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What factors deter self-identified White anti-racist social workers from interrupting acts of racism in interpersonal interactions

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Mary Panke
What factors deter self-identified
White anti-racist social workers from
interrupting acts of racism in
interpersonal interactions?

ABSTRACT

Current National Association of Social Workers codes, mandates, and policies require members to work to end racism. Although there is a strong need for social workers to consistently act against racism there are times social workers choose not to interrupt racism in interpersonal interactions. This study was interested in learning how social workers understand their decisions not to act against racism to gain a better understanding of the barriers to interrupting racism. This information may assist social workers in meeting their personal and professional obligations to combat racism.

Ten self-identified White anti-racist social workers were interviewed for this qualitative study. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences identifying as anti-racist and choosing to interrupt/not interrupt racism in interpersonal interactions. The research noted participants' anti-racist expression emerged from varying levels of racial awareness. Participants described significant internal and external factors impacting their choice to stand against racism and revealed a deep complexity to individual decisions not to interrupt racism. Findings suggest that increased awareness of the intrapersonal and interpersonal factors that make disrupting racism challenging may help social workers act more consistently to interrupt racism in interpersonal interactions.

**WHAT FACTORS DETER SELF-IDENTIFIED WHITE
ANTI-RACIST SOCIAL WORKERS FROM INTERRUPTING
ACTS OF RACISM IN INTERPERSONAL INTERACTIONS?**

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

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Summer, 2011

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a Masters of Social Work student I arrived at Smith with only a burgeoning awareness of my White racial identity. Although I had an intuitive sense of the negative consequences of race and racism in society, I had little understanding of the complex and far-reaching nature of systemic racism. Classes on race and racism provided the opportunity to look within myself and surrounding systems with a more critical lens. I learned to better assess my level of racial awareness and strived toward developing more anti-racist ways of being. I came to understand my future role as a White social worker included a responsibility to actively work to combat racism. I increasingly noticed racism happening in and out of the classroom. And, I witnessed myself and others struggle with interrupting that racism.

A defining moment arrived during my second year, when my efforts to name racism in class became a heated controversy that quickly moved beyond my sense of competence. I subsequently noticed myself making conscious choices not to interrupt the racism I perceived. I began wondering about other White students and social workers who might be experiencing the same kinds of choices and also deciding not to interrupt racism. What would they say about these decisions? What might I discover about our collective process of learning to consistently interrupt racism from their answers? This study emerged from these questions that seek to address both personal and professional ethics as they relate to anti-racist identity and action.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study seeks to determine what factors deter self-identified White anti-racist social workers from interrupting perceived acts of racism in interpersonal interactions. Racism in the United States (U.S.) is pervasive and harmful to all members of society (Miller & Garran, 2008; West, 2001)). The social work profession has had a long and complicated history with racism in the U.S. (Reisch & Andrews, 2002). Evolving anti-racist ideals have led to current National Association of Social Workers (NASW) codes (2006), mandates (2007) and policies (2008) requiring members to work to end racism. As such there is a strong need for social workers to consistently act to interrupt racism. However, despite personal and professional ethics, there are often times when self-identified White anti-racist social workers choose not to interrupt racism.

The decision not to interrupt racism is problematic because disrupting racism is a crucial component to ending racism. When perpetrators of racial bias are confronted about their enactments they are subsequently less likely to make prejudicial statements and more likely to report decreases in their prejudicial attitudes (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006). A few outspoken people can influence the normative climate of an interracial social setting (Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, & Vaughn, 1994). "The capacity for people to influence others for the good of humanity is a compelling testament to the power of the individual" and should not be underestimated (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006, p.801). Interrupting racism is part of the social worker's call to eradicate racism and a better understanding of the barriers to interrupting racism would enhance ethical practice and contribute to social work's overall goals for social justice.

Literature relevant to this research is derived from multiple academic fields including history, social work, and psychology. An examination of the history of the social work profession and U.S. racism reveals a shift from support and participation in racial oppression to

increasing levels of commitment to anti-racist action (Reisch & Andrews, 2002). White racial identity development theories have provided a context for understanding that individuals move toward effective anti-racist action (Hardiman, 2001). Specific anti-racist actions have been enumerated by social justice organizations (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2005; Labanowski, date unknown). Psychodynamic theory has provided insight into intrapsychic responses to race and racism (Suchet, 2004; Mattei, 2002; Altman, 2000) and the field of psychology offers various theories explaining individual responses to conflict in social settings (Bandura, 2002; Darley & Latané, 1968; Sherif, 1966; Asch, 1951). However, there has been limited research exploring anti-racist responses to racism (Eichstedt, 2001; Altman, 2000) and no research regarding self-identified White anti-racist social workers' decisions not to interrupt perceived acts of racism. This study seeks to better understand what is happening when social workers decide not to interrupt racism by asking them to reflect on and make meaning of these experiences. Although psychic and social defenses are inevitable when facing conflict (Altman, 1995) it is best to look at these responses, become aware of them as they happen, and tell our story about them (Tatum, 2003) in order to better address barriers to interrupting racism and find new antiracist ways of being.

A long history of racism in the U.S. and an awareness of how White individuals continue to play a part in perpetration of that racism require those whose mission it is to work for social justice, such as social workers, to seek, identify and understand what gets in the way of their anti-racist action. This study seeks to better understand what factors deter actions to interrupt racism and how these barriers might be overcome. Social work practitioners may utilize this information to facilitate more fully enacted antiracist commitments in their personal and professional lives by addressing barriers to interrupting racism identified in the study.

This exploratory study used open-ended questions to gather descriptive data about the unique life experiences of ten self-identified White anti-racist social workers. The study explored participants' experiences identifying as anti-racist, witnessing racism and deciding whether or not to interrupt racism. Thematic qualitative content analysis was utilized to further understanding of individual experiences of barriers to anti-racist action.

Thesis Outline

The remaining chapters will be organized as follows. Chapter Two includes a review of the literature from the fields of history, social work and psychology as they relate to race and racism. Chapter Three introduces the methodology used for data collection and analysis. Chapter Four is a presentation of the key findings in relation participants' experiences of identifying as anti-racist, witnessing racism and deciding whether or not to interrupt racism. Finally, Chapter Five will discuss these findings as they relate to White anti-racist identity and interrupting/not interrupting behaviors within the context of the literature, offer implications of these findings for the field of social work, review the limitations of the study and offer areas for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors deter self-identified White anti-racist social workers from interrupting perceived acts of racism in interpersonal interactions? White social workers committed to anti-racist action often encounter opportunities to stand against racism, but there are times when they consciously or unconsciously choose not to do so. Since there is limited research on White social workers efforts to interrupt acts of racism the intent of this qualitative study was to gather descriptive data about the “decision not to interrupt racism” in hopes of helping social work professionals overcome barriers to anti-racist action. The study was conceptually guided by writings from multiple academic fields, including history, social work, and psychology. This chapter will examine pertinent literature in the following sequence: *Defining Racism; Social Work Commitment to Anti-racism; U.S. History of Racism and the Role of Social Work; History of Social Work and White Anti-Racist Action; White Identity and Anti-racist Action; Intrapsychic Responses to Racial Conflict; and Interpersonal Responses to Conflict.*

Defining Racism

To provide continuity throughout this study it is helpful to present basic definitions for the levels and types of racism. The following definitions of racism from Miller & Garran (2008) will be adhered to throughout this paper. *Intrapersonal or intrapsychic* racism is an internal process referring to one’s conscious or unconscious “prejudice and bias, attitudes, beliefs,

emotions, ideas, and cognitions” about race (Miller & Garran, 2008, p.32). *Interpersonal* acts of racism are those intentional or unintentional racist communications that are “expressed in interactions between people” (Miller & Garran, 2008, p.32). *Intergroup* racism is where the “collective interactions of [racialized] group members results in domination, exclusion, discrimination, and other forms of group based oppression” (Miller & Garran, 2008, p.32). *Institutional* racism is “manifested through laws, policies, and formal and informal practices” as a durable inequality and can include “residential, educational, employment, accumulation of wealth and upward mobility, environmental and health, mental health, criminal justice, political and media (Miller & Garran, 2008, p.63). And *Official and State* racism is “state-sponsored racism at any level of government” (Miller & Garran, 2008, p.32). Racism can also be categorized as being direct (active) or indirect (passive) and intentional (conscious) or unintentional (unconscious) (Miller & Garran, 2008). Furthermore, Miller & Garran (2008) point out that racism does not fit exclusively to any one category, for example “Individual and institutional racism coexist side by side and are also interactive” (Miller & Garran, 2008, p.30). Importantly, the term *structural* will also be used in this study to describe a broader category of racism that includes intergroup, institutional and/or official/state levels of racism.

Social Work Commitment to Anti-racism

This study seeks to better understand the behavior of White anti-racist social workers when they choose not to interrupt perceived acts of racism. This is an important study question because social workers have a professional obligation to combat racism. The following section will describe anti-racism mandates in the field of social work and some of the challenges social workers have faced in fulfilling these ethically driven directives.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics names social justice as one of its six core values based on the ethical principal that “social workers challenge social injustice.” (NASW, 2006, p.5) “The *Code* is relevant to all social workers and social work students, regardless of their professional functions, the settings in they work, or the populations they serve” (NASW, 2006, p.2). Working to eradicate racism is a social justice issue and as such is central to social work.

Special initiatives aimed at combating racism have been enacted in the social work field. The 2005 Social Work Congress named twelve goals the profession would focus on over the coming decade. Two of those goals focused directly on racism. They were to “address the effect of racism, other forms of oppression, social injustice, and other human rights violations through social work education and practice” and to “continuously acknowledge, recognize, confront, and address pervasive racism within social work practice at the individual, agency, and institutional levels.” (NASW, 2007, p.4) Leaders in the social work profession have provided more explicit guidelines toward ending racism. The 2008 NASW Policy Statement on racism asserts that “racism at any level should not be tolerated” and “emphasis must be placed on self-examination, learning, and change to unlearn racist beliefs and practices” in order that its members fulfill their ethical responsibility to work to end racism (p.1).

The above pronouncements logically lead one to assume that the majority of White folks who enter the social work profession are ready to practice anti-racism. However, Green, Kiernan-Stern & Baskind (2005) showed that individual White social workers’ level of racism was on par with the general population; that respondents’ “cognitive attitudes were more positive than their affective attitudes [and] they possess the same ambivalence and social distance about race that characterizes contemporary American society” (p. 47). Similarly, Dominelli (2008)

asserts that although “social workers assume that personal tolerance and commitment to professional ethics rooted in equality enable them to practice in non-oppressive ways” multiple studies have shown that this is not the case (p.33). There is a measurable distance between the anti-racist ideals of the social work profession and the reality of the active anti-racist engagement of its membership.

Understanding how social work practice fits into the larger context of a racist society is important to understanding the behaviors of individual White social workers today. Reisch (2008) provides a detailed history of the social work profession, highlighting both ineffective responses to racism and lack of attention to valuable contributions of diverse groups. The following section will provide a brief overview of U.S. history of racism and the role of social work.

U.S. History of Racism and the Role of Social Work

Racism has deep roots in U.S. history. When early European settlers found they could not effectively enslave the Native Americans they imported Africans as an exercise of free enterprise to provide the free labor upon which the burgeoning economies would thrive (Zinn, 2003). At first, colonizers rationalized enslaving people because they were not Christians, but eventually to secure an abundant and free source of labor they redefined slavery as hereditary and for those who did not have a European appearance. In other words, they categorized people by the color of their skin (Brown, 2002). Miller & Garran (2008) state “...neither Native Americans nor African Americans were treated with dignity, were afforded security, or were eligible for freedom and equality. They were not considered fully human - an underpinning of severe racism” (p. 36). At the same time White indentured servants and low wage workers were pitted against free black labor, fostering an economically based prejudice of Whites against blacks as they could not

adequately compete for wages (Zinn, 2003). Despite the legal end to U.S. slavery in 1865 White supremacy remained and endured. Reconstruction after the U.S. Civil War failed and freed slaves were subjected to legalized discrimination such as the Jim Crow laws enforcing segregation in the southern states (Brown, 2002).

In the late 19th century race became an area of scientific exploration and claims of racial difference and inferiority were based on biological and psychological differences. The mass arrivals of eastern and southern European and Russian Tsarist immigrants between 1879 and 1919 sparked movements to address social problems (Park & Kemp, 2006), such as charity organizations and settlement houses, that would eventually become the foundations for social work focusing on individual and/or community needs (Jansson, 2005). Both intervention strategies were geared toward new racialized White immigrants who were seen as the cause of social ills and needing help assimilating to the American ways of life (Park & Kemp, 2006). African Americans, at this time, received inadequate, separate or no social services whatsoever from the burgeoning social work movement (Reisch, 2008). And indigenous peoples suffered a “combination of coercive assimilations and destruction of cultural traditions regarding community and interdependence” (Reisch, 2008). Social work emerged as monocultural; attending almost exclusively to needs of ethnic White Protestant immigrants, exhibiting marked racist, anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic ideologies (Higham, 1983).

Racism in the U.S. thrived in the early twentieth century while White supremacy took hold with the rise of racist propaganda, minstrel shows, and the Ku Klux Klan, who more than four million strong by the 1920s (Brown, 2002). “European American mobs killed tens of thousands of African Americans across the United States, by hanging, burning, shooting, or torture, with only a tiny fraction of these crimes ever investigated by a grand jury” (Brown,

2002, pp.12-13). Mexicans lost their land and rights to citizenship in 1848, Chinese workers were subject to pogroms and both Chinese and Japanese immigrants were prevented from entering the U.S. (Miller & Garran, 2008). Unfortunately, social work aligned itself with White superiority by supporting the faulty racial science of the U.S. born eugenics movement (Brown, 2002). LaPan and Platt (2005) argue that "eugenics played an important ideological and practical role in the formative years of the profession" and that the "class, racial, and gender biases permeating eugenics left an enduring legacy in the profession" (p.139).

