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# An exploratory study of White people's evolving consciousness and how their awareness of White privilege and racism changed their consciousness

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Phillip Channing Plemons Horner  
An Exploratory Study of White  
People's Evolving Consciousness  
and How Their Awareness of White  
Privilege and Racism Changed Their  
Consciousness

**ABSTRACT**

This study was undertaken to explore the many ways in which a White person's consciousness changes due to their awareness of White privilege and racism. The research was a qualitative study with a sample of 12 White people who self identified as able to recognize the benefits of their White privilege, accepted their own role in perpetuating racism, were knowledgeable about racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, and are able to talk about race. Through phone interviews, participants were asked to reflect on their lives and offer their narrative of how learning about and accepting their White privilege and racism have changed their consciousness.

The findings of the study increase our understanding of how White people's racial identity is formed, the complex emotions and stages that are part of this formation, and offer important guidance for other White people looking to join in anti-racism work. Many of the participants indicated focusing on one's own racism and privilege and finding allies and support were important and necessary for their White racial identity development. Through the stories of these White antiracism educators, practitioners, social workers, and community organizers, this researcher hopes to bring more attention to White privilege and racism, highlighting the importance of the subjects for social work, and give inspiring and helpful guidance to White

social workers that are attempting to reflect on their White privilege and racism.

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF WHITE PEOPLE'S EVOLVING CONSCIOUSNESS  
AND HOW THEIR AWARENESS OF WHITE PRIVILEGE AND RACISM CHANGED  
THEIR CONSCIOUSNESS**

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Mast of Social Work

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2012

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

This thesis looks to explore the question: how have White people who have examined their White racism and privilege come to that process of reflection and how has it changed over time? This researcher decided to write about this topic because he found many White people in his MSW program having difficulty knowing what to do about racism or what their next step might be. Many of these questions left this researcher confused because it seemed many students were waiting for someone to tell them how they could take action against racism as if it was something that they did not contribute to, but something that they were going to fight against. At this point in this researcher's life, he believed it was most important to reflect on oneself and understand their own White privilege and how they might be perpetuating racism. He now hopes that this research can be a helpful "road map" or guide to, not only White MSW students, but all White people that are wondering what the next step in battling racism might be.

This topic is relevant to the field of social work because social work is predominantly a White profession, a profession that is committed to social justice and social change (NASW, 2006) The Code of Ethics (2006) of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has asserts an ethical principle for social workers to challenge social injustice and states that:

Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people. Social workers' social change efforts are

focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people.

This research explores the process by which a White person's consciousness changes as they devote themselves to understanding racism and White privilege. By doing so White social workers are able to be in more in touch with issues related to race and White privilege.

This study suggests that all White social workers who are interested in engaging in anti-racism work (as is suggested by NASW code of ethics) should first reflect on ones' own White privilege. This is grounded in the belief that how White people interact with the world has profound meaning and that one must work at achieving a consciousness of one's own relation to racism in order to begin to change behaviors that perpetuate racism. Social workers serve a very diverse population, many that have been oppressed and have felt the negative effects of racism. Many of the people that social workers serve are People of Color whose experiences with social workers are influenced by the extent that they are in touch with issues related to race. It is then very important for social workers, more importantly, White social workers to become aware of their White privilege and their role in perpetuating racism. This could help White social workers create positive experiences with their clients of color.

Many institutions, such as Smith College School for Social Work (SSW), have recognized the importance of furthering social justice and have articulated an antiracism commitment. At Smith College School for Social Work, there is a mandatory class, Racism in the United States, and there is the Unlearning Racism student group, both which broach the topic



of racism and White privilege and help White students openly think about how White privilege gives them unfair advantages.

This thesis will focus on the following questions: How self reflection of racism and White privilege changed the views of White people about the world around them and how has that view continued to evolve; How the consciousness of a White person changes?; How reflecting on one's own racism feels?; How does White people's behavior change because of this reflection?

Chapter two will cover the literature that was reviewed for this topic. The third chapter will explain the methods used by this researcher to conduct the study. Chapter four will detail the themes found in the findings and chapter five will discuss the findings, how they compare with the exiting literature, and the significance and limitations of the study.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

The purpose of this thesis is to ask the question: how have White people who have examined their White racism and privilege come to that process of reflection and how has it changed over time? Before answering this question it is important to understand key concepts such as prejudice, racism, anti-racism, and allies, and be familiar with White privilege and colorblindness. To truly understand a person's reflection we must understand racial socialization, White racial identity formation, and what a person's consciousness is. Lastly, this researcher will look into the importance of confronting one's own racism and privilege by providing examples of White anti-racism educators.

#### **Key Concepts**

To understand this research it is important to understand some basic concepts. To understand racism one must first understand prejudice. Tatum (1999) describes *prejudice* as, "a preconceived judgment or opinion, usually based on limited information," (p.5). It is widely assumed that all people have prejudice of some kind because we are continually exposed to misinformation about others (Tatum, 1999). Prejudice is formed from socialization, which is discussed later in this literature review, and is usually characterized by displaced aggression towards out-groups (Miller & Garran, 2008). Racism is based on just one social identity, race, therefore the out-group in this case and in the context of the United States, is People of Color.

Terry (1974) describes *racism* as, “any activity by individuals, groups, institutions, or cultures that treats human beings unjustly because of color and rationalizes that treatment by attributing to them undesirable biological, psychological, social, or cultural characteristics,” (p. 41). Poptapchuck, Leiderman, and Major (2005) explain racism as a way of, “classifying people into racial groups was developed as a method to justify treating some groups as less human than others, and that the idea of races is more political than biological,” (p. 32). There are many different forms of racism such as *aversive, cultural, and institutional* racism.

Carter (1997) explains that *institutional racism*, “consists of established laws, customs, and practices which systematically reflect and produce intentionally and unintentionally racial inequalities in American society,” (p.200). The institutional policies that do create these circumstances may never mention any racial group, but their effect is, “to create advantages for Whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as non-white,” (Poptapchuck et. al., 2005, p.39). *Cultural racism*, as defined by Carter (1997), is:

The conscious or subconscious conviction that White Euro-American cultural patterns and practices, as reflected in values, language, belief systems, interpersonal interaction styles, behavioral patterns, political, social roles, economics, music, art, religious tenets, and so forth, are superior to those of other visible racial/ethnic groups (Asian, Black, Hispanic, Indian Americans). (p. 200)

One example of this would be making English the official language of the United States and then defining some dialects as “standard” English (Poptapchuck et. al, 2005).

*Aversive racism* is a form of modern prejudice that characterizes the attitudes of many White people with egalitarian values who believe they are non-prejudiced, but who still discriminate in subtle ways which they can rationalize (Gaertner, Dovidio, Banker, Rust, Nier,

Mttola, & Ward, 1997, p.168). Unlike other racisms, aversive racists are much more liberal and egalitarian and are motivated to not see themselves as bigoted or harboring negative beliefs. As the researcher asserts in the last section of this literature review, it is important to recognize our own racism (Gaernter et al. 1997).

*Anti-racism* refers to a, “commitment to dismantling racism, which has dimensions that are institutional and social as well as attitudinal and behavioral,” (Miller & Garran, 2008, p. 210-211). For this research, the researcher will use Wise’s (2008) definition of *White people*, “typically of European descent, who are able, by virtue of skin color or perhaps national origin and culture, to be perceived as ‘white,’ as members of the dominant group,” (p. viii). The role of an *ally* is, “to speak up against systems of oppression, and to challenge other whites to do the same,” (Tatum, 2011 June 2). There is no one way to be an ally. But there are many things one person can do to help: assume racism is everywhere, notice how racism is denied, understand and learn from the history of whiteness and racism, understand connections between racism and other forms of injustice, support the leadership of People of Color, don’t do it alone, and talk with your children and other young people about racism (Kivel, 2005).

### **White Privilege & Colorblindness**

**White privilege:** Some parts of our social identity carry different social privileges and power while others might cause people to be targeted (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Hardiman & Jackson explain that this can be understood through the ideas of *agents* and *targets*. Miller & Garran (2008) define *agent status* as residing in a person who has, “power, privilege, and the capacity to define and determine what is ‘normal,’” and explain that *target status*, “means that social identity places a person with a group that is discriminated against, marginalized, and oppressed” (p. 7). Oppression not only affects the members of the target group, but also

members of the agent group. Members of the agent group are trapped in their social grouping by social oppression and confined to the prescribed behavior roles of their group (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997).

|  | <b>Agents</b>              | <b>Targets</b>                                   |
|--|----------------------------|--|
| Race and Ethnic                                    | Whites                     | People of Color                                  |
| Gender   | Men                        | Women  |
| Sexual Orientation                                 | Heterosexuals              | Gay men, Lesbians,<br>Transgender, and Bisexuals |
| Religion   | Christians                 | Jews, Muslims, and Other<br>Religious Minorities |
| Physical/Psychological/Developmental<br>Disability | Able persons               | Disabled Persons                                 |
| Class  | Owning and<br>Middle Class | Poor and Working Class                           |
| Age  | Middle/Adult               | Young and Elderly                                |

Figure 1.1 - Target and Agent Status

Source: "Conceptual Foundations of Social Justice Courses," by R. Hardiman and B.W. Jackson, in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 16-29

For this study it is important to understand the agent status for race and ethnicity: White privilege.

Peggy McIntosh (2005) defines *White privilege* as, “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks” (p. 109). Tim Wise (2008) explains that to be White, “is to be born to certain advantages and privileges that have been generally inaccessible to others,” (p. 17). Robert Jensen (2005) explains that, “in a White supremacist culture, all White people have privilege, whether or not they are overtly racist themselves,” (p. 115). All of these authors, McIntosh, Wise, and Jensen, have come to understand the advantages of their own Whiteness.

White people can work hard at making sure they are not racist and do their best to resist the racist training and the racism which exists in U.S. culture. Still, White people may routinely trip over the lingering effects of their learned racism. As much as White people might try to unlearn their own racism there is one thing that will never change, they will still have White privilege (Jensen, 2005).

In a qualitative research study, Sandra Lawrence (1998) asked 21 White female students to split themselves up into groups of four and five and define an abstract concept, one term that was often used was multiculturalism. The students were first given fifteen minutes to come up with a definition of the term. Then they then had to make mobiles of their definition using preassembled packets of materials on their tables. Lawrence (1998) supplied some tables with more materials to use and others with much fewer. The students were then asked to present their mobile and explain it. There was also a follow up assignment that asked the students to reflect on the assignment.

Lawrence (1998) found that the students with fewer materials were upset, frustrated, and explained how it was unfair they were given less. They said that they felt robbed and cheated. These students also noticed that other groups were given more materials to work with. The

groups that were more privileged and had more supplies did not notice that other groups had less, but did wonder why their mobiles were less colorful. A student from the less privileged group explained, “I felt ‘underprivileged’ for probably the first time in my life...it showed me that American’s underprivileged children DO feel cheated and DO notice that others have what they don’t have,” (Lawrence, 1998, p. 199). This study is a perfect example of how White privilege goes unnoticed to many White people in the United States. It also hints at Color-blindness in the U.S.

**Colorblindness:** Color-blindness is a dominant racial ideology, where people believe everyone should be looked at as just another person and to forget what a person might identify as and forget what levels of discrimination might be present for them (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). For example, in schools this can happen with educators. Wise (2008) explains, “the most commonly heard refrain from educators, in my experience with them, is something to the effect that they ‘treat all kids the same and don’t even see color’ when they look at them,” (p.21). In this instance it is important to realize that those kids do have a race and it matters, because it says a lot about the challenges they are likely to face (Wise, 2008).

Charles A. Gallagher (2003) took data from seventeen focus groups and thirty individual interviews with White people from around the country, with the majority of the individuals between the ages of 18 and 22. Many of the groups were conducted in college or university settings and the rest were in rural counties in Georgia where one county was 99.54% White while, in another county, the Whites were the racial minority. The research suggested that the belief among the majority of White people at the time was that the socio-economic playing field is level (Gallagher, 2003). The information also suggests that White people believe racial harmony is the norm, making White privilege seem invisible and that any social programs that

are race-based are not needed. This study suggests that the majority of White people have a color-blind perspective.

Gallagher (2003) explains that, “colorblindness allows whites to believe that segregation and discrimination are no longer [an] issue because it is now illegal for individuals to be denied access to housing, public accommodations or jobs because of their race,” (p. 4). It is important to note that treating everyone the same is to miss the fact that People of Color have the same challenges that all White people do, but they also have to deal with racism (Wise, 2008).

