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Race Matters : When Middle/High School Teachers Engage in Participatory Activist Research on the Power of Stories to Disrupt Racism

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Race Matters: When Middle/High School Teachers Engage in Participatory Activist Research on the Power of Stories to Disrupt Racism

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

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Research on the Power of Stories to Disrupt Racism

of

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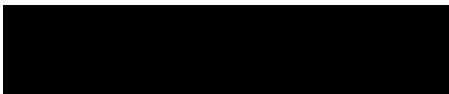
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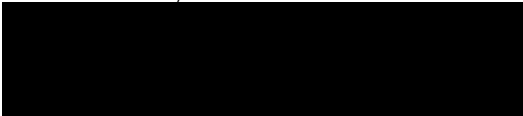
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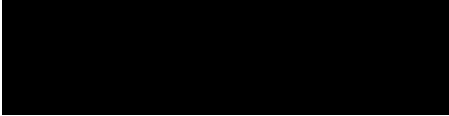
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Abstract

This study represents a four-month segment within the ongoing work of The Race Matters Alliance; a group that I cofounded several years before beginning this dissertation with four other white, middle/high school teachers and several students of color in an effort to open a space to speak about race at our predominantly white school. Using participatory activist qualitative research methods, we documented this segment of our work that focused on the disruption of racism within five areas: (a) school culture, (b) faculty/student communication, (c) individual and institutional stories, (d) curriculum, and, (e) fear of disrupting the status quo. We explored the following questions: How does a group of teachers grow into race collaborators, allies, and activists as they work in opposition to the institutional and individual racism that characterizes their school environment? And what change processes are a group of teachers able to put in motion within themselves and their school as they work together to open a space to speak about race?

The findings showed that the work of aspiring allies cannot be done alone and is facilitated by participation in: (a) white teacher affinity groups, (b) cross-cultural/interracial race conversations, (c) the sharing of personal stories, (d) interactions with students of color and outside organizations to assist in amending whitewashed curriculum, and (e) disclosure of personal fears of retribution to build racial resiliency. The findings emphasized the power of race stories to foster interracial relationships, which, in turn, have the capacity to disrupt racism. This implies that interracial relationships, forged through the sharing of existing stories and the making of new ones rooted in cooperative anti-racist efforts, hold promise for an increase in the development of more effective race allies and for the emergence of more socially just schools.

Keywords: race ally, white affinity groups, interracial relationships, personal stories

Acknowledgements

From the time that I first began to consider writing this dissertation, there was no doubt in my mind as to who my committee members should be. Dr. Monica Taylor believed that the work I was doing at my school would be of interest to other educators long before I did. She has an innate understanding of education, academia, and academic writing. She instinctively understands the ways in which each of her students can get the most out of that world, as well as what they can contribute to it. She opened up that world to me in ways I could never have imagined. No one expects to be transformed after 60, but she gave me that unexpected gift.

When Dr. Monica Taylor and Dr. Emily Klein join forces, there is not much that can stop them, and yes Dr. Klein, that is a sweeping statement, but I will not take a note and correct this one. Together with Dr. Taylor, you are a relentless communal force for social justice. Dr. Klein loves to learn and believes that everyone has something to teach her. In the classes of these two women I learned so much, and in their presence I felt both pushed and supported. The guidance that they have both given me throughout this dissertation process has been more than I could ever have expected, as well as exactly what I needed. Most importantly, as my dissertation chair, Dr. Taylor, you gave me space even when that independence frightened me. I pushed myself because I wanted to please you, and I ended up pleasing myself and gaining respect for my abilities as a writer and a researcher.

The third member of my committee, Dr. Jeremy Price, introduced me to the voices within the field that spoke to my sensibility. During a summer independent study with Dr. Price, I came to understand my thinking on race in relation to the field of education. Dr. Price actually introduced me to one of the most respected scholars in race studies; an introduction that steered the course of this dissertation. Dr. Price, the comments and advice you shared with me on the

direction of my writing rang so true that I was eager to address them rather than dreading the loss of time they might otherwise have evoked. Thank you to all three of you. Together, you have made me believe that I can make a legitimate contribution to my chosen field.

I had always wanted to pursue my doctorate, but I did not see a path forward in the field of education because I was not drawn to the areas of supervision or curriculum. When I came across the TETD program while searching the Montclair website for a student, the light in the room grew brighter. I immediately called Dr. Ana Maria Villagas who encouraged me that day, and all the days of my time at Montclair going forward up until her retirement. I am so grateful to her for looking out for me along the way.

I am fortunate to be a part of a small but mighty family. When my parents died while I was in college, my older sister Jo, and her husband Terry, took on the role of guardians and continued in that position. Although we lost my sister a few years ago, my brother-in-law remains a stabilizing force in my life along with his children Kate and Matt, their spouses, Chris and Christine and their children, Eleanor, George, and Oliver. In particular, my niece Kate has been there for me. She has listened to my doubts concerning this dissertation for so long that, despite her brilliance, I think I have completely relieved her of any thoughts of pursuing a similar academic path. My husband David, my children Wyatt and Emmett, and my grandchildren Tessa and Logan, have supported me in my academic pursuits even when they took me away from them more than they should have. The love and encouragement they have given to me, and their belief in my ability to fulfil my dream of earning my doctorate means everything to me. I am also happy to be graduating with Wyatt who earned his master's degree this year as well. And to Emmett, I have appreciated your suggestions throughout this process, but I will never forget the support you gave me on the night before my dissertation draft was due.

I have also been fortunate enough to have incredibly supportive friends who have generously encouraged me in this endeavor. I am very lucky that my long-time friend David DeBacco now lives in Hawaii. Since his day is my night, I was supported by him through my many late-night writing sessions. My closest friend from childhood, Kathy Propper Hyra, has patiently waited for us to be able to go out for lunch, even before the pandemic. I look forward to being with her again. Thank you to my friend Lisa Tumminello for her positive texts and the strength of her good wishes, and to my friend Cheryl Kress for her unwavering belief in my ability when I had trouble maintaining it myself. To my dissertation partner Candice Chiavola, I truly could not have made it through this process as well as I did without your always generous support, your funds of knowledge, and your humor. Thank you, and thank you all.

Finally, my four co-participants as well as the two Race Matters Alliance students who played the most prominent role in this study are foremost in my mind when I think of how fortunate I am to be able to do this work. You have taught me the importance of sharing stories by so generously sharing your stories with me. It is so frustrating not to be able to thank you by name. Your voices rise from the pages of this dissertation with an honesty that is palpable. I cannot thank you enough for your participation and for your help in making me see everything differently. I hope that I have come remotely close to expressing the importance of your contributions. Most of all, thank you to the three young women and their families who first challenged me to form The Race Matters Alliance. I want you to know that my co-participants and I set out to make positive changes in ourselves and our school through attempting to become race allies and activists. If we have in any way been able to do that, it is because of you. Your persistence and bravery has been the catalyst for all that we have been able to accomplish, and it continues to be the force behind all that we hope to achieve.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the two people without whom it would never have been written. Without my husband David's constant companionship and unwavering support throughout the writing process, and the six years of study leading up to it, this dissertation could not have been completed, and without the inspiration of a life well-lived, and the unconditional love that I received from my late sister Jo, it would never even have been started.

To all of my students of color and their families: your resilience and refusal to turn from joy in the face of ever-present injustice is my greatest inspiration

Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Creating a new identity; that of educator as an ally, an advocate for students of color, and a much-needed antiracist role model for white students, is a long-term process. It means undoing years of "color and power-evasive" socialization. (Frankenberg, as cited in Fine, Weiss, Pruitt, & Burns, 2004, p. 371)

Problem Statement

Race is a difficult subject for white teachers to understand, and even harder for them to talk about (Nieto, 2008; Pollack, 2004; Singleton & Hays, 2008). The predominantly white, middle class, and typically monolingual women who comprise the majority of our country's teaching force (Snyder, et al., 2019) increasingly face a growing population of diverse students from whom they are separated by a virtual wall of cultural and often linguistic difference (Charity & Mallinson, 2011; Godley et al., 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2003). Although teachers may have completed valuable coursework and practical training on race as part of their teaching preparation programs, their beliefs on the subject, having already been shaped by their prior life experiences, are often reflective of their white culture's deeply engrained racial biases, and are therefore stubbornly resistant to change (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2006).