When the atrocities of the Holocaust in Europe came to light eugenics lost much of its appeal on the world stage and in the U.S. (Brown, 2002). Although social work's awareness of racial discrimination increased following the Second World War their responses to racial injustices were tempered by the intimidating climate of McCarthyism (Reisch, 2008). It was during this time period that Bertha Capen Reynolds, noted psychodynamic clinician whose work was grounded in social justice was forced to resign from her teaching position at Smith School for Social Work because of her political views (Reisch & Andrews, 2002). "As the profession retreated from social and political activism and focused increasingly on professionalism" attention shifted to "the family as the primary vehicle of socialization" causing it to "overlooked the social justice impact of other societal institutions" (Reisch, 2008, p.796).

"After World War II, the modern-day Civil Rights Movement coalesced, gathering momentum in the 1950's and leading to dramatic political responses in the form of the Great Society in the 1960's" (Miller & Garran, 2008, p.41). The Civil Rights Movement was marked by key legal, legislative and social events that moved the national conversation toward racial equality. Although many positive strides toward racial justice have been made, radical

consequences to racial discrimination still abound and the work to eradicate racism continues.

Cornel West (2001) enumerates present day costs of racism:

The most visible examples are racial profiling, drug convictions (black people consume 12 percent of illegal drugs in America yet suffer nearly 70 percent of its convictions!), and death-row executions. And the less visible ones are unemployment levels, infant mortality rates, special education placements, and psychic depression treatments. (p. XV)

Reisch & Andrews (2002) suggest that although professional social work rhetoric claims ongoing commitment to social justice and equity it does not always act accordingly. For example, when President Clinton signed the Welfare Reform Act in 1996 which basically undid social welfare policy social work reformers had fought years to secure, there was “little organized protest from the social work profession” and not only that, Clinton then received the NASW’s endorsement for re-election (Reisch & Andrews, 2002, p.2).

This section has provided a brief review of historical intersections of social work and racism in the U.S. The following section will explore social work’s history with anti-racist action.

U.S. History of Social Work and Anti-racism

White anti-racists and “radical” social workers have historically acted to question, resist, ameliorate and interrupt racial injustice. Reisch & Andrews (2002) describe “radical” social workers in part as those who have focused their efforts on social inequalities, including racism. Early in U.S. history Whites interested in social reform worked alongside Blacks to challenge racist attitudes and actions by organizing efforts to abolish slavery and secure voting rights.

Examples of White antiracist actions included forming anti-slavery societies, speaking and writing against slavery, petitioning legislatures to free slaves, financially assisting enslaved men to secure their freedom or otherwise helping them to escape captivity (Aptheker, 1992).

During the Progressive Era there was a small band of social reformers who addressed racism. Jane Addams, who is considered “one of the foremost ancestors of modern social work” and known best for her early work in White ethnic settlements houses, also worked to combat discrimination against African Americans (Reisch & Andrews, 2002, p.14). Addams helped to establish The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909, advocated for establishment of African American settlement houses and worked for protections for African Americans from lynching and race riots (Jansson, 2005). Addams contemporary, Florence Kelley, a prominent resident of Hull House in Chicago, worked for equal distribution of educational funds in an effort to address the racial disparities in the public schools and was applauded by W.E.B. DuBois for her “lifelong dedication to the battle against jim crowism” (Reisch & Andrews, 2002, p.54). The work of social reformers, such as Addams and Kelley, drew attention to needs of racially oppressed people and made distinct contributions to the development of U.S. social policies, the formulation of social work values and the structure of the emerging field (Reisch & Andrews, 2002).

While social reform efforts retreated in the conservatism leading up to and following World War I, the Great Depression brought reform efforts back to the forefront as it “threatened the economic well being of social workers in private sector agencies and brought them in to closer contact with the consequences of growing poverty and unemployment” (Reisch & Andrews, 2002, p.60). Although mainstream social work endorsed Roosevelt’s New Deal “despite its imperfections” because it was deemed the “only viable alternative to economic and

social chaos and fascism” considerable numbers in the social work field disagreed (Reisch & Andrews, 2002, p.64). Led by prominent social reformer, Mary van Kleeck, the first grassroots radical movement in the social work profession, the Rank and File, questioned whether the reliance on government sponsored programs committed social workers to preserving the status quo and separated them from their clients (Reisch & Andrews, 2002). Influential social workers of the time such as Bertha Capen Reynolds, Harry Lurie, Paul Kellogg, Helen Hall and Grace Coyle criticized the New Deal programs in part because of the programs inherent racism (Reisch & Andrews, 2002). With regard to race specifically, the Rank & File publication *Social Work Today* repeatedly published editorials in support of civil rights legislation, and burgeoning social work unions and organizations supported antilynching legislation and the end to discrimination against African Americans in public sectors jobs (Reisch & Andrews, 2002).

McCarthyism following World War II was a dangerous political climate marked by “suspicion, investigation and ostracism” and impacted “all social workers, but particularly those who spoke out on behalf of human rights, peace and social reform” (Reisch & Andrews, 2002, p.113). The anti-communist furor of the time resulted in accusations of communism directed toward civil rights worker (Reisch & Andrews, 2002). And although the majority of the profession during this time tended to move away from social justice advocacy to redirect its energies to “profession building and perfecting technique” there were stellar social work professionals who withstood intimidation and did not back down from their commitment to social justice (Reisch & Andrews, 2002, p.113). Social work theorists and educators Bertha Capen Reynolds, Marion Hathway and Eduard Lindeman are prime examples of social work professionals who continued their efforts to unite social work with civil liberties despite blacklisting, forced resignations and being discredited in academia (Reisch & Andrews, 2002).

Despite the conservative and oppressive political climate of the times, Reisch (2008) delineates the following tangible acts to combat racism social workers helped to produce by the late 1940's:

restrictive housing covenants were outlawed; all-White primaries were opened to African Americans; anti-Japanese laws were annulled; the segregation of Mexican American children in Texas public schools was abolished; The Fair Employment Practices Commission reduced discriminatory employment against African Americans and Jews; and two Southwestern states revoked the ban voting by Native Americans. (p.795)

As the country moved toward the social reform of civil liberties so did social work. Since active support in the Civil Rights Movement social work has continued to combat racism most notably by advocating for legislative and policy changes, focusing on families and working to alleviate the deleterious effects of poverty (Jansson, 2005). In recent years social workers have focused efforts on increasing awareness of differences among cultures through education and training, but still struggle to “bridge the conceptual gaps between social justice and multiculturalism” (Reisch, 2008, p.798).

There have also been seeds of anti-racism in the development of clinical social work. A notable example is Bertha Capen Reynolds's early attempts to bring social justice and psychodynamic work together in practice (Reisch & Andrews, 2002). Although her views were not necessarily embraced during her lifetime her legacy in part lives on in today's Social Action Welfare Alliance (Reisch & Andrews, 2002). Additionally, the impact and role of race in clinical work has been explored more recently the writings of Altman (1995, 2000), Leary (1995, 2000)

and Suchet (2004, 2007) who stress the importance of the clinician's awareness of racialized subjectivity and making room for race and racism in the therapeutic conversation.

Throughout the history of social work there have been vocal anti-racist proponents and those who sought to move beyond the prevailing dominant cultures prejudices, biases and oppressions. These sections on history are presented to provide a broader context for present day challenges social workers face in acting to interrupt racism. The following section will shift gears and focus on the intersection of White racial identity and anti-racist action.

White Identity and Anti-racist Action

The focus of this study was on the interrupting behavior of self-identified White anti-racist social workers. In order to better understand the experiences of individuals who identify as both White and antiracist it is helpful to look at what literature tells us about that relationship. Although there is no satisfactory definition of a "White anti-racist identity" (Case, 2003; Thompson, 2003) there are many references to anti-racist action on the part of Whites. This section will first examine how *White racial identity* is thought to be connected to anti-racist action and then describe specific *Types of anti-racist action* to provide a broader context for understanding the study participants' experiences identifying as anti-racist with regard to interrupting/not interrupting racism.

White Racial Identity

White racial identity theory suggests anti-racist action may result from increased racial awareness and developing sense of positive White identity (Miller & Garran, 2008; Sue & Sue, 1999; Tatum, 1999; Helms, 1995, 1990). Several White racial identity models have been constructed since the early 1980's in order to describe this developmental process (Hardiman, 1982; Ponterotto, 1988; Helms, 1990, 1995; Sabnani, Ponterotto, & Borodovsky, 1991). Each

model similarly describes a place in the developmental process where the integration of positive feelings associated with a redefinition of White identity “energize the person’s efforts to confront racism and oppression in daily life” (Tatum, 2003, p.112). For example, the final status in Helms’s model, autonomy, represents an “internalization of positive White identity and is evidenced by a lived commitment to antiracist activity, ongoing self-examination, and increased interpersonal effectiveness in multiracial settings” (Tatum, 1999, p.59). This final status represents “a deep understanding of one’s White racial self, effective actions that interrupt racism, and multiracial alliances that work toward a more just society” (Lawrence & Tatum, 2004, p.364).

Sue & Sue further link racial identity with anti-racist action when they assert that Whites who attain a more integrative racial identity “have acquired an inner sense of security as to self-identity ... [and] while discrimination and oppression remain a powerful part of their existence, [they] possess greater psychological resources to deal with these problems” (1999, p.141). Additionally, research suggests advanced levels of racial identities may lead to the higher psychological functioning required to manage intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict (Carter, 1995) which is a significant aspect of acting to interrupt racism. Furthermore, with regard to clinical social work, Miller & Garran (2008), Reynolds & Baluch (2001), Carter (1995), Helms (1990), and Ponterotto (1988) have stressed the importance of therapists doing meaningful self-assessment of their own racial identity in service of ethical, anti-racist practice.

A key component within a developing White racial identity is awareness of one's White privilege (Tatum, 1999). White privilege is the institutional and cultural system of special treatment and freedom from racial exclusion given to European Americans in the U.S. (Johnson, 2001). Peggy McIntosh described White privilege as an “unearned advantage and conferred

dominance” that allows Whites to move through their world feeling morally neutral, normative, average and “ideal” role models (McIntosh, 2002, p.78-79). McIntosh delineates a lengthy list of privileges afforded to people perceived as White in this society, such as: moving unmolested through public spaces, ability to select location of residence when applying for home mortgage loans and being seen as an individual, rather than a representative of one’s race (2002).

As Whites become more aware of their privileged status in society and the resulting oppressive forces against people of color they may be moved to anti-racist action (Miller & Garran, 2008; Tatum, 2003; Hardiman, 2001). Tatum (1999) asserts Whites acknowledgement of the reality of their White privilege positively impacts their ability to engage in effective anti-racist action. She argues, the White individual “who is intentional in his or her ongoing efforts to interrupt the cycle of racism,” by acknowledging their racial privilege and going “beyond guilt to a position of claiming responsibility for the dismantling of institutional racism” is better capable of anti-racist action (Tatum, 1999, pp.61-62).

Influenced by clinical theories, in “Unraveling Whiteness,” Melanie Suchet (2007) describes her understanding of the process Whites must go through to address their White privilege and shift to a more effective anti-racist position when she writes:

The work lies in a deep acceptance of all the parts of the self and the conflicts that accompany me. I am the colonizer and the colonized, the oppressor and the oppressed, the racist and the anti-racist. In accepting this I can occupy a different space with a different awareness and openness to how race is lived and experienced, intrapsychically and interpersonally....[To] unravel Whiteness ... is to live more deeply in race. There is no longer the need to ward off the unacceptable. It is to let race occupy one’s psyche, thinking, feeling, and reading race in the many ways in which it will inevitably present

itself...It is to move beyond the shame and guilt of the paranoid-schizoid position, which leaves one split off and evasive, brittle and defensive. (p.884)

Katz (1978) describes this awakening to White privilege in terms of the costs to Whites who must come to terms with the discrepancy between their beliefs in humanitarianism and their perpetuation of racist practices by accepting the advantages of being White. Bonilla-Silva (2002) describes the anti-racist as one who takes responsibility for their unwilling part in a racialized society and then living a life committed to achieving real racial equality. And Altman (1995) asserts an effective anti-racist stance is only possible when individuals can manage the inextricably linked intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of racism, including their relationship to White privilege.

White racial identity theory describes an increasing level of racial awareness, including increasing awareness and response to one's White privilege, which leads to effective anti-racist action. While White racial identity models describe anti-racist action in the last stage of development they do not actually describe the White anti-racist identity. Further exploration into the meaning of identifying as a White anti-racist, such as this study in part seeks to provide, may assist in better describing this identity and how it relates to decisions not to interrupt racism. The following sub-section will briefly explore the types of anti-racist actions that might be expected of an individual who identifies as both White and anti-racist.

Types of Anti-racist Action

White anti-racist action has been characterized by specific actions. The following is a list of anti-racist actions provided by Phyllis Labanowski (date unknown) of the Anti-racist Alliance,

an organizing collective of human service practitioners and educators who strive for racial equity:

Names issue as racism; recognizes and makes unearned privilege visible; dismantles internalized dominance and the belief in the racial superiority of self as a White person; challenges other Whites; interrupts collusion with other Whites who seek to maintain their power and privilege; breaks silence and speaks up; seeks and validates critical feedback from People of Color; facilitates the empowerment of People of Color; consistently challenges prevailing patterns; takes personal responsibility; acts intentionally and overtly; is consistently conscious; behaves as a change agent; [and] promotes and models change for other Whites.