Gallagher (2003) concludes that colorblindness makes us forget about race, but it also hides our White privilege and renders invisible the institutional arrangements that perpetuate racial inequality.

### **The Cycle of Socialization**

It is important to have a basic understanding of socialization. Our identity is formed by the world around us and we only cement that feeling when we perpetuate those same learned behaviors and beliefs that our society has taught us (Harro, 2000). Feagin & Vera (2005) explain that, “most White Americans have absorbed racist attitudes from parents, friends, or the mass media. In this sense, racist views are a ‘normal’ part of being a White American” (p. 133). To understand socialization allows one the ability to look at the many parts of their own identity and understand its creation. The researcher’s purpose here is to understand the racial identity of White people.

The Cycle of Socialization (2000), which was created by Bobbie Harro, goes to great depths to understand the development of socialization in eight stages: *the beginning, first socialization, institutional and cultural socialization, enforcements, results, action, decision to change, and core of socialization.*



In the *beginning* we are born into society with no concepts of what things are and with norms and society already set up before us (Harro, 2000). There are target and agent groups already established and no matter which group a person is born into, they are “dehumanized by being socialized into prescribed roles without consciousness or permission” (Harro, 2000, p.17).

The *first socialization* happens from a person’s parents and family. They learn what is good, bad, healthy, and acceptable by society. Sometimes these messages are unconsciously passed down by family members. Parents might not even be aware of what they are and at other times they know (Harro, 2000). For instance a person might be told:

‘Boys don't cry’: ‘You shouldn’t trust white people’: ‘They're better than we are.

Stay in your place’: ‘Don’t worry if you break the toy. We can always buy 'another one’:

‘Christianity is the true religion’; ‘Children should be seen and not heard.’ (Harro, 2000, p.17)

In the *institutional and cultural socialization* stage a person starts learning from non-family members, most notably people at school (Harro, 2000). One’s ideas may be contradicted or reinforced from what they’ve learned at home, and a person will start to see whose ideas get preferential treatment and whose don't. Usually, a person in the target status will be able to see the differences. In this stage, a person might learn that, “Money talks. White means- good; black means bad. Girls are responsible for birth control. It's a man’s world. Jews are cheap. Arabs are terrorists,” (Harro, 2000, p. 18).

The *enforcements* stage keeps an individual in their socialized place. It generates a line of thinking that, if we as people try to think for ourselves or be different than what society has told us, society will rise up and force us to stop and we will be labeled trouble-makers; those who stay in their places will receive privileges for keeping with society’s rules (Harro, 2000).

In this stage, if a person is in a target status then they might be held up as examples as why this group is inferior (Harro, 2000). Those that are of agent status that break the rules will be punished as well. For example, “White people who support their colleagues of color may be called “n -- -- lovers. Heterosexual men who take on primary child-care responsibilities, cry easily, or hug their male friends are accused of being dominated by their spouses, of being “sissies,” (Harro, 2000, p. 18).

This leads a person into the *results* stage. Here, a person might start to feel and understand what society has pushed them into being. A targeted person might be upset with society and how it has formed, while also developing low self-esteem, high levels of stress, and a sense of helplessness (Harro, 2000). The learned helplessness can be a kind of internalized-oppression because the person might have learned to oppress themselves. An agent who might be examining their social identity might feel guilt, shame, and fear payback. By participating in the role of agent and being unconscious of the cycle, agents are perpetuating the system of oppression (Harro, 2000).

At this point, a person faces the *action* stage where they must decide what they are going to do, continue being silent and giving consent to what is happening or try to interrupt this cycle (Harro, 2000). For many targets, at this point they have been fighting for change and have felt beaten down and it has become the role of Allies to stand up with them (Harro, 2000). Now a person is faced with their *decision to change*, and for a target this is difficult to do alone; here, agents have the power and privilege to help. If people continue at this point without interrupting the cycle they come to the *core* of socialization and feel fearful to do anything or they have been kept ignorant of the cycles and neither know what to do nor have the confidence to break from what they have been told (Harro, 2000).

## **White racial identity development theory**

It was only twenty years ago that theories started to develop to understand the identity formation process for White people's racial identity in the United States (Carter, 1997). Janet Helms (1992, 1995a, 1995b) started developing the White Racial Identity Theory (WRIT). She contends that, "White racial identity is a psychological template which operates as a 'world view' and serves as a filter for race-based information," (Carter, 1997, p.199). Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) offered many critiques of Helm's theory and provided a White Racial Identity Development model of their own, White Racial Consciousness (WRC). They explain that the, "purpose of White Racial Identity Development models is to explain how Whites developed attitudes toward their racial-group membership," (Rowe et al., 1994). Instead Helm's described how Whites develop levels of sensitivity and appreciation for different racial/ethnic groups and not about White identity. For the purpose of this research, the researcher will be focusing on Janet Helm's theory.

In Helms's theory there are two major tasks for White people in the process of developing a healthy White identity: the abandonment of individual racism and the recognition of and opposition to institutional and cultural racism (Tatum, 1999).

To accomplish these tasks there is a six status process. The first three statuses are: *Contact, Disintegration, and Reintegration*. Together they represent the movement away from racism. The last three statuses are: Pseudo-Independence, Immersion-Emersion, and Autonomy. They represent a more complex ego identity formation and a movement towards a non-racist identity (Carter, 1997).

It is important to note that these statuses are not mutually exclusive and that a person can be in more than one status at a time (Helms, 1992). At first Helms had five different stages,

which a White person would go through linearly. They were Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-Independence, and Autonomy. But drawing on further research and articles critiquing Helm's (1995a) White Racial Identity Theory (WRIT) and the use of stages in her developmental pattern (Rowe et al, 1994), Helms replaced stages with statuses. The change from stages to statuses also allowed Helms (1995a) to explain how racial status worked. Helms (1995a) explains that, "each time a person is exposed to or believes he or she is exposed to a racial event, the ego selects the dominant racial identity status to assist the person in interpreting the event," (p.187). The dominant racial identity status that is selected is the expression of the information-processing strategies (IPS), which differ for each status (Helms, 1995a).

Helms' *contact* status is the beginning of the abandonment of racism. The IPS for this status include: denial, obliviousness, or avoidance of anxiety-evoking racial information (Helms, 1995a). At this status it is normal for Whites to be oblivious to racism and have very little understanding of what racism is (Helms, 1995b). Whites may profess to being colorblind, perpetuate stereotypes and the superior/inferior dichotomy associated with Whites and People of Color are not noticed (Helms, 1995b). Ignorance is usually a strong trademark of this status as well (Helms, 1992). Whites also confess to being free of prejudice, unaware of their own assumptions about other racial groups, and are also unaware of the socialization process (Tatum, 1999).

The next status, *disintegration*, is marked by the person's growing level of awareness of racism and White privilege. The IPS for this status are: disorientation, confusion, and suppression of information (Helms, 1995a). This stage is usually reached by some kind of moving experience involving race. An example could be a White person forming a close friendship or romantic relationship with a Person of Color and seeing firsthand how racism

operates (Tatum, 1999). This is when the person realizes that race does matter and that their prior “color blind” perspective is not accurate (Carter, 1997). They will become increasingly conscious of their own Whiteness and experience conflict when choosing between their own group and their updated moral values (Helms, 1995b). In the disintegration status many White people will have feelings of guilt and shame (Helms, 1992), usually due to a new awareness of one’s own prejudices (Tatum, 1999).

The last status of abandoning racism, *reintegration*, is characterized by the need for relief from the tensions that are created between noticing and not noticing racism in oneself and others (Tatum, 1999). The IPS for this status are, “distortion of information in an own group-enhancing manner,” (Helms, 1995a, p. 188). At this point Whites have felt so much guilt and shame (Tatum, 1999) that they revert back to the idealization of Whites and denigration of People of Color (Helms, 1992). This status can also be thought of as a stage of regression (Helms, 1995b).

A study done by Donald Pope-Davis and Thomas M. Ottavi (1994) revealed that the reintegration status had the highest level of racist attitudes associated with it compared to the other statuses. It can take a powerful event for a White person to abandon this type of racial identity, but it is possible that a person’s commitment to self-growth can start the process of self-awareness, thus beginning of the process of developing a non-racist White identity (Carter, 1997).

*Pseudo-independent* status is the beginning of a complex ego identity formation and a movement towards a non-racist identity (Tatum, 1999). The IPS for this status is, “reshaping racial stimuli to fit one’s own ‘liberal’ societal framework,” (Helms, 1995a, p. 188). At this status, Whites will still hold the belief that Whites and White culture are still better than other racial groups, but not intentionally (Tatum, 1992). At this status it is common for Whites to try

to learn from People of Color about racism, instead of examining themselves (Carter, 1997). They might also believe that they are cable of helping and assisting People of Color who are in need of help, and feel they need to, possibly because of guilt (Helms, 1992). A person might also know that Whites are responsible for racism, but might believe it is something that only “bad” Whites do (Helms, 1992).

The *immersion-emersion* status is the beginning of the realization for Whites that People of Color alone cannot stop their victimization and that, since Whites invented race and maintain it, they turn to other White people to help them challenge racism.(Carter, 1997). The IPS for this status is, “reeducating and searching for internally defined racial standards.” (Helms, 1995a, p. 188). Whites’ guilt and shame start to fade as they find other antiracist White people in their lives (Tatum, 1999).

The last stage, *autonomy* is the culmination of White racial development (Tatum, 1999). The IPS for this status are, “flexible analyses and responses to racial material,” (Helms, 1995a, p. 188). Autonomy, in this case, occurs when a White person had freed themselves from racism and White racial denial (Carter, 1997). Helms (1995b) explains that at this point White people have accepted their own role in perpetuating racism; are knowledgeable about racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, they value diversity, and are no longer fearful, intimidated, or uncomfortable talking about race.

### **Consciousness**

It is important to understand the basic idea of consciousness since that is what changes in White people as they progress into their White racial identity. The consciousness is hard to understand and is an ongoing human quest (Miller & Garran, 2008). Damasio (1999) uses the

metaphor, “stepping into the light,” (p. 3) for consciousness as it is like the birth of a knowing mind and the creation of a sense of self.

In this research many of the participants might feel like they have stepped into the light when they start to confront their own racism and privilege. When this happens and the journey of self-examination begins, White people will start to go through many of Helms (1995) statuses.

Damasio (1999) speculated that consciousness has two major components: 1) an awareness of things around us and how they affect how we think and feel; and 2) an awareness that people are both the viewer and writer of what we see, which constitutes consciousness. From this we develop a sense of who we are outside ourselves as actors and objects (Damasio, 1999). Damasio (1999) helps explain why People of Color may have a better understanding of race and racism than White people since they are more likely to have a better racial self-awareness and they are more in tune with the world around them and how it reacts with them. This is not always true though. As Bivens (2005) explains, internalized racism can blind People of Color from racism around them because they might believe the racist beliefs are true.

This researcher is interested in how the consciousness of race changes as White people start changing their White identity and creating a *liberatory* consciousness (Love, 2000). A liberatory consciousness allows people to live in their oppressive environments with awareness and intentionality, “rather than the socialization to which they have been subjected,” (Love, 2000, p.470). It also allows people to live outside the patterns of thought and behavior learned through the socialization process, which, as explained earlier in the literature review, perpetuates oppressive systems (Love, 2000).

Freire (1993) believed consciousness was determined by the socio-economic and political context, and also by cultural conditioning. He separated consciousness into three different

levels, *magical consciousness*, *naïve consciousness*, and *critical consciousness*. The process of change between each is extremely difficult (Hooks, 1999). To do so a person must give up set ways of thinking, “that we shift our paradigms, that we open ourselves to the unknown, the unfamiliar,” (Hooks, 1999, p.29).

This is the first step out of Freire’s (1993) *magical consciousness*. *Magical consciousness*, “simply apprehends facts and attributes to them a superior power by which it is controlled and to which it must be submit,” (p.39) it is usually characterized by fatalism. People with *magical consciousness* usually will not question injustices done in their lives and are silent and docile (Freire, 1993). The next level in consciousness is *naïve consciousnesses*, which is the ability to look at oneself and see our own problems, while being unable to see how they connect to the outside world (Freire, 1993). If we do not change our consciousness, “we cannot change our actions or demand change from others,” (Hooks, 1999, p.29). To understand *critical consciousness* one must understand W.E.B. Du Bois’s theory of *double consciousness*.

Du Bois’s (1903) theory of *double consciousness* proposes:

This sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness –an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p.12).

