AM–12:00 PM

Hytten & Warren Handout
I passed out a chart that displayed the typical ways that whiteness gets reified in white, anti-racist discussion circles drawn from the work of Hytten and Warren (2003). We discussed whether or not we saw any of these issues occurring in our own group. This activity was sequenced here so that we could have the awareness to counteract any discourses that might cause us to reproduce the problem we were seeking to eradicate.

Barriers to Doing Anti-Racist Work
Participants identified responses to five questions that prompted them to think about the barriers that prevent them from enacting anti-racist ideals. The list we developed can be found in Appendix Q. We then had a discussion about how these are normal, natural feelings that can be overcome through inter-group dialogue, ally work, and finding support from other white anti-racists.

The Great White Elephant Handout
I passed out copies of an article by Robin Parker (2006) and we discussed the contents, with special emphasis on a model for how to live with privilege contained therein.

Committing Ourselves to Combat Racism
I passed out a handout with a bulleted list of actions that would constitute a commitment to combat racism and also some of the challenges that anti-racist whites can expect to encounter. This reading and discussion would help prime our discussion of action plans in the seventh session.

Continuing our Learning
We discussed various web-based anti-racist resources and opportunities that exist to further one’s learning. This discussion also helped prime our discussion of action plans in the final session.

Tuesday, July 25, 5:00–9:30 PM

Identifying Triggering Events
This was a topic that we had identified as one we wanted to discuss further as a group. I passed out an inventory of triggering events and facilitated a discussion about how knowing your triggers and responding to being triggered were important facets of our work to spread the message of anti-racism.

 Developing an Action Plan and Identifying Support Systems
We each identified an action step we wanted to take in the coming week, month, and year. We then discussed as a group how we could support each other and where else we could turn for support as we sought to continue our anti-racist work after the project concluded.

White Privilege Attitude Scale Post-test
Each group member completed the instrument.

Closure
We engaged in two symbolic activities to affirm our group commitment to anti-racism and reflect on our significant progress over the course of the month.
APPENDIX B:
SAMPLE ELECTRONIC MAIL SEEKING PARTICIPANTS

This e-mail is to invite you to participate in my dissertation research project, which will focus on investigating White racial privilege as one step toward developing an antiracist professional identity for future student affairs practitioners. If you are:

   Interested in discussions about racism, antiracism, and White privilege
   Intrigued by the idea of participating in deep learning about race relations
   Committed to the concept of self-improvement through continued learning

Then this project might be of interest to you.

I am currently seeking students who identify racially as White, who are current or incoming students in the Higher Education Masters program (although I can also consider students who are newly admitted to or in their first couple years of coursework in the doctoral program), and who will be in Ames during the June/July time frame.

I will be conducting an action research project that aims to create new knowledge about how White privilege operates in the student affairs profession. This is an opportunity for you to join your peers who are experiencing many of the same feelings, thoughts, and concerns you are feeling as you prepare to enter a field where multicultural/social justice competence is highly valued.

We will meet once or twice a week over a period of one to two months for a total of 30-40 hours. In addition to attending the workshop-style meetings, I will ask you to complete a one hour entrance and exit interview, and also complete brief reflections after each group meeting.

This is a voluntary project. There is the possibility that you could earn academic credit for your participation in this project, if that is of interest to you and meets with the approval of your major professor. Your confidentiality will be protected at all times and you can choose to terminate your participation at any time.

While I cannot guarantee a specific outcome for you, I would suggest that an immersion experience such as this would:

   Broaden your horizons
   Help you to become less intimidated by racial differences
   Enable you to communicate more openly and effectively across racial lines
   Generate a good deal of self-knowledge, awareness, and skills which will benefit you in your student affairs job search and eventual employment in the field.

I have posted responses to some “frequently asked questions” about the project in my personal webspace: http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jcullen/

I hope you will consider this opportunity. Please reply back to Jeff Cullen <jcullen@iastate.edu> as soon as possible if you are interested.
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: An Action Research Project to Deconstruct White Privilege Among Student Affairs Practitioners
Investigators: Jeffrey E. Cullen, M. Ed.

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the concept of White racial privilege with students who identify racially as White in a student affairs graduate preparation program. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your affiliation with the Higher Education program at Iowa State University.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for approximately forty (40) hours over a span of not more than eight (8) weeks. During this time frame, you will be invited to take part in group meetings that will occur at mutually convenient times and locations, and also to commit to individual interviews and asynchronous reflective journaling using the WebCT interface. During the study you may expect these study procedures to be followed:

1. You will be asked to complete an in-depth, semi-structured entrance interview with the principal investigator.
2. You will be asked to complete a brief instrument, the White Privilege Attitudes Scale (WPAS) as a pre-test/post-test benchmark evaluation.
3. You will be invited to attend a six-hour orientation and immersion experience that will focus on issues of race and racism.
4. You will be invited to be a part of a participatory action research group that will meet once or twice weekly to take part in experiential activities, discussions, and reflective exercises that consider how White racial privilege affects you/us as individuals and as practitioners in the field of student affairs.
5. During the course of the weekly meetings, various paper and pencil activities may be completed, and your work will be collected by the principal investigator as part of the data for the project.
6. You will be asked to think about the participatory action research experience and respond using the WebCT interface to prompts that encourage you to reflect on and give feedback about your experience in the project.
7. You will be asked to complete an in-depth, semi-structured exit interview with the principal investigator.
8. Depending on how the participatory action research project proceeds, some participants may be asked to complete an in-depth, semi-structured interview at the midpoint of the project.
RISKS

While participating in this study you may experience strong emotional or psychological responses. Sustained group conversations about White privilege and White people taking responsibility for racism may result in feelings of being misunderstood, defensiveness, cynicism, hopelessness, embarrassment, guilt/shame, fear/trepidation, confusion, anger, and emotional exhaustion, among others. Every attempt will be made to manage and address these feelings in real time. There are some additional resources that will be available for participants who find they have persistent, distressed feelings or reactions to participation in this project:

1. Participants having strong reactions during a session are encouraged to monitor themselves and take a break, if needed. Participants are reminded that they may decline to answer any question, or opt out of any activity, or leave the study at any time without penalty. At the beginning and end of each project meeting, the PI will read the following statement, “You are reminded that any activity or exercise that this group is invited to participate in is considered ‘challenge by choice.’ You may opt out of any activity, refuse to answer any question, or leave the study at any time, without judgment or penalty.”