(<http://www.antiracistalliance.com./allychar.html>)

Additionally, actions to confront bigotry, including racist remarks, are provided by the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry:

Speak up when I hear or see bigotry; Question and identify bias when I see it; Be mindful of my own behaviors; Promote and appeal to higher principles; Set limits on what is said or done around me; Seek help and help others to work against bigotry; and Remain vigilant and persistent. (2005, p.81)

This section has sought to describe the relationship between White identity and anti-racist action by considering literature on racial identity theory and specific types of anti-racist actions.

The following sections will examine factors that impact anti-racist actions by exploring individual internal reactions to race and racism and examination of interpersonal responses in social settings.

Intrapsychic Responses to Racial Conflict

Clinical social work practice is informed by the psychodynamic conceptualizations of race and racism being deeply connected to the unconscious (Altman, 1995). Altman (2000) asserts race and racism are the result of social constructs:

...our thinking and thus our experiences are structured by networks of concepts that existed long before we were born and into which we were socialized early in life. Insofar as these conceptual networks, like those having to do with race, perpetuate oppressive social arrangements, one might say that we are all inadvertently socialized to be racist, to take for granted the discriminatory practices of our society. (p.592)

The clinical implications of these realities are that thoughtful clinicians should expect to find racism in their thoughts and feelings as well as their countertransference experiences (Altman, 2000; Pinderhughes, 1989). Therefore, it is essential that “clinicians become familiar with their racism” and remember that “vigilance is always required” (Altman, 2000, p.602). If this reflective work is neglected racial enactments will most likely follow in both social and therapeutic contexts (Suchet, 2004; Leary, 2000).

Intrapsychic defenses can become barriers to anti-racist actions (Mattei, 2002). Suchet (2004) argues that “Whites have dissociated the historical position of the oppressor from the collective conscious, due to [their] inability to tolerate an identification with the aggressor” (p.423). The cognitive and emotional dissonance that accompanies increased racial awareness can initiate several defense responses: *denial, avoidance & split reverse identifications* (Mattei, 2002). These defenses might present themselves in the individual as denial that race is still an issue or avoidance by asserting one's individuality excludes one from the implications of racism

or split reverse identifications that cause individuals to see everything “black” as good and desirable and everything “white” as bad and oppressive. Significant to this present study, Mattei (2002) points out that although we may have achieved psychological maturity it is important to remember, “We *all* remain at risk for the distortions and fragmentation of identity based on primary and racial dichotomies, especially when we are frightened, vulnerable, threatened, and angry” (p.231). Experiencing intrapsychic conflict under stress may be one explanation for why individuals who self-identify as anti-racist, and have acted against racism in the past, may later choose not to act to interrupt racism under similar or different circumstances. According to this view the individual is in some way triggered to internally regress and is unable to maintain the psychological fluidity and flexibility required for anti-racist action (Suchet, 2004).

As individuals are able to process and integrate the intrapsychic conflict created by increased racial awareness they are also faced with the task of confronting the systematic and socio-political realities and consequences of racism, their participation in its enactment, and the social and emotional conflict involved in acting to undo the status quo (Altman, 1995). Thus, in addition to intrapsychic responses to conflict, individuals also respond to complex external environments. This section on intrapsychic defenses explored thought on the role of the unconscious in creating barriers to anti-racist action for Whites. The next section will explore pertinent literature on interpersonal responses to such social and emotional conflict.

Interpersonal Responses to Conflict

Although literature on interpersonal response to conflict does not speak directly to anti-racists choosing not to interrupt racism, Social Psychology provides a vast amount of theory regarding human behavior in emotionally charged social settings that may offer insight into why individuals do not act in accordance with their anti-racist ideals. Accordingly, this section will

survey literature on *Social Norms, Conformity to Peer Group, Bystander Effect and Moral Disengagement*.

Social Norms

A “social norm” can be thought of as a social a rule or principle that defines a kind of mandatory standard of behavior, permissible or forbidden, independent of any legal or social institution (Sherif, 1966). Violations of social norms typically provoke punitive attitudes in others, such as anger, condemnation and blame and can lead to social punishment such as criticism, avoidance, exclusion or even physical harm (Sherif, 1966). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) suggested that social norms contribute to attitude-behavior inconsistency. And Miller, Monin and Prentice (2000) assert that behavior that does not match one’s attitudes and belief is directly affected by social norms. When Whites act against racism in public discourse they are acting against an often subtle, yet entrenched social system of White supremacy and risk rejection and ostracism (Moon, 1999). Based on these understandings of the impact of social norms on the individual it is reasonable to conclude that the desire to retain a comfortable level of social acceptance may contribute to a White anti-racist’s choice not to act in accordance with their commitment to fight racism.

Conformity to Peer Group

Quite similar to social norm concepts are those of "Conformity to Peer Group" a phenomenon was most notably researched by Solomon Asch in the 1950’s who determined that in a study setting individuals would give what they believed to be the wrong answer when surrounded by others giving the same wrong answer (Short, 1999). Asch (1951) asserted that a minimum majority of three was required to elicit the conforming behavior and that larger majorities did not increase the effect. Short (1999) reported that Asch also claimed that the

individual being subjected to peer group pressure is much less likely to give in to that pressure if there is one other person who is also not conforming. Individuals are thought to conform to avoid the “threat of isolation, rejection and ostracism, and to avoid appearing morally superior” (Short, 1999, p.55). Therefore it is possible to conclude that Whites may act against their anti-racist commitment, for example choose not to interrupt an act of racism, because of their need to conform to the opinions of others.

Bystander Effect

The role of the “bystander” in witnessing but not acting to stop an act of violence has been studied widely by social psychologists since the 1960’s when a young woman in New York was murdered in what was believed to be the presence of approximately forty neighbors (Short, 1999). Darley & Latané (1968) showed that when faced with an emergency situation the presence of other bystanders reduced feelings of responsibility and slowed responses to help, concluding inaction was more of a response to the presence of other bystanders than actual indifference to the victim.

The bystander effect, or diffusion of responsibility, is a psychological phenomenon which occurs when many people together witness a person in need of help (Short, 1999). In these instances it has also been theorized that confusion arises among the witnesses about who will help, whether help is needed and assumptions that someone else will intervene (Short, 1999). Additionally, “psychologists studying bystander effect have observed that people possess a stronger tendency to help those they see as similar to themselves and with whom they have a special bond or commitment.” (Short, 1999, p. 53) Latané and Darley (1970) proved that even a brief acquaintance with the future victim reduces the tendency to stand aside when the time for help arrives. Interestingly, Beaman, Barnes, Klentz, & McQuirk (1978) demonstrated that

students who were provided education about the social-psychological factors that inhibit helping behavior (the bystander effect) were more likely to later help a victim than students who were left uninformed. Bystander behavior may present a barrier to effective White anti-racist action; however the effect of the barrier may be lessened by previous relationship between the bystander and the victim or education about the factors that inhibit helping behavior.

The Confronting Prejudiced Responses (CPR) Model draws on bystander theory to describe the “factors that predict the likelihood that people will confront discrimination that they experience or observe” and presents five decisions or “hurdles that people face when deciding whether to confront others’ prejudiced responses” (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008, p.333). The first decision in CPR is interpreting the incident as discrimination, the second is deciding whether the act of discrimination is egregious enough to warrant confrontation, the third decision is taking responsibility for confronting, the fourth is deciding how to confront and the fifth is deciding to take action (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008). Social psychologists, Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin (2008) state that although the model is presented in sequential steps “observers of discrimination are not locked into this particular sequence of obstacles and decisions” and “they may waver between steps or skip steps entirely,” (p.335) “especially in emotionally charged circumstances” because the model “is not a purely cognitive, consciously controlled decision tree” and there are times when unconscious factors are at work as well (p.339). The CPR model may provide a useful tool in better understanding individual responses to witnessing racism and their decision of whether or not to take action to interrupt that racism.

Moral Disengagement

“Moral disengagement” is derived from social cognitive theory which explains human behavior as the dynamic, interdependent relationship between social structures and personal agency (Bandura, 2002). Moral agency is seen as having both the power to refrain from behaving inhumanely and the proactive power to act in a humane way (Bandura, 2002). Moral behavior is determined by “self-reactive self-hood rather than dispassionate abstract reasoning” (Bandura, 2002, p. 101). In other words, the individual’s decision to act in accordance with their personal sense of morality is mediated through socially based circumstances. When a conflict between the individual’s moral code and external circumstances arises there are many psychosocial mechanisms by which an individual’s sense of morality can be disengaged eliminating the need to behave in a moral fashion (Bandura, 2002). It is helpful to look at these psychosocial mechanisms to better understand how individuals committed to moral behavior (i.e. anti-racism) might choose to act otherwise. Eight mechanisms of moral disengagement described by Bandura (2002) are explained in the following paragraph.

Moral justification might best be described as “the ends justify the means.” Individuals give new meaning to the inhumane behavior by redefining it as moral because it serves a larger purpose whereby their “conduct is made personally and socially acceptable by portraying it as serving socially worthy and moral purposes. People then can act on a moral imperative and preserve their view of themselves as moral agents while inflicting harm on others” (Bandura, 2002, p. 103). *Euphemistic labeling* describes the use of sanitized language to reshape thoughts about questionable actions, make harmful conduct respectable, and reduce personal responsibility (Bandura, 2002). *Advantageous comparison* measures current behavior with another presumably worse action. Bandura (2002) explains that “by exploiting the contrast

principle reprehensible acts can be made righteous” (p. 105). *Displacement of responsibility* is reflected in the view that behavior is result of following orders of a greater authority and the actor is not responsible for the consequences (Bandura, 2002). *Diffusion of responsibility* is enacted to weaken the connection between the agent and the detrimental behavior. This can be accomplished by subdivision of tasks so that each individual act appears harmless in and of itself (Bandura, 2002). It can also be enacted by group decision-making where although everyone is technically responsible, no one person necessarily feels responsible (Bandura, 2002). *Disregard or distortion of consequences* is another way of weakening moral control of behavior by minimizing, discounting or distorting the effects of one’s actions (Bandura, 2002).

Dehumanization is a mechanism where “self-censure for cruel conduct can be disengaged or blunted by stripping people of their human qualities” (Bandura, 2002). And in *Attribution of blame* the individual is exonerated by attributing the cause of their immoral act to the victim of the act themselves or the circumstance that brought about the need for the act (Bandura, 2002).

Moral disengagement presents a useful lens when looking at individuals' choices not to act in accordance with their moral sensibilities. This theory may present possible explanations for why White social workers choose not to interrupt acts of racism in interpersonal interactions despite their commitment to anti-racism. This section on interpersonal responses to conflict has drawn widely from social psychology theory to offer possible explanations for individual behavior that contradicts one’s values and beliefs in social settings.

Summary

In preparation for the exploration of White social workers’ difficulties with anti-racist actions this literature review has described the anti-racism charge to the social work profession and the field of social work's history with both racism and anti-racism. This foundational

information was followed with an exploration of the intersection of White identity and anti-racist action; intrapsychic responses to racial conflict; and interpersonal responses to conflict. Although not directly related to race, the interpersonal responses provide useful lenses into behavior in social settings. The aim of this study was to uncover the barriers to interrupting racism for self-identified White anti-racist social workers. This literature review provides a historical and theoretical framework from which to explore and interpret the narrative data collected through in-depth interviews.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study explored the question: What factors deter self-identified White anti-racist social workers from interrupting perceived acts of racism in interpersonal interactions? As little research exists in the area of individual social workers' response to racism (Eichstedt, 2001; Altman, 2000) an exploratory study was designed. The study used open-ended questions to gather descriptive data about the participants' unique life experiences as self-identified White anti-racist social workers facing racism because such qualitative methods not only have "their special strengths in the discovery and generations of hypotheses, but also to get at more in-depth understanding of ideas and views of a person" (Schilling, 2006, p.35). This study hoped to use rich descriptive data to further understanding of White social workers' decisions not to interrupt racism, information that would support future professionals in meeting their ethical requirements to combat racism in their personal and professional lives.

The overarching research question sought to explore and describe factors that deter self-identified White anti-racist social workers from interrupting perceived acts of racism in interpersonal interactions. The central research questions that guided this study included: What is the individual's experience of identifying as anti-racist? What is the individual's experience of witnessing perceived acts of racism? What is the individual's experience of interrupting and conversely, not interrupting perceived acts of racism? What is the individual's explanation for and understanding of their decision not to interrupt? And lastly, what would help individual's better interrupt racism going forward?

Sample

“As with all research there is the ‘ideal way’ of doing things and there is the ‘practical way.’ Sometimes a researcher has to settle for the latter” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.153). This researcher elected to follow a more practical approach in obtaining a sample for this study by using known contacts in social work or other related fields to obtain a non-probability sampling. The initial sample of *availability* or *convenience* then provided further contacts through the *snowball method* where each subject was ask to provide contact information for other possible participants (Rubin & Babbie, 2007).