In a 2009 Ted Talk, Adichie referred to the acceptance of this type of culturally produced prejudice towards a group of people as subscribing to a "single story" of their existence, and she warned of its dangers. Through a series of personal examples, both as a privileged Nigerian child passing judgement on one of her family's servants, and later, as a foreign exchange student in the United States, enduring her white American roommate's deficit view of Africans, Adichie demonstrated the universal human tendency to classify

others by stereotypical characteristics. She contended that without being aware of doing so,

we absorb the pervasive, negative narratives that our cultures maintain about anyone who

differs from ourselves. She demonstrated our tendency to accept these "single stories",

thereby creating the stereotypes that become the default for how we form our opinions of

others. As Adichie (2009) pointed out, "The problem with stereotypes is not that they are

untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (12:57).

When we subscribe to a single deficit story of a people, we rob them of their dignity and

diminish ourselves in turn (Adichie, 2009).

The single story around race in America is nowhere more dangerous than within its

schools. Inside its classrooms, the life experience of the nation's predominantly white

teachers, and the repetitive, one-note narrative of race that they have been brought up with

are likely to exert the strongest influence on their beliefs about and attitudes towards their

students of color (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2006). There is, however, a strong body of research

that supports the raising of race conversations and engagement in ongoing racial inquiry

between all educational stakeholders as a means of addressing the persistent single story

held by so many teachers regarding students of color and establishing a safer and more

equitable anti-racist environment at school (Chang & Conrad, 2008; Delano-Oriaran &

Meidl, 2012; Hawley, 2008; Lensmire & Lewis, 2009; McIntyre, 2008; Michael, 2015;

Pollock, 2008; Singleton & Hayes, 2008).

The actual process of raising issues of race is complicated as well as uncomfortable,

and attempts at racial inquiry can be daunting. Ali Michael, author of *Raising race*

questions: Whiteness and inquiry in education (2015), described her initial exposure to

talking about race as a freshman college student in a required African American literature

course. She explained that she had come from a family that did not speak about race. It was her family's belief that white people who actually did speak about it were racist, and that she and her family were good white people because they avoided the subject (Michael, 2015). Like Michael, I was taught to avoid race conversations based on a desire to be polite. In my family's view, it was wrong to make people feel different. However, when one of my students of color responded to my sharing this fact by asking me what was actually wrong with being different from white people, I was shocked into recognizing the deep bias that had so obviously, but (I would like to believe) unconsciously, motivated my family's insistence on such "politeness."

Michael's (2015) family and my own were not alone in their moratorium against talking about race. Pollack (2004) cited Guinier and Torres (2004) as claiming that both liberals and conservatives in government have argued against talking about race, with conservatives holding that "when one notices race, one is implicitly manifesting racial enmity" (p. 38) and liberals adhering to the idea that "a frank engagement with race would only heighten social divisions" (p. 32). In opposition to these views, Michael (2015) posited that guiding teachers in asking questions about race, and engaging them in sustained inquiry on the subject, could lead to "antiracist classrooms, positive racial identities, and a restoration of the wholeness of spirit and community that racism undermines" (back cover).

Singleton and Hayes (2008) referred to this as "courageous conversation" (p. 18) to which they applied four rules of engagement. Over the course of fifteen years, they fostered race talk across racial boundaries bounded by the tenets of staying engaged, expecting to experience discomfort, speaking your truth, and expecting and accepting a lack of closure. The result was a strong measure of confidence on their part in the possibility of achieving "a

more compassionate and just world" through this type of interracial interaction. But Sleeter (2015) argued that it was not enough to merely speak about race. She urged white people who wished to challenge the deeper, systemic nature of racism and their complicity in maintaining it to move beyond mere talk towards engagement in "collective action in which whites learn to become allies" (p. 82).

The way to becoming an educator ally is dark and unmarked. There is no road map, and the journey is different for each individual who attempts it. We do have some understanding of what does not work. One-off anti-racist courses added onto teacher education programs, and short-term student teacher placements in racially and ethnically diverse schools often serve to further reinforce deeply held racial biases rather than to disrupt them (Hayes & Juarez, 2011; Lawrence & Tatum, 2004). Efforts to develop the racial consciousness of teachers in order to improve the educational experience of their diverse students and to, thereby, raise their academic performance have been developed and implemented for more than half a century. Yet, despite the addition to teacher education and development programs of anti-racist educational initiatives such as multicultural education (Banks, 1993, 1997; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Sleeter & Grant, 1987), and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), white privilege is still an integral part of the schools where teachers work (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

The Study

Within the often race-evasive environments of their schools, teachers can easily be forced to water down or even abandon the anti-racist teaching practices they may have adopted during their studies or professional development programs (Berchini, 2016). But

what happens when teachers *do* manage to maintain their anti-racist beliefs and act on them in opposition to what Jupp and Lensmire (2016) referred to as the "pervasive and enduring institutional and individual racism that characterizes policy and practice in US schools" (p. 985)? The complex struggles that I have personally and collectively encountered in the course of my race work as part of a group of aspiring teacher allies at a predominantly white middle/high school, and my doctoral studies in teacher education and development with a focus on race, led me to ask that question, and to attempt to position myself and my colleagues in a situation which would allow us to ultimately find its answer. Therefore, the purpose of this participatory activist research study, in which I acted as both researcher and collaborator, was to demonstrate what it looks like when teachers resolve to become race allies through their collective efforts to create a space to speak about race at school. Specifically, I asked the following research questions: How does a group of teachers grow into race collaborators, allies and activists as they work in opposition to the institutional and individual racism that characterizes their school environment? And what change processes are a group of teachers able to put in motion within themselves and their school as they work together to open a space to speak about race? Through the ongoing work we had done with our Race Matters Alliance, we had already begun to address these questions. However, our methods became more formalized and our study began to take shape as we moved to document our actions.

Scholars acknowledge the importance of white allies in the struggle for educational equity (Boucher, 2016; Boutte & Jackson, 2013; Delano-Oriaran & Meidl, 2012; Denevi, 2017; Gaffney, 2016; Harris, 2017; Kivel, 2015; Lawrence & Tatum, 2004; Michael & Conger, 2009; Tatum, 1992, 1994). Boucher (2016) analyzed the practice of a young white

teacher who had already been shown to be an "effective" teacher of Black students as well as an ally capable of creating an aura of mutual respect and solidarity with his students. Boutte and Jackson (2013) related their experience as Black professors forging a complex alliance with white allies who they saw as having the power to further the initiatives of Black university faculty members who had been shut down by white administrators. However, I discovered no evidence within the literature of groups of white teachers working together on their own, as my colleagues and I had done, to set in motion change processes both within themselves and in the context of their schools. It was therefore our hope, and it is now my belief, that this dissertation study contributes to filling that gap.

Overview of the Dissertation

The second chapter of this dissertation first provides background information pertaining to the creation of The Race Matters Alliance, and the race work that my co-participants and I engaged in prior to this study as we first attempted to open a space to speak about race at our school. This information affords the reader a better understanding of the context of the particular school setting in which we worked, and of the resistance we encountered from our white colleagues and students in response to our efforts. Additionally, it offers a view of our initial individual and communal mindsets, establishing a point of reference for measuring our growth as aspiring allies and activists throughout the study. It also illuminates the way in which the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, described in detail in this chapter, supported that growth. From Adichie's (2009) concept of the danger of the single story, which served as the conceptual framework of the study, my co-participants and I had already been able to draw insights that helped us to address the systemic racism embedded within our school community. Armed with the perspective we

took from this framework, we were able to check our tendency to label our more race-evasive colleagues as unilaterally racist, and to meet them instead at their own levels of racial development. Also included in this chapter is the theoretical framework, which was used to structure this study. I believe that second wave white teacher identity studies offered the type of open-minded perspective needed to maintain patience and resolve as my co-participants and I spoke up about diversity in the face of persistent race evasiveness. Finally, chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature that examines the two areas of scholarship my co-participants and I turned to for support and guidance throughout the project. The literature on the subjects of race talk and allyship provided us with a better understanding of the white resistance we continued to struggle against, and educated us in how to address it.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of participatory activist research and the ways it guided the collection of data and directed the methods I employed in analyzing my findings. Participatory activist research (lisahunter et al., 2013), a comparatively new addition to the action research family, closely resembles participatory action research which takes place in real-life situations and involves participants as researchers and researchers as participants working together to promote reformative change within existing social situations (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015; lisahunter et al., 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). What differentiates participatory activist research from all other forms of action research is its promotion of an "emancipatory approach" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 18). lisahunter et al. (2013) acknowledged that the conceptual basis of participatory activist research is not new, drawing as it does on certain elements of action research, critical theory, and participatory action research. However, its emphasis on activism, its

opposition to oppression within the research environment, and its tendency to cast its researcher/participants as co-activists attempting to "make a difference," explicitly sets it apart, and, in my mind, it provided my co-participants and me with the best course for pursuing and documenting our journey towards becoming race allies. It is assumed in action research that we, as collaborators, are changed in the process of working together toward these larger change goals. With this in mind, for this study we chose to sit in a space of a collective journey as well as an individual one so that we were able to capture the many forms of both our "*being* and our *becoming"* (Mason, 2016, p. 1048) in regards to race. In this way, we exposed all of the messiness and complexity of this process of developing into race collaborators, allies, and activists as we attempted to alter the discourse of race at our school.