Frantz Fanon came up with a very similar idea, but applied it to colonized people (Fanon, 1965). There has been debate on whether *double consciousness* is a constructive way to look at the dual lives of people living in oppression (Moore, 2005), but either way it is a useful construct to understand the evolution of consciousness.



Black (2007) proposes that if People of Color and colonized people develop a *double consciousness* by seeing the world through their eyes and also by what others see them as then would it not be useful for Whites and colonists to develop a dual perspective as well. In the case of this research that would mean White people would develop the ability and evolved consciousness to see their racial positions from the eyes of people of color, which would then form a *double consciousness* (Black, 2007). This might help White people find *autonomy* in their White racial identity formation (Helms, 2008) and form a *critical consciousness*.

*Critical consciousness* is when people stop looking at problems as individual but start to see them at structural (Freire, 1993). It always, “submits that causality to analysis; what is true today may not be true tomorrow,” (Freire, 1993, p.39). This idea suggests that for our consciousness to be fully evolved we must be able to look at more than just our individual problems, but also to see how they have formed systemically, which is very similar to *autonomy* in Janet Helm’s (1995a) theory of white racial identity formation. Hooks (1999) reminds us that it, “has been extremely difficult to move beyond this shallow, empty version of what we can do, mere imitators of our oppressors, toward a liberatory vision – one that transforms our consciousness, our very being.” (p. 29)

### **Confronting One’s Own Racism and Privilege**

Rothenberg (2002) believes the most important thing White people can do is to explore themselves because, “White privilege is the other side of racism,” (p. 1). It is often easy for Whites to deplore racism, but to talk about their own White privilege or racism can be uncomfortable to them (Rothenberg, 2002). It is important that White people take personal responsibility for the receipt of unjust advantages (Wise, 2008). Wise, Rothenberg, Terry, Jensen, and McIntosh have all come to this same conclusion. They have not only looked at their

own participation in racism and the benefits they receive from being White, but they have all written about their own White privilege.

While interested in understanding men's unwillingness to acknowledge their privilege, McIntosh (2005) realized that this was not the only phenomenon, and states "that since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of White privilege which was similarly denied and protected," (p. 109). This realization helped McIntosh examine her own White privilege. Miller and Garran (2008) explain that it is, "often easier to be aware of how advantages are structured when we feel disempowered because we do not have passports of privilege," (p. 91). This would help explain how McIntosh was able to explore her own White privilege. McIntosh explains that, by working in Women's Studies to reveal male privilege and asking men to give up their power, and also as being someone who talks about White privilege, she poses the question, "Having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?" (p. 109). McIntosh (2005) hopes by examining her own White privilege it will be a hopeful inspiration to the rest of the White people in this country to do the same. Below is some of McIntosh's listing of daily effects of White privilege:

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.

2. 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. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.

4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on White privilege.
9. 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.
10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability" (McIntosh, 2005, p. 110,111).

Tim Wise is another White person who has examined his own White privilege. As Wise (2008) says, "only when Whites start challenging other Whites, and begin to break the wall of silence that so often enables racist behavior, is anything likely to change," ( p.75) and to do this White people must first confront their own racism and privilege. Wise (2008) not only wrote about some of his own White privileges, but wrote a book about how his White privilege helped form who he is today. He acknowledges his own White privilege and explains:

"the only reason you are reading this book...is because of White privilege. You're not reading this book because I am a great writer or because I am particularly smart. There are lots of folks, especially Persons of Color, who know a lot more about racism than I

do...But you're not reading their book right now; you're reading mine, and that has everything to do with privilege," (2008, pp. 14-15).

Jensen (2005) agrees and explains that, like many people, he has overcome certain hardships in his life and worked hard to get where he is, but says that to feel good about himself he does not need to believe that merit alone got him there and said he can, "acknowledge that in addition to all that hard work, I got a significant boost from White privilege, which continues to protect me every day of my life from certain hardships," (p. 117).

Terry (1974) not only acknowledges his participation in racism, but explains that we should not focus racism to be People of Color's problem. He explains that, "if, on the other hand, we become oriented so that we understand ourselves as the problem, then it becomes possible to explore new behavior and reevaluate earlier attitudes," (p. 26).

All of these writers find the most important aspect of dismantling racism is to acknowledge one's own privilege and racism and that the first step for White people is to not be afraid to admit that White people have benefited from White privilege (Jensen, 2005). In this study, the researcher will interview White people who have taken this first step and have attempted to dismantle racism but accepting their White privilege and discussing racism openly.

It is important that White people connect with other Whites who might be struggling to recognize their privilege (Denevi, 2004). When they are having this trouble it can be related to a lot of things, but generally it is because the person might be in denial that racism exists. Racism is something that many people in the United States believe is no longer with us (Wise, 2008). Denial is a common defense that is used for many people to protect themselves. It involves a negation or non-acceptance of important aspects of reality (Goldstein, 1995). White denial is something that has been around forever. In the 1960s a poll of nine of ten white people said that

People of Color had as fair a chance to secure employment as Whites did (Wise, 2008). Denevi (2004) explains that this defensiveness can be disguised from disclaimers such as, “I’m not a racist, I have friends who are people of color. I don’t see color (colorblindness). I went to a workshop on White privilege.”

The other reason one might deny racism and White privilege is because it would open them up to guilt and shame. Guilt is a feeling that is associated with realizing that one has behaved in a manner that is bad or flawed (Brown, 2006). Shame can be best described as a debilitating set of emotions that are associated with a person’s belief that they are personally flawed or bad, feel disconnected from reality, and can do nothing to redeem themselves (Brown, 2006). Those that are able to resolve guilt and shame understand that no single human can be charged with all the creation of the oppression system today (Love, 2000).

To end this literature review it is important to have taken away one important fact that Terry (1974) knew over 38 years ago in 1974, “the crucial task in gaining new White consciousness is to recognize our own racism,” (p. 40).

## **Summary**

This chapter has reviewed some of the literature on racism in the United States, including allies, prejudice, White privilege, colorblindness, White racial identity theory, racial socialization, consciousness, and how White antiracist educators and organizers have confronted their own racism and privilege. This research has shown that reflecting on one’s own White privilege and racism is a difficult task and one that is met with many obstacles along the way. In the United States, society does not expect White people to think about race or challenge it (Wise, 2008). In a person’s journey it has been shown that their opinions, views, beliefs, morals, and how they understand the world changes. This research will attempt to further understanding of

those changes in a White person's life? How do their emotions change overtime towards society, friends, partners, teachers, and their own country? How do they continue their work when they might find guilt, pain, and frustration? Have there been certain steps or stages in their White racial identity formation? And how does the world ultimately change in their eyes? The answers to these questions might contribute to a better understanding of how to confront one's own White racism and White privilege and begin their own journey to battling racism in the United States. The next chapter will describe the methodology used and any ethical concerns that may arise through this research.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

Using qualitative research methods, this study explored the question: “How have White people who have examined their White racism and privilege come to that process of reflection and how has it changed over time?” The purposes of this study are to 1) investigate how White people have come to examine their own racism and privilege, 2) what reflection of racism and privilege looks like to different White people, and 3) to understand how internal processes of accepting their own White privilege and racism develop and evolve over a person’s life. This is important to social work. Social workers pursue equality and care for everyone. This could be difficult to accomplish with White racism prevalent in the United States. Understanding White privilege could be useful for social workers and how White people contribute to racism in the United States.

I have interviewed White people who have already started to investigate their White privilege. I found my participants through The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond’s Unlearning Racism workshops. The ethical issues I had to work with were regarding confidentiality and subjects feelings regarding the topic. There is also bias in this study because of how I identify racially.

This researcher is a White male and this study involves only White people. Because of this extra effort had to be made to make sure to limit researcher bias. This researcher might be

blind to understanding some unconscious racist beliefs. Because this researcher is White, he is still understanding his White privilege and unlearning ingrained racism. The limitations and researcher bias will be covered in more detail in the discussion chapter.

Even though there was a general focus to the questionnaire, each interview was arranged to follow the narrative of each participant. The topics that were aligned with the study's purpose were raised by the researcher, but they were raised within the framework of the participants' responses.. This can cause the information to be more difficult to categorize and collect, causing the research question to be more difficult to answer. The wide-ranging group of participants made drawing themes from the interviews very complex and difficult. Since the question the researcher asked looked to tap into the deeper meanings of particular human experiences, it was suggested by Babbie and Rubin (2010), that the research question be exploratory and for this researcher to use a qualitative methods approach. It helped me understand the many different factors that are related to this phenomenon. Interviews allowed me to extract data and uncover unpredicted themes. The information from this study is intended to provide White people with a better understanding of how to approach and understand their own racism and White privilege. Typically researchers would build on prior research, but in this case there was a lack of studies, which made it necessary for this researcher to initiate what he hopes will be a field of inquiry that will receive greater attention

### **Obtaining a Sample**

The researcher gathered participants from organizations dedicated to opposing racism. I did not attempt to recruit for diversity such as gender, sexual orientation, or religion. I looked to gather any participants that met my criteria for participants, which were people who were able to identify the benefits of their White privilege, have accepted their own role in perpetuating



racism, are knowledgeable about racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, and are able to talk about race.

With the help of my thesis advisor I made a contact at the Anti-Racist Alliance. Anti-Racist Alliance is an organization that is a collection of human service practitioners and educators whose hope it is to bring a clear anti-racist structural power analysis to social service education and practice. They also team up with The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, another organization dedicated to raising awareness about and working to eradicate racism. They focus on understanding what racism is, where it comes from, how it functions, why it persists and how it can be undone.

This researcher was able to recruit the necessary participants through the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond and also through the use of snow-balling. Connecting with People's Institute of Survival and Beyond provided the opportunities for me to make contact with and try to recruit people for this study, by distributing information and also getting email and phone contacts. The information was distributed by email, and fliers. I also used snowball sampling as another way to gather participants for my research. I did this by asking the groups, organizations, and possible participants who else they believed might be eligible for and interested in my study.

### **Sample Description**

The final sample consisted of twelve participants. The participants ranged in age from 26 to 67. Three men and nine women were interviewed. Everyone had an undergraduate degree from a four year college or university. Eleven of the participants had graduate level experience: five had or were obtaining a Masters in Social Work degree, four had or were obtaining doctorates (in the fields of psychology, social work, and social justice), one had a Masters in

French Literature and Health Advocacy, and one had a Masters in Divinity. Ten participants identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual, one was questioning, and one person described herself as a Womanist using the definition:

A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counter-balance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.

The participant's years of antiracism work ranged from 3 years to 44 years with the average being 18 years.

### **Data Analysis**

This researcher audio-recorded and transcribed five of the interviews and the other seven were transcribed by the transcription service, SpeechPad. After completing the transcriptions, the researcher analyzed the data using content/theme analysis. The researcher first read through all of the transcriptions and made notes of common ideas and themes. Then the researcher reread the transcriptions, applying one or more codes to each section of text. Each transcription went through multiple readings to ensure the maximum amount of information was taken from each participant's interviews. Then this researcher was able to find how many times a certain codes occurred. With the wide selection of quotes already collected, the researcher picked out those that would best illustrate each theme.

Some of the themes that emerged from the coding process included: evolved white racial consciousness; heightened awareness; Janet Helms's "autonomy" status; changed behaviors; confronting racism; emotions; People's Institute for Survival and Beyond: Undoing Racism Workshop, and relationships. The most prevalent of these themes are discussed in the following

chapters. It is important to note that because this sample size was so small it cannot be generalized to all White people who dedicate themselves to anti-racism work or education for racial justice.

### **Confidentiality**

Each interview was audio recorded. The recordings were transcribed onto a password secured document on my personal laptop. I also took notes throughout the interview. This researcher transcribed five of the interviews with the other seven being transcribed by SpeechPad with consent from each participant prior to transcription. All data that might be in professional publications or presentations, as well as in the thesis itself, will be presented so all identifying information will be disguised.

All audio recordings, transcripts and consent forms will be kept securely on my password protected laptop for a period of three years as stipulated by federal guideline after which time they may either be destroyed or continued to be maintained securely.

### **Risks of Participation**

For this research to be feasible I had to find people that are willing to be interviewed on their White privilege and their own racism. I asked each participant to share stories about their own reflection of White privilege and their own racism and how these reflections have changed over time. This is a delicate topic, which made it hard for some people to talk about and some participants chose to skip some of the questions. It was common for participants to feel angry, sad and upset when being asked some of the questions that are pertaining to their White privilege and racism. I distributed a list of counseling services and resources to all participants.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore the evolution of White racial consciousness after a White person devotes him- or herself to reflecting on and understanding racism and White privilege. The researcher encouraged participants to reflect and talk openly about their experiences and by doing so create a narrative of their White racial identity. This researcher asked questions to find out how their lives and consciousnesses have changed as their racial identity developed. The following themes will be discussed in this chapter: evolved consciousness, Janet Helm's White Racial Identity status, "autonomy", changed behaviors, confronting racism, emotions, People's Institute for Survival and Beyond: Undoing Racism Workshops , relationships, and advice for White people.