After receiving approval from the Human Subjects Review Board at the Smith College School for Social Work (see Appendix A), initial outreach to locate participants was through an email solicitation (see Appendix B) sent to known contacts in social work or other related fields, followed by the snowball method of sampling. The study required that participants self-identify as White and anti-racist, hold a minimum credential of MSW, live in the northeastern part of the United States and have been engaged in some form of antiracist work. Upon receiving the email describing the study, potential volunteers contacted this researcher by phone or email to express interest in participating in the study. After confirming participation criteria and satisfying their questions about the study, the volunteer committed to participating in the study and a mutually convenient time and location for the interview was agreed upon. This researcher then sent an email copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix C) for review before meeting. The first ten respondents who met the selection criteria were interviewed. Detailed demographic data of the final sample is presented in the following chapter.

Data Collection

Before official data collection this researcher conducted two pilot interviews guided by self-developed interview questions based on research and conversations with research advisor. The pilot interviews revealed concerns about how to elicit responses from participants if they could not recall specific instances of choosing not to interrupt racism from which to draw meaning. A revised list of questions and probes was developed with assistance from research advisor and used as an interview guide (see Appendix D). Additionally, the emotional difficulty participants might have in talking about instances they had not acted in accordance with their beliefs was considered and a script was created (see Appendix E) to guide pre-interview discussion. The script was used before each interview to help prepare the participant by explaining the upcoming process and normalizing the possible experience of difficulty in talking about one's relationship to racism.

This researcher then conducted ten face-to-face interviews in Massachusetts and Connecticut from October 2010 to March 2011. The digitally recorded interviews ranged from 45 to 80 minutes and were completed in the privacy of study rooms at public libraries, participants' offices or this researcher's home.

Each of the interviews started with a brief description of the interview process and review of the informed consent form. The consent form outlined the study, guaranteed confidentiality, and described the potential risks and benefits of participation. Participants were able to read the consent form and ask questions about their participation. Both participant and researcher signed and dated the consent form and participants were given a copy for their records.

This researcher conducted semi-structured interviews using the interview guide that included questions about participants' experiences in relation to their White identity and anti-

racist commitment, witnessing racism, interrupting and not interrupting racism and their understanding of their behavior. More specifically, the interview guide included demographic questions and questions exploring racial identity, participants' action or non action in response to perceived racism, participants' definition of "interrupting racism," and possible supports to anti-racist stance. Follow-up questions or additional probes were used to clarify responses and explore important areas of questioning as needed.

There were benefits and risks to participating in this study. Participants might potentially benefit from knowing that they are contributing to the professional social work knowledge base with regard to understanding and supporting development of anti-racist action on both personal and professional levels. In addition participants potentially benefit from having this opportunity to openly reflect on their anti-racism. There were few anticipated risks to participating in this study, however, in any experience of self-reflection it is always possible that strong feelings could be evoked which the participant might feel warrants further attention.

Strict privacy and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study process. All digital files of interviews, transcripts and corresponding notes were identified by a numeric code. Signed consent forms were stored separately from the data. All identifying information about the participants was removed, including all proper names of their places of work or residences. Any quotes used for illustrative purposes do not include identifying information. This researcher and research advisor reviewed this data together after identifying information had been removed. Consistent with Federal regulations, all materials pertaining to this study (digital files, transcripts, notes, signed consent forms) will be stored in a secured area for three years by this researcher. After that time, all materials will be destroyed or kept securely stored.

Participation in this study was voluntary and there was no financial benefit to the participants. Participants could have refused to answer any questions and could have withdrawn their consent any time before April 15, 2011. If a participant chose to withdraw from the study there was no penalty, no information regarding their participation would be disclosed and all data pertaining to their participation would be destroyed. Participants were asked to contact this researcher at the number on the signed consent form if they chose to withdraw from the study or they had any questions regarding this process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded from verbatim transcripts prepared by this researcher. One interview suffered from incomplete digital recording, however it was still included in the sample as this researcher was able to take sufficient notes of the participant's thoughts and ideas that were not captured in the transcript. Demographic data was analyzed manually and are presented in Table 1 of the following chapter. Participant narratives were analyzed by conducting a content-theme analysis that used *open-coding* to derive emergent themes from raw data, followed by *axial-coding* to identify larger concepts and the relationship of these concepts to the study question (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Particularly, this was done by coding the data grouped by the central research questions to identify main themes and exceptions. Frequency of responses provided for general quantification of the data. Categories of common themes were created to draw comparisons between answers and develop concepts. The relationship of these concepts was then applied to discussing the overarching study question. All responses were carefully charted into increasingly refined grids according to developing themes and categories providing easy access to all data collected.

Limitation and Bias

The reliability of a study is reflected in the degree of consistency in measurement (Rubie and Babbie, 2007). Use of pilot studies to assess and refine the interview guide questions and pre-interview script were used to enhance the reliability of this study by increasing this researchers' ability to maintain consistency in the interview process. However this researcher found that the replication of the interview experience was not always possible due to the limitations of researcher, environment and other outside influences.

Inherent to qualitative research is loss of validity when asking participants to describe and make meaning of their behaviors. Research in social psychology identifies limitations in self-report because participants might find it difficult to grasp their most subtle attitudes through introspection (Wilson, Lindsey, & Schooler, 2000). This may have been true for participants in this study as they discussed their understanding of their decisions not to interrupt racism and thereby affected the accuracy of findings. Additionally, validity is compromised when participants are motivated to tailor their answers to what they perceive as socially desirable (Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980). Again, when speaking about anti-racism, Whites might be motivated to answer in the most anti-racist way possible. Interviewee bias is then an important factor in determining the validity of this study.

Bias on the part of this researcher must also be taken into account when assessing the validity of this study. As a White social work student committed to anti-racist action this researcher's idiosyncratic beliefs and attitudes may have impacted the analysis of the narrative data. "The qualitative paradigm requires that the researcher be self-reflective – that is, examine researcher bias and monitor the dynamic interaction between researcher and participants, much as the therapist in clinical practice attends to transference and countertransference" (Silverstein

Auerbach & Levant, 2006, p.351). This researcher endeavored to examine and process internal responses to interview material throughout the research process through self-reflection, constant study of readings on racism, discussions with peers and consultations with and academic advisor. Additionally, it is important to note that this researcher, with the guidance and assistance of research advisor, is essentially one interpreter of these findings. Ideally this study would pass through more auditing and consensus building on content and themes. The interview guide was self-developed, again with the assistance of research advisor, but would ideally be subjected to greater scrutiny to locate and remedy bias where possible. To compensate for possible researcher bias, open ended questions were used in part to avoid leading participants toward predetermined directions (Anastas, 1999). In summary, this researcher's personal and methodological biases were monitored throughout the process as researcher was able.

Although the findings of this study represent a foundation upon which future research can address issues related to anti-racist White social workers' ability to effectively interrupt acts of racism they are not meant to represent the experiences of all White anti-racist social workers. Additionally, the small size, non-random selection and restricted geographical location of the sample prohibit generalization of findings.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe factors that deter self-identified White anti-racist social workers from interrupting perceived acts of racism in interpersonal interactions. This chapter contains findings from interviews conducted with ten self-identified White anti-racist social workers who hold a MSW and have engaged in some form of anti-racism work. This researcher used an interview guide which contained open ended questions derived from the study's central guiding questions. As such, participants were encouraged to be reflective about their experiences identifying as anti-racists, their experiences of witnessing racism, their experiences of interrupting racism and their decisions not to interrupt racism. Additionally, participants were asked to define and explain their understanding of the term “*interrupting racism*” and to describe what they believe helps them to interrupt racism.

Although the sample size was small, there are common threads as well as significant differences in participants' responses that provide valuable descriptive data regarding barriers to interrupting racism. The data from these interviews is presented in the following sequence:

Demographic Data; Formation of Anti-racist Identity; Witnessing Racism; Interrupting Racism; Factors that Support Interrupting Racism; Barriers to Interrupting Racism; and Summary.

Demographic Data

This study was comprised of ten individuals who self-identified as White and antiracist, held a minimum credential of a Masters in Social Work and reported engaging in some form of

anti-racist work (e.g. membership in anti-racist group, participation in social justice actions to fight racism, training or educational experiences related to anti-racism). Participants were from Connecticut and Massachusetts. Seven women and three men were interviewed. They ranged in age from 26 to 67. Five participants were licensed practitioners, and four also held advanced degrees in areas including Public Health, Education and Spanish. Five participants held their MSW for more than ten years, three participants held their MSW between three to five years, and three participants held their MSW for two years or less. Nine participants worked in a variety of social work positions, ranging from administrative to service provider levels. The fields included nonprofit agencies, public health consultation, education and school setting, court systems, outpatient clinics, and a psychiatric hospital. One newly graduated participant had not yet entered the professional social work field but interacted with the public in a college university setting and another participant had recently retired after 35 years in the field. Although not specifically asked about other social identities, many participants shared what they felt were salient aspects of their social identities including being a member of an interracial family, of low socioeconomic class, being Jewish, Catholic, Gay, Lesbian, and Irish-American. (See Table 1)

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Years of Experience</u>	<u>Current Work</u>	<u>Other Social Identities</u>
Ali	53	female	MSW MA Public Health	>10	Nonprofit Systems Liaison: employment issues	Interracial Family, Jewish
Molly	66	female	MSW Licensed	>10	Director of Clinical Case Management	Irish-American, Catholic
Leslie	49	female	MSW PhD. Education	3	Licensed Adult Outpatient Clinician	
Lisa	29	female	MSW	>1	College Admin Office: works with public	Low Socio-economic Class
Sue	39	female	MSW	>10	Child & Family Outpatient Clinician	Interracial Family
Glen	29	male	MSW	2	School-based Outpatient Clinician	
Val	26	female	MSW	2	Judicial Court Planner: assesses & locates services	
Anne	65	female	MSW Licensed 6 th Yr. Ed. Admin.	>10	Director Education Services: Autistic Spectrum Disorders	Lesbian
John	27	male	MSW Licensed	5	Public Defender Social Worker: assesses & locates services	
Mike	67	male	MSW Licensed MA, Spanish	>10	Psychiatric Social Worker: recently retired	Interracial Family, Gay

Formation of Anti-racist Identity

All participants reported their anti-racist commitment included addressing their implicit racism and taking action to combat racism where possible. For some participants their anti-racist stance was a central component to their overall identity. For instance, Ali described her anti-racism as her “marching orders,” Leslie as her ongoing “job,” and Glen as his “mission.” Furthermore, participants reported their commitment to anti-racism had evolved overtime and was informed by various aspects of their life experiences. The most powerful influences informing their anti-racist identity participants expressed are described in the following categories: *Upbringing; Awareness of White Racial Advantage; Awareness of Structural Racism; Relationship, Roles and Other Social Identities; and Ethical Stance.*

Upbringing

Eight participants reported they felt their early experiences with family contributed to their future anti-racist identities. Leslie shared how her White middle class family’s approach to alleviating racial disparities from a charitable perspective by their participation in a *Fresh Air Program* left her with significant questions about racial difference and social responsibility. Glen reported that growing up in Kentucky his parents’ liberal views and openness to other races and cultures contrasted with many of their neighbors and allowed him to freely pursue relationships with his African and Argentinean peers. Glen attributes his early exposure to difference and the oppression that often accompanies it to his later commitment to anti-racism. Sue, who grew up in a White neighborhood into which children of color were bused for school remembered realizing, “ Oh these kids don’t have a house like I do, they live, like in the projects, or someplace like that...I started to realize that there was not so much Black and White, but more like maybe, class issues.” And Lisa stated that from her earliest memories race and religious difference was

an important part of the fabric of her life, “it was kind of embraced, the diversity. But it was always there. I always knew I was White.”

Two participants described how being raised not to judge people by their skin color led them toward their anti-racist identities. Val said, “... the way I was personally brought up, it was never like, oh, someone’s Black, someone’s grey, someone’s brown, someone’s, you know, yellow. That’s a person, you’re a person, we are all, people, get along with everybody.”

Similarly, John stated that from his two social worker parents, “I learned more to judge someone based on their personality instead of, you know, looking at the exterior.”

Exceptionally, Ali is the only participant who reported actually being taught to be an anti-racist in childhood. She described it straightforwardly, “I was raised in a communist household, being White has always meant I have a special responsibility to fight racism.”

Awareness of White Racial Advantage

All participants described their anti-racist identity as being somehow linked to their evolving understanding of their privileged status based on their White racial identity. While some participants talked about the social and economic advantage of being White generally, others talked about their personal experience of racial privilege. Leslie addresses her awareness of privilege when she describes that being White:

... has become for me more a symbol of my privilege and the fact that a lot of things come easy to me because I’m White and I don’t have to experience a lot of reality, a lot of racist reality, because I’m White. So the way I think of it, just concretely, is I’m on the top of the heap.

Similarly, Lisa acknowledged the possibility that she had “better job opportunities [and] better educational opportunities” than her friends of color because she was White. And John reported that “there’s been no situation in my life where I have not been able to be granted any kind of opportunity” because of racism. It is the growing awareness and discomfort with the inequity of White privilege that participants suggested impacted their anti-racist identity.

Awareness of Structural Racism

All participants reported understanding racism as being more than intrapersonal and/or interpersonal was an important part of their anti-racist identity. Although each talked about the importance of acknowledging the impact of structural forms of racism, there was a wide range of overall understanding reported. Participants’ descriptions of structural racism ranged from general information learned in a single course on institutional racism resulting in better understanding of the “plight of the minority groups” to the more sophisticated analysis of the elusive and damaging impact of structural racism provided by Ali:

That there is actually a reason for racism, its strategic and its really used by people in power to keep people separated, you know, and that there are tons and tons of poor Whites...but it’s not in anyone’s’ consciousness that that is the face of poverty in this country, because racism is used to sell everyone a bill of goods...I mean racism is more than you didn’t get a job. It’s that, if you’re black then your dad probably has 11 years of life less than my father, you know, it’s pretty fundamental....there are pretty radical implications to racism in this country. You know whether you are going to be locked up or whether you are not.