Chapter 4 presents the dissertation findings, beginning with a description of the areas of focus concentrated on by the co-participants from the start of their efforts to become race allies, several years before formalizing their work with this study. The goals that they continue to pursue today grew out of these original focus areas, which also help to organize the presentation of the study findings. The chapter also includes individual race biographies of the co-participants and a detailed description of the unique ways in which they each respond to the many personal stories they encounter. The final chapter includes an interpretation of the study findings and a discussion of the conclusions drawn from them. I end the chapter with an examination of the implications offered for teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and for the field of research.

It should be noted here that throughout this dissertation I have chosen to break with the APA style convention of refraining from capitalizing the words black and white.

Throughout this dissertation, I have capitalized Black, but not white. This decision reflects my alignment with statements made by Visconti (2009) who has pointed out that many Black people describe themselves as being "Black" and that this conception of their identity is reflected in a specific body of literature, music, and academic study; something for which white people have no comparable manifestation of their whiteness. Visconti (2009) concluded that white people just do not see themselves in that way and that there would therefore be no reason to capitalize the word white. He did find one exception. White supremacists do think of themselves as having a white culture. They do have a definitive vision of what "white" means, and they do capitalize the W. Out of respect for the culture that the word Black represents, and as a way of making a small protest against those like the white supremacists who would wish to discount it, I capitalize Black, but not white.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

There is a great deal of scholarship to support the notion that the development of teachers into potential allies must necessarily begin with the development of their racial identity (Gaffney, 2016; Howard, 2007; Kivel, 2015; Tatum, 1992). Before change can be enacted with students, it must start with educators themselves (Howard, 2007). But the development of racial identity is not without its stops and starts. This process takes place slowly over time and the work is messy and complex (Howard, 2007). Tatum (1994) described two developmental tasks in the process of becoming aware of one's white identity. She saw these tasks as "the abandonment of individual racism and the recognition of and opposition to institutional and cultural racism" (p. 463).

My own journey away from individual racism has been halting and the resistance I have met in opposing institutional racism has often been intimidating. As a doctoral student focused on race in teacher education and development, as well as a high school teacher engaged in race work at my school, I had long been troubled by the single story of deficit and failure held by America's predominantly white teaching force (Delpit, 1995; Valencia, 1997) and the resistance to addressing issues of race that are part of that deficit perspective. I had learned about its persistence in my course work and I had seen it played out first hand as I worked with a small group of colleagues, students, and parents to create a space to speak about race at our school. I saw it in the resistance of some of our teachers and administrators to the professional development efforts we had initiated. Our suggestions for faculty training regarding race had been ignored. In spite of the fact that our group, known

as The Race Matters Alliance, had participated in panel presentations at Montclair State University and had forged relationships around race work with students at other schools, we were allowed to present at the new teacher orientation only; not to the entire staff. Additionally, the title of our presentation was changed from "Addressing Issues of Race at School" to the innocuous "Getting to Know Your Students" without warning or explanation.

The persistence of the single story of deficit was also evident in our fellow educators' lack of understanding of our relationship with our students of color. In trying to explain the transformative aspect of our work, I once told an administrator how humbling my relationships with my students of color were, and how those students helpfully alerted me whenever I erred and said something racially insensitive. She responded by asking me what I could possibly have said to them that would be racially insensitive. Another teacher told me that she was glad that we were helping "these kids," but added that she had trouble accepting how hard she worked just to have her tax dollars go to support people like them who did not.

Examples of this single story of deficit and its accompanying attitude of resistance were also experienced by our students of color directly. One student mentioned in sociology class that she would like to discuss race and was promptly told by a classmate that there was a Black president and therefore no more race problem in America. However, on the day after the 2016 presidential election (the school filled with white students cheering and wearing "Make America Great Again" hats) I opened the door to my small windowless office to find it completely filled with students of color, attempting to escape the harassment they had been experiencing in the halls and in their classrooms, hiding in the dark, the fear on their faces visible in the light of their phones.

The result of these experiences on the members of our Race Matters group was that we became angry. We began to see the teachers who subscribed to a single story regarding our students of color as merely obstacles to our goals rather than as colleagues. We became discouraged and began to lose hope that we could actually make a difference in our own school. Our negative experiences there, coupled with the highly charged atmosphere of violence against men and women of color in the world beyond our doors, had left us feeling that white teachers' widespread resistance to change might be insurmountable. Adichie's conception of the single story challenged this notion. It offered us the possibility of viewing our colleagues' single story of deficit and failure as a broader narrative. Within that expanded view, we were able to take into account how the teachers' individual life stories contributed to their negative viewpoints on race and to open the possibility for disrupting them. By showing us the universal quality of the single story, Adichie provided common ground. From this perspective, we realized that we ourselves had become perpetrators of our own deficit single story once we had allowed ourselves to view our colleagues as ignorant, biased, and incapable of change. We suddenly saw how easy it was to allow this to happen, especially when surrounded by those who are like-minded. As distasteful as we found their framing of a single story for our students, we came to understand that, just as Adichie herself had discovered through her own bias towards Mexicans, we too were guilty in the question of the single story. This realization motivated us find a way in to dismantle it. We vowed to maintain a spirit of continuous inquiry and individual, as well as group reflection, to avoid falling prey to the single story in the future.

As I reflected on our Race Matters work, I recognized how I had allowed my frustration with my school dynamic and its players to narrow my view of what is possible. I

was reminded of Maxine Greene's 2007 talk on creating authentic openings through the

intersection of oppression, culture and imagination. She suggested that "Poetry moves from

dread to possibility" (Greene, p. 9). Beginning with suffering, it finds an opening, and then

moves on to the possibility of "what might be" (Greene, p. 10). I believe that is why

Adichie's words resonated with me. Looking through the lens of the single story at the

resistance we were encountering with our teachers regarding diversity made what we had

believed to be an insurmountable problem, now seem to be a valuable opportunity. With

Adichie's words, she had offered us an opening into "what might be" (Greene, 2007, p. 10).

        After a somewhat shaky start, my white teacher allies and I had been successful in

learning to work with our diverse students and their families, becoming true listeners and

making legitimate efforts to avoid being oppressive. Our success led me to assume that

practical knowledge in our own time and context was superior to anything that the literature,

either empirical or conceptual, could provide. However, when we hit a bumpy place (a

teacher had decided to tell his class that our Race Matters group was nothing more than an

anti-white racist organization) we knew that we would have to tread very carefully with our

resistant white colleagues as we moved forward in our professional development related to

race. This challenge was beyond our experience, or even the experience of our students of

color and their parents to address. I knew that we had to fall back on the deep and varied

literature on race that I had been reading and writing about in my doctoral program.

        Revisiting Beverly Tatum (2007), Mica Pollock (2004a), and Pablo Freire (1970), I

realized the importance of learning from researchers, teachers/teacher educators, and

thinkers, both white and of color, who had previously studied, reflected on, and written

about race issues before we began our work. I saw that we would be wise to utilize their

"funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 132). From Tatum (2007), we gained insight into securing the trust of the parents of our diverse students who were anxious to see how we would handle this racially charged situation. Pollack (2004) exposed the push by whites to delete race words from conversation in the name of equity as no more than a veiled attempt to allow racial disparity to persist. Her revelations mobilized our group to demand that the administration address our colleague's racist behavior. Finally, Freire (1970), in defining the process of speaking truth to power, gave us the impetus we needed to make this demand.