#### **Evolved Consciousness**

This researcher inquired of each participant how their consciousness changed due to their self-reflection on racism and White privilege. The exact question was: Has your self-reflection of racism and White privilege changed your view of the world and how has that view continued to evolve? How has your consciousness changed? For all (n=12) of the participants this led to a narrative of their journey to where they are today. These stories ended up explaining in great detail, what each participant's life looked like prior to concerning themselves with racism and White privilege and how their consciousness has evolved to the present day. Participants discussed their awareness of their environments and themselves in the racial context. This

section will lead us through a demonstration of each participant's evolution of their awareness of themselves in their oppressive world in the hopes that their consciousness leads to Autonomy.

Helms (1995b) explains that Autonomy occurs when White people have accepted their own role in perpetuating racism; are knowledgeable about racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, they value diversity, and are no longer fearful, intimidated, or uncomfortable talking about race.

The evolution of the participants' consciousnesses was evident in all 12 participants, creating many different themes. Throughout the discussion of these sub-themes this researcher will be using the terms White racial identity formation, evolving White racial consciousness, and evolving consciousness somewhat interchangeably. Each time the researcher will select the term that best fits the specific instance. This section will be grouped in several sub-themes: awareness of White privilege; ability to step out of the struggle with racism; White people are all racists; and heightened awareness.

**Awareness of White privilege.** For many participants (n=9) awareness of their White privilege was noted as a pivotal step in their evolving White racial consciousness. Although the researcher did not ask direct questions regarding the awareness of the participants of their White privilege, this theme came out of the participants' detailed narratives to questions like "has your self-reflection of racism and White privilege changed your view of the world?", "Has your reflection on your own racism scared, upset, and confused you? How?", "How has your awareness changed you?", and "How, do you believe you can reach Autonomy?" To reiterate Janet Helms (1995, p.1) defines Autonomy as:

Increasing awareness of one's own Whiteness, reduced feelings of guilt, acceptance of one's own role in perpetuating racism, renewed determination to abandon White entitlement leads to an autonomy status. The person is knowledgeable about racial,

ethnic and cultural differences, values the diversity, and is no longer fearful, intimidated, or uncomfortable with the experiential reality of race. Development of a nonracist White identity becomes increasingly strong.

When the previous question was asked the researcher reviewed the concept with them.

Understanding White privilege has been important for each of the participants. The evolution of participant #9's consciousness started because of their awareness of White privilege: Consciousness occurred when I was working with a group of therapists of color in my work in a methadone clinic and got schooled on the idea that there is such a thing as White privilege in the work of Tim Wise, etc. I'm sure you're familiar with and realized, "Wow. There's is such thing as White privilege."

For some participants (n=3), acknowledging White privilege was identified as a beginning to dismantling racism. Participant #3 explained:

just by doing what she talks about, you know, go through the guilt and you say ok, and you are able to dispense with the guilt and then you say, 'I am White and because I am White I have privileges I am part of the power structure, um I'm a race that keeps this in place' and then you can make the conscious choice to say, 'ok I need to do something about it' and then you take action to dismantle it and you do that in things that are seemingly small, but also on a macro level so you know those of us that have or are in leadership positions can really change, change systems

White privilege was also found to create a place of comfort for most (n=7) of the participants.

This comfort was evident in participant #11's explanation:

Because I think I have a fairly comfortable life, and that comfort, I'm increasingly aware, comes at least partially from White privilege. And so, being aware that I kind of live in

this place, physically and psychologically, of comfort that comes because I'm White and I live in this privileged place and often walk around feeling at least somewhat entitled to this. So that I really shouldn't be sitting in this place of just comfort without doing something, and so I'm constantly kind of fighting the urge to just kind of pull back into a comfort zone

Even though participant #11 explained that it creates a comfort zone, it was found that the awareness of White privilege was useful as well because it allowed participant #5 to witness how life is easier for White people:

So I think the evolution is just asking myself to keep looking for those situations and then the first step for me is to be responsible enough and recognize where I am getting ahead or what is easier for me. That is probably the word I would use for where I am at and I know this is a long process and a lot of growth needs to be had and I think for me it is to be recognizing more and more where things are easier for me as a White man.

Lastly participant #5 also recognized how White privilege allows White people to step out of their own personal struggles with racism, because it does not feel like it might be affecting them personally:

And there are times, like when I was just burned out working in Danbury, Connecticut and some of the stuff. I was just fighting seven days, 24/7, and pretty much burned out. And I had to buy myself a little elbowroom. What a nice White privilege.

**Awareness that White privilege itself allows White people to step out of the struggle:**

Three of the participants found that the more aware they are of their White privilege the more they realize that they are able to “opt out” of dealing with their own struggles in reflecting on racism and White privilege. This theme came out of the participants’ detailed response to

questions like “Has your self-reflection of racism and White privilege changed your view of the world?” and “How has your awareness changed you?”

With one participant the awareness of the privileges of being White in the United States pushed them to try and sit in their discomfort instead of opting out. Participant #11 observed this when asked how their awareness has changed them:

Well, I would say the biggest changes are my constant awareness of my ability to opt out, and therefore kind of pushing myself to not opt out. Because I think I have a fairly comfortable life, and that comfort, I'm increasingly aware, comes at least partially from White privilege. And so, being aware that I kind of live in this place, physically and psychologically, of comfort that comes because I'm White and I live in this privileged place and often walk around feeling at least somewhat entitled to this. So that I really shouldn't be sitting in this place of just comfort without doing something, and so I'm constantly kind of fighting the urge to just kind of pull back into a comfort zone

Participant #1 also reflected on their White privilege to find a similar conclusion. Participant #1 explained that when her sister explained that she had a fear of retreating to when, “she didn't used to know these things,” she could relate:

because at the end of day we really do have the luxury of not caring or turning it on or off. Then to know that you have that, and nothing's going to change that, it's always going to be a temptation. It's kind of scary, you know? So, even though I could say my sister is past that, I could say that for myself too, totally. We were talking about, I think that's why staying connected to people. Staying active and accountable is still important, and will help counteract that tendency.



Both of these participants reflected how easy it is to allow oneself to let go of guilt and step out of caring about inequality and racism. Participant #3 found this to be true as well and has found her using one of the privileges of being White, not having to think about racism:

well one thing occurs to me, but one of the advantages of or dynamics of White privilege is that you can deal with racism or not and I know right now that I am not actively dealing with it in a way to dismantle it and I think about that a lot. I haven't done anything about it in little old funky [name of place], but um I just think always realizing how your advantages or your White privilege advantages are just protect you and keep things the same.

**Recognition that to be White is to be born with privileges:** Several (n=4) participants viewed White people as being born racist because of the structural system that is set up to benefit White people. Participant #7 explained how she came to this realization:

I'll tell you the truth, a few years ago I really hated the idea that somebody could ever call me a racist, and today I'll tell you I am a racist. I cannot live as a White woman in this culture and not be. It's huge. It's huge. I think if you're White in this country, you're a racist by definition. It's structural. It is absolutely ingrained in everything and how we live.

Participant #5 agreed with participant #7 and explained that it is impossible to be White and not be racist:

For White folks, as you well know. We are really a mess. In fact, I've written and tried to be an advocate for saying to be White in America is to be racist. And to be racist is to have a mental illness. Absolute simplistic definition of mental illness is being out of touch with reality. That's what being White is-being out of touch with where the truth is.

It was evident in participant #5 and #7's responses that to be White in the United States is to have a systematic, institutional, and personal advantage. This is best explained by participant #5:

And I don't know for White people, we don't have any trouble seeing ourselves as fathers and grandfathers and uncles and brothers and all different roles there, all under the same person. But we do have trouble seeing ourselves as racists and anti-racists. At the same time, we can be both.

Participant #4 expressed their struggle with that recognition:

It's moving from understanding that I am racist and first being, "oh my God, I'm a racist. I must be a terrible person." To, "well oh my god, I'm a racist but I'm not a terrible person." How do I balance that? You know it's that I can't be racist I'm nice to Black people. That crap.

**Heightened awareness:** This researcher asked all the participants, "How has your awareness changed you?" in the context of their evolving understanding of race and racism. The majority (n=7) of the participants found that they have changed as their awareness of racism and White privilege has increased. Several participants reflected on the continued process that they are in. Participant #4 was able to be humble about his journey and how much he has left to accomplish:

And then how in my self-awareness do I move away from that kind of base position of [participant name] racist. So there is a continuum there. I don't know that there is a plateau but that I suppose would be how I would say this is how my growth happened or I'm in process. It hasn't, I mean it's like in Genesis, in the beginning God began to create. I'm not by any means finished. It's an ongoing process.

Participant #4 was able to also see that at times he is unable to be aware of racism around him, “I am aware I'm in the forest and I still have trouble seeing the trees. I know it's there. I struggle with it.” Participant #5 also saw that there is a lot of work to do and that more accountability is needed on their part:

I had a ton of work to do, and every step I took I took hits, you know the White guy who goes off to slay the dragon under the self righteous, but we always are slaying the wrong dragon, there is this whole process that is so painful and I did not have a whole lot of accountability

Although participant #5 found that they need more accountability for their actions, participant #9 found that she is able to recognize that her White privilege was paramount in helping her get where she is today. This ability to recognize how White privilege has helped in their lives was common among all the participants (n=12) as participant #9 explains her ability to do so:

I can go on and on but people don't get this shit, they think everyone starts at the same place and you worked hard - no. Of course I worked hard, but I had advantages of already having a college degree, already having a Dad who was a middle-class insurance salesman who paid for it. This is sort of where I am, if you can hear my exasperation, because I recognize that a lot of where I am is because I'm a White woman. And I move through the world that way, and so do my kids

Participant #9 began to show elevated emotion that became very common in most (n=10) participants when asked interviewed about this subject. Participant #10 finds herself upset with not only the situation of the United States, but at the lack of education around racism and White privilege that was provided to her:

Once I understand what structural racism is and I got clear that I am a gatekeeper and that my responsibility is either to dismantle it or to do nothing, which would make me an enabler. Once I was clear about that I did not have a choice and I was pissed off. I was already way too old, no I should have learned this in my education, and had I been properly educated I could have been a gatekeeper for transformation. Instead I went through elementary school, finest schools in the country, I went through high school the finest schools in the country, etc etc, I found myself in school for social works and still no one had rolled out an analysis I could understand, how us as individuals are pawns in a system that perpetuate structural racism so. Once I had that clarity and I started going through my own reflection and understand, it literally rehumanized me and I am not the same person.

Once participant #10 was able to find an analysis she was able to witness the world around her in a different light:

I am not the same person I am now looking through the eyes of undoing racism as a way of life. It has changed what I do in my life, as far as work, where I play, who I hang out with, where I shop, where I eat, why I eat, what movies I go to, who I hire, everything, everything I do either enables it or help bring about equity. In that consciousness I am a transformed person and I feel that I have been rehumanized so that is what I want to say. And I feel that I am absolutely responsible on a daily basis for my privilege. I understand that till the day I die I can't get out of this box and that we are all prisoners, we can never get out of it but we can be responsible and accountable to it.

Participant #10 also was able to understand how accountability for a White person's privilege and racism in this country is an important step to evolving a White person's consciousness much

like participant #4 and #9 did. That means understanding how White people perpetuate racism and how White privilege helps White people every day of their lives. Participant #12 was also able to recognize this and how important it was to change their actions:

I think I am a lot more aware, when I speak, when I am silent, when I am intentionally creating space for other people's voices to be heard. It has been a lot of stepping up in White circles and stepping back in multiracial circles

### **Janet Helm's "Autonomy"**

This researcher defined Janet Helm's status "Autonomy" and then asked participants, "How, do you believe you can reach Autonomy?" I included the explanation that Janet Helms believed we could transition back and forth in each status of her White Identity Development Theory. This means that we were not always in Autonomy, but that we might reach it for a brief moment and then step out of it again. Some of the participants (n=4) found it impossible for us to actually reach Autonomy as far as the definition describes it, but then some of the participants (n=3) believe that it is possible for us teeter in and out of Autonomy.