Relationship, Roles and Other Social Identities

Seven participants identified personal and/or social identities as impacting their White anti-racist identity. Three participants talked about their close personal relationships shaping their anti-racist identity. Two of these participants spoke of being members of interracial families and their anti-racist identity having been impacted by their experiences of racism alongside their loved ones. Ali shared:

... my family is multiracial. My daughter is Nicaraguan, who was adopted when she was three. Racially, she looks indigenous....And also my partner is African American and we've been together for 5 years. ... Everyone has an opinion, obviously, and a reaction.

Sue talked about her family's reaction to learning that she planned to marry an African American man. She said that although the family eventually came to support her marriage, initially there were many painful questions about whether she wanted to raise biracial children. For Glen, witnessing his Argentinean friend being brutalized by police in what he later testified to in court as race based discrimination "put a ripple in my life as far as how I feel about race and systems." Ali, Sue and Glen all spoke of their personal connections with People of Color as intimately informing their anti-racist identities in profoundly personal and lasting ways.

Two participants described their role as parent as being deeply connected to their anti-racist identity. Leslie said, "I feel as though raising my children with an awareness of racism and their Whiteness is probably the greatest anti-racist act I can do."

And three participants identified other aspects of their social identities, for example, being Irish-American or a member of a sexual minority as motivating their anti-racism. Molly said reading "How the Irish Became White" helped her make important connections about

prejudice and oppression across ethnic and racial lines and increased her commitment to anti-racism work. Mike spoke about how his experiences of prejudice as a Gay man informed his White anti-racist identity by enabling him to be more sensitive to and concerned about the negative effects of racism on People of Color:

I have seen, being a member of a minority, or a sexual minority ... I see that I see things very differently from heterosexual people ... that ... I'm careful with things that people wouldn't have any idea that I needed to be careful with ... and that I can perceive people's prejudice against me in ways that they can't perceive.

Seven of the White social workers interviewed in this study reported close personal relationships, important social roles or other aspects of their social identities were significant to the formation of their anti-racist identity. Participants shared that these relationships, roles and identities worked to increase their awareness and sensitivity to the impact of racism and enhanced their commitment to fight racism.

Ethical Stance

All participants reported that their anti-racist identity was connected to their personal sense of morality and/or equality, while seven participants additionally linked their anti-racism to the social justice mission of the social work profession.

A moral stance was reflected in such language as “sense of right and wrong” “being polite and respectful” “it's a moral issue to let a comment like that go by” “I felt self righteous” “it was the right thing to do” and “everything about this is so wrong!” An equality ideal was expressed by participants through such phrases as “same access” “treat everyone fairly and evenly” “everyone's created equal” and “not being treated as better or worse.”

The seven participants who understood their careers in the social work profession as anti-racism in action expressed this view in a variety of ways. Glen regarded his work as a school-based clinician as anti-racist work because, "...the work that I am doing now is always coming through that perception of interrupting racism, doing your best to give people a leg up." Anne said that she believed "as a social worker that I would be able to work with people period, and help them through whatever their issues might be. That...I would relate to diversity, it would be okay with me." Val described her work in the courts as combating racism by "starting off micro and working your way out to the macro level." And, John talked about his work with the Public Defender as one where he saw himself "interrupting racism" because he is advocating that "these people are innocent, that these people are a person, they are not criminals and that the police needs to stop stereotyping and targeting a certain population, just due to their race."

This section has reported the salient influences study participants named as informing their anti-racist identities. The following section will describe findings regarding participants' experiences witnessing racism.

Witnessing Racism

The focus of this study was on identifying barriers to interrupting racism in interpersonal interactions for social workers who identified as White and anti-racist. Data about the experiences of participants' responses to racism were derived from their various descriptions of recognizing acts of racism and their subsequent decisions to act or not act to interrupt. Noted in the findings were participants identification of various *levels and types of racism* and the *language and affect* connected to their experiences of racism.

Levels and Types

All participants' narratives described witnessing two or more racist acts at interpersonal, intergroup, and/or institutional levels. Additionally, examples provided could be further described by type: intentional verses unintentional and direct verses indirect.

Ten participants described interpersonal racism in the form of racial jokes and slurs or intolerance that occurred within families, the work place, or public settings. These acts were described as either intentional or unintentional. For example, Leslie provided an example of an unintentional interpersonal act of racism in a racist email unwittingly forwarded by a close family member. And Ali provided an example of an intentional interpersonal act of racism when she both witnessed and experienced the open hostility of a White man in reaction to her African American boyfriend.

Intergroup racism was identified by one participant. Sue stated her African American husband was unable to secure home service contract work in their predominantly White community. Sue believed this was due to the community's negative reaction to his race.

Ten participants described institutional racism which included participants' reports of recognizing racism in criminal justice, education, healthcare, immigration policy, the media, medical research, employment and service industry settings. For example, indirect institutional racism was described Val who carefully observed the racial disparity in criminal sentencing of a two men for drug possession.

Language and Affect

Participants' use of language during the interview process was noted. Five participants communicated indirectly about their experiences of race and racism as evidenced by long pauses, repeated phrases, incomplete sentences and noticeably lowering their voice. Participants also

used language such as “whatever,” “you know,” “this or that,” “this that or the other thing,” and “that kind of stuff” when referring to race or racist acts.

Additionally, all participants reported experiencing powerful emotions in response to witnessing racism, predominantly anger, empathy, isolation, and helplessness. Nine participants reported feeling anger at the injustice of racism. Five participants reported feeling empathy for the victim(s) of racism. Five participants reported feeling isolated, alone or the “only ones” who were seeing the racism. And six participants reported feeling helplessness while witnessing racism. This vulnerability could be with regard to physical or emotional safety. A few participants reported that these emotions might be experienced simultaneously or nearly so, as Leslie described a kind of “cascade” effect where the difficult feelings came in rapid succession.

This section reported findings on the levels and types of racism participants described, the language used to describe these events and participants’ emotional reactions to witnessing racism. The following section will provide findings on participants’ actions to interrupt racism.

Interrupting Racism

During the interviews participants were asked to define the term *interrupting racism* and provide examples of their efforts to interrupt racism since indentifying as anti-racist. Most participants agreed that at the very least interrupting racism meant speaking out against racist attitudes and actions, and for some it expanded beyond disrupting the racist act in the moment. One participant, John, initially defined “interrupting racism” as an act on the part of a racist institution, but he ultimately agreed that the term, as used in this study, meant “standing up” against racism. Participants identified and provided examples of five types of interruption of racism: *Confronting Racist Attitudes and Actions in the Moment*; *Confronting Structural Racism*; *Monitoring Own Racism*; *Offering New Information* and *Being Strategic*.

Confronting Racist Attitudes and Actions in the Moment

Participants reported a shared understanding that on the most basic level interruption would mean speaking up against an individual racist attitude or action when it happens. These responses included such phrasing as “confront it,” “identify it,” “pointing it out,” “giving voice to it,” and “objecting to them.” Regarding racist jokes on line, Leslie said, “I commented back to all of them that this was racist.” For face to face communications, John declared, “I don’t tolerate racial slurs in front of myself.” And Molly reported that when she recognized racial bias on an interview panel of which she was a member, “I felt that I had to say that, um, we really, we really needed to focus on which candidates could do this job.”

Examples of interruption styles included questioning racist statements in hopes of entering into an enlightening dialogue with the speaker. Leslie, an adult outpatient clinician, talked about exploring racist statements with clients. “When a client makes a racist statement, I have to deal with it... I am responsible for dealing with it.” And Molly referred to asking questions to “tease out” meaning in attempts to reveal whether the speaker was camouflaging their racism by using a kind of “quick code.” The quality of communication of these interruptions differed among participants but each participant acknowledged that ideally engaging in dialogue about race was preferable to just naming an attitude or act as racist. Molly elaborated on this preferred style:

Interrupting racism has to do with, first of all listening to other people, even if they are racist, enough that you get the gist of what they seem to be trying to say and then to try to understand the social context and then to try to reach some sort of common ground where you can bring another frame in.

Confronting Structural Racism

Five participants described interrupting racism as working to combat racism beyond the interpersonal level. These participants shared an understanding that individual acts of racism were embedded in a larger structure of racism as demonstrated in Molly's reflection, "I saw too that most people weren't committing an individual act of racism that I could interrupt, so they were going with the flow of some social rule that neither one of us were aware of."

Examples of interrupting institutional racism included participants working toward policy change or in support of political actions. Val described her responses to racial biases in the media as interrupting institutional racism because "just bringing awareness to it, bring it a voice would be interrupting it. Maybe not to the society as a whole, but to whoever is around you." Glen shared that he was able to interrupt the institutional racism of the criminal justice system when he gave "testimony in court for a civil suit against the police officers" who he witnessed harass and assault his Argentinean friend in high school. And Mike spoke of addressing intergroup racism by working to remove racial barriers in public spaces. In explaining his idea further he said:

I suppose one kind of barrier would just be the look of a place or whatever you project out could be considered a barrier if you project that this is a place for White people of privilege, for example, or Anglos and not Latinos or whatever, "*No Spanish spoken here*" or whatever, all those things would be barriers.

Monitoring Own Racism

Although all ten participants indicated they considered awareness of their own racism was an important part of the White anti-racist identity, as noted in above section, only two

participants linked this idea directly to interrupting behavior. Lisa and Mike specifically stated that confronting their own racism was part of their overall understanding of interrupting racism. As Lisa explained, "...monitoring your own racism, kind of, if you're treating someone the way you wouldn't treat another person figure out why. Does it have anything to do with their race, if so, why am I doing this?" Similarly, Mike said:

Well, when I first think about it, I think of it as interrupting racism in other people, in other situations but ... well, you first have to interrupt it in yourself, find ways to interrupt it internally because it's always there, um, so, so I guess, really thinking about it that would be the first struggle, would be interrupting it in yourself all the time, always trying to be aware that it can be there.

Offering New Information

Five participants reported that providing information about racism to others was a valid form of interruption. Ali described a scene where she overheard her doctor telling an intern that they "don't speak Spanish in Puerto Rico" and how she acted to interrupt this biased assumption by explaining how the doctor was looking through a social lens and not really seeing past the idiom. Molly shared a story that when her elderly aunt was refusing to accept her daughter's marriage to an Ethiopian man because of his race she brought an old primer on Catholicism to "prove to her" it wasn't against "the rules" to marry outside one's race in the Catholic Church. And Mike talked about conducting a talk on immigration in his church community to dispel common myths and misconceptions, often grounded in racism.

Being Strategic

Eight participants described using tactical action to interrupt racism. Ali, Molly and Lisa described interrupting racism in the course of their work by addressing race issues without ever talking about racism. Not bringing in race was an effort to avoid the resistance of others. Ali said “...sometimes it’s really funny, you don’t even say anything about racism, you just do it. Say with this job [employment services], nobody says, nobody would *ever* say the reason most of clients are Black or Latino is because of racism.” Molly spoke at length about a program to help juveniles avoid early incarceration that would help to address the racial disparities in the criminal justice system. She acknowledged that nowhere in the grant proposal do they mention the racial disparity or their intended goal of addressing it. And Lisa described a work place situation where the one African American student was being targeted by the remaining White staff and how she worked behind the scenes to enhance understanding about “cultural and family differences.” Race and racism were purposively never mentioned in connection with the increasing hostility, though she felt sure it was an issue.

Seven participants described interrupting initiatives that included support of anti-racist politicians, creating system mechanisms to help avoid racial bias, contributing money to anti-racist organizations, allying with other anti-racists to increase political power, and building relationships. Ali advocated working for the “promotion of the feeling against racism” and spoke passionately about her efforts to unite her racially diverse neighborhood, combating racism through building positive relationships:

I started a block party... I started this thing where I talked to every single person in the neighborhood to introduce myself and my kid. After a while I started figuring out they didn’t know each other, so we started introducing each other. And then I came up with

the idea of let's have a block party, so we all start passing out leaflets, doing all that. Then we start having block parties. And one of the reasons that is most, most critical where I live is because it's so multinational, multi-racial ... and everybody is really cool with each other, but it's not an accident ... if you keep everybody together, you keep talking. You keep this mother being able to talk to that mother and it's just easier. So that's one of the things I've done. You know, I think it's a good one.

A general consensus identified in the findings was that "interrupting racism" meant speaking out against racist attitudes and actions. For some participants "interrupting racism" might also include working against structural racism (intergroup, institutional and/or official/state levels of racism), interrupting intrapersonal racism, offering information about racism to others and employing active strategies to promote anti-racism. The narrative data also provided useful descriptions of factors that supported participants in acting to interrupt and will be explored in the following section.

Factors that Support Interrupting Racism

Participants identified what they felt help them to make the decision to interrupt racism in interpersonal interactions. These factors will be described in the following categories: *Self Confidence; Effective Strategies and Practice; Self-care; Support of Others; Relationships; and Anti-racism Education.*

Self Confidence

Five participants reported their decision to interrupt racism was supported by "strong beliefs" that gave them the courage of their convictions. Leslie alluded to this confidence when she said, "there's a certainty of my power as a White woman who's intelligent and articulate and

angry.” Sue spoke of her ability to interrupt racism as not being hindered by doubt, “I just feel the way I think is right and I don’t have to worry about questioning that.” And John stated he was best able to interrupt acts of racism when, “I’m confident with what I believe in and if I’m the only person that believes in it, then okay. I’m owning my opinion, I’m owning my beliefs.”