Our efforts have not always been successful. In fact, as we have continued our Race Matters Alliance work, my colleagues and I have found that both faculty and administrative resistance seem to be increasing. Perhaps this school community pushback is not merely a result of what some have referred to as our "stirring things up at school." When I wrote the proposal for this study, I speculated that it might also be connected to the neo-liberal tendencies that I saw becoming an influential part of our school climate. At that time, it was very early in the Trump presidency. In retrospect, I realize that I had no idea how difficult the situation would become.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Framework: The Danger of the Single Story

As we moved forward in this work, we were guided, as we already had been, by Adichie's (2009) concept of the danger of the single story. Throughout this study, we examined our school culture, our colleagues, and ourselves for evidence of this concept: the tendency to reduce those who are different from us to one-dimensional stereotypes and, to develop a deficit opinion of them as a result. I chose Adichie's notion of the single story to

act as the conceptual framework of this study because I believed that it offered an intriguing possibility for understanding and disrupting the persistent white resistance to speaking about race that had been well documented in the literature (Guinier & Torres, 2004; Jupp & Lensmire, 2016; Michael, 2015; Pollack, 2004) and that my co-participants and I had repeatedly encountered through the work we were doing with The Race Matters Alliance.

Based on false perceptions of difference that have no basis in science (Pollack, 2008), race, as defined here, is a social construct that is used to unfairly advantage one group over another (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). In education, "Race is not simply a benign demographic fact that describes our students; it is a social force that influences everything that happens in school" (Michael, 2015, p. 16). The classification of children into the false categories of race transforms schools into threatening environments for students of diverse backgrounds. It exposes them to stereotyping and leaves them vulnerable to the danger of the single story.

This has been the overriding experience of the students of color at our school. The majority of them enter our district as "choice" students from surrounding towns whose schools pay the cost of their tuition and transportation to attend. This is a money-making proposition for our district that is perceived as an undesirable but necessary evil by many of our town's inhabitants. The "choice" students are served constant reminders that the resident students have a single deficit story of them and the towns they come from. They are seen as residents of "the ghetto." This is not true, but the "choice" students must endure frequent "jokes" such as the one in which the resident students tell them that they would like to visit them at their homes over the weekend, but would be afraid to do so unless they were armed. On its own, this type of racist taunting would be deplorable, but the "choice"

students have also shared with us that this type of bullying often occurs in class in front of faculty members who, in every case, have failed to address the situation. At the time that this study was proposed, some of the "choice" students' parents had complained to the then newly hired and well-meaning principal who had taken up the issue with the teachers and the students. The result was that the teachers felt attacked and the students, emboldened by the current political climate, were unrepentant, insisting that they were "just joking", or "just telling the truth as they saw it."

Upon hearing about the treatment that our students of color were so often being exposed to, as well as the failure of their teachers to intervene, we became angry, and, as we had done before, we had succumbed to the danger of the single story ourselves. We had labeled the bullying students and apathetic teachers with a single negative story of bias. We had fallen into the trap of seeing them all as completely racist. However, we quickly recognized the evidence of the single story in our own behavior, which had diffused our anger, and which led us to begin searching for a more far-reaching way to deal with the problem than that which had been attempted by our principal.

Using Adichie's (2009) idea of the danger of the single story as the conceptual framework for this study did allow us, as it had already done repeatedly, to move beyond viewing incidences of racial bias at our school as isolated occurrences perpetrated by individual bad actors, and to instead recognize the presence of systemic racism and white supremacy that was often invisible to us, but was clearly evident to our students of color. Searching for evidence of systemic racism in the race work we had already engaged in had enabled us to acknowledge the ways in which we are all complicit in maintaining this shadowy system of oppression. More importantly, however, it had provided us with a way to

better understand how our school community, and we ourselves, had been indoctrinated by our personal and cultural experiences to become equally "guilty in the question of the single story" (8:25). Armed with an understanding of the source of our communal bias as we engaged in this study, I believe that we were better prepared to address it. I noticed that we were more able to work to foster change toward racial equity while avoiding the possibility of harboring guilt as well as the tendency to project blame throughout the process.

Theoretical Framework: Second-Wave White Teacher Identity Studies

For additional support in documenting our work towards becoming allies, collaborators, and activists around issues of race, I guided the group towards the tenets of second-wave white teacher identity studies. I felt that this area of scholarship provided hope for breaking down teacher resistance to race work, and in turn, for positively influencing school culture. Defined as "a multidimensional field studying the cultural production of race, whiteness, and white teacher identities that articulates complex historical and social forces along with related understandings of teaching and learning in context" (Jupp et al., 2016, p. 13) the basis of second-wave white teacher identity studies was not new. It is part of the family of white teacher identity studies that originally combined African American intellectual traditions with critical white studies in education and ultimately became institutionalized as an accepted diversity component of many teacher education programs (Jupp et al., 2013).

The core principles of second-wave white teacher identity studies differed from those of the original first-wave version, which focuses primarily on teachers' race-evasiveness and the conception of white privilege introduced by McIntosh (1988); a conception that has continued to have a profound effect on the evolution of race work in education today.

Although they were respectful of McIntosh's contributions to the field, second-wave white teacher identity scholars felt that her work had limited understanding of and had minimized opportunities for anti-racist action. They posited that first-wave white teacher identity studies, or white privilege pedagogy, as they also referred to it, called for confession; something that they saw as a dead-end for anti-racist progress (Lensmire et al., 2013). This is a stance with which I strongly agreed, as we embarked on the work of this dissertation study, especially in the context of our particular school environment.

I must note, that in the more than two years since I compiled this literature review, the scholarship around second wave white teacher identity studies has continued to grow and evolve. I have noticed the addition of more voices to those led by the originators of the field of study, Jupp et al. (2016), including more women (Hambacher & Ginn, 2020; McManimon et al., 2018). These scholars now often refer to the area of study as critical whiteness studies or simply white identity studies rather than the term "second wave white teacher identity studies" that Jupp and Lensmire coined over a decade ago. Sleeter (2018), in her review of *Whiteness at the table*: *Antiracism, racism, and identity in education* (McManimon et al., 2018), stated that the authors' push "Critical Whiteness Studies forward on multiple levels" (para. 1).

I believe that our choice of second wave white teacher identity studies was a valid choice for us to use as a theoretical framework for this study. In its willingness to meet white teachers where they were in their development, it allowed us to work with colleagues who were race-evasive, while encouraging us to view their race visible behaviors. It was a legitimate approach at the time, and we, and some of those race-evasive colleagues, have grown and evolved just as the field of study has. I continue to follow its scholars and to

absorb their patience towards race-evasive yet developing white teachers. I also continue to see my own opportunities for growth in their writings. Most importantly, second-wave white teacher identity studies were a way into the literature for us. Like our more race-evasive colleagues, we still had a great deal of growing to do, and the field of study was exactly the guide we needed at the time.

As a theoretical framework, I believe that second-wave white teacher identity studies research dovetailed nicely with our search for the single story in its refusal to focus narrowly on individual acknowledgement of white privilege and white teachers' race-evasiveness, analyzing instead the systemic roots of racism present in the cultural and life experiences of us all. Second-wave white teacher identity studies also take into account the variation of white teachers' identities as well as the social context of the environments in which they live and work. In this way, misinterpretation of their struggles with diversity as being a single story of racism might be more easily challenged, and a more nuanced and effective approach to engaging in race work with them might ultimately be achieved (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016).

When we began our study, the literature on second-wave white teacher identity studies was somewhat limited as it was a more recent addition to the area of white teacher identity scholarship. In the late 2000s, a critical chorus of voices within first-wave white teacher identity studies had begun to be heard as researchers within the field began to take issue with what they saw as the tendency of their ranks to practice a simplification of white teacher identity that essentialized race-evasiveness and was overly focused on the concept of white privilege (Jupp et al., 2016). By 2013, Lensmire et al. continued to acknowledge

the contributions of first-wave white teacher identity studies but they were also clear in

expressing their wish for change:

> It is time for us to move to more complex treatments of how to work with white
>
> people on questions of race and white supremacy and also for new theorizations of
>
> the identities and actions white people might take up in the name of antiracism. (p.
>
> 412)

However, it was not until the publication of their 2016 review of white teacher identity

literature from 2004 through 2014 that Jupp et al. delineated the tenets of second-wave

white teacher identity studies and actually referred to the branch of scholarship by name. It

is important to note, that although they described second-wave white teacher identity studies

as a separate area of scholarship pertaining to white teacher identity studies, Jupp et al.