Participant #1 explains that it seems impossible due to the definition of Autonomy that says White people are "no longer fearful, intimidated, or uncomfortable with the experiential reality of race." Participant #1 is also partially confused by the definition and finds that she cannot say that she is autonomous:

It's interesting. In terms of the no longer fearful, intimidated, or uncomfortable piece, I never really thought about if I would challenge this - and I don't really feel like I'm in the position to challenge Janet Helms, that would be a bit pompous of me, but to me it sounds a little finite. No longer fearful? Maybe she's saying in general, but if it's a

definite never again in my life can I ever reach this point of not feeling intimidated or uncomfortable . . . I don't know. I would like to think I just haven't gotten to that point.

I think it's actually okay that it's an uncomfortable thing, because we're in this structure that we didn't create that we have a lot of problems with, and that really goes against our humanity in every way. So, how could we not be uncomfortable with that reality?

By the end it seems that Participant #1 is almost challenging Janet Helm's definition and wondering out loud if it is even possible to be comfortable with the reality we live in today.

Several (n=3) other participants also believed that it is not possible to reach autonomy.

Participant #2 and #12 found that without help along the way they don't believe this could have been possible. Participant #2 explains:

If I had been left to do this, to make this journey on my own, I don't think I would have arrived--would be arriving, passive voice--where I am right now. It really is a supportive community of other people that taught to debrief, struggle, reflect, laugh, party, have a drink with...It's been so critical.

Participant #12 agrees and finds trouble with the definition because of the word that is being using, Autonomy:

Um I think, the only thing I struggle with in terms of Autonomy, is just the word, because to me it sounds like something that is self governed and I don't believe that we can do it by ourselves. I would question or challenge is that it is autonomous especially for White people you need other people to see what you are not seeing and communicate that to you.

Both participant #12 and #2 found that the original meaning of the word "autonomous" describes that we, alone, can do this work without help, which both of them have difficulty agreeing with.

Participant #4 found it similarly problematic how Autonomy was defined, “Wow. Taking in total, taking the whole statement in total, can I believe White people can reach this my answer is no.”

Several of the participants (n=3) did find it possible to reach Autonomy. Participant #7 found it was possible, but that it was a very long process:

I'm going to say yes, but I think it's a long process. It's like saying can we reach enlightenment. Perfect enlightenment? Probably not, but it's not just the intent but it's also the behavior to support the goal of growing, if you want to call it autonomy. I would call it enlightenment. It sounds so trite to say “it's not the definition, it's the journey.” I think there are quite varying degrees. If you ask me to rate myself on a scale of autonomy, I would say I don't know how to answer that question.

Participant #7 had trouble with the definition, but was able to look past it and believe that because of the goal it was possible. Participant #8 believed that because Janet Helm explains that each part of her White Racial Identity Development is a status and that White people move in and out of them, that it is possible, “Good question. Yeah. I think so. I again think that it might be for a few days, a few weeks so that something might happen, but I do think that is possible.”

Participant #10 agreed for the same reasoning:

I believe that it is possible to teeter around that and it comes and goes and we should never say that we are autonomous or we get dangerous, but I understand contextually that I don't need to always be around people of color or what to do and to be accountable. I believe that I am absolutely there, but not all the time could I be trusted 100%

## Changed Behaviors

The researcher wanted to understand how participants' behaviors have changed and asked the exploratory question "How has your behavior changed?" in the context of the participants' evolving understanding of White privilege and racism. For every participant, heightened awareness of their own racism and of race and racism around them was achieved. This was covered earlier in this chapter in the Heighted Awareness section. This researcher observed that all the participants had begun to involve themselves in local communities, personal work, and institutional settings where they were addressing racism, institutionally, systemically, and personally.

Participant #2 found that in her own practice she brings racism up as a topic:

Yeah. There are moments of hard, and then you go, "Okay, what am I going to do?" And if I'm working with a person of color who is struggling with depression and self-efficacy, I will often introduce their experience with racism as part of our therapy conversation, and then also invite them to talk about their experience of talking to me, a White person, who must represent what they have been oppressed by.

Participant #4 saw that in his own profession there was certain changes that he could instill that could help open other people's awareness:

I think the biggest change was asking myself how do I preach on it? How do I witness it? How do I become present to it as an active process and what does that mean if I am present to it? And I think that's really where I am

Many participants (n=9) found that in their own work environments they could change how they were teaching, practicing, or talking with their family to help raise awareness of White privilege



and racism. Participant #3 was able to use their power as an administrator to address diversity and racism:

working for an organization that has that mission gave me total license to do anything, not anything, but to do so many things that would, correct the balance, so I really could have affirmative action hires and no one could really critical of me because of our mission. And even though there would be White people on the board and other White people on staff and you know who would just get their feathers ruffled and didn't quite understand it, you know I could always say, "Well this is our work, this is our mission"

Much like the previous participants, participant #9 found that they could get involved in the local community. By doing so participant #9 observed that there were many situations that they could be involved in:

There are White friends of mine who agree, there are others who think it's an exaggeration. I've become more involved with the stop-and-frisk problems with the NYPD and recognizing that movement is real and necessary. We don't hear about that stuff, I only hear about it because I have some involvement. I would never hear that black kids, every time they leave their house they're at risk, just walking to school. People don't believe that, they think I'm too radical when I say it. So I believe that.

Participant #7 also found that their main behavior change has been their involvement in local communities:

How has my behavior changed? It has caused me I think to slow down a little bit. It's not external. I don't think my external behavior has changed. It's more of an inside job, although it's gotten me involved in Peekskill, New York, where it's my goal to be an ally. It's my goal to be an ally to the Latino population that lives here.

## **Confronting Racism**

Although this researcher did not ask any direct questions about confronting racism and being an ally, all participants discussed confronting racism. This theme came out of questions like “How have you felt when you have had conversations about race with family and close friends? Has it been difficult?” and “How has your behavior changed?” Several (n=3) participants did not want to push people away when they confronted their racism. Participant #1 explains, “So, I try to be really strategic about choosing my battles.” Participant #4 explained:

I wanted facts but what I didn't want to communicate was you White folks look what you've done. Look what you were complicit because I am fearful that will simply shut them down because they'll say I'm not racist so you're not talking to me about this stuff. But I have to respect them or have to be very careful because I know what it's like to be shut down.

Participant #5 found it useful in conversations to not point fingers, but to show themselves as an example:

I've found, usually, that when I talk about myself rather than what I talked about what you're doing or what you said, it's easier because I do all the crap too. I make all the assumptions and I do all that. I'm just as White as anybody. I may have sharper antennae than a few people but I do it too. So when I talk about it and own it myself, sometimes that helps

Some participants (n=5) have found that their anger towards other people has shifted and their confrontations now come from a place of love. Participant #8 explained this:

The first time I interrupted or said something to somebody about something racist was in a yoga class. After class I opened my mouth and I just burst into tears because it was so

scary for me. I couldn't even get it out. I always share that story with my class because I'm like "This stuff is really scary if we're not used to it." But now I've shifted to kind of feeling complete and utter love and respect for the person, and really come from that place as I talk to them, and really make myself vulnerable. It's such a subtle energy shift from fear.

Several (n=3) participants found that they now will confront racism when they are in public.

Participant #9 observed this of themselves:

One thing that I do differently now, when I'm in a group of people - maybe that I don't really know well - or am at a gathering of Whites and a comment is made I definitely speak out now. If they think I'm a nut or a pain in the ass, I don't care. I've definitely been doing that more and putting myself at risk for not being liked as much or being considered to be too radical. When I don't speak out, I feel like I'm doing the wrong thing around Whites.

## **Emotions**

This researcher was interested in learning about the many different emotions that White people go through as they reflect on their racism and White privilege. By asking questions like, "Has your reflection on your own racism scared, upset, and confused you? How?" and "Were there different stages that you felt you went through these changes? (e.g., Guilt, anger, frustration, sadness, or not concerning yourself with the problems of racism)," participants acknowledged the many different feelings and feelings they have had.

Several participants (n=3) indicated that they had felt angry about what is and has happened, but also at themselves. This anger led to being upset and scared. Participant #6 observed that anger and confusion they found in different situations:

So I don't really feel angry or self conscious of myself, but I think that I get reminded, maybe angry and confused is a fair word if you combine them. But it is just, like the first quarter of a second when I see a situation or a person and it is the things that I wouldn't want to tell people that cross my mind. That are typically stereotypical or just assuming about someone. I think that, that is the hard part of it, angry, confused.

This anger was also relevant when observing other situations as participant #10 observed:

Absolutely, absolutely, as I understand the fullness of it I am very upset and I am angry, because I understand fully what is going on right under the surface, from the removal of black children from their homes to child welfare, the exclusion of black boys from classrooms

The anger can also be disguised as being pissed off at society. Participant #5 is able to witness how his anger can be a hindrance to his work:

[Name]tells me, the black man that I'm close to here and who's leading the Committee for Justice, says, "[participant #5], we're not going to get it done on our [lifetime] but jeez, you've got to leave something for your kids and some understanding and some work that they can do." That was kind of healthy for me to hear. I get impatient and pissed off sometimes. But it's good perspective. And he's been through more.

Participant #10 expressed, "I often feel powerless and that is when the community organizing comes in and unless we are organizing with other people for change around drugs laws, the new Jim Crow campaign, it's scary. Yes I am scared."

Many participants (n=5) talked about guilt and feeling ashamed, when participant was asked, "Has your reflection on your own racism scared, upset, and confused you? How" they observed:

All three. How could I possibly harbor such thoughts? How could I be such a horrible person, wanting to hide it. Feeling ashamed that I could possibly have the thoughts or the behavior. Wanting to be a good person, and then getting confused

Participants observed many different emotions; one of those was pain, which was observed by participant #9:

You know, Phillip, to me, all I can say is you have to really be willing to really be non-defensive and say, "I'm going to really open my mind to this. I'm going to allow myself to be that open." Being that open is painful for a White person, it was painful for me. I'm talking about this now. It's rolling off my tongue. I'm talking about 15 or even ten years ago; this was very hard for me to stay that open. Maybe one of the reasons I was able to do it is I had some White colleagues who were doing it, too - not maybe, I did. I had some White colleagues doing it with me. I wasn't the only White in the group

Fear was something that was common for several (n=3) participants. Participant #1 explains it well:

I think I'd gotten fearful about making mistakes As I learned more about how enormous this is, and how much it affects our society and our lives, it seems so inevitable to me that I can never really understand it, or that I'm always going to have these major blind spots. So, unfortunately, I think at one point, I was more in the guilt and shame phase, but I can't say that I've really overcome that fear of messing up - both in personal relationships but also in organizing. I just feel like hyper-aware a lot of times, and I have concerns about that on many levels. I definitely don't think it's a healthy thing, or productive feeling, but it's not something I've really been able to shake at this point.

All participants have felt many different emotions when going through the process of reflecting on their White privilege and racism. Participant #5 observes this:

Only when I'm awake. Yeah. My understanding about my racism, my ownership, my implication riles at me. I intellectually dealt with it. I understand I'm crapped and I'm a victim too, in terms of the crap going on

### **People's Institute for Survival and Beyond: Undoing Racism Workshops**

The People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (2012) is a non-profit organization that holds workshops called "Undoing Racism" that focus on understanding what racism is, "where it comes from, how it functions, why it persists and how it can be undone." The Undoing Racism workshops emphasize, "learning from history, developing leadership, maintaining accountability to communities, creating networks, undoing internalized racial oppression, and understanding the role of organizational gate keeping as a mechanism for perpetuating racism." They help create a common language that everyone that attends the workshops can share. This researcher collected eleven participants through their connection with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond.

Almost all (n=11) of the participants talked about People's Institute for Survival and Beyond's Undoing Racism workshops as pivotal moments in their lives. This researcher did not ask any questions directly about the Undoing Racism workshops or the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. Participant #3 helps explain how it was pivotal for their own process:

I've taking the undoing racism training three times. I think I'd like to do it again.

It's peeling layers, the layers of the onion. I think it's true and we have to accept the fact that it is a long journey. It's not stepping into the light overnight and having everything go away. Human consciousness doesn't work that way. Our ego structures don't allow it.