2. Private 1:1 debriefings with the facilitator, who has a Masters degree in counseling psychology, will be available at any time after or in between group meetings.

3. Staff psychologists from the Student Counseling Service are available to registered students by appointment and are willing to process concerns or reactions of any participant.

4. The principal investigator will 1) review any critical incidents that occurred during the previous week’s participatory action research meeting and 2) preview the proposed training design for the subsequent week’s group meeting with a critical outside reference group of scholars familiar with White privilege and White identity development. In this way, there will be some third-party review of what is happening within the participatory action research group meeting and an assurance that activities are within acceptable standards for educational training and development.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you. Because of the substantial time commitment involved with participation in this project, participants may receive up to two (2) credits of HGED 590/690. One (1) satisfactory credit is available for completion of 15 contact hours in the research project and two (2) satisfactory credits are available for completion of 30 contact hours in the research project. This credit is available in exchange for presence, regardless of the positive or negative content of your participation.

One indirect benefit of participating in a White privilege/White racism consciousness-raising activity is an increased level of awareness about how racism operates between individuals and in organizations. This information may help make you a more effective student affairs practitioners and may give you additional knowledge, awareness, and skills that will help you to be a more marketable candidate for employment. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing valuable information about how to counteract White privilege and will provide a roadmap to future generations of scholars and practitioners seeking methods for talking about White racial privilege.
COSTS AND COMPENSATION
You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. At the outset of the project, we will engage in a discussion of group norms and expectations (about how to handle conflict, for example). Repeated gross violations of these group norms may result in an individual being asked to leave the research project.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, the principal investigator’s major professor or Program of Study (POS) Committee, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

1. The in-depth, semi-structured interview, the six-hour orientation and immersion experience, and the weekly participatory action research meetings will all be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher for further study. The audiotapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet that only the principal investigator has access to. Once an audiotape has been transcribed, it will be erased.

2. Computer files, such as word processed transcripts, will be stored on a laptop computer that is firewalled from the Internet and password protected.

3. Reflections submitted via the WebCT interface will be stored on a mainframe computer and can only be viewed by the course designer/principal investigator. Once the participatory action research phase of the project is complete, participant responses/reflections will be downloaded to a CD-ROM for further analysis and interpretation. The course and all of the data that has been entered will then be deleted from the WebCT mainframe.

4. All written records arising from this study that will be retained by the researcher will be stripped of identifying information through the use of pseudonyms and retained only as long as necessary for ongoing publications and reports to be written.

5. One (1) year from the time the study expires, all written or computerized raw data will be erased or destroyed.

6. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS
You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.
For further information about the study contact Jeffrey Cullen (h: 515-597-2722, c: 515-559-4393, e-mail: jcullen@iastate.edu or Professor Nancy J. Evans (o: 515-294-7113, e-mail: nevans@iastate.edu).

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact Ginny Austin Eason, IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, austinger@iastate.edu, or Diane Ament, Director, Office of Research Assurances (515) 294-3115, dament@iastate.edu.

***************************************************************************

SUBJECT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject’s Name (printed)  ____________________________________________

(Subject’s Signature)  ________________________________  (Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)  ____________________________________________

(Date)
# APPENDIX D: PAR GROUP MEETING DATES, TIMES, AND LOCATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, June 21</td>
<td>4:30–9:30 PM</td>
<td>ISU Memorial Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, June 27</td>
<td>5:00–9:30 PM</td>
<td>ISU Public Safety Conference Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, June 30</td>
<td>9:00 AM–1:00 PM</td>
<td>ISU Public Safety Conference Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, July 11</td>
<td>5:00–9:30 PM</td>
<td>ISU Public Safety Conference Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, July 18</td>
<td>5:00–9:30 PM</td>
<td>ISU Public Safety Conference Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, July 21</td>
<td>9:00 AM–12:00 PM</td>
<td>ISU Public Safety Interview Room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, July 25</td>
<td>5:00–9:30 PM</td>
<td>ISU Public Safety Conference Room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30 hours total
APPENDIX E:
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

DATE: May 30, 2006
TO: Jeffrey Cullen
CC: Dr. Nancy Evans
FROM: Institutional Review Board
       Office of Research Assurances
SUBJECT: IRB ID Number: 06-239

Approval Date: May 30, 2006  Date for Continuing Review: May 29, 2007

The Chair of the Institutional Review Board Chair of Iowa State University has reviewed and
approved the protocol entitled: "An Action Research Project to Deconstruct White Privilege
Among Student Affairs Practitioners." The protocol has been assigned the following ID
Number: 06-239. Please refer to this number in all correspondence regarding the protocol.

Your study has been approved for a period of one year from May 30, 2006 to May 29, 2007. The
continuing review date for this study is no later than May 29, 2007. As a courtesy to you, you
will receive a reminder of the approaching review date approximately one month prior to this
date. Please submit a continuing review form with sufficient time prior to this date for the IRB
to review and approve continuation of the study. Failure to complete and submit the continuing
review form will result in expiration of IRB approval on the continuing review. A new
application for IRB approval may be required to re-activate the study. In addition, all research
related activities involving the participants must stop on the continuing review date, until
approval can be re-established, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard to research
participants.

Please remember that any changes in the protocol or consent form may not be implemented
without prior IRB review and approval, using the "Continuing Review and/or Modification"
form. Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report,
and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These
documents are located on the Office of Research Assurances website or available by calling

You must promptly report any of the following to the IRB: (1) all serious and/or unexpected
adverse experiences involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) any other unanticipated
problems involving risks to subjects or others.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office of Research
Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.
APPENDIX F:
INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How do you describe your race/ethnicity?

Tell me about the racial make-up of the neighborhood/town/city where you grew up and the schools you attended.

Describe some of the diversity training experiences you have participated in.

What were some of the early messages you received about race from parents, older siblings, other family members, teachers, religious educators?