Effective Strategies and Practice

Five participants associated having proven plans for acting to interrupt racism with helping them to take action. Like the other four participants in this grouping, Mike endorsed empathetic listening and engaging in meaningful dialogue when possible. Mike said that he learned over the years that if he could plant a seed of antiracist thought by showing that he was listening and “not appalled” or thinking “they are a jerk” he can try and bring in some “rationality and some other way of thinking, so they could at least think about it or notice that the person that they’re talking to doesn’t share their world view.”

As a new MSW graduate and the youngest study participant, Lisa acknowledged that practicing interrupting strategies was crucial for efficacy. She stated she needed to build her skills in order to more consistently interrupt acts of racism:

Perhaps if I was more used to putting out racism, like if I was more in the habit of doing it at the moment, then it wouldn’t [be], ‘Hey, wait a minute, what should I do?’ I would just do it.

Ali, a long time anti-racist activist affirms that experience and practice is crucial for effective anti-racist action. She stated that as a younger woman, just starting out in the social work field interrupting was a scary proposition, but when she began interrupting on a “consistent basis” it became “very liberating” because she always knew what she was going to do.

Self-care

Three participants linked their ability to interrupt racism with taking proper care of themselves. Participants were better able to maintain the optimism and hope necessary to do the difficult work of combating racism when they attended to their physical and emotional needs. Glen linked his ability to confidently confront racism with his ability to maintain a sense of well being when he said, "I think when I take care of myself I have much more positive outlook on life." Conversely, Glen explained, lack of self care leaves him susceptible to feelings of hopelessness where he finds himself asking, "What difference will I make? I'm really not going to do anything. I'm not going to change anything. Nobody's going to care what I have to say. So I'm just not going to say anything."

Support of Others

Seven participants reported that an important factor in their ability to interrupt acts of racism is "being surrounded by people who feel the same way." Five participants described it as the actual presence and moral support of other anti-racists when interruption is needed on an interpersonal level and three participants referred to the support of working alongside others toward a common anti-racist cause on a structural level as empowering.

On an interpersonal level, Anne said that she felt better able to interrupt racism, "If I had other people around me that think like I do, support in numbers, sometimes just one other person even." Glen concurred when he said that his family's support when he brought courtroom testimony against race based police brutality was crucial. He stated, "If I was going to go all in they were going to go all in with me," and it was this support that gave him the strength he needed to speak up publically.

Molly spoke of how working with college students committed to anti-racism helped to empower her to continue anti-apartheid work at the time of the South African Liberation Movement. Working alongside others who could “see the continuing de facto segregation” in the U.S. provided like minded people to talk with and to share experiences. Molly spoke to the critical importance of sharing anti-racist experiences with others. She said it was important to be able to share the “... personal moments and humiliations, and times when it feels good because you learn something” because without those connections “it takes a really long time by yourself.” Molly believed that without the support of others the “loneliness and isolation of this kind of struggle [anti-racism] is what undoes all of us in our weak moments.”

Relationships

Six participants reported that meaningful relationships with others helped them to interrupt acts of racism. The types of relationships described by each of the six participants were varied but each led the respondent to a greater motivation to stand against racism. These relationships were with members of other races, family or close friends. What each story had in common was that the relationship allowed the participant to forge empathetic connections with those suffering racial discrimination and it was that emotional connection that increased their motivation to interrupt racism. Ali talked about the kinds of relationships that resulted from her neighborhood Block Party efforts and how they helped her to interrupt her own racist thoughts:

It’s like when I say all teenagers suck, but the Black kids are the menacing ones. I know that the reason I say that, is because I’m sure I have those feelings, now and then I’ll have those feelings and then, ‘Oh, that’s David and Andre from down the block. It’s not hooded bands of roving Black teens. I knew them when they were little kids, you know,

before their mom died.’ It’s a no brainer in a certain kind of way, go out and talk to everybody, see what’s going on. People are so afraid, I don’t even know why.

Other participants described motivations to take action against racism resulting from feelings of compassion for co-workers, clients, and even strangers standing in check-out lines. Molly told a compelling story of how her deep commitment to her young female clients suffering and dying of AIDS led to greater empathy for Haitian immigrants being held at Guantanamo because they were infected with the virus. She said it was the powerful emotional connection with her clients that motivated her go further, and take action to try and interrupt the racist treatment of Haitian refugees on a structural level by opening a health clinic for women and children in Haiti.

Anti-racism Education

Three participants reported that anti-racist education was a key component to their ability to interrupt racism. These participants all stressed the importance of continued education regarding racism. When asked what would help him to better interrupt acts of racism Glen said, “I’m always thinking education.” And Leslie talked at length about how exploring new ideas and new perspectives with regard to fighting structural racism would help her to better focus her efforts there, just as learning about combating inter-personal racism had helped her interrupt one on one:

I do know that if I went in and started exploring the middle ground, if I found a book, or talked to somebody ... it wouldn’t be as scary to me, just as the other anti-racism, thinking about more individual interactions isn’t scary anymore.

Molly, who has been practicing clinical social work for 30 years, suggested students in MSW programs would benefit from more ethical training. She said she believed social work curriculums should be aimed at linking the profession to a personal obligation to interrupt racism. Molly reported she had received support toward ethical practice in her work environment and this had helped her a great deal over the years, but she wished she had been given more ethics training in her MSW program. Molly said:

I think that precisely this kind of discussion would have been very helpful to me in my graduate education. Even the courses that talked about race and culture and ethnicity are rarely, at least in my experience, rarely connected with personal responsibility for addressing racism.

This section has described internal and external factors that participants identified as supporting their decisions to act to interrupt racism. The following sections will explore participants' responses regarding barriers to interrupting racism.

Barriers to Interrupting Racism

Participants were asked to describe times they had witnessed racism and chosen not to interrupt. Participants' narratives included instances with family, friends, strangers, employers, employees, funders, service providers, as well as with racist structures within institutions. Notably, three participants could not recall any specific instances where they had chosen not to interrupt racism although they were each very sure that many of these occurrences had happened and answered questions about not interrupting from their best understanding of themselves. The possible reasons for the difficulty with memory were explored by Mike who said, "I have witnessed more than one and probably [many more], I don't know, but I think I am blocking, I

think I block it out, because it's not a comfortable thing and because I probably don't respond too effectively." The following sections will describe the various reasons participants believe they have chosen not to interrupt racism: *Power Differential; Negative Social Consequences; Trouble Dealing with Feelings Created by Conflict; Wish to Protect Offender; Exhaustion; Fear for Personal Safety; and Perception of Futility.*

Power Differential

Seven participants reported deciding not to interrupt acts of racism because of the potential costs of confronting an individual or system that holds power over that individual or others in close relationship to that individual. A common refrain of participants pertaining to this barrier was a need to "choose your battles." Examples of power differences described included situations between employer and employee, doctor and patient, prosecutor and public defendant, state funder and nonprofit recipient, and finally, male and female. The following examples are illustrative of the overall experience of the seven participants who reported that power differentials played an important role in their decisions not to interrupt acts of racism.

John explained that at times his decision not to interrupt a racist comment and "suck it up and just kind of brush that statement aside" was how he provided the best possible service to his client. In the Public Defender's office where hierarchical roles are well defined and potential for abuse of power is great John argues the best professional course of action when faced with a racist comment by court officials is to "just keep going, then the client is actually going to get a good offer." Val said she chose not to question racially biased research methods because the "three men in charge" were her bosses and she didn't want to "piss them off" and she believed she just "couldn't win in that situation." And Ali described a recent scenario which typifies the power differential dilemma for many in social work:

I was sitting in one office, my boss was sitting in the other office with a funder and you can hear everything through these walls and she starts talking about you know something about the Orientals, if we could get the Orientals or some ching-chong something, you know, like that. And I, my ears went up ... Should I get up and tell my funder that's giving us a million dollars ... from the state to work to get more employability, um, to be able to teach people how to get jobs to support them. People, you know, that have not had much access to this. What am I going to do, go tell her, don't be so racist?

Negative Social Consequences

Six participants reported that their decision to not interrupt was due to possible social costs of acting against racism. Participants expressed concern with being ostracized by their communities. Such fears were evidenced by statements such as John's, "you don't want to be an outcast... you would just (laughs, inaudible) [go along] just to be accepted, you know, just to be part of the group." Concern about being viewed differently by others was also present in statements such as Anne's wish "not to be seen as a goody-two-shoes" and Val's desire not to "become like this, tight little what's wrong with you girl." Preserving relationships was also an important goal, as in Mike's desire to avoid making a visit with family and friends "awkward" by focusing on racist statements. And Leslie talked about struggling against social norms when she described her perception that calling attention to something people don't want to think about, such as racism, was not socially acceptable in her White middle class community.

Trouble Dealing with Feelings Created by Conflict

Five participants reported that the "nerve-racking," "scared," or "uncomfortable" feelings that often accompanied interrupting racism were sometimes enough to prevent them

from taking action. Some participants who had trouble with these kinds of feelings described themselves as “shy,” “embarrassed,” “not comfortable with confrontation,” and generally “avoidant.” Mike expressed it this way:

I don't want to rock the boat. I mean that's a very internal thing for me ... I don't like conflict...[and] these are the kinds of statements, that people, you know you have to recognize that people, this isn't just some casual opinion, these are the kinds of things that people feel deeply about and so it feels harder to confront that kind of thing because you know [its] part of their identity or part of something that's important to them and it's important to me, so, it's harder to confront and cause problems.

Wish to Protect Offender

Three participants shared their decision not to interrupt racism was an effort to protect the offending party from getting their “feelings hurt.” Lisa spoke to this issue when she said she had chosen not to interrupt her co-workers when she witnessed their open intolerance because, “I don't want to upset a co-worker. I don't want to make them feel they are not doing a good enough job, even if I think they are not doing a good enough job.” Additionally, Anne explained that her decision not to interrupt can be based on her perception of the offender's intent. She said, “... when I have seen it, sometimes it's been ignorance, so I have, I like to give people the benefit of the doubt, as the way they were brought up or they, you know, they just didn't realize it.”

Exhaustion

Three participants reported that they did not interrupt racism because they were “too tired” and didn't have “the energy.” Glen summed up this factor when he explained there were

days when exhaustion prevented him from interrupting because depending on the particular stressors that day and his level of self care leading up to the incident he may feel unable to act. Glen said in these instances he will recognize his “limits” and ultimately be “less inclined to step up.”

Fear for Personal Safety

Two participants reported there were times they chose not to interrupt racism because they feared for their personal safety. Ali spoke to the experience of being out with her African American boyfriend and being assaulted by a group of White men who had been drinking to excess:

It feels bad not to confront racism, but there is also the balance of who you’re doing it with and what’s going on ... I was like there is nothing to do here but get our asses kicked. So not only was I not confronting racism, I was telling someone else do not confront racism. Right here we don’t have any power, we are going to get our asses whooped with these drunks, all these White drunks around us. This is not the time.

Although only two participants in the study spoke to personal safety as a potential barrier, Glen expressed his belief that fear for one’s physical safety was a more common experience than Whites want to admit. He said, “You never know what can, kind of, evoke someone to do.”

Perception of Futility

Nine participants reported deciding not to attempt interrupting acts of racism because they felt it would be unproductive. This category was broken down into more detailed groupings to better identify and described participants’ particular reasons for not interrupting racism. The following categories will describe the ways participants felt acting to interrupt would in some

way be futile: "*Don't know what to say or do*"; "*I'm not convinced that it makes a difference*"; "*It's not bad enough*"; and "*I can't believe he said that!*" Seven participants reported experiencing more than one of these categories.

"Don't know what to say or do." Seven participants reported that they felt they lacked the necessary skills to interrupt racism. Molly's comment reflected the participants' sentiments about confronting racism in the moment when she said, "I felt like I really ran into racism *everywhere*. And it was very baffling to me; I didn't know what to do." This was also echoed in Sue's words about her just "not knowing what to say." Three participants also spoke about their difficulty in knowing how to combat structural racism. This struggle was best exemplified in Leslie's words:

The question about what to do about myself as part of the structure, as a symbol of racism really, as a, um, like a cog, is much harder for me to understand, it much harder for me to know how to, what to do about that.

"I'm not convinced that it makes a difference." Five participants reported not interrupting acts of racism because they believed their efforts would have no positive impact. Participants used similar phrases describing their belief that their interruption "wouldn't make a dent" or "would not be heard" or would not "even matter." This fruitless feeling was best illustrated by John when he described not interrupting his elderly aunt:

I was like with an aunt and she was saying something like really ignorant about a specific culture and I was like (exhales exasperatedly), but she is old school, she seventy years old, (pause) what am I going to say that's going to make her think differently? I mean I could have a full blown power point presentation about the negative consequences and ...

I don't think she would change her opinion because she has had this long road of messages throughout her life thinking this one way.

“It’s not bad enough.” Four participants reported their decision not interrupt racism was based on their assessment of harm. They described a kind of “gray area” where it was not “urgent enough” to warrant action. Lisa talked at length about this kind of instance in her university workplace where international students come for assistance with their schedules. Lisa described difficulties in communication of needs because language barriers between the staff and students, which leads to staff “losing patience” and “becoming snotty” with the students. Although Lisa reported that she often took note of the behavior and was “bothered by it” she rarely interceded to stop her co-workers because it was not being “overtly” harmful.