Like participant #1, participant #2 found it to be helpful experience in their struggle with their own racism:

That was a long period of my life, which is sort of this fierce color-blindness. It was key for my non-acceptance of being White, and it was really my own huge struggles through many of the Undoing Racism workshops, where I was unable to not only own being White, but to see it as a place of growth and benefit, where I could be as fierce an activist as a social transformer

For others the Undoing Racism workshop was a place that created a common language that they could understand and talk with other people about. Participant #10 observed this:

That is where the People's Institute Undoing Racism makes an enormous difference, because those of us who have gone through the workshop share an analysis, share a language and that is how this movement has been taking place. I mean everybody; I mean the fact that in two minutes you can get 100 people that want to participate in your interview. It's because we have been transformed through the Undoing Racism workshop experience. It makes a big experience. My daughter and my husband have done it.

Like participant #10, participant #12 found the undoing racism workshop very helpful in helping their family understand what they have been going through, but also help them educate their family in this new analysis:

Yeah that is actually my first organizing adventure to get my mom, dad and my sister to the Undoing Racism workshop, because I really felt a divide when I went home and tried to talk about it and I felt like that, especially when you talk about it as a internalized process it was really hard for my mom to hear it and not feel that I was blaming her for something so then I just shut it down and kept saying like "oh my gosh I just can't

explain it they will explain it so much better at the workshop and just cant do it justice you really need to hear it from a trainer” I really just stopped explaining it because I knew I couldn’t do it by myself I knew I needed the help from other people, the same way the person who invited me to the workshop needed the help from other people

## **Relationships**

This researcher was very interested in understanding how relationships change with friends, family, and intimate partners. To understand this researcher asked “How have you felt when you have had conversations about race with family and close friends? Has it been difficult?” and “How have your relationships with friends changed?” All participants explained that their relationships in some form or another have changed due to their understanding of racism and awareness of White privilege. This section will be split into two sub themes: family; and friends and intimate relationships.

**Family:** Some participants (n=3) found that they were willing to work with family longer than they would with friends. Participant #2 explained, “With my family, I don't give up. At least I'm in a different place with family, unless they're totally egregious. Ultimately, they haven't been...well, I'll stick it out with them. With friends, the commitment is not as life-long, life-lasting.”

Participant #11 also observed this:

Yeah. There have definitely been people over the years that it's been increasingly difficult for me to spend time with. And these are obviously White people. And some of them have some been family members - I don't cut off from family members, so there's nobody in my family that I don't speak to, but it is definitely difficult to have fully open



conversations with a lot of my family. And it's actually a major source of pain for me in my life, that when I think about

Like participant #11, participant #2 found it to be similarly a painful struggle, but one that they still have:

Except they're absolutely, unconditionally committed to being my family member, and they're in the room with me. It's delicate, it's different. I have hugely struggled to accept that they are where they are, and it's a level of acceptance that really, I don't do with friends.

Participant #6 was also willing to struggle to their family, but also found it to be extremely difficult and needed more time and help to have the discussion:

I just couldn't get it across, but I just think that it was hard, but it was nice to struggle through with people that love me. So my immediate family while I was growing up, my in-laws, wife's in-laws, people I am close with at work, who you know sort of throw out clichés we could agree to disagree. But later I would say I really believe in this, let me come back to you and they would kind of keep allowing that process to happen

Participant #8 found that having a continued discussion with her family was helpful instead of pointing out every time they were racist and were unaware. She explained this:

I call my mom everyday on my way to teach. I'm just kind of like "Oh my Gosh, Mom! Today we're . . ." I tell her everything that we're doing in class. I've been doing that for the last few years. It's amazing to see. It's not in a, "Wow, Mom you said something racist, so now I'm going to let you know that." It's for me to say "Let me share with you what I'm doing, what I'm really enthusiastic about and I care about." So she had said to

me, "[Participant #8], you've transformed like your Dad and I." She's much more aware than she was and is often surprising me in a lot of areas of her person

There were also some participants (n=3) that found they became angry and disconnected from family or stepped back from the conversation and did not confront them. Participant #4 explained, "Well, actually I didn't. I think if anything, they would make the statements and I would just step back. I wouldn't argue. We would go to another topic, but I would not make any statements that would challenge theirs."

Participant #11 explains she feels so dumbfounded by some comments that she does not try to confront them or does not know how to:

So cousins of mine will drop comments that sometimes I address and sometimes I don't address because I'm almost left dumb-founded and then I want to address it later on and then it feels like out of context, and then I didn't address it

**Friends and intimate relationships:** With friendships it was observed that some (n=4) participants described having different levels of friendships. Participant #1 explains:

And so, I think I find that when I do develop friendships and relationships now, it's kind of a given that the people who I feel closest to and who I end up forming relationships with have some kind of analysis and are like active in activism stuff.

Participant #1 also explained that her friends from high school would not have an analysis of racism and White privilege:

And like in my group of high school friends, like one of my best friends is White and she is like very much does not have anti-racist analysis at all. So I have like a fear that if we did try to all talk as a group of friends, that there would be like this divide there.

Much like participant #1, participant #10 observed that she did not have the same level of friendship with many of her friends prior to becoming interested in social justice:

I would not lose friendships, but what happens is the friendships that I had became uninteresting to me, but I still have those friendships. I am no longer interested in the things I did before so the friends that have grown together. This happens in a lot of arenas of life we grow apart from people. What I am saying is I have not lost people, but I am no longer finding it interesting to spend long amounts of time with people who aren't wanting to do this work or something else that is substantial, social justice kind of a thing

Some (n=3) participants acknowledged that they have made closer friendships and relationships with People of Color. Participant #9 observed, "My friendships have changed in that I have more contact with people of color. More friends of color." Participant #8 also saw this to be true, "Since I started thinking about this, I have way more friends of color than I ever did before." Participant #12 sees that not only did the friendships with people of color grow, but they supported the participant when they needed it:

I definitely push people on that, so yeah it is a lot of mixed things, and I think for my relationships or friendships with people of color I think there has just been a lot of support and a lot of incredible accountability that has come from it and because they are also people that are also organized or organizing with the People's Institute and those friendships are a lot deeper than before hand and I think it is all a matter of seeing people clearer, I think that is true for all my friendships.

## **Advice for White people**

At the end of each interview this researcher asked each participant, “For White people who are struggling in their own journey of reflecting on privilege and racism, what kind of advice or tips would you give them?” This question was used to allow the participant to reveal what has been most important for them in this process or what would have been helpful for them to have known. Most (n=10) participants revealed how important it was for them to not be alone during there process, participant #8 expressed this simply by saying, “I would say one of the hardest parts is isolation. I'd say reach out to people, let yourself feel feelings if it's connected to race and racism.” This view was echoed by nine other participants. Participant #2 expressed her need for support:

Find friends, find allies. Don't do it alone. Don't do it all alone, but there is some part of it you have to do alone – the reflection, the meditation, the owning the pain, the going back to your own family of origin. That's stuff you have to do alone. But be sure you have allies and friends and lovers and people around you as you do it.

Participant #5 agreed with participant #2 about support, but expressed what kinds of support he needs:

But that support network isn't just somebody who is going to hug you and make you feel good. It's somebody going to kick you in the ass when you need it too. And I think that's so valuable to us. And hard to do, especially when we're so in need of support and collegiality around this stuff.

Participant #7 expressed that she also needs others and that it is important for White people to, “get out and participate. I've taking the undoing racism training three times. I think I'd like to do

it again.” Participant #1 expressed the importance of not only finding others, but having a space for White people:

Having that separate space for white people gives us that opportunity to explore that whole autonomy idea, and help each other get there. I just said this, but to have a space where there's just only other white people to work some of this stuff out. I think that's doing a service to people of color, as well, to have that space because there's a lot of work we need to do on our own

Some participants (n=4) found it very important to struggle in their process of reflecting on White privilege and racism. Participant #6 very nicely captured this, “Struggle with it and be happy to struggle with and recognize how much better our existence can be by acknowledging this,” he continued and later on added, “so I would just be vulnerable and be ok to struggle with it and be ok to not have any answers.” Participant #4 expressed his difficulty with owning this process and how important it is to “own it”:

First of all be okay with owning it. As I said earlier, I struggled to own it. I think that's the first thing is to own it and not be punishing oneself for owning but rather to say this is who I am this is what I am and now that I am authentically owning it rather than excoriating myself and saying I'm a terrible person

As important as these participants expressed it was to struggle in this process they also expressed the need for White people to be kind to themselves as well. Participant #7 expressed the importance of this, “To be gentle with themselves when they're exploring, to be not to afraid, to look at their own negative reactions, as ugly as they might feel.” Participant #8 agreed with participant #7's sentiments and included the need of compassion, “Just be really compassionate

to yourself and other people. I think I would reinforce that racism is something that, I love the analogy that it's smog in the air that we all breathe.”

The findings from this chapter will be discussed further in the next chapter. Participant #10 nicely concludes this chapter by explaining her everyday reality and goal:

My ability to assume responsibility for it, to accept that as a White person I cannot be outside of my socialization, so basically me around racism you know I feel like I fall off the wagon, fall of the wagon every day. It's like an alcoholic having to work at a bar or a brewery, it is really hard and I have just accepted that and that's fine. I am learning to grow and to be accountable for it and just to continue learning and growing and I think that has enabled me to have authentic relationships with people of color who are extremely forgiving and over time it happens less and less and less. It is just incredible. It is really hard you know when you are in recovery, they say “stay away from people places and things that can bring you back to your illness” well when you are recovering from White supremacy theory and internalized White superiority it is hard to stay away from people, places, and things. We just keep going to meetings, the workshop, follow up meetings, and staying within this sober community.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

The previous chapter described the findings of the research. In this chapter the researcher will discuss all the major findings and how they compare with the literature review. This chapter is organized by the themes found in the findings chapter and then will be followed by a discussion of limitations of the study.

#### **Evolved White Racial Consciousness**

This theme incorporated many sub-themes: awareness of White privilege; awareness that White privilege itself allows White people to step out of the struggle; recognition that to be White is to be born with privileges; and heightened awareness. Each of these sub-themes was consistent with the research cited in my literature review.

**Awareness of White privilege:** Many of the participants (n=9) noted that their awareness of their White privilege was a pivotal if not the starting point in their evolving White consciousness. This was so evident that it leads this researcher to say to all White people that one of the first steps in understanding racism or undoing racism is becoming aware of their own White privilege. This is consistent with the literature and what Wise, Terry, Jensen, Rothenberg, and McIntosh were saying: confront your own White privilege and racism before looking at everyone else's. For example, participant #9 explained that she had been working on anti-racism for years before she ever thought about privilege and that her awareness of her White privilege

did not form till years later. Repeating a quote from the findings chapter because of how well it captured this, participant #9 explained:

Consciousness occurred when I was working with a group of therapists of color in my work in a methadone clinic and got schooled on the idea that there is such a thing as White privilege in the work of Tim Wise, etc. I'm sure you're familiar with and realized, "Wow. There's is such thing as White privilege."

This can tell us that, even though it might be more helpful and beneficial for a White person to start looking at their White privilege before engaging in anti-racism activities, a White person can still do plenty of beneficial work before being aware of White privilege.

Several participants (n=3) raised the point that awareness of White privilege was also important in helping them realize how comfortable their lives were because of White privilege. They also found that their White privilege could be used positively to dismantle racism because of the power that they possess. It also gave them insight that at any time they could step out of their own personal struggle with racism and White privilege and go back to giving themselves a break or, as participant #5 explains, some "elbow room" which is a "nice White privilege". This researcher notices that these White people seem to have found many advantages to becoming more aware of their own White privilege.

**Awareness that White privilege itself allows White people to step out of the struggle:**

Several of the participants found that they were able to, as participant #11 explained, "opt out" of their own personal struggles. Participant #1 explained this to be a "fear" of hers of "retreating" to when she didn't know things. The literature explains that this occurrence seems to be similar to the *reintegration* status of Janet Helms's (1995a) White racial identity theory, where White people have so much guilt and shame they revert back to the idealization of Whites (Tatum,



1999). What was most important was that each of these participants (n=3) found that because they became aware of this feeling in themselves, to want to opt out or the ability to do so, they pushed themselves not to and to face the struggle they were dealing with.

**Recognition that to be White is to be born with privileges:** The participants' ideas of the advantages of being White seem to be consistent with the literature except for the definition of racism. Some (n=4) participants directly equated being White with being racist in the United States. The researcher decided to use a quote already used in the findings section by participant #7 because it explains this theme well, "I think if you're White in this country, you're a racist by definition. It's structural. It is absolutely ingrained in everything and how we live." Their explanation is that being White in the United States is to have a systematic, institutional, and personal advantage in life. This definition of White people being racist is not consistent with the literature, although Terry (1974) suggests that to form a new White consciousness is to recognize one's own racism. The participants seem to be explaining that if you are White in this country you benefit from racism and have an advantage because of your White privilege and thus you are racist. The assumption made here is a person is racist because they benefit from racism. This is a contested idea. It should be noted that this came up with only four of the twelve participants, but was relevant enough to mention.