Do you remember the first time that you became aware of racial differences? What are some of your earliest memories of people who were racially different from you?

Has there been a Person(s) of Color in your life who you consider to be a significant influence, positive or negative? Can you say more about how this person affected you?

What does it mean for you to be White?

As you consider your family, significant other, and your closest circle of friends, what percentage is racially different from you?

How would you define racism?

Do you believe racial equality has been achieved in the United States? Why or why not?

Do you feel like being White has privileged you in your lifetime? Why or why not?

If you accept that White privilege exists, how does that make you feel?

What is your understanding of the term “reverse racism?”

What is your understanding of the term “affirmative action?”

Have there been critical incidents during your time at Iowa State that have influenced your current perspectives on race/racism/White privilege? What about in the student affairs preparation program?

Do you experience fear or trepidation when interacting with someone racially different from you?

Think about the following groups and give your immediate overall emotional reaction: African Americans, Asian/Pacific Americans, Latino/Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, White Americans

As far as risk taking, do you see yourself as being someone who is a risk taker or are you risk averse?

When you are in a group setting and conflict comes up, what is your reaction to that?
Have your views about white privilege changed since the beginning of the project. If so, how? Has your increased awareness caused you to question your privilege more?

Has your awareness of white racial privilege carried over into any other facets of oppression (more sensitivity to issues of heterosexual privilege, class privilege, etc.)

What was the most difficult part of being involved with this project for you?

What effect did democratizing principles have on the conversation? What do you think about participatory action research, generally and as an approach to this research project, specifically?

What were your reactions to this project being composed of only white people?

Were there others in the group you felt particularly close to? Who? Why?

What is your sense of how white privilege operates within the field of student affairs?

Did you discard your mask? Were there times in the project when you held back? What were they and why didn’t you feel able to speak about them?

In the first interview, I asked you “What does it mean for you to be white?” Do you feel your answer has changed? How/why?

Has the level of fear or trepidation (walking or egg shells or self-censorship) you experience when interacting with someone racially different from you changed as a result of participation in the project?

You talked about an action plan for the weeks and months following the project that included ___________. Are these actions you have followed up on? (Ask more about the significant conversations with People of Color.)

Would you say the quantity or quality of the friendships you have with People of Color has changed in any way since participating in the project? What about with other whites who identify as anti-racist?

Are there specific classroom conversations you’ve been a part of this fall where you’ve brought a different viewpoint as a result of participation in the project?

What is the likelihood that you will be going strong with anti-racism stuff five years from now? 10 years from now?

Is there a question I didn’t ask that you’d like to answer?
APPENDIX H:
DISSERTATION GROUP NORMS AND EXPECTATIONS

DEVELOPED 6/21/2006
AGREED UPON 6/27/2006

Own your own opinions- use “I” statements
Don’t attack the opinions of others
Be an active listener to the end
Look for the learning edge
Respect confidentiality- what’s said in the room stays in the room
Agree to disagree
Be honest, don’t sugarcoat
Don’t be afraid to ask questions
Recognize differing styles
Honor feelings (e.g., “I heard __________ and I feel __________.”)
Have fun
### APPENDIX I:
OUTLINE AND TIMELINE OF DATA ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Transcription</td>
<td>Audio tapes of interviews and group process meetings were transcribed.</td>
<td>August –December 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) First reading</td>
<td>Each interview and group process transcript and WebCT reflection was read for general meaning.</td>
<td>December 2006-January 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Chunking and coding</td>
<td>Sections of each transcript that seemed to contain important passages were highlighted and a temporary code was assigned.</td>
<td>January-February 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Clarification and consolidation of codes</td>
<td>Codes were reviewed for clarity, particularity, and areas of overlap.</td>
<td>February 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Recoding</td>
<td>Every transcript was re-read and re-coded to reflect any changes from step 4.</td>
<td>March 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Categorizing</td>
<td>A new document was created that categorized all the data having the same code in one place to enable comparison.</td>
<td>March-April 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Significant category identification</td>
<td>Categories that were saturated with data were foregrounded in the first draft.</td>
<td>June-November 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Member checking</td>
<td>Initial drafts of Chapters 4 &amp; 5 were shared with participants and they were invited to revise or clarify their remarks.</td>
<td>August-November 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Inquiry audit</td>
<td>A confirmability audit was performed by a knowledgeable outsider.</td>
<td>February-April 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX J:
JEFF’S RESPONSES TO INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(posted to WebCT on 6/25/2006)

One of the premises of participatory action research is that there is no hierarchy between the researcher and the participants. We’re all sort of in this together. In the spirit of democratic egalitarianism, I figured I should be willing to answer all the questions I asked of you in the entrance interview. So here goes (the questions are in bold and my answers follow in plain text):

Entrance Interview Questions:
How do you describe your race/ethnicity?
I identify as white. I check the “Caucasian” box on forms. The name “Cullen” is Scotch/Irish. We know that about six generations back, a Cullen married a Lonergan and they got on a boat and emigrated from Scotland to French Quebec (Canada), and then after a couple generations made their way across the border into northern New York (where my grandfather and father were born). My mother’s maiden name is Christensen, so that is Danish. I don’t have any strong ethnic identity, nor—as near as I can tell—do any of my living relatives.

Tell me about the racial make-up of the neighborhood/town/city where you grew up and the schools you attended.
Prince George’s County, Maryland was pretty diverse racially and socio-economically when I was growing up and is even more so now. It is represented in Congress by an African American man, so that tells you something. I recall my elementary school as majority white, my middle school as about 50/50 between whites and People of Color, and my high school as about 85% African American, another 5% Filipino, and the remainder whites. My high school had a magnet program and was under a court-ordered busing plan to try to integrate the school. We were one of only two white families in our neighborhood of 30 or so single-family homes, so most of the kids in the neighborhood where I lived growing up were different from me racially.