(2016) took care to point out that it is "a progress narrative, in which a second wave of

studies builds on and improves on an earlier one" (p. 27). They never represented it as

eclipsing the contributions of first-wave white teacher identity studies. In fact, they even

suggested that its scholarship should continue to address such areas as white privilege and

race-evasive practices, albeit in ways which embody more analytic flexibility. In short, they

advocated for keeping sight of racialized inequalities while at the same time attending to the

complexity of racial identities, societal forces, and the contexts within which white teachers

do their work.

The work of second-wave white teacher identity scholars reflects a willingness to

recognize the complexities inherent in the study of race, whiteness, and white teacher

identities. Although continuing to focus on white privilege, some early researchers went

beyond merely exposing it, and took a deeper look at its causes and the variety of ways in

which it was manifested. Mazzei (2004, 2008, 2011) was able to uncover evidence of white privilege expressed within the silences of her white teacher participants. Using poststructuralist and psychoanalytic understandings of empirical silences, she found that, in the case of her participants, silence was a manifestation of their fear. She concluded that fear of losing their white privilege had generated their silence; an expression of resistance that was unwittingly keeping them from fully developing their racial identities (Jupp et al., 2016). Marx (2004) and Pennington (2007) stepped into a more participatory researcher mode by sharing their own stories of whiteness and white identity with their participants, thus establishing trust between them and resulting in "authentic identity exchanges and sometimes significant transformations with several respondents" (Jupp et al., 2016, p. 15). The reflexive approaches of these second-wave white teacher scholars to the investigation of white teacher privilege and white teacher identity development have added new understandings to the scholarship of the field. For our purposes, their willingness to deal with the complexity of these issues emphasized the importance of avoiding a binary approach of us versus them in dealing with racial identity. This allowed us to theorize about the ways in which we might begin to dismantle the effects of white privilege at our school, not by merely calling it out, but by seeking, in the same way as these researchers had done, to develop a better understanding of its roots and manifestations.

Second-wave white teacher identity studies also made a significant contribution to the larger field of white teacher identity studies by narrowing the gap between research and practice. By contributing accounts of actual contexts in which teachers and teacher educators dealt with issues of racial identity, second-wave white teacher identity scholars offered us "representations that are already built to cycle back into practice" (Jupp et al.,

2016, p. 26). Focusing her research on context as it affected a young high school English teacher in the first teaching assignment of her career, Berchini (2016) examined the teacher's failure to transfer the racial awareness she had successfully developed in her preservice teaching program to her actual teaching practice. Under strict orders from her superior to conform to the curriculum of a Holocaust unit, the young teacher refused to allow a Black student to make historical connections between that tragic period in history and his own personal experience with segregation. The frustration of the Black student in this study and the willingness of his teacher to adhere to a curriculum that she knew to be racially exclusive by design, illustrated, for us, the power of context to obstruct white teachers in their attempts to establish trust between themselves and their students of color.

Berchini's findings supported the motivations of second-wave white teacher identity studies scholars who were committed to exploring the effect of context on the practice of white teachers; a commitment to pay "closer attention to the social contexts within which white teachers learn and work" (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016, p. 987). This stance reinforced our belief that we must carefully examine our own school community when making choices regarding race-related initiatives in our district rather than merely taking the advice of even well-meaning outside sources. When our colleagues at New York University (NYU) suggested that we ask our adamantly race-evasive school board to hire an outside company to conduct professional development seminars on race with our teachers, we thus refrained from doing so, convinced that such a course would lead to inevitable conflict. Instead, we successfully lobbied for a single race facilitator who we felt would be a better fit for our particular school community.

Other practitioners of second-wave white teacher identity studies, like Crowley (2016), have addressed the emotional ambiguity that exists in the efforts of teachers to achieve race consciousness. His study's participants were not resistant to race work, but were torn between their desire to grow and concerns for their safety in the context of the urban school in which they worked. Crowley described the complexity and contradictions that existed in the efforts of these teachers to engage with the topic of race. His findings supported the logic of second-wave white teacher identity studies practitioners who readily acknowledged the messiness of negotiations between white teachers and race, and exhibited a willingness to reject any single story of how that work should be done.

The findings of Berchini (2016) and Crowley (2016), as well as those of the other second-wave white teacher studies scholars mentioned above, were a reminder for us to approach our race work with an overriding sense of patience and self-reflection. Having acquired some knowledge of white teacher identity studies, and after several years of struggling to do race work at our school, I believe that if my colleagues and I were able to achieve any measure of success, which we were, it shows us that we were right in our decision to rely on this scholarship. I believe that we were wise to follow the thoughtful and open-minded tenets of second-wave white teacher identity studies. In doing so, we were required to be cognizant of the ways in which our school culture produces its own definitions of race, whiteness, and white teacher identity, and we had to be aware of the historical and societal pressures that weighed on our fellow white teachers as we nudged them and ourselves towards change. We also needed to keep an eye toward the oppressive powers that resided (as they still do) within the context of our work environment, to be willing to address them when we could, and to work around them when we could not.

Both the concept of the single story and the tenets of white teacher identity studies reflect ideas that are inherent to post-structural feminism. In our Race Matters Alliance work we had already established it as the lens through which we searched for evidence of the single story regarding race throughout our school community and within ourselves. Throughout this study, we continued to use its perspective as we analyzed our findings using a theoretical framework of second-wave white teacher identity studies. In the willingness of second-wave white teacher identity studies researchers to think more broadly about the negative perceptions of racial difference held by so many white teachers, we recognized the tenets of post-structural feminism. Like Foucault (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000), who held that "we must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces" (pp. 139–140), the proponents of second-wave white teacher identity studies emphasized the importance of viewing whiteness and race as a historically and socially variable concept rather than a static, unchanging entity (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016). In our work, the lens of post-structural feminism allowed us to recognize the complex, flexible, and continually evolving narrative of the single story in our group's ongoing race work. I believe that the framework of second-wave white teacher identity studies, which offered us a nuanced way of analyzing everyday racism at school, benefitted from being observed through a post-structural feminist lens which, as St. Pierre (2000) explained, can be used to examine ordinary situations in order to be able to think about them differently.
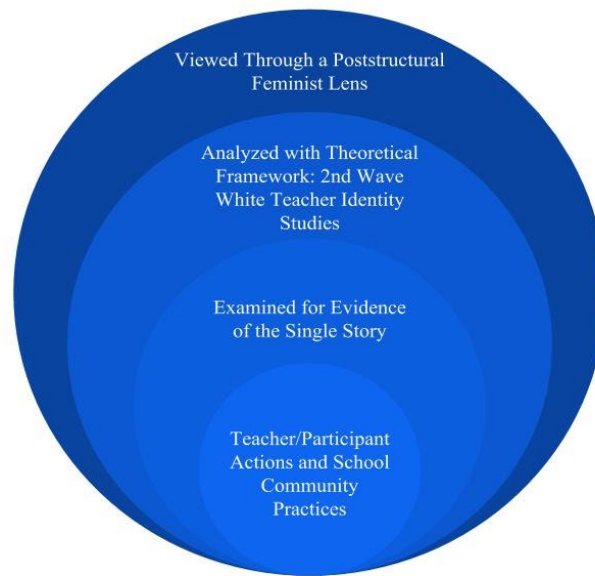
Figure 1. *A Conceptual and Theoretical Framework for Studying Developing Teacher Allies. This figure illustrates the study participants' use of the concept of the single story (conceptual framework), and second-wave white teacher identity studies (theoretical framework) viewed through a post-structural feminist lens to examine and analyze changes in themselves and their school community as a result of their involvement in race work at school.*

Literature Review

Dedication and good intentions alone were not enough to prepare my colleagues and me for dealing with the complicated and emotional topic of race at school. Initially, our racial identities were far too underdeveloped for us to be competent white allies, working alongside our students of color and their parents in addressing the issues that Caruthers et al. (2004) referred to as "undiscussables" (p. 36). We were blindsided by the intensity of the resistance of our white peers and the frustration of our students of color and their parents towards our fledgling attempts to start a school-wide conversation about race. However, we found much-needed guidance within the existing race scholarship. The theories and practical

information we studied allowed us to bridge the gap between research and practice by providing us with alternative options for overcoming obstacles as we encountered them. Recognizing evidence of Adichie's (2009) concept of the single story in our work has made the resistance and frustration we have encountered from our school community less daunting, and turning to second wave white teacher identity studies for guidance offered us valuable practical solutions for addressing it.