**Heightened awareness:** The findings on how participants' awareness changed showed that over half of participants (n=7) felt that they have changed dramatically because of their reflections on racism and White privilege. This agrees with the literature from Freire (1993) and Hooks (1999) that explains once a person's consciousness starts to change so does their behaviors, attitudes, and views of life.

Both the findings and the literature review reveal how important it is for White people to look at their own actions and place in the United States. Participant #10 revealed that once she found a new analysis the whole world looked different, that included her own actions in the world and how she interacted with other people. This participant seems to be describing her own creation of Love's (2000) liberatory consciousness, where she is now living in her oppressive environment with awareness and intentionality. This is common among many (n=9) participants. The findings suggest that it is important for White people to reflect on their own White privilege and become educated on racism in the United States. This information also suggests that this awareness would help jumpstart each participant's consciousness in terms of racism. The findings relate to Janet Helms's (1998) *White Racial Identity Development* theory's disintegration status which is marked by the person's growing level of awareness of racism and White privilege. The study's findings suggest that if a White person is to engage in anti-racism work, the first step would be to reflect on ones' own White privilege. This is grounded in the belief that how White people interact with the world has profound meaning and that one must work at achieving a consciousness of one's own relation to racism in order to begin to change behaviors that perpetuate racism.

### **Janet Helms's "Autonomy" Status**

There were two major findings that came with this theme. This researcher was interested in knowing if the participants thought it was possible to reach Janet Helms's "Autonomy" status which is:

Increasing awareness of one's own Whiteness, reduced feelings of guilt, acceptance of one's own role in perpetuating racism, renewed determination to abandon White entitlement leads to an autonomy status. The person is knowledgeable about racial, ethnic

and cultural differences, values the diversity, and is no longer fearful, intimidated, or uncomfortable with the experiential reality of race. Development of a nonracist White identity becomes increasingly strong (Helms, 1995a).

Some participants (n=4) found it impossible for White people to reach Autonomy while other participants (n=3) believe that it is possible for us to teeter in and out of Autonomy.

This researcher found it interesting that the reasoning as to why each participant found it impossible for us to reach Autonomy was all very similar. Each of these participants seemed to find the idea of Autonomy to be a definite place where they would stay. Participant #1 explained that the idea of no longer being fearful seemed to be too absolute and to no longer ever be fearful seemed impossible. Participant #2 did not think it would have been possible to become autonomous without other people in the first place and participant #12 also did not like the word that was used, Autonomy, “because to me it sounds like something that is self governed and I don’t believe that we can do it by ourselves.” All of these participants also explained they did not want to challenge Janet Helms, but found it difficult to believe White people could find this status.

What is most interesting is that Janet Helms explains that the Autonomy *status* (a word defined by Janet Helms to mean a transient place) is a place that someone can enter, but also exit from at anytime. Helms’s Autonomy status was introduced and explained to each participant even if they acknowledged already knowing Helms’s theory. The definition of Autonomy as explained above and what a status was were both explained prior to asking any questions about Autonomy and yet participants seemed reluctant to embrace that status.

This suggests that all of the participants might have actually agreed with Janet Helms’s conception of Autonomy status if they had thought of Autonomy as a transient place. This

would mean that someone could for one instance be not fearful to talk about race or in that instance be able to have a conversation on race without allies helping them or that they would be able to self govern themselves for one time.

The participants who believed it was possible for White people to be in a Autonomy status all believed it could be done, but also said it might only be a for a few days and that to get to this status would take help from their allies. These allies agree with Janet Helms's definition of Autonomy and believe in it because Autonomy is indicated as being a transient and fluid phase just like all of Janet Helms' White Racial Identity Development theory statuses. The findings suggest that Helms's theory be more widely studied to see if these similar findings are found.

### **Changed Behaviors**

This researcher wanted to understand how White people's behaviors changed due to their self reflection on their racism and White privilege and if there were any major significant changes among them. The biggest change in the behavior reported by the participants was heightened awareness, which was covered earlier and was consistent with the literature. The other major behavioral changes were in how they interacted and involved themselves with their communities, personal work, and institutional settings. This researcher noticed that many participants engaged in more conversations about racism and White privilege at work. Some used their positions of power to enact change by hiring more People of Color, teach or preach about racism, or start at home by talking with their family about White privilege and racism. Participant #4 noted that there were certain changes in his professional life that he could make that would help open other people's awareness. He asked himself this question after becoming aware of racism himself. The literature explains that to have a *critical consciousness* we must be

able to look at more than just our individual problems, but also to see how they have formed systemically (Freire, 1993). These participants seemed to be changing their own behaviors in the attempt to change their professional settings and address systemic problems.

The findings seem to suggest that if a White person is interested in engaging in anti-racism work that a good first step might be to understand one's own relation to racism. Doing so could help create awareness, which could help one see what behaviors they could change that might be perpetuating racism and thus create a *critical consciousness* which might also allow them to see how racism has formed systemically

### **Confronting Racism**

This theme was not something that the researcher directly asked about, but was something that the participants were interested about. Many of the participants reflected on having trouble interacting with people around racism and more importantly when something racist is being said or institutionalized. A few (n=3) reflected how they did not want to push other people away from the conversation on racism and made sure that when they confronted them that they were, as participant #1 explains, "strategic about choosing my battles."

There was a participant who was honest about being unable to be kind to White people when they reinforce racism in a system or behave in a racist way to another person or they themselves say something racist. This participant explained that they would become too emotional and upset and would either yell at them, cursing what they have done wrong, or possibly crying. This participant seemed very dedicated, but also had trouble knowing how to interact with people and had lost patience with White people in general. This experience was not wide spread, but seemed to have happened to almost all the participants at one point in their lives.

This researcher found much literature on confronting one's own racism, but the literature reviewed does not have a substantial amount on confronting other people. This researcher found that one important behavior learned from this study is that White people, who choose to have conversations about racism and White privilege with other White people, should, as participant #8 puts it, do so with, "utter love and respect for the person." The findings of this study suggest that if White people can hold the memory of how difficult their own developmental process was to forming their evolved White consciousness when they have conversations with other White people on this subject matter, it might help them interact with them in a kinder way that will not push White people away from the discussion, but instead draw them closer. This researcher also found that it is very important to come from a place of "love" and understanding. As participant #6 commented nicely about having conversations about racism, race, and White privilege with family, "it was nice to struggle through with people that love me."

### **Emotions**

Although this researcher did not review much literature on emotions resulting from this process, this researcher was interested in the varying emotions that were expressed and what they were like. Participants described feelings of anger, frustration, fear, shame, and pain when they were asked, "has your reflection on your own racism scared, upset, and confused you? How?"

Participants found themselves to be upset about not being aware of racism or privilege for most of their life, knowing what horrible things are happening everyday in the United States due to racism, and at themselves for still thinking possibly racist thoughts. Other participants found that they were fearful about making mistakes and doing more damage because they live a system that has been infiltrated with racism. These emotions are only a few of the very many that White

people have when their view of the world is changed because they can see racism as it is in this country.

The problem seems to be that some of these emotions can be devastating to White people's efforts to progress in their White Identity Development or be an ally to other White people who are not as aware of their own White privilege or racism. The findings suggested earlier that if a White person is to engage in anti-racism work, the first step would be to reflect on one's own White privilege. Thus the findings say that, if a White person is unable to reflect on their White privilege, they might not be able to work on achieving a consciousness of their relation to racism before beginning to change behaviors that perpetuate racism. This would thus suggest that it is important to work on one's own emotions as well, otherwise they can be not only devastating to a White person's effort to progress in their White racial identity development, but also costly to anti-racism work.

### **People's Institute for Survival and Beyond: Undoing Racism Workshops**

This researcher did not ask any direct questions about the Undoing Racism Workshops or the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, but eleven of the participants mentioned how important these workshops have been to their development. The participants explained that it was a place that helped them with processing their racism and White privilege, but also give them an analysis that they could share with everyone else who had ever attended the workshop. This was powerful because it gave so many people who attended these workshops the same definitions, which made conversations about racism and White privilege easier for the participants of these workshops to have together.

This researcher believes that workshops such as the Undoing Racism Workshop or safe spaces to talk openly about race and White privilege can be a very helpful place for White people

for many reasons. First they create a conversation about White privilege and race, which might have been absent from that person's life. If the White person is new to these conversations they can experience a broad range of emotions as noted above. Creating a safe space where all people are openly discussing race and White privilege with trained facilitators can support their progress in their own White Racial Identity Development (Helms 1995a).

Second they help create a shared analysis for everyone who has gone through the workshop. This analysis allows the White person to see the world through a different lens and reflect on themselves as a White person in the United States. As this researcher proposed earlier in this chapter, if a White person is able to be aware of their White privilege and racism it could also help them to do the anti-racism work that they have wanted to. This is very important for White social workers. Since White social workers work with People of Color and often are unaware of the privileges and power resulting from racism, the effect might well be that clients will suffer from this lack of awareness.

### **Relationships**

This researcher grouped the two sub themes, *Family* and *Friends and intimate relationships* together because the participants' responses about each were interconnected. There were three major findings that came out of this theme: more able to have conversations with family than friends or intimate relationships about racism and White privilege; two different forms of friendships, friends after becoming aware of White privilege and racism and friends before this awareness; and the increase in friendships with People of Color.

Many of the participants shared that they feel that they were more willing to have conversations about race, racism, and White privilege with family members than they were with friends or intimate partners. Participant #2 explained this to be true about friends because the,



“commitment is not as life-long, life-lasting.” Although participants were more willing to have these conversations with family than friends, they explained that they were a major source of pain because with friends they could just walk away or cut them out of their lives, but most participants found they could not or would not do this to family. At this point participants explained that these conversations with family were long lasting and were something that they continued to have over time. Participant #8 found that she would have the conversations with her mother all the time and even tell her what she is doing in class, calling her and saying, “ ‘Oh my Gosh, Mom! Today we're . . .’ ”

This researcher found it very intriguing how many participants had different levels of friendships and those levels of friendships were based around the ability to have conversations openly about race, White privilege, and racism. Many times, but not always, that meant friendships that were formed before the participant became aware of White privilege or racism and those friendships that were formed afterwards. Overall this researcher found that participants’ close friendships centered on people who primarily concerned themselves with social justice, White privilege awareness, and undoing racism.

There was one last interesting theme found among several of the participants. Several of them pointed out that they have made more friendships with People of Color, and they noted that these friendships were not just more numerous but also more intimate. This researcher sees this information as inspiring. These findings show many of the benefits for a White person to reflect on ones’ own White privilege. They also suggest that although the conversations about race and privilege can be difficult they are important to continue. This section also suggests that there is more time to have these conversations with family as that connection is more likely to be an enduring one.

## **Advice for White people**

This researcher was very interested in knowing what the participants thought was most important to pass down to other White people going through a similar process of reflecting on their White privilege and racism. Out of this question two distinct themes formed and were categorized together because they were both important pieces of advice for White people. The participants expressed that not being alone during this process and being willing to struggle and be kind to yourself during this process were the most important pieces of information to remember.

Out of the twelve participants, ten of them mentioned how helpful and important it was for them to have had allies while they went through their journey. One participant even expressed how important it was for her to have a place with only White people where she could “work this stuff out” and would allow White people to do some of the work they need to do on their own. Overall this researcher realized and witnessed the importance for White people to find other people and possibly White people going through the same process of reflection that they were going through. This finding agrees with Denevi (2004) who expressed the importance for White people to connect with other Whites who might be struggling to recognize their privilege.

Some participants also agreed that the “struggle” and “guilt” that White people go through is an important part of their development. It seems that the participants were expressing that bypassing this struggle or pushing it away would only slow a White person’s progress in understanding their White privilege and racism and further developing their White racial identity. This seems to agree with the literature and Janet Helms’s (1995) White Racial Identity Development theory and, in particular, the disintegration status which involves feelings of guilt

and shame (Helms, 1992). The disintegration status is marked by a person's growing level of awareness of racism and White privilege (Tatum, 1999).