Describe some of the diversity training experiences you have participated in.
There have been quite a few over the past 15 years. One of the first “ahah!” experiences I had around social justice issues was being at a training that was required for Resident Assistant candidates for “working with gay staff and students.” It was conducted by two student affairs professionals I liked and respected and one of them came out as a lesbian woman. She told of the overt discrimination she experienced and I was able to empathize. Once I was in graduate school and involved in student affairs professional associations, I began attending some of the half-day and full-day “unlearning racism” trainings available at conferences. After graduate school, I worked for three years at the University of Massachusetts, and it was there that I received most of my “formal” training in the Social Justice Education Training Project. The faculty and students there have done amazing work over the past 30+ years to model the way for anti-racism and other anti-oppression training. Since then, one of the most impactful training experiences I’ve had was attending the Social Justice Training Institute.
Many of the activities and ideas I will bring to this group are adapted from that training.

What were some of the early messages you received about race from parents, older siblings, other family members, teachers, religious educators?

As near as I can recall, my parents were not overtly prejudiced. They weren’t overtly anti-racist or anti-sexist, either. But they were pretty open-minded and I think cultivated that in me, as well. I remember a phase where I was really into reading “Truly Tasteless Jokes” which was basically a collection of “humor” based on racial/ethnic stereotypes. I’m sure I bought into all sorts of media constructed images of good/bad, white/black, evil/purity, etc.

Do you remember the first time that you became aware of racial differences? What are some of your earliest memories of people who were racially different from you?

I’ll answer the preceding two questions at the same time. I really struggle with “earliest memories” of racial difference. I would have encountered people of different races from a very young age, so they were just always around (the grocery store, e.g.) and not remarkable to me. Both my kindergarten and first grade teachers were African American women (this was in the 1975-1976 time frame), so I learned from early on that Black women could be educated, kind, and nurturing. I have a distinct memory of working on an art project in kindergarten where we were to draw our families. I was using a white crayon. Mrs. Hansborough (African American woman) came over and showed me how the peach crayon from my box of 32 was actually much closer to the color of my flesh and wouldn’t I like to use that one instead. Score one for anti-racist education, right?! We stayed in touch with Mrs. Hansborough and her family. She came to my high school graduation party.

What does it mean for you to be white?

I acknowledge that whites are the dominant racial group in the United States, that we have practiced white supremacy as a nation, and that white privilege is the contemporary legacy that whites enjoy. I am not particularly proud that “my people” are implicated in racism past and present. I also try not to get bogged down in guilt/shame around my whiteness, because that tends to immobilize me. I recognized some time ago that white men that “get it” were in short supply and that if I could “unlearn” my racism and teach other whites how to do it also, that would be a valuable commodity.

As you consider your family, significant other, and your closest circle of friends, what percentage is racially different from you?

Yeah, see, this is where I feel like a hypocrite. Very few are racially different from me. My wife’s brother is an adopted indigenous Guatemalan of Mayan descent. I talk a pretty good talk, but when it comes to my actual lived experience, it’s pretty homogenous. We’ve moved around a lot. Five years is the longest I’ve lived in one place since high school. I’m looking forward to putting down roots in Maryland when we move back there at the end of July. Kristen and I would like to find a neighborhood/school that is
multiracial and I would like to get more involved in working for social change on a community level, so hopefully I will be able to answer this question differently in 5-10 years.

How would you define racism?

Sort of the textbook definition that I buy into is racism equals prejudice plus power. People of any race can be prejudiced toward others not like them, but only people in the dominant group (in the United States that would be whites) have power to make their prejudice stick at institutional and cultural levels.

Do you believe racial equality has been achieved in the United States? Why or why not?

No. I recognize that we’ve come a long way in the past 50 years, but we still have a long way to go. The good news is that racism is not so much the overt, in-your-face, snarling dogs and fire hoses kind of racism of the 1950s and 1960s. The bad news is that racism has morphed into something that is practiced covertly and is even enacted unconsciously. I think one of the most telling pieces of social science research in the past few years is that study that showed that if you have a “white” name on your resume you’ll get 50% more callbacks than a person with equivalent credentials and a “black” name on their resume.

Do you feel like being White has privileged you in your lifetime? Why or why not?

Absolutely. My parents got a good education and were upwardly mobile, so they were able to own their own home in a decent neighborhood. I did well on standardized tests that have a demonstrated racial bias that favors members of my race, so I got into good academic programs/schools myself. I was identified as “talented and gifted” so I got enrichment activities and got tracked into a college-bound curriculum that was populated mostly by white students, even when the school we were in were mostly not white. People evaluating me throughout my school and work career have been mostly white, so it stands to reason that they had a positive, or at least a neutral view toward people of my race, so I’ve likely always received the benefit of the doubt.

If you accept that White privilege exists, how does that make you feel?

Somewhat guilty and angry. I’m kind of peeved that I am the recipient of benefits I haven’t earned, that I have advanced at least in part due to my race (and gender and sexual orientation) and not necessarily due to my merit. What is worse, someone equally good may have been passed over. That’s the part where I feel guilty. I think that too much wallowing in unearned privilege makes me “soft.” I would rather have faced (at least a little) adversity in my life, because then I think I would have developed more skills and awarenesses.

What is your understanding of the term “reverse racism”?

I think it is a code word mean to incite whites to rise up in opposition to affirmative action. In keeping with my definition of racism above, I think “reverse racism” is a fallacy—People of Color can’t enact racism on whites because they don’t have institutional or cultural power here in the United States.

What is your understanding of the term “affirmative action?”
It is a policy meant to level the playing field and allow women and People of Color to compete on an equal footing with whites for jobs, admission to certain programs, and federal contracting opportunities. Affirmative action (AA) does not mean quotas, which have been outlawed under case law precedent since the earliest days of the policy. I think some organizations have actually screwed up their implementation of AA programs on purpose as a means to sabotage the policy in the court of public opinion. AA is actually one example of a policy meant to combat white privilege, and it has been moderately successful. I think the growth of the Black middle class in this country over the past 30 years has a lot to do with affirmative action.

Have there been critical incidents during your time at Iowa State that have influenced your current perspectives on race/racism/White privilege? What about in the student affairs preparation program?