As we transitioned from our informal work to the dissertation project, we continued to rely on the scholarship to assist us in navigating the process of becoming race allies through initiating race conversations at school. This literature review is therefore specifically focused on those two topics of research, and includes empirical and non-empirical sources, all of which were published since 2000. Although I set no date or geographic parameters for my research, the search terms I used as descriptors returned sources primarily confined to this century; a reflection of the contemporary nature of the literature. I gave precedence to sources published in the United States.

Engaging the databases of ERIC and Education Research Complete, the search terms I used as descriptors included the following: *race discussion, race talk, race conversation, race discourse, developing race allies,* and *allies.* After obtaining the results of these searches, I combined the single term of *allies* first with that of *teachers*, and then with that of *race,* thus narrowing the scope of the results while maintaining the greatest number of salient sources. In determining which articles to include in this literature review, I used the following criteria: (a) appearance in journals with peer-reviewed status; (b) central focus on white pre-service or professional teachers or college students involved in race education

courses; and (c) use of qualitative and/or narrative research methodologies, as well as conceptual writings.

As a result of these searches, I developed a document universe (N=29) for this literature review. However, I added to this document universe seven books that did not appear in these searches, but that I chose to include either because they had recently been recognized for their contributions to the field of race research, or because of my prior familiarity with their contents. Several of these books were texts from doctoral courses I had taken or were suggested to me by professors, or researchers. After summarizing and analyzing these 36 sources, I organized them according to themes that emerged in the course of that process. I then narrowed the themes down to three that appeared in the sources pertaining to initiating race conversation, and three that were found in the sources on race ally development.

The three themes that were indicated within the sources analyzed in the area of race ally development were: 1. Characteristics of allies and factors that determine their development: What it takes; 2. Stages of ally development and guidance for aspiring allies: Navigating the journey; and 3. White identity development and its importance to the process of becoming a race ally: Transformation. The three themes that emerged from the sources analyzed on the subject of initiating race conversation were: 1. The importance of initiating and sustaining race conversations at school: Addressing the issues that divide us; 2. Methods of initiating and sustaining race conversations at school: Strategies of self, cross-cultural dialogue, inquiry, book discussion groups, and storytelling; and 3. Barriers to initiating and sustaining race conversations at school: The dangers of white privilege and the colorblind/colormute approach.

Throughout my investigation of the literature, I have kept the concept of Adichie's (2009) single story in mind and have taken note of it in the examples of bias, race-evasiveness, and colorblindness at work within the studies I have examined. But, I have also reminded myself that I too am guilty in the matter of the single story, and I have used that knowledge to avoid taking a binary approach to the work in this review. Additionally, I have tried to weave the tenets of second wave white teacher identity studies through my analysis. This effort has demanded that I maintain a posture of open-mindedness by focusing on the "race-visible identity" rather than the race-evasiveness of the white teachers represented, "who, with more or less success, were each attempting to come to grips with their own complexity and complicity in a white-supremacist system" (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016, p. 985). In looking at all of these examples I have used a lens of post structural feminism, being ever conscious of the fact that it does not yield simple definitions. Instead, in its tenets it is more closely aligned with the perspectives of Foucault (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000), who suggested in his theory of discourse that ways of thought *can* change when people have other ideas and speak out about them.

Characteristics of Allies and Factors That Determine Their Development: What It Takes

Although social justice allies have made invaluable contributions to society throughout history, the actual process through which people develop into allies has only begun to receive attention in the literature within the last twenty years (Landreman et al., 2007; Munin & Speight, 2010). In the early 2000s, researchers began to examine ally development in stage theory research (Bishop, 2002; Edwards, 2006; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Watts et al., 2003). These studies documented the struggles of allies to come to terms with their privilege and complicity in maintaining oppression, along with

their attempts to engage in actions to disrupt it (Munin & Speight, 2010). However, Broido (2000), with the introduction of her Model of College Student Ally Development, made a considerable contribution to the field of study by approaching the research from a different direction. Rather than analyzing the effort to become allies, as was done in the stage theory approach, she looked instead at the characteristics of allies for social justice and the factors involved in their successful development. She organized these factors into three areas: information acquisition, meaning-making, and self-confidence.

 In her model, Broido (2000) described would-be social justice allies as first expanding their awareness of oppression, then making meaning of that awareness through discussing it with their fellow aspiring allies. The allies' newly acquired knowledge thereby increased their self-confidence and ultimately allowed them to take action against oppression. But beyond being a factor in ally development, Broido (2000) saw self-confidence as a prerequisite for allyship itself. She also cited an acceptance of egalitarian values and a belief in equal opportunity for all as requirements for the role, and noted the frequent presence of moral reasoning and epistemological development in those who aspire to it.

Other researchers built upon Broido's (2000) framework. In their study on factors influencing the ally development of college students, Munin and Speight (2010) expanded upon Broido's ideas by broadening their participant pool beyond the limited group of white heterosexuals that characterized her work; opening their study to include "all allies working as agents of social change in opposition to their position of privilege" (p. 250). In this way, they added additional perspectives to the research, including those of participants who embodied intersectionality, exhibiting both dominant and marginalized identities

simultaneously, such as white women or men of color. Munin and Speight (2010) also furthered Broido's (2000) scholarship by increasing their understanding of the individual participants in their study before it even began by asking them to cite any pre-existing factors or attributes that had already contributed to their desire to become allies. As their study progressed, they discovered numerous factors that were common to their participants, who, it should be noted, were all attendees of a religious university. It is not surprising then, that in addition to personality qualities, the factors of family influence, faith, and a realization of otherness were found to be present in their participant pool. Under the heading of personality qualities, extroversion, empathy, and leadership stood out as common characteristics. Munin and Speight (2010) found that, on the whole, their participants "desired to be at the forefront of a group, expressing the views of any silenced voices" (p. 253). Landreman et al. (2007) also recognized the work of Broido (2000) and cited the findings of several additional scholars who had made contributions to the same line of research. They highlighted Guthrie et al.'s (2000) discovery of a link between higher reflective thinking scores and lower levels of bias towards Blacks, lesbians, and gay men, and described Paccione's (2000) finding that an important step in educators becoming committed to allyship involved critical examination of the cultural institutions and practices of the dominant U.S. culture. The ability to engage in reevaluating their country's established norms was found to be facilitated by both positive and negative childhood experiences as well as other factors, including cultural immersion, coursework, and interaction with others (Landreman et al., 2007, pp. 275–276). Through their own work, Landreman et al. (2007) found a similar connection between the prior experiences of their participants and the ability to recognize and question social or moral injustice. For many of

their participants, reflecting on experiences of mistreatment in their pasts "helped them gain an understanding of and empathy for others who also experienced oppression" (p. 281).

I have found Broido's model, with its description of factors and characteristics that facilitate ally development, to be a valuable method of assessing our own qualifications for the role. The findings of the additional scholars mentioned above, whose work parallels Broido's model, also continue to provide me with a basis for comparing my co-participants and me to others who are engaged in working for social justice. I have recognized our own struggles with race work in the desire of Munin and Speight's (2010) participants to speak up for those without power, and, like those involved in the studies of Paccione (2000) and Landreman et al. (2007), I have been able to trace the roots of our empathy and understanding of others' oppression to our own past experiences with injustice. However, Waters (2010) cautioned against judging aspiring allies such as ourselves solely based on traits and factors. He pointed out that the participants in Broido's (2000) study had been chosen based on their previous involvement in leadership positions and altruistic pursuits, and noted that they were already eager to be involved in an ally development program. For this reason, he perceived Broido to be defining allyship as a form of social identity which could inadvertently lead to the exclusion of potential allies who might not yet see that potential in themselves, or who might not yet meet the stated requirements for the role.