This “gray area” was also reflected in participants being unsure whether the act they witnessed was indeed racist. Lisa was not completely convinced the problems encountered because of the language barrier referred to above were related to race. Ali spoke to this same feeling among these four participants when she pondered whether her mailman’s stunned reaction to her African American partner was actually racist and called for interruption on her part when she said:

What is there for me to do? He, that’s his struggle, he has to walk through that and go to the other side. It’s not racism in this case. Maybe we call it racism. It’s more like shock or surprise, or, I don’t know what the thing was for him. I don’t know what it was. I don’t know if that’s racism though, that kind of shock, surprise, ‘It’s not what I expected my goodness.’ But is that racism? He didn’t hit me or scream at me.

Being unsure about whether the action is harmful enough or an act of racism was also considered a barrier to interruption by participants in response to joke making. Lisa reported that it was often difficult for her to decide whether to respond negatively to a joke that felt “slightly off” but was not clearly racist.

“I can’t believe he said that!” Three participants reported that they failed to interrupt racist acts because of “a sense of incredulity.” In these instances participants described not being able to interrupt because of their own feelings of “shock” and “disbelief.” Ali said:

Sometimes Joe [Ali’s African American husband] and I will see something that happen and we’ll be out of it by the time we’ll go, ‘That was racist! That was crazy! Would they have done that to someone else?’ Do you know what I mean, so sometimes we can’t even believe it ... Sometimes it will go fast and then you’re out of there and you’re like, what?

Lisa felt similarly when she described an instance she chose not to speak up about a co-workers racist statement at a workplace gathering. She said, “Part of me was so shocked that he said it that I didn’t say anything because I was still kind of like, Oh My God! I can’t believe he just said that, you know, at an office function.” And Sue shared a recent instance where she was completely taken aback by a long time friend’s comment relating to Sue’s African American husband and her White friend’s four year old son. Sue reported that her friend said she was “surprised” that her son “was not scared” of Sue’s husband, presumably because he was Black. Sue said she was speechless. Her reasons for remaining silent in this instance were complex, but she was clear that like Ali and Lisa, one of the reasons she did not respond was because her friend’s comment was incomprehensible to her in the moment.

Summary of Findings

The research found that participants' anti-racism was informed by multiple factors, including but not limited to their understanding of the intersection between their White identity and racism. For some participants social work was considered an expression of their anti-racism. The study found participants witnessed various types and levels of racism and did not always act in accordance with their personal and professional codes of ethics to combat racism. Participants described significant internal and external factors that impacted their choice to interrupt racism and while many of these factors were found in the literature, the unique history and experiences of participants revealed a deep complexity to individual decisions not to interrupt.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The current study was an exploratory investigation into the factors that deter self-identified White anti-racist social workers from interrupting acts of racism in interpersonal interactions. The research confirmed that participants did not always act in accordance with their anti-racist commitment and while many of the barriers to interruption described by participants were found in the literature, the unique history and experiences of participants revealed a deep complexity to individual decisions not to interrupt. The study found participants struggled with significant internal and external factors when faced with the choice to interrupt racism. This chapter discusses the key findings in relation to previous literature and their implications for social work practice. The chapter closes by limitations of the study and offering recommendations for future research in the area of anti-racist social work.

Participants' descriptions of their experiences of identifying as antiracist and their decisions of whether to interrupt acts of racism revealed two significant areas of interest for discussion: *White Anti-racist Identity* and *Interrupting/Not Interrupting Racism*.

White Anti-racist Identity

What is a White anti-racist identity? The study sought to understand the decisions of individuals who identified as both White and anti-racist to interrupt/not interrupt racism and in doing so explored a yet to be defined identity, the White Anti-racist (Thompson, 2003; Case, 2003). Participants tended to describe their anti-racism as a commitment to not participate in racism and a commitment to take action against racism. The study also raised some interesting

questions about what it means to not participate in racism while simultaneously benefiting from White privilege and how this relationship may impact decisions to interrupt/not interrupt racism? A few participants spoke about their inner struggle with the paradox of being advantaged by a racist social structure and simultaneously identifying as anti-racist.

Racial identity models assume that Whites are subjected to and become part of a racist society without choice, but by increasing their racial awareness to a point of integrating a positive White identity they can relinquish White privilege and take effective anti-racist action (Hardiman, 2001). At the same time, these models acknowledge individuals can still act against racism at any level of racial awareness (Miller & Garran, 2008; Hardiman, 2001; Reynolds & Baluch, 2001; Carter, 1995; Helms, 1995, 1990). Thompson (2003) points out that racial identity models do not explain how one relinquishes White privilege and argues for the need to go beyond the idea of creating a “positive White identity” to a broader and more complex examination of what it means to be a White anti-racist and how to best make meaning of and work with the inherent social, political and economic contradictions.

Results revealed that participants similarly described awareness of White privilege and structural racism as informing their White anti-racist identity. Although this was a common thread in describing their experiences identifying as antiracist, participants expressed a wide range of understanding that appeared to reveal different levels of racial awareness as described by racial identity models. Some participants' responses to questions about their anti-racist identity revealed a more sophisticated understanding and engaged relationship to both White privilege and structural racism, while other participants' responses reflected what appeared to be a less sophisticated understanding and only rhetorical engagement. This difference may be significant in understanding decisions not to interrupt racism because it places the decision in the

context of how White individuals connect their privilege to the overall racist structure. It seems possible that without owning and addressing the connection between one's racial privilege and larger racist structures, the decision to interrupt racism may be impacted. Although correlations were not explored in the findings, this researcher's overall impression was that the greater racial awareness articulated by drawing connections between White privilege and structural racism, the stronger the tendency to interrupt racism across multiple settings and contexts. Therefore, more detailed research connecting racial awareness to decisions to interrupt racism may be beneficial to understanding possible barriers to such action.

Different levels of awareness of White privilege and structural racism notwithstanding, all participants reported acting to interrupt racism. This is consistent with literature that asserts an individual need not be fully self-actualized with regard to racial identity in order to take action against racism (Miller & Garran, 2008; Tatum, 2003; Hardiman, 2001; Reynolds & Baluch, 2001; Sue & Sue, 1999; Carter, 1995; Helms, 1995, 1990). In other words, one need not be considered anti-racist by racial identity model measures or by standards of others in their community to understand one's self to be anti-racist and take anti-racist action. This finding leads this researcher to questions about the possible differences in contexts, frequency and efficacy of interrupting behavior among self-identified White anti-racists exhibiting different levels of racial awareness. This is another avenue of exploration that may further illuminate decisions to interrupt/not interrupt racism.

The results also indicated that participants generally believed that understanding one's own conscious and unconscious racism was critical to their anti-racist identity. Such awareness is supported in literature as foundational to anti-racism work, including clinical social work (Miller & Garran, 2008; Suchet, 2007; Reynolds & Baluch, 2001; Carter, 1995; Helms, 1990; Altman,

1995; and Ponterotto, 1988). A finding related to participants' awareness of their own racism was participants' use of vague language during the interview process. When describing responses to acts of racism some participants avoided using race related language and often resorted to words such as "whatever" or "you know" or "this, that and the other thing." Also observed was some participants' tendency to lower their voice, drop off completely or talk in incomplete sentences when referring to racist acts directly. Bonilla-Silva (2002) describes this linguistic phenomenon as an indicator of color blind racism which does not support an anti-racist identity and calls into question how such a contradiction might impact one's decision not to interrupt racism.

Other non-dominant social identities were recognized by study participants as being integral to their anti-racist identities. Consistent with literature, participants tended to agree that experiencing oppression because of a non-dominant part of their social identity increased their motivation to fight racial oppression. Croteau, Talbot, Lance & Evans (as cited in Miller & Garran, 2008, p. 114) found "having some aspects of identity that are socially targeted helps people connect with people from other oppressed groups, as well as having a more realistic understanding of the dynamics of oppression." In considering the barriers White anti-racists face in acting to interrupt racism it is helpful to consider how the individual's multiple identities may inform decisions about taking action against racism.

Interrupting/Not Interrupting Racism

Participants described multiple contexts in which they were able to successively interrupt racism. Although the study was seeking to explore interruption in interpersonal interactions of racism results showed that "interrupting racism" was not limited to confronting individual attitudes or actions in the moment. Data showed interruption of racism also included working to stop racism in self and structures as well as offering new information or using other strategies to

limit the negative effects of racial bias. These methods of anti-racist interruption are consistent with the actions described by anti-racist organizations (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2005; Labanowski's, date unknown) and provide the reader with a wide range of opportunities to practice anti-racist action.

This researcher was particularly interested in the strategic use of "silence" regarding racism described by three participants. At first this researcher struggled with the seeming contradiction in "not naming racism" as a method of interrupting racism. But upon further reflection considered that as in clinical work where the clinician must strive to meet the client where they are at, so might the anti-racist work to meet an individual or structure enacting racism on palatable terms. This expanded view of interrupting was reflected upon by one study participant who suggested that just as she saw herself as the psychological "developmental partner" to her clients in session; she similarly saw herself as the developmental partner for those who she witnessed committing acts of racism.

Participants identified internal and external supports that influenced their decisions to interrupt racism. Feelings associated with self confidence were linked to deciding to interrupt racism as well as the more tangible support of others in their environment and continuing anti-racism education. These findings were similar to Case's (2003) qualitative study examining White anti-racist action that found an anti-racism support group helpful to participants both emotionally and practically. The greater psychological resources available to individuals desiring to combat discrimination and oppression the more likely they are able to take action (Sue & Sue, 1999).

Conversely, instances when participants chose not to interrupt racism were attributed to *personal discomfort, power differentials* and *perception of futility*. Participants' personal

discomfort included examples of internal factors (difficulty with feelings about conflict and exhaustion) and external factors (negative social consequences; wish to protect offender; and fear for safety). Participants who offered examples of these internal barriers essentially attributed their decision not to interrupt racism to personal idiosyncrasies outside the scope of the study questions (e.g. disdain for conflict, being shy, passive nature, inattention to self care). Case's (2003) study also found individual choices to not interrupt were in part due to their wish to avoid the tensions of conflict. However, it is important to consider the possibility that stress induced from emotionally charged racial interactions may in fact contribute to the disempowered feelings described by these participants (Suchet, 2004; Mattei 2002).

Fear of negative social consequences, wish to protect offender and fear for personal safety are external factors participants named as deterrents to interrupting racism. These external factors are consistent with Moon's (1999) finding that Whites interrupting racism are acting against an entrenched social system of White supremacy and risk rejection and ostracism. The attitude-behavior discrepancy displayed by White anti-racists who decide not to act against racism because of a wish to avoid possible negative social consequences of condemnation, isolation, or even physical harm is also consistent with literature on social norms and conformity to peer group (Miller, Monin and Prentice, 2000; Moon, 1999; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Sherif, 1966; Asch, 1951). When White anti-racist social workers are faced with the possibility of negative social consequences, understanding the psychology of wanting to avoid those consequences may help them to seek the support needed to consistently act to interrupt racism. The barrier to interruption that is represented in negative social consequences might be limited by seeking out positive social reinforcement.

Participants also described power differentials between themselves and the offender(s) as a significant deterrent to interrupting racism. The decision not to interrupt in these cases can be considered strategic, as in the case of a Public Defender social worker reporting he did not interrupt the racist remarks of court officials who may retaliate against his client, a person of color. Or the non-profit organizer who reported she did not interrupt the State funder's racist remarks because a substantial amount of money that would benefit oppressed populations was at risk. Sometimes not interrupting might be the best choice (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2005).

However, the theory of Moral Disengagement suggests that psychosocial mechanisms may be at work eliminating the need to behave in accordance with one's moral attitudes (Bandura, 2002). In the examples above, "moral justification" might be used to suggest that the benefits of a "good disposition for the client" or "a million dollars" for a social justice program outweigh the costs of allowing the racist comments to pass, uninterrupted. In essence, the ends justify the means. It may be hard to argue for interrupting racism in these particular cases, but it begs the question, where does one draw the line? And how does one weigh the benefits and the costs of racism? And for whom are they being incurred? Not included in the narratives of the above examples were the potential personal costs of interruption to the social workers, or conversely, the potential personal benefits obtained by not interrupting. Case (2003) found that White anti-racist individuals do not always act to interrupt racism, in part, to preserve White privilege.

Nearly all participants' identified the importance of their perception that acting to interrupt racism would be futile. The categories of reasons participants gave for believing interruption would not work are reflected in the Confronting Prejudice Model (CPR) model which breaks down the ultimate decision to confront prejudice into five possible separate

decisions (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008). This researcher believes this construct is useful in examining the barriers to interrupting racism because although participants may generalize their experience of not interrupting racism as being futile, further exploration demonstrates more particular barriers, knowledge of which might help professionals better manage their responses to racism for more effective anti-racist action.

The first decision in CPR is interpreting the incident as discrimination (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008) and is reflected in the findings category as the “I can’t believe he said that!” Participants described their sense of shock and incredulity at the time of the racist action prevented them from fully recognizing it as racism, thus they did not respond accordingly. The second decision in CPR is deciding whether the act of racism is egregious enough to warrant confrontation (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008) and is reflected in the findings as the “It’s not bad enough” category. Participants reported that in these instances they determined the racist act was not harmful enough to warrant interruption. In terms of bystander theory, it was not considered an emergency (Darley & Latané, 1968). The third decision in CPR is taking responsibility for confronting (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008) and was not reflected in the study results. The fourth CPR decision is deciding how to confront (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008) and is reflected in the findings as the “Don’t know what to say or do” category. Here participants reported they lacked the knowledge and skills needed to effectively interrupt racism. And the fifth and final decision in CPR is deciding to take action (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008) and is reflected in the findings as the “It won’t make a difference” category. Participants’ responses indicated that strong feelings about the offenders’ inability to change led them to their ultimate decision not to interrupt.