The participants also agreed that it is important to be kind to yourself in this stage. This researcher reached the impression from the participants' reflections that if a White person was not kind to themselves that they might also become stuck in a place of guilt, shame, and pain. This seemed to be one way White people exited their reflections and would enter into Janet Helms's (1995b) reintegration status which is characterized in this literature review as the need for relief from the tensions that are created between noticing and not noticing racism in oneself and others (Tatum, 1999). Overall the participants seemed to suggest that for White people to move forward in their own journey of reflection on racism and White privilege they needed to allow themselves to struggle, but also be kind to themselves in this process. It also seems to be important for White people to not go through this process alone, but find other people and notably White people that are going through similar struggles.

## **Conclusion**

This study suggests that the field of social work and White social workers in particular, have many things to consider if we want to be social justice advocates and help create transformative change towards undoing racism in the United States. The findings create an outline of the journey that White people might take when venturing on this personal and socially important journey. The reports of the participants make a case for the importance of focusing on the self and one's own White privilege and racism and that focusing on this can be the positive start of a person's White racial identity development. These findings note benefits from increasing our White privilege awareness such as: comfort in discussions on race, racism and privilege; closer friendships with people and more relationships with People of Color; and

feeling more love towards people. The experience of the participants makes a case for the importance of White people focusing on understanding White privilege. The research suggests it is important for several reasons: it can help them change their behaviors that might be perpetuating racism; create compassion for other White people when having conversations about racism or White privilege; lastly the research suggests that it can help create a consciousness of their relation to racism. It also shows that it can help White people when working with People of Color. These findings have presented a friendly “road map” for the journey of White racial identity formation. Racism is becoming harder to see and is intertwined with many other forms of oppression. Jensen (2005) and some of the participants have explained that all White people in United States have privilege , what can we as White people do to raise awareness of this privilege and make sure that everyone has it?

### **Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research**

This study has many limitations relating to the sample, ambiguous criteria for participants, and researcher’s bias. This researcher used snow ball sampling techniques to contact the participants, which very likely will have affected the diversity or responses because almost all (n=11) of the participants were contacted the same way and through the same organization. Since the sample size was so small, the ability to generalize the findings was limited. The researcher’s bias included the researcher’s wish to present some of the participants as more positive about the evolutionary process they went through than they were; and sharing the view of some participants more heavily because the researcher saw them as a positive White role model, perhaps giving even more weight to their words because of this.

Future studies should include larger samples of participants from all areas of the United States. Participants next time should also be asked to clarify how they believe they fit the criteria

for a study such as this. Although this was an exploratory study in the realm of White consciousness development, future studies might involve quantitative research methods to include larger participant pools and to reduce the researcher's bias when interviewing and interpreting findings.

### **Final Words**

This researcher originally started this research in hopes of understanding what it looks like to examine one's own White privilege and racism and how this examination changes a White person's consciousness. There was hope in figuring out how to navigate one's own White racial identity development, how to not abandon the process of reflection, and what some of the next steps might look like. All of this was fulfilled in this researcher's eyes and more. This study became inspiring and uplifting for this researcher. It showed the dedication of White people to social justice and the willingness to focus on oneself, even when it was difficult and painful.

This study shows the importance for White people to take the time to reflect on their experiences, White privilege, and racism. Many participants agreed that, although this is difficult work, it is very important to find allies and support, because for, as much this struggle is individual, it takes a group effort for people to carefully develop their identities and consciousness to become antiracist and to perform antiracism work. The hope for this researcher now is that this study lends a hand to other White people that might be struggling in their own place with reflecting on racism and White privilege, and attempting to contribute to antiracism work.

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## Appendix A

### Approval from Organization

#### Anti-racist Alliance

Dear Phil

We would be happy to work with you.

[name], LCSW

[www.antiracistalliance.com](http://www.antiracistalliance.com)

Undoing Racism in Our Lifetime!

On Dec 6, 2011, at 9:33 PM, phillip horner > wrote:

Dear [name],

My name is Phillip Horner. I am a MSW student at Smith College School for Social Work and I am conducting a study for my thesis and was hoping that I could get your help with it. At this moment I am looking for participants for my interviews and was told that you would be a good organization to reach out to. I would like to conduct interviews with White people who have self-examined their own White privilege and racism. My thesis is asking the question, "How have White people who have examined their White racism and privilege come to that process of reflection and more importantly how has it changed over time." Further details and hopeful characteristics of participants would be supplied.

I thought that you might be able to help me find participants for my study, possibly through your past and present trainings and groups, but also your staff. Or you might have suggestions of other people that might be interested in my study. At this point I am not looking to find people yet, but to talk to you about getting approval for searching for people with your help. I am in the process of approving this study with my Human Subjects Review Board at my school and they need approval from some of the possible sources.

I have left my smith email, but you can also contact me at my work email [removed].

I hope to hear from you soon.

Phillip Horner

## Appendix B

### Flyer for Recruitment

Dear possible participant,

Are you interested in reflecting on White privilege and racism? I am a Masters of Social Work student at Smith College School for Social Work and I am conducting an exploratory study of how White people who have examined White racism and privilege come to that process of reflection and how has it changed over time. The purposes of this study are 1) investigate how White people have come to examine their own racism and privilege, 2) what reflection of racism and privilege looks like to different White people, 3) to understand how internal processes of accepting White privilege and racism develop and evolve over a person's life.

I am looking for people who are able to identify the benefits of their White privilege, have accepted their own role in perpetuating racism, are knowledgeable about racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, and are able to talk about race. In Janet E. Helms words I am looking for people who identify as being in Autonomy status. To define Autonomy I use Janet E. Helms (1995) definition:

Autonomy: Increasing awareness of one's own Whiteness, reduced feelings of guilt, acceptance of one's own role in perpetuating racism, renewed determination to abandon White entitlement leads to an autonomy status. The person is knowledgeable about racial, ethnic and cultural differences, values the diversity, and is no longer fearful, intimidated, or uncomfortable with the experiential reality of race. Development of a nonracist White identity becomes increasingly strong.

A risk of participating in this study will include talking about your White privilege and your own contribution to racism. This subject can be emotionally difficult for many people and could cause the participant to feel sad, angry, and upset. Also as a participant you might benefit from gaining perspective on White privilege and your own involvement in racism. The interview will allow a space for you to create a narrative of your own experience with White privilege and racism. No compensation will be provided to you for this interview.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions you choose and can also choose to withdraw from the interview. If you are interested please contact me by email: [Email](#). If you know someone that might be interested in this study please pass this email on to them.

Thank you,

Phillip Horner

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent and Mental Health Resources

Dear Participant,

I am a Masters of Social Work student at Smith College School for Social Work and I am conducting an exploratory study of how White people who have examined White racism and privilege come to that process of reflection and how has it changed over time. The purposes of this study are 1) investigate how White people have come to examine their own racism and privilege, 2) what reflection of racism and privilege looks like to different White people, 3) to understand how internal processes of accepting White privilege and racism develop and evolve over a person's life.

The information that is found through this study can be helpful for White people in their investigation into their White privilege and reflection of their own racism. It can also be used to provide a clearer understanding of this topic for social workers, teachers, and the pedagogy of schools. This is important because a large majority of social workers are White and it is crucial for us to understand our own privilege and racism when working with oppressed communities so that we do not increase the potentially damaging nature of social work. Data from the study may be used in professional publications and presentations on this topic as well as for my Master's in Social Work Thesis.

You are being asked because you are older than 18, White, speak English fluently, and grew up in the United States. You also have been identified as someone who has identified the benefits of their White privilege, accepted your role in perpetuating racism, are knowledgeable about racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, and are able to hold a conversation about race. Participants that are not going to be included are those that are not White, above the age of 18, and if they identify as having not reflected on their White privilege and accepted their own role in perpetuating racism. You will be asked to participate in an interview and discuss the subject of White privilege, racism and how your understanding of it has changed over your lifetime, if it has. While you answer questions you will be able to tell your own narrative of your experience, I will also be collecting personal information. The interview could last up to an hour and probably no less than thirty minutes. A pilot interview took 45 minutes to complete. All of the data will be recorded and later transcribed onto a password secured document on my personal laptop. I will also be taking notes throughout the interview. All audio recordings, notes and consent forms will be kept securely on my password protected laptop for a period of three years as stipulated by federal guideline after which time they can be destroyed or continued to be maintained securely until they are no longer needed.

A risk of participating in this study will include talking about your White privilege and your own contribution to racism. This subject can be emotionally difficult for many people and could cause you to feel sad, angry, and upset. Also as a participant you might benefit from self reflection on your White privilege and your own involvement in racism. Also the additional

resources provided may be helpful in continuing exploration of White privilege and racism. The interview will allow a space for you to create a narrative of your own experience with White privilege and racism. No compensation will be provided to you for this interview. A list of referral sources and resources for information will be provided with this consent letter.

The interview with you will be recorded (audiotape). The transcription will be done by me and all of the information you provide will be kept confidential. If I choose to contract with an outside transcriber, this person will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. The informed consent form will be kept in a separate place than from the data I retrieve from the interview with you and all the information provided will be coded. Confidentiality will also be protected by presenting the data in the aggregate or in a form that is not personally identifiable in professional publications or presentations; any identifying information or characteristics will be disguised. All audiotapes, notes and consent forms will be kept secure in my office for a period of three years as stipulated by federal guideline after which time they can be destroyed or continued to be maintained securely until they are no longer needed.

Your potential participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions you choose and can also choose to withdraw from the interview. If you wish to withdraw from the study you must withdraw before March 15<sup>th</sup>. If you do choose to withdraw all information on you will be destroyed. If you have any concerns about your rights or about any other aspect of this study, I encourage you to contact me at either of the emails below for questions or concerns about this study before or after the interview. Also if you want a summary of the completed thesis please use these emails to contact me. If you wish you may also contact Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

**YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Contact:**

Phillip Horner  
Smith College School for Social Work  
Northampton, MA 01063

**List of Mental Health Resources**

## **New York**

### **Mental Health Association in New York State, INC.**

194 WASHINGTON AVE. SUITE 415, ALBANY, NY 12210  
ph. 518-434-0439 ~ fax 518-427-8676 ~ [info@mhany.org](mailto:info@mhany.org)

## **California**

### **Mental Health Association in California**

1127 11th Street, Suite 925  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Telephone: (916) 557-1167  
FAX: (916) 447-2350

## **Massachusetts**

### **Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership**

Community Relations and  
Clinical Access Line:  
Toll-Free: (800) 495-0086  
Main: (617) 790-4000  
Fax: (617) 790-4128

## **Northampton, MA**

### **Windhorse –Integrative Mental Health**

(413)586-0207

## **Hotline**

### **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**

1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

### **Mental Health America (MHA)**

1-800-969-6642

## Appendix D

### Interview Questions

How has your self reflection of racism and White privilege changed your view of the world and how has that view continued to evolve? How has your consciousness changed?

*The following questions are in the context of an evolving understanding of race and racism:*

Are there certain shows, comics, phrases, sayings, songs that you look at differently?  
How?

Are there some people you have had more trouble interacting with during this time or have lost friendships? How?

How have you felt when you have had conversations about race with family and close friends? Has it been difficult?

How have your relationships with friends changed?

What are the biggest changes in yourself as you reflected on your own racism?

*Following the same line of question above:*

Has your reflection on your own racism scared, upset, and confused you? How?

How has your awareness changed you?

How has your behavior changed?

Were there different stages that you felt you went through these changes? (ex. Guilt, anger, frustration, sadness, or not concerning yourself with the problems of racism)

As your view of the world changed did you feel more or less optimistic about life, did you start to feel depressed, sad, happy, or angry?

How do you believe you can reach Autonomy? To define Autonomy I use Janet. E. Helms (1995) definition:

Autonomy: Increasing awareness of one's own Whiteness, reduced feelings of guilt, acceptance of one's own role in perpetuating racism, renewed determination to abandon White entitlement leads to an autonomy status. The person is knowledgeable about racial, ethnic and cultural differences, values the diversity, and is no longer fearful, intimidated, or



uncomfortable with the experiential reality of race. Development of a nonracist White identity becomes increasingly strong.

For White people who are struggling in their own journey of reflecting on privilege and racism, what kind of advice or tips would you give them?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

## Appendix E

### Personal Information Questionnaire

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Age:                                    |  |
| Gender:                                 |  |
| Years of Education:                     |  |
| Years of Antiracism Work:               |  |
| Where you spent most of your childhood: |  |

## Appendix F

### Human Subjects Review Committee Approval Letter



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**School for Social Work**  
Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

February 3, 2012

Phillip Horner

Dear Phillip,

The requested revisions to your Human Subjects Review application have been reviewed and are approved.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck on your research project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'David L. Burton', with a horizontal line underneath.

David L. Burton, M.S.W., Ph.D.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Fred Newdom, Research Advisor