Although Waters (2010) saw her work as being aligned with Broido's framework, she challenged it by conceptualizing the act of becoming an ally as a developmental process. She believed in changing the question of *who* qualifies to be an ally, to one of *how* one gains that qualification. This point of view would, in her opinion, allow those involved in guiding prospective allies to "meet students where they are in their social justice journey"

(p. 4). This interpretation is clearly in agreement with the tenets of second-wave white teacher identity studies (Jupp et al., 2016), the theoretical framework of this proposed study. It demands a broader analysis of the characteristics and factors involved in ally development, calling for us to focus, not on the race-evasive attitudes of our colleagues and ourselves, but rather, on the context in which we are all trying to make sense of the complexity of race relations at school and our power to deal with them.

In my previous reading of Berchini (2016), a proponent of second-wave white teacher identity studies, I had already been exposed to an example that aligned with Waters' philosophy. The actions of Berchini's (2016) study participant, who found it impossible as a first-year teacher to implement the anti-racist pedagogy she had been taught because it conflicted with the curriculum at her new school, exemplified the complex nature of ally development. We too, have often found ourselves mute when called upon to stand up to our peers and administrators on issues of race, and have as a result, often felt unjustified in thinking of ourselves as allies. However, by viewing Berchini's (2016) participant as well as ourselves as going through a growth process of the type suggested by Waters (2010), rather than embodying a prescribed identity, the role can be seen as far more flexible, and therefore, attainable. This realization has led me to agree with Waters' (2010) contention that refusing to view allyship as a singular identity allows us to place emphasis on "how our everyday lives are lived, instead of our personal (or others') identification as an ally" (Waters, 2010, p. 2); a contention that is in direct alignment with Adichie's (2009) concept of the single story, the conceptual framework of this proposal.

Stages of Ally Development and Guidance for Aspiring Allies: Navigating the Journey

Stages of Ally Development. Broido's (2000) scholarship around the characteristics and factors involved in ally development added valuable information to the field, but numerous studies supported the idea that stage theory research on the subject contributed to it as well (Bishop, 2002; Edwards, 2006; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Munin & Speight, 2010; Watts et al., 2003). Stage theory was credited with supplying social justice researchers with an important tool for understanding the behavior of their study participants, and providing those who hoped to become allies with a way to envision and evaluate the trajectory of their development. In the following section of this review, I examine the stages of ally development as they are represented in the literature, along with scholarship that offers guidance for aspiring allies in navigating their developmental journey.

According to Munin and Speight (2010), stage theories provide a framework for researchers to use in studying "the unique and multifaceted process of how allies cultivate identities counter to the dominant narrative" (p. 249). Although various stage theory studies have existed on the subject of racial identity development for quite some time (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1992; Parham, 1989; Phinney, 1989; Tatum, 1997), just four studies, specific to ally development, emerged from the research conducted for this review (Bishop, 2002; Edwards, 2006; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Watts et al., 2003). Each of these four studies attempted to explain the phases that would-be allies pass through as they struggle to understand the unearned privilege they enjoy, the part they play in reinforcing a system that benefits them at the expense of others, and the actions they might take to correct this injustice.

Bishop (2002) presented seven steps in the process of becoming an ally and developing within the position. These included the following: a growing understanding of

oppression in all its manifestations; an increasing sense of consciousness and healing; the

orchestration of one's own liberation; and a deepening sense of what it means to be an ally.

These developmental steps were followed by a willingness to educate others in how to

become allies, and finally, the development of an ability to sustain hope in the face of the

inevitable challenges of the role. Bishop followed her detailing of these steps with concrete

strategies for identifying and responding to oppression. Among these were skill-building

exercises including role playing, art projects, and word games, all of which seemed to me to

have potential for use in our race work at school. King and Baxter Magolda (2005)

advanced a developmental model of intercultural maturity which provided a framework for

colleges to foster interaction between students of different cultures in ways that would lead

to allyship. Edwards (2006) delineated three progressive states of ally development that

revolved around realizations of oppression. In his model, allies in the first stage (Allies for

Self-Interest) viewed the world as a fair place, albeit one that harbored individual incidences

of injustice, and were completely unaware of their own privilege. In the next stage (Aspiring

Allies for Altruism), allies sought to help the oppressed but avoided establishing

relationships with them. In the third and final stage (Allies for Social Justice), allies

perceived that systems of oppression were harmful to them as well as to those who

experienced the injustice firsthand. This stage model documented the development of its

participants into allies who came to see oppression as dehumanizing for all. However, it also

exposed the tendency of whites to focus on themselves first and foremost regarding racial

oppression. Within this model, I could easily envision a place for the knee-jerk defensive

reaction of our fellow teachers to our efforts to carve out a space for race talk at our school.

Lastly, Watts et al. (2003) put forth a theory of sociopolitical development that examined

how Black men developed into allies for their own defense, expanding the idea of allyship to include the ways in which people of color come to understand their own agency in the struggle for social justice.

The research on stage theory regarding ally development allowed me to examine the common pitfalls along the road to allyship, and to track our own journey through the course of this dissertation. However, I could not forget the warning sounded by second-wave white teacher identity studies scholars Jupp et al. (2016) regarding the inadequacy of stage models. They cited three studies that pointed out these inadequacies (Han et al., 2011; Hill-Jackson, 2007; Horton & Scott, 2004). This research showed that the teachers who were examined often "represented multiple statuses of white racial identity development outlined by Helms" (1992, p. 19) in her seminal model of racial development, rather than singular linear stages of growth. Horton and Scott (2004) posited that both Helms (1992) and Tatum (1997) did not actually describe developmental models at all, but rather merely documented states of mind. Jupp et al. (2016) reported that each of the three scholars who critiqued the stage theory research cited above found the models to fall short of adequately representing the complexity of racial identity development, and determined that Helms (1992) and Tatum (1997) had resorted to "simplistic notions of white race-evasive/ally binaries" (p. 19). As a result, I referred to these models for guidance throughout our project while viewing them as just one part of the story of ally development. The existing literature on guidance for prospective race allies, which is described next in this review, offers a variety of options for ally building that, in light of the cautionary observations of Jupp et al. (2016), may provide more reliable support for our complex and never-ending journey towards allyship than the stage research models described above.

Guidance for Aspiring Allies. In reviewing the literature on guidance for aspiring race allies, I found there to be a divide between the recommendations submitted by scholars and activists of color, and the advice given by their white counterparts. The majority of the scholarship offered by whites focused on addressing the identity, perceptions, and feelings of aspiring white allies, with the aim of ultimately motivating them towards collaborative action (Alimo, 2012; Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Michael & Conger, 2009; Reason & Davis, 2005). Michael and Conger (2009) maintained that the biggest challenge for developing white race allies was that whiteness had been strategically made invisible within our society. As a result, "much of our training as white people has taught us to see racism and racial hierarchies as normal" (p. 59). This persistent perspective emerged as the one that those who hope to become race allies must recognize, reevaluate, and alter.

Reason and Davis (2005) pointed out the discomfort and feelings of resistance experienced by would-be allies engaged in challenging their embedded assumptions regarding people of color. They suggested that those involved in guiding these aspiring allies "would be wise to meet their students at their current level of racial identity development and to lead them into embracing more complex ways of thinking" (p. 11); an approach that would be heartily supported by Jupp et al. (2016) and the proponents of second-wave white teacher identity studies. Denevi and Pastan (2006) and Michael and Conger (2009) agreed that a way of encouraging complex thinking in aspiring white allies would be to enroll them in white affinity groups. Denevi and Pastan (2006) referred to these groups as places for "white on white dialogue" (p. 71), while Michael and Conger (2009) defined an affinity group as "an assembly of people gathered with others who share a common element of identity in order to explore, celebrate, sustain and process experiences

around that identity" (p. 56). The type of affinity groups described would offer a safe space for aspiring race allies to develop their racial identities and to become experienced in speaking about race. They would then be better prepared to participate in race/ethnicity intergroup dialogue, a skill that had already been proven to foster engagement in social justice actions, the ultimate goal of white advisors engaged in guiding ally development (Alimo, 2012).