The final decision to take action to interrupt racism is also reflective of study participants' responses with regards to the power differentials mentioned above. Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin (2008) suggest that individuals may also be dissuaded from taking action in the final decision because they want to avoid interpersonal conflict, especially in situations with clear power and status difference. Additionally, Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin (2008) state that although the model is presented in sequential steps "observers of discrimination are not locked into this particular sequence of obstacles and decisions" and "they may waver between steps or skip steps entirely," (p.335) "especially in emotionally charged circumstances" (p.339). Affectively charged reactions to racism which led to immediate interruption of racism were also described by study participants, who could not explain their interrupting behavior beyond statements such as "It's just me." These kinds of responses are also supported by the CPR model because as Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin (2008) explain the model "is not a purely cognitive, consciously controlled decision tree" and there are times when unconscious factors are at work as well (p.339).

All of the decisions described in the CPR model were found in the study narrative except the third decision where the individual must decide it is *their responsibility* to stand against a perceived act of racism (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008). It is unclear whether its absence in the narrative data reflects participants' mastery of taking responsibility for interruption as might be indicated by Leslie's comment regarding a client's racist remark, "I know this is an issue that I am responsible for dealing with." Or the absence of descriptive data about taking responsibility as a barrier to interrupting racism might reflect something more significant about the relationship between participants' feelings of responsibility and their anti-racist action. In the latter case, taking responsibility for interrupting racism might be an

important factor to consider when looking at White anti-racist social workers decisions not to interrupt racism. Janet Helms (1992) asserts that Whites use fear, guilt and denial to avoid taking responsibility to address racism when they recognize the costs to themselves. This intrapersonal struggle of taking responsibility was acknowledged by one study participant who spoke about the need for social work education to increase its focus on ethics and better link professional and personal responsibility to addressing racism.

Exploration of participants' decisions to interrupt/not interrupt racism revealed several important elements that support anti-racist action as well as factors that may deter anti-racist action. Interrupting racism goes beyond interpersonal interactions in the moment and may not involve direct confrontation of racism. Participants reported that increases in psychological support increased their ability to interrupt racism. The ability to manage personal discomfort, personal and professional risk and feelings of futility are crucial to consistently decide to interrupt acts of racism. An ambiguous finding regarding White anti-racist social workers relationship to taking responsibility when faced with racism warrants further study and may indicate an important area of focus for anti-racism training.

Implications for Social Work Practice

This self-selected group of self-identified White anti-racist social workers provides a descriptive exploration into the factors that deter individual action to interrupt racism in interpersonal interactions. Participants' willingness to candidly explore and describe times when they chose not to act in accordance with their beliefs and attitudes contributes to a growing body of knowledge of how Whites can strive to more fully live their anti-racist commitment, as well as assist social workers in providing more racially aware services. A better understanding of individual experiences of barriers to interruption may assist social workers in identifying and

overcoming similar barriers in order to fulfill their profession's ethical obligation to combat racism. Social workers may also benefit from increased awareness of both intrapsychic and interpersonal forces at play as they are challenged to act against society's status quo by interrupting racism. Furthermore, the study's findings on interruption may provide social workers with additional strategies for successful anti-racist interventions. Finally, social work educators may benefit from these findings by increased awareness of possible struggles White social work students face in their daily interactions with racism. This knowledge might help to inform anti-racism curriculum's that seek to assist students in recognizing and overcoming possible barriers to interrupting racism as they enter the social work field.

Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

This study had limitations relating to the sample and researcher's bias. The findings cannot be generalized because of the small sample size and regional concentration in Massachusetts and Connecticut. The use of non-random convenient and snowball sampling techniques also limits the diversity of the responses because the sample was drawn from the researcher's informal connections to mental health and public service providers in her surrounding geographical area, resulting in a socially connected sample that consisted of friends of friends.

This researcher's racial bias was noted during the course of the study. As a White social work student striving to live up to my anti-racist ideals I caught myself feeling frustrated by and judging certain responses to interview questions as being racist. Upon reflection, further reading and discussions with peers, mentor and research advisor, I was able to identify these as defensive responses. By casting myself as what Audrey Thompson (2003) refers to as the "good white" in comparison to the participants I was defending against my own implicit racism. Designing,

researching and conducting the study, along with the best of intentions, did not prevent my relationship to race and racism from entering the process. To the best of my ability I monitored and attempted to control for these reactions in analysis of the data but considered it impossible to eliminate completely. Therefore, it is expected that the data analysis is affected by my unconscious biases.

Participant bias is also important factor in determining the overall validity of this study. The questions asked of participants focused on difficult issues of race, racism and the participant's failure to behave in accord with their stated beliefs. As mentioned in the Methods Chapter loss of validity is inherent to qualitative research when asking participants to describe and make meaning of their behaviors, especially behaviors they may not feel comfortable with. It is possible participants may have been motivated to tailor their answers to what they perceive befitting an anti-racist stance and thereby altered the findings.

Future studies might continue to explore barriers to interruption with larger more randomly selected samples of social workers throughout the United States. Additionally, participants might be asked to define terms like racism, anti-racist and White anti-racist to provide a clearer context for responses. Empirical evidence, from a qualitative or quantitative study, might be sought to show whether increase in racial awareness decreases individual decisions not to interrupt perceived acts of racism. Also, research might more specifically focus on individual psychological processes in the *decision to take responsibility* to interrupt racism to better understand its relationship to decisions to interrupt/not interrupt racism. Another avenue of exploration might be on participants' avoidance of conflict and how it relates or does not relate to acts of interrupting racism. Such studies would continue to provide clues as to how White

social workers might, as one participant said, “grow a person inside” who is better able to continually choose to interrupt racism on the way to becoming anti-racist.

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Appendix A

Human Subjects Review Approval Letter

Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950
F (413) 585-7994

March 28, 2010

Mary Jane Panke

Dear Mary,

Your amended documents have been reviewed. All is now in order and we are glad to give final approval to your study.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent 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 with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Marsha Kline Pruett / ds'.

Marsha Kline Pruett
Vice Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Rani Varghese, Research Advisor

Appendix B

Email Solicitation for Participation

Hello [insert referred name or title],

My name is Mary Panke and I am a student at Smith College School for Social Work located in Massachusetts. I am currently in the process of recruiting subjects for my thesis research that is required for partial fulfillment of my Master's degree. The research question I am studying is:

“What Interrupts Interrupting? An exploratory study of the factors that deter self-identified White anti-racist social workers from interrupting perceived acts of racism in interpersonal interactions.”

All participants of this study will be adults who hold an MSW and identify as both White and anti-racist. Participants will have done some form of anti-racist work (e.g. membership in anti-racist group, participation in actions, training or educational experiences).

I am contacting you because [insert referral source] suggested that you would be a good candidate for my study.

I am interested in your reflections of your experiences of racism, identifying as an anti-racist and instances when you have both acted to interrupt acts of perceived racism in interpersonal interactions and when you have not. The purpose of this study is to better understand the factors that deter White anti-racist social workers from interrupting perceived acts of racism in their day to day lives. It is my hope this information might serve to better inform White social workers on how to become more effective allies to people of color in their personal and professional lives. Your participation will require a 45 to 60 minute face to face interview at a mutually convenient time and place. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed. Your confidentiality will be protected and the data obtained will not be connected to any of your personally identifiable information.

Participating in this study is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on and enhance your anti-racist identity.

Please respond in a timely manner if you are interested in participating in this study. Also, please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you have regarding this study. Lastly, if you do not think you will be able to participate at this time, but that you might have a friend or colleague who you think would be interested and meet the criteria for participation, please pass their names and contact information along.

Thank you for your time,

Mary Panke
XXX-XXX-XXXX
mpanke@smith.edu

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

My name is Mary Panke. I am currently a Masters of Social Work student at The Smith School for Social Work in Northampton, Massachusetts. I am conducting a research study to explore the factors that deter self-identified White anti-racist social workers from interrupting acts of racism. The data gathered from interviews in this study will be used in my MSW Thesis. Better understanding of the factors that deter effective anti-racist action is important to the social work profession's overarching goal to work toward social justice, including work to dismantle racism.

As a participant in this study you self-identify as White and anti-racist, you hold a minimum credential of MSW, you live in the Northeastern part of the United States and have been engaged in antiracist work (e.g. membership in anti-racist group, participation in actions, training or educational experiences). As a participant in this study you are willing to reflect on your responses to perceived acts of racism in your daily life. You will participate in a 45 to 60 minute face to face interview of open-ended questions about your experiences with racism at a mutually convenient and private location. Your interview will be digitally recorded and I may take additional notes during and after the interview.

Complete confidentiality of all materials related to the interview process will be protected. Data will be coded to remove identifiable information from computer files and subsequent transcripts. I will store data in a locked file for the duration of the study and three years following the completion of the study as defined by Federal guidelines, after which all computer files and transcripts will be destroyed. Should I require further use of the data after that three year period I will continue to keep them in a locked file and destroy them when no longer needed. My Smith School for Social Work research advisor will have access to the transcribed material, but not the identity of the participants. In the event I employ a volunteer or professional transcriber to transcribe the digital recordings, they will not have access to the identity of the participant, and will also sign a pledge of confidentiality. The resulting study may be presented in publications and public presentations. All data will be presented as a whole and when brief illustrative quotes or vignettes are used they will be carefully disguised.

Potential benefits of this study to you and the social work profession are increased understanding of possible barriers to anti-racist action for self-identified White anti-racist social workers. This information can assist individuals, educational institutions, social justice organizations and clinicians in becoming better prepared to work to dismantle racism in our daily lives. I do not anticipate any substantial risks from participating in this research, however, in any experience of self-reflection it is always possible that strong feelings may be evoked which will warrant further attention from your own mental health provider.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, you are free to decline any particular question and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the process before April 15, 2011. All materials pertaining to your participation will be destroyed upon your withdrawal. Should you have any questions about this study or wish to withdraw please contact me at XXX-

XXX-XXXX or mpanke@smith.edu. Should you have any additional concerns about your rights or the study that I am not able to address please feel free to contact the 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. Thank you for your time and participation.

Participant's Signature / Date

Researcher's Signature/ Date

Please keep a copy of this Consent Form or your records.

Appendix D

Interview Guide

1. Age, gender, education, current job
2. What does being White mean to you?
Probe -How long have you known you were White?
3. What does being anti-racist mean to you?
Probe -How did you learn this?
Probe -How long have you identified yourself this way?
Probe -What do you mean by White privilege?
Probe -Define any particular terms used
4. What things do you do in your personal and professional life as an anti-racist?
Probe -What does your life as an anti-racist look like?
5. What has been your experience of identifying as anti-racist?
Probe -What does it feel like?
Probe -What has been the impact on your personal or professional life?
6. The purpose of this study is to look at what gets in our way of interrupting racism. How would you define “interrupting racism”?
7. Can you give me examples from your own life of interrupting racism?
Probe -If example is overt, can you think of any examples where the racism is more subtle?
8. What has been your experience of interrupting acts of racism since you have come to identify as anti-racist?
Probe -What has it felt like to interrupt?
Probe -What helped you take that action?
9. We know that for all of us there are moments when we see racism, we witness racism or we experience racism and for whatever reason we choose not to respond, we do not act to interrupt. Can you reflect on any instances you may have had where you didn’t interrupt acts of racism?
Probe -If not, were there times you recognized instances of inter-personal racism, or more subtle forms or structural racism and didn’t act?
Probe -If not, were there times that you had where you weren’t sure it was racism, and you didn’t act?
Probe -If so, can you describe one of these times?
10. What was your experience like of not interrupting racism?
Probe -How did it feel?
11. What got in the way of not taking action?
Probe -What is your understanding of your decision not to interrupt racism?
12. What would have helped you or supported you in taking action?
13. I’d like to pause now before we wrap up to sincerely thank you for your willingness to reflect on your thoughts and feelings with regard to racism. Is there anything you would like to add or comment on that we have not discussed? Is there any question I did not ask that would help me better understand what gets in the way of interrupting?

Appendix D

Pre-interview Script

Thank you for being with me today and agreeing to be interviewed as part of my master's thesis research. This interview is one of 10 interviews. You as well as other individuals who identify as anti-racist Whites and hold an MSW will be interviewed using the same interview guide. Your interview will be part of the data used for this exploratory research study, which will help me better understand what gets in our way of interrupting acts of racism in our daily lives. This interview will take 45 to 60 minutes to complete.

We will start by having you review the consent form, which outlines the procedures, expectations and confidentiality. I will answer any of your questions about the research study, methodology or the consent form and ask you to sign it. We will then complete the interview and there will be time at the end for you to ask any questions.

Review and sign Informed Consent.

As I mentioned in my email the interview is designed to gather information about your thoughts and feelings regarding your experiences as a White anti-racist social worker. I want to stress there are no "right" or "wrong" or "politically correct" answers to the questions in this interview. I am interested in hearing about your experiences when faced with acts of racism in your daily life. You need not feel like you should say only positive things. I am interested in learning about the whole range of experiences that anti-racist Whites have in facing a racist society, the successes and failures, the ideals and the reality.

As we go through the interview please take time to think about the questions and answer them as completely as possible. Feel free at any time to ask me to clarify any of the questions. And feel free to decline answering any of the questions.

Do you have questions before we start?

As we begin I will start with a few demographic questions and then go on to the interview.