My views on race/racism/white privilege were pretty well-formed before I got to ISU. During my second year in the doctoral program, I took HGED 676 and we were cruising along having lively classroom discussions about LGB identity development (there were at least a couple out gay folk in the room), and Black identity development (there were at least a couple Black folk in the room), and then we came to the module on white identity development, and even though the room was majority white, no one was talking. I found it really interesting that people either didn’t want to or didn’t know how to talk about their whiteness. I would add the ability to attend the White Privilege Conference two different times when it was being held in Pella, IA was also a critical incident. It was a good environment to see some of the different approaches that were being taken toward addressing white privilege.

Do you experience fear or trepidation when interacting with someone racially different from you?

Not so much any more. I definitely used to. I feel like I have the language and experiences to be able to talk about my current understandings. I’m still a little nervous talking to People of Color activists because one of my central anxieties is that they will see me for a fraud, and that’s not how I want to be seen on this issue.

Think about the following groups and give your immediate overall emotional reaction:

- African Americans
- Asian/Pacific Americans
- Latino/Hispanic Americans
- Native Americans
- White Americans

As I revisit this question, I’m not sure why I really asked it, except maybe to assess where other participants were with their familiarity with different racial groups. I would say that I am most familiar with African Americans, Asian Americans, and White Americans and I am least familiar with Latinos and Native Americans.

What are your other social identities (gender, social class, (dis)ability status, religious identity, sexual orientation)? Do you have a sense of privilege from the standpoint of any of these subordinated identities?

I didn’t ask this question because I realized that after just having met most of you for the first time, we didn’t really have a basis of trust in our relationship for me to be asking you to disclose this information. I feel comfortable disclosing my other social identities, because I am in the dominant group on pretty much every measure, so I have little to risk from disclosure. I am a White male (obviously), who identifies as temporarily able-
bodied, Christian (Catholic), and heterosexual. I am also middle-age (36) and come from middle-class roots. I hope you all will come to feel comfortable bringing all of who you are to our group, not just your whiteness. The within-group differences enrich the collective experience and give us added perspectives to be able to access the elusive topic of privilege.
During the fourth PAR group session, I gave a short lecture on the three levels of social justice ally development (Edwards, 2006): ally for self-interest, aspiring ally for altruism, and ally for social justice. Participants were then asked to indicate with a blue sticky arrow where they saw themselves on a continuum of social justice ally development. The results are pictured above.
### APPENDIX L:
COSTS TO PEOPLE OF COLOR AND COSTS TO WHITES
OF MAINTAINING WHITE RACIAL PRIVILEGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White Privileges</th>
<th>White Privileges at ISU</th>
<th>Costs to People of Color</th>
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</table>

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.  
   1. At ISU, I know I can surround myself with people of my race most of the time.  
   2. Always feeling on edge, uneasy, doubting whether someone is genuine or contrived, not knowing who’s got your back.  
   • We miss out on potentially meaningful relationships.  
   • Not having the full range of skills to use in the workplace (i.e. poorly developed cross-cultural communication skills).  
   • If everyone were healthy, everyone would be healthier (i.e. a rising tide lifts every boat).  
   • If you’re always comfortable, you’re not on the learning edge.  
   • Mistrust breeds even more mistrust.  
   • Having to be constantly paranoid and fearful if you buy into stereotypes.  
   • Being ignorant and not even knowing if you’re being ignorant.  

2. I can avoid spending time with people whom I was trained to mistrust and who have learned to mistrust my kind or me.  
   2. At ISU, there are many social opportunities that allow me to avoid people I have been trained to mistrust.  

3. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.  
   3. In Ames, I can go to any apartment company and get an apartment rather quickly.  
   3. When I consider purchasing or renting a house in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live, I know some of my prospective neighbors feel silent panic that their property values will decrease and their community will change for the worse.  

4. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.  
   4. In the dorms, I can be pretty sure that my roommate will be neutral or pleasant to me.  
   4. I can be pretty sure that some of my neighbors in such a location will eventually move because I chose to live there or will be hostile to me because I am Black.
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<tr>
<td>5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.</td>
<td>5. I can go to the ISU Bookstore with a backpack on and be pretty well assured I will not be followed or harassed.</td>
<td>5. When I am shopping, I know that security personnel observe me more closely as a potential shoplifter than they would a white woman.</td>
<td>• Increasing commuting difference because of “white flight” ends up detracting from time spent with family</td>
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<td>6. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.</td>
<td>6. I can open the Des Moines Register or the Ames Tribune/Iowa State Daily and see people of my race widely represented.</td>
<td>6. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see few people of my race represented in positive circumstances.</td>
<td>• Whites created white flight and now have to live with the consequences.</td>
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<td>7. When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.</td>
<td>7. When I learn about Iowa history or U.S. civilization, I am shown that people of my color made it what it is. At ISU, U.S. Diversity &amp; International Perspectives courses are the exception rather than the rule. For many students, the diversity requirement is an afterthought to be resisted.</td>
<td>7. When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown few people of my color who made worthwhile contributions to that cause.</td>
<td>• Our own cultural learning gets truncated.</td>
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<td>8. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.</td>
<td>8. I can be sure that my children (or I) will be given curricular materials in the Higher Ed program that testify to the existence of their race &amp; accomplishments.</td>
<td>8. I was sure that my children would be given curricular materials that barely reflected an historical or current account of the contributions of Black people to the development of our country, and I was correct.</td>
<td>Generalized psychic costs to People of Color:</td>
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<td>9. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.</td>
<td>9. I can write an article on my opinion of my race and easily find someone to publish it in Ames, Iowa.</td>
<td>9. If I want to, I can persevere to find a publisher for this piece on Black Pain, but many will have a “so, what’s new” attitude.</td>
<td>• Unwelcome</td>
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<td>• Ostracized</td>
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<td>• Not feeling validated</td>
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<td>• Loneliness, isolation</td>
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<td>• Frustration</td>
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<td>• Alienation</td>
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<td>• Internalization of self-doubt</td>
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<td>• Targeted, marginalized</td>
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| 10. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race. | 10. In the rare instance when I am the only white person in a group, I can still be relatively sure of having my voice heard. | 10. Feeling inadequate, unimportant, less important, constant uphill battle, “don’t you people get it,” wanting to give up, exhaustion, stress | • Not knowing who’s got your back (stress, second-guessing)  
• Conflicted feelings of do I have to support that person (Condé Rice, e.g.) regardless  
• Always fighting uphill battles  
• Raging against the machine  
• Not being trusted  
• Having to go out of your way to get things done |
<p>| 11. I can be casual about whether to listen another [person’s] voice in a group in which [she/he] is the only member of their race. | 11. [blank] | 11. Could not be casual, might feel pressure at agree with another POC even when they don’t agree, don’t backstab. (e.g. just because one is Jewish doesn’t mean that one always has to agree with Zionist positions) | |
| 12. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser’s shop and find someone who can cut my hair. | 12. I can go to Fareway/Cub Foods/HyVee and find staple foods that fit into my cultural traditions and I can go to Younkers or Great Clips salon and find someone to cut my hair | 12. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented because so many musicians outside of my culture have adopted the ethnic nuances of black music in their compositions and arrangements. I can find a beauty salon that has black operators or inquire of others that are white operated if they “do black hair” knowing there will be patrons who do not wish me to be there. | |
| 13. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability. | 13. When I use checks or credit cards in Ames, I am not asked for a second form of identification. | 13. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color to give the appearance of financial risk. | |</p>
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<td>14. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.</td>
<td>14. I can protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them using campus pre-school and/or child care.</td>
<td>14. My children are increasingly at risk because they are black males and I worry constantly about their well-being because of their skin color.</td>
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<td>15. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.</td>
<td>15. My parents did not have to tell me to be careful at ISU because someone might try to hurt me because of my race.</td>
<td>15. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters or be late for meetings and be certain that others will stereotype my behavior as “what blacks do.”</td>
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<td>16. I can be pretty sure that my children’s teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others’ attitudes toward their race.</td>
<td>16. I can be pretty sure that ISU faculty and employees will tolerate me if I fit school or workplace norms; I don’t have to worry about a negative stigma that attaches to my race.</td>
<td>16. Always having to second-guess actions of teachers and administrators—are they due to bias? Pathologizing race (children of color being over-represented in special ed) Is something wrong with my child or with the system? Who needs to change?</td>
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<td>17. I can talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my color.</td>
<td>17. I can engage in socially unacceptable or rude behavior and not have it attributed to people of my race (e.g., bumping into someone on the bus, being demanding, drinking a lot).</td>
<td>17. Negative stereotypes, attributions of pathology or deficit.</td>
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<td>18. I can swear, or dress in secondhand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.</td>
<td>18. I can come to class wearing my chore clothes or from the field and not have people assume I’m morally unclean, but rather know me as a hard worker.</td>
<td>18. Negative stereotypes, attributions of pathology or deficit.</td>
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<td>19. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.</td>
<td>19. Whiteness frees me up to talk about privilege.</td>
<td>19. I can speak in public to a powerful, all-male group and will most likely be politely received, but not taken seriously even if my presentation is powerfully relevant.</td>
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<td>20. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.</td>
<td>20. I can be accepted into a Masters or Doctoral program at ISU and not be called a credit to my race.</td>
<td>20. Whenever I do well, I’m perceived as a credit to my race.</td>
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<td>21. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.</td>
<td>21. In classes, no one asks me to speak for all white people about why we drive SUVs.</td>
<td>21. Most white people believe that I can speak to all issues and problems that concern black people.</td>
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<td>22. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world’s majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.</td>
<td>22. I can be oblivious to the language and customs of international students at ISU without feeling a penalty for being oblivious. In most colleges at ISU, there is no foreign language requirement.</td>
<td>22. If I remained oblivious to the language and customs of the white majority, I would be penalized economically, academically, and professionally.</td>
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<td>23. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.</td>
<td>23. I can disagree with government policies without being seen as a cultural outsider in classroom discussions.</td>
<td>23. I would be seen as a cultural antagonist if I criticized our government and discussed my fear of its policies and behavior.</td>
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<td>24. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to “the person in charge,” I will be facing a person of my race.</td>
<td>24. If I am unhappy with the housing assignment I was given and asked to speak to the DOR Director, I can be assured I will be talking to a person of my own race.</td>
<td>24. I can be pretty sure most of the time when I ask to speak to “the person in charge,” I will be facing a white person.</td>
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<td>25. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven’t been singled out because of my race.</td>
<td>25. If a DPS officer pulls me over, or my FAFSA is flagged for verification, I can be sure I haven’t been singled out because of my race.</td>
<td>25. My race can be a catalyst for negative attention by traffic policemen and IRS audits of tax returns.</td>
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<td>26. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children’s magazines featuring people of my race.</td>
<td>26. I can easily buy posters at the poster sale featuring people of my race.</td>
<td>26. In order to buy posters, post cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children’s magazines featuring people of my race, I must find special sections in shops and stores or purchase from black-owned businesses.</td>
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<td>27. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.</td>
<td>27. I can come home from the ISU Business Club meeting feeling that I belong, can be heard, and am in the majority.</td>
<td>27. When I attend high-level meetings, I am either the only black person in the room or one of a very few. This can make me feel isolated, alone, outnumbered, and I am frequently ignored.</td>
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<td>28. I can be pretty sure that an argument with a person of another race is more likely to jeopardize her chances for advancement than to jeopardize mine.</td>
<td>28. Whites have more credibility to take on controversial issues, more latitude to take risks.</td>
<td>28. OC might have to censor themselves to avoid provoking. Fear of losing a job might override speaking out against a wrong</td>
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<td>29. I can be pretty sure that if I argue for the promotion of a person of another race, or a program centering on race, this is not likely to cost me heavily within my present setting, even if my colleagues disagree with me.</td>
<td>29. I can encourage students of color to run for positions or support minority student initiatives and not have it impact my own status with other students or colleagues.</td>
<td>29. Can support people/programs without being seen as self-interested. Catch-22: Damned if you do and damned if you don’t.</td>
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<td>30. If I declare there is a racial issue at hand, or there isn’t a racial issue at hand, my race will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of color will have.</td>
<td>30. If I said that Jason Berryman’s arrest was or was not racially motivated, my opinion will carry more weight because of my race.</td>
<td>30. Stereotyped as a troublemaker, less credibility, easily dismissed.</td>
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<td>31. I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them, but in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices.</td>
<td>31. Whether I choose to attend cultural events on campus, or not, there won’t be negative consequences for me.</td>
<td>31. Being cast out from the POC group as well as the dominant group. Also a Catch-22.</td>
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<td>32. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.</td>
<td>32. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races as I conduct my job search upon graduation.</td>
<td>32. The cost of having to develop and maintain a double-consciousness (ignorance of how white culture/white racism works could be fatal).</td>
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<td>33. I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing, or body odor will be taken as a reflection of my race.</td>
<td>33. I can get to [element] and not worry that what I wear, how I talk, or how I smell will be taken as a reflection on my race.</td>
<td>33. Actions and physical appearance will reflect on my race.</td>
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<td>34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.</td>
<td>34. I can study white privilege without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.</td>
<td>34. Sincerity will always be questioned.</td>
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<td>35. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.</td>
<td>35. I can get into a program or receive a scholarship from an “affirmative action” school without having my peers suspect I got it because of my race.</td>
<td>35. When I receive a high-level appointment to a position, there are always co-workers who assume racial preference rather than competence.</td>
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<td>36. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.</td>
<td>36. If I flunk a test, lose my job, or can’t get a date during my sophomore year at ISU, I need not ask if it has anything to do with my race.</td>
<td>36. Always having to question what race had to do with it. Increased stress.</td>
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<td>37. I can be pretty sure of finding people who would be willing to talk with me and advise me about my next steps, professionally.</td>
<td>37. It’s pretty easy to identify mentors who are the same race as me.</td>
<td>37. Harder to find mentors, being a pioneer means you don’t have a support system. Being more educated than anyone else in the family. Isolation, confusion, frustration, takes more effort.</td>
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<td>38. I can think over many options social, political, imaginative, or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.</td>
<td>38. As I contemplate my future with regards to options, social, political, imaginative, or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.</td>
<td>38. Prepare to be judged. Increased stress.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>39. I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race.</td>
<td>39. I can be late for class and people won’t associate that with my race.</td>
<td>39. Attributions/assumptions made towards race becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.</td>
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<td>40. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.</td>
<td>40. I can live wherever I want to in Ames without fearing that I will not be offered a lease or mortgage, or be mistreated in the place I’ve decided to live in because of my race.</td>
<td>40. I can put certain members of my race in jeopardy of embarrassment by selecting certain public places for meetings/gatherings.</td>
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<td>41. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.</td>
<td>41. When I go to Student Health or Student Legal Services, I can rest assured that my race will not work against me.</td>
<td>41. My race can be a negative factor in obtaining legal or medical help.</td>
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<td>42. I can arrange my activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race.</td>
<td>42. I can join any club, eat at any restaurant, and work out at any facility and not worry that I will be rejected because of my race.</td>
<td>42. I am constantly “on alert” for racial overtones in circumstances, situations, and interactions.</td>
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<td>43. If I have low credibility as a leader, I can be sure that my race is not the problem.</td>
<td>43. If I’m a student organization president with poorly developed leadership skills, I can be pretty sure it won’t be chalked up to my race.</td>
<td>43. Double-edged sword. If I am successful, it will be despite my race and if I am unsuccessful, it will be because of my race.</td>
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<td>44. I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.</td>
<td>44. I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only or mostly to people of my race at ISU.</td>
<td>44. There are few courses that highlight race and those that do tend to devalue it.</td>
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<td>45. I can expect figurative language and imagery in all of the arts to testify to experiences of my race.</td>
<td>45. I can go to Movies 12 and expect to see many movies to which I can relate.</td>
<td>45. Images tend to exoticize, fetishize POC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>46. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in “flesh” color and have them more or less match my skin.</td>
<td>46. I can go to the C-Store or Onions and purchase bandages in “flesh” color or stockings in “nude” that will more or less match my skin tone.</td>
<td>46. Blemish cover sold in most stores does not match my skin. Bandages advertised as “flesh” color are not the color of my flesh.</td>
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APPENDIX M: POTENTIAL ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT WE IDENTIFIED/THAT WERE IDENTIFIED FOR US BY PEOPLE OF COLOR

The List of Potential Future Actions Brainstormed by Jeff's PAR Group

Panels to bring issues to life, expert guest speakers
Benefits/costs, Address “what’s in it for me?”
A segment on ally development (how to do, what to do, how to grow)
A workshop on how to translate materials to other settings
  Workshop in a can—just add water and go
  Sustainability of momentum for change
Training manual
Thinking about what could be accomplished through HEGSO.
Try not to be so intense—use humor.

The List of Potential Future Actions Brainstormed by the People of Color We Met With

Living in Ames is not easy
Safe spaces—intellectually, socially, emotionally
The “slight” insults that “tax your energy”
Paying attention to verbal and non-verbal cues during intercultural communications
Being “wordly”
10-year plan for pedagogical, instructional change
Immersion experience—taking a cultural risk through a personal/social program
Don’t co-opt
Don’t overdo attempts at integration
Social justice is the “in” thing to say, but what do the actions of social justice allies look like?
  List of suggested behaviors for social justice allies
  “Fit”
  “Border crossings”
Pedagogy of fitting in or not fitting in
What is cultural norm of ELPS program and what is the implication if you don’t fit that norm?
Need for more opportunities to have conversations like this
  Attending activities
  Readings
Immersion experiences
Making commitment to learn about others
Speak up (in class, in interpersonal conversations)
Find out what you don’t know
APPENDIX N: END OF PAR GROUP ACTION PLANNING

(Key: W = week, M = month, Y = year)

**Avery**
- W: Each day, write down a privilege I have and its cost to me and others.
- M: Bring race/ethnicity conversations into workplace conversations.
- Y: Develop a good program for the student athletes that will increase awareness or affirmation to the participants and me.

**Emma**
- W: Keep my awareness in check. For example, not “forgetting” about privilege when I get busy moving, etc.
- M: Incorporate white privilege awareness ideas into my teaching.
- Y: Work toward being comfortable with confrontation.

**Jeff**
- W: Reflect on this project, how white privilege has/will privilege this dissertation
- M: Make new connections with People of Color in my new community
- Y: Get involved in community activism around issues of white privilege

**Kevin**
- W: Talk to some of my friends who are People of Color and ask them about their own experiences and how they see me using white privilege to my advantage.
- M: Read “The Education of a WASP” and discuss it with people in my life who will challenge and support me.
- Y: Support anti-racist activities by joining different groups and confronting racist attitudes and beliefs in myself and others.

**Peyton**
- W: Talking with students in the organizations I advise to see how they feel about the topic of racism and white privilege. Do some more research on effective ways to work with People of Color to become aware of issues.
- M: Participate in social justice conference to continue the discussion and increase my awareness. Open up to talking with students and peers about what is going on on this campus.
- Y: Use past experiences and learn from them in my career and with students I work with.

**Zach**
- W: Do the research. Look at the resources I have and draw lessons from them.
- M: Share the knowledge. Incorporate a lecture on multiculturalism and white privilege in my orientation class of 100 mostly white identifying students.
- Y: Involve myself with multicultural student affairs in the hopes of broadening my horizons and including new perspectives for them.
APPENDIX O:
WHITE PRIVILEGE ATTITUDE SCALE

WPAS

Directions: Below is a set of descriptions of different attitudes about White privilege in the United States. Using the 6-point scale, please rate the degree to which you personally agree or disagree with each statement. Please be as open and honest as you can, there are no right or wrong answers. Record your response to the left of each item.

If you identify primarily as a person of color, many items will not apply to you. You may leave those items blank. If you identify primarily as European American, Caucasian, or White, please answer all items.

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<thead>
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<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strongly Disagree</strong></td>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>I plan to work to change our unfair social structure that promotes White privilege.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Our social structure system promotes White privilege.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>I am angry that I keep benefiting from White privilege.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>I am worried that taking action against White privilege will hurt my relationships with other Whites.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>I take action against White privilege with people I know.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Everyone has equal opportunity, so this so-called White privilege is really White-bashing.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>I accept responsibility to change White privilege.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>I feel awful about White privilege.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>If I were to speak up against White privilege, I would fear losing my friends.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>I have not done anything about White privilege.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>I am ashamed of my White privilege.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>I look forward to creating a more racially-equitable society.</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>I am anxious about the personal work I must do within myself to eliminate White privilege.</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>I intend to work towards dismantling White privilege.</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>I am ashamed that the system is stacked in my favor because I am White.</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>I don't care to explore how I supposedly have unearned benefits from being White.</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>If I address White privilege, I might alienate my family.</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>I am curious about how to communicate effectively to break down White privilege.</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>White people have it easier than people of color.</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>I'm glad to explore my White privilege.</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>I am angry knowing I have White privilege.</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>I worry about what giving up some White privileges might mean for me.</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>I want to begin the process of eliminating White privilege.</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>Plenty of people of color are more privileged than Whites.</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>White people should feel guilty about having White privilege.</td>
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<td>26.</td>
<td>I take action to dismantle White privilege.</td>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>I am anxious about stirring up bad feelings by exposing the advantages that Whites have.</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>I am eager to find out more about letting go of White privilege.</td>
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APPENDIX P:
TRANSCRIPTION CODES

1st  First interview  
2nd  Second interview

PAR1  First group session  
PAR2  Second group session  
PAR3  Third group session  
PAR4  Fourth group session  
PAR5  Fifth group session  
PAR6  Sixth group session  
PAR7  Seventh group session

R1  WebCT reflection following first session  
R2  WebCT reflection following second session  
R3  WebCT reflection following third session  
R4  WebCT reflection following fourth session  
R5  WebCT reflection following fifth/sixth session

Examples:
Kevin/2nd/236-240 would refer to Kevin’s second (post-project) interview, lines 236-240.  
Peyton/R4/1-8 would refer to Peyton’s reflection recorded in WebCT after the fourth PAR  
group session, lines 1-8.
APPENDIX Q: BARRIERS TO PRACTICING ANTI-RACISM

How do I/we fool ourselves into thinking we are powerless?

- I am just one voice and I can't change everyone's mind
- It doesn't matter what I do in the long run—the majority is too powerful
- One person can't change the world, I'm just one person, self-doubt, etc.
- There's no way I can explain it so people understand what I'm thinking
- I'm not as privileged as others, so I won't be listened to.
- Focusing on the negative instead of the successes

What does practicing humility look/sound/feel like?

- Being able to accept criticism
- Saying “I was wrong,” or “I shouldn’t have done/said that.”
- Don’t overindulge in privilege
- Say “I’m sorry.”
- Learning from mistakes; asking why it was wrong
- Respecting different opinions
- Silence speaks—kind of like “If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all,” but “If you don’t have anything relevant to say, don’t say anything at all.”

What are potential detours/barriers to addressing privilege with one another and in society?

- Fear of what you may find out
- Personal life—other issues being/seeming more important
- Being misunderstood or “not gotten”
- Being comfortable with current lifestyle and not willing to sacrifice or change
- Fear of risking relationships with those who may disagree or not understand white privilege
- Takes a lot of energy
- Becoming a “self-involved” anti-racist: not keeping checks and balances in your anti-racist work. Leaving the people you’re fighting for out of the fight.
Who can I/we specifically be in conversation with so we can stay “on the hook” for privilege/racism and what would allow entry into dialogue?

- People who have experience with the positives/negatives of privilege
- Engage yourself with experiences that will challenge you and cause you to reflect
- Ask questions
- Respect space and privacy
- Friends—hold each other accountable and make it known that you will respect them but also be honest with them; talk to them and set ground rules and expectations
- Be sincere about learning about other experiences and then you can create friends/peers who you can engage in discussion with.
- People you’re comfortable with, people who you know won’t immediately judge you negatively

How do I/we ignore privilege or otherwise make ourselves comfortable with privilege?

- Take the “I can’t help it that I’m white” way out of owning the societal problem
- Avoid thinking about it or say “I had no idea”
- We make excuses for the privilege/disadvantage that exists
- Since I can’t help it if I’m white, why shouldn’t I benefit from privileges that I can’t control?
- Ignore it by immersing yourself in other aspects of your life (social, work, school, etc.)
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