The strategies described above were designed to address the internalized structural racism that continues to pose an ongoing threat to the process of race ally development. It is a process that takes time under the best circumstances and can seem infuriatingly slow to people of color who are often frustrated in their work with white allies by "the inconsistencies and frequent relapses in the support that is extended to them" (Boutte & Jackson, 2013, p. 1). That frustration showed in the literature on the type of guidance offered to developing white allies by scholars and activists of color. Instead of the understated and gently dispensed advice of white scholars and activists, theirs was an urgent call for would-be allies to vigorously engage in practical anti-racist actions, both on their own and collectively, in order to be more effective in the role (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2008; Boutte & Jackson, 2013; Dyson, 2017; Harris, 2017; McKenzie, 2015). According to Boutte and Jackson (2013), this sense of impatience and urgency was motivated by the recognition that racial issues have been "pervasive and persistent for centuries" (p. 4). There was a sense throughout the literature on the advice of scholars and activists of color that the time for change was long overdue.

Although they were in agreement with their white counterparts that achieving and maintaining race ally status is challenging, several of the advisors of color directly warned

of harmful positions commonly taken by whites around issues of race. These included: their tendency to hijack everything and to commandeer Black angst as their own (McKenzie, 2015); their inclination to hide behind an aura of innocence regarding white privilege and systemic racism (Dyson, 2017); their lamentations about being attacked (Boutte & Jackson, 2013); and their unwillingness to listen to and believe the voices of people of color (Harris, 2017). Some advisors of color offered lists of measures that would-be allies might take to avoid these pitfalls and to facilitate their development (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2008; Boutte & Jackson, 2013; Dyson, 2017; Harris, 2017). These measures included: standing up to racist stereotyping and jokes around white friends; learning as much as possible from the literature on racism and cultures of people of color; protesting at rallies and community meetings; developing relationships with people of color; and supporting programs that gave them equal opportunities.

Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2008), in speaking specifically about the field of education, advised that aspiring teacher allies remember that they are part of a racial social structure that they are likely to reproduce, but that they might successfully challenge if they assumed a "spirit of critical thought" (p. 335). Boutte and Jackson (2013) also spoke directly to educators with the most direct and uncompromising directive of all, by warning all teachers who wish to be allies that "silence on issues of racism is not an option" (p. 10).

White Identity Development and Its Importance to the Process of Becoming a Race Ally: Transformation

White identity development was a recurring theme across the literature on allyship, appearing in each of the sources on that subject examined for this review (Boutte & Jackson, 2013; Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Diangelo, 2018; Dyson, 2017; Gaffney, 2016; Lawrence &

Tatum, 2004; Tanner, 2018). Gaffney (2016) addressed the importance of identity development for aspiring white teacher allies and their diverse students, and suggested that the use of a culturally responsive curriculum would be an effective way to achieve it. She contended that because culturally responsive pedagogy explores identity, it would allow teachers to develop themselves while simultaneously affirming the identities of their diverse students. Gaffney (2016) questioned Nieto in this article and cited her as supporting that line of reasoning with her assertion that "investigating your identity through exploring your values, biases, and blind spots helps establish who you are as a cultural being. Knowing these things about yourself will help you connect with your students" (p. 35). Gaffney (2016) concluded that addressing the subjects of white identity development and social justice at school would not only create a safer space for marginalized students, but would also affect the teachers and their teaching in a positive way. She theorized that a new sense of identity would likely inspire them to see the world differently and generate new ways for them to teach about it as educator allies.

Some of the authors reviewed for this section maintained that successful ally formation requires the development of not just a white identity, but a specifically positive white identity (Boutte & Jackson, 2013; Lawrence & Tatum, 2004; Tatum, 2004). Boutte and Jackson (2013) emphasized the role that white university faculty allies can play in helping their colleagues of color to advocate for diverse students. Noting that white allies can be most useful in the realm of educational politics, the authors lamented that their support was often inconsistent or subject to an element of oppressiveness. To overcome this roadblock to effective allyship, Boutte and Jackson (2013) proposed that "white allies need to have an identity which acknowledges their inevitable privilege and racism while at the same time actively working to dismantle their legacies of dominance" (p. 18). In order to

disrupt the inequitable status quo, the authors called on their white colleagues to be willing to unlearn their own racism and to develop a more positive white identity.

Tatum (1994) and Lawrence and Tatum (2004) used Helms' (1992) model of white racial identity development as the framework for their explorations into the ways that white teachers grow as allies through the formation of a positive view of what it means to be white. Helms' six stage model can be divided into two major phases. The first phase includes the abandonment of racism, and the second is represented by the defining of a positive white identity. According to Tatum (1994), a white person developing their racial identity must become aware of their whiteness, learn to accept it as an important part of themselves, and ultimately internalize a realistically positive image of that whiteness. Even after an aspiring ally has passed through the final autonomy phase of Helms' model and has successfully incorporated whiteness as part of their identity, it is still possible to move back and forth through the stages which remain fluid. This flexible interpretation of the process of white identity development is clearly aligned with the tenets of second-wave white teacher identity studies which emphasize the "intricate missteps and advancements that accompany teaching and learning about race, whiteness and white identity" (Jupp et al., 2016, p. 27).

Tatum (2004) strongly supported Helms' model and saw it as a lead-in to the continued development of white allies' positive racial identity. She maintained that society really only offers three models of whiteness: the actively racist white; the colorblind white who does not recognize the existence of racism and believes they are unbiased; and the guilty white. However, Tatum kept the idea that moving through Helms' stages would prepare whites for a fourth model of whiteness—that of the white ally who would, after

passing through this stage, be able to "speak up against systems of oppression and to challenge other whites to do the same" (p. 474).

The belief that positive white identity development is necessary to the process of becoming an ally was not accepted within all of the literature on allyship examined for this review. Diangelo (2018), a white person herself, described it as an impossible goal that was inherently racist at heart because, in her view, the very existence of white people is built into the system of white supremacy. She did not expect whites to stop identifying as such. In fact, she believed that would only foster colorblind racism. Instead, she felt that they should make an effort to be less white.

> To be less white is to be open to, interested in, and compassionate toward the racial realities of people of color. I can build a wide range of authentic and sustained relationships across race and accept that I have racist patterns. And rather than be defensive about those patterns, I can be interested in seeing them more clearly so that I might ameliorate them. To be less white is to break with white silence and white solidarity, to stop privileging the comfort of white people over the pain of racism for people of color, to move past guilt and into action. (p. 150)

Like Diangelo (2018), Dyson (2017) perceived little value in positive white identity development. He accepted the fact that to become allies, whites must develop an awareness of their white identity, but he asserted that until they become familiar with Blackness, they would not be able to understand America itself. He described white Americans as emotionally immature about race, unable to see how much whiteness has become entwined with their American identity so that any criticism of the country is seen as an attack on white identity as well. The recent white outrage over Black football player Colin

Kapernick's taking a knee during the national anthem comes to mind as an example of this idea. Dyson also suggested that the racial immaturity and innocence of white people stands in the way of our progress as a people; that it is a burden to both individual whites as well as to the nation itself. However, it was Dyson's hope that if whites can set aside their innocent, colorblind notion of whiteness and try to understand what it is like to be Black in America, a different white identity can begin to take shape—one that works alongside Black identity. He pronounced this allyship to be nothing less than crucial for the survival of America itself, stating that "without white America wrestling with these truths and confronting these realities, we may not survive" (p. 7).

Although Diangelo (2018) and Dyson (2017) would probably appreciate the efforts of educators Denevi and Pastan (2006) and Tanner (2018) which were aligned with those outlined by second-wave white teacher identity studies, they would likely take issue with the gentle way in which these researchers approached their white study participants. Focusing on the deep complexity of identity development for white teachers, Denevi and Pastan (2006) formed a white affinity group at their school aimed at developing teachers' anti-racist racial identities. Tanner (2018), addressing this same complex process for his students, dedicated himself to creating a pedagogy based on second-wave critical whiteness principles. These educators embraced the difficulties experienced by white teachers and students engaged in facing the realities of racism. Denevi and Pastan (2006) described their work as necessary but delicate, noting that some of their white participants who had never even thought about their racial privilege abandoned their affinity group "unable to deal with the guilt or sense of accountability it fostered" (p. 71). Tanner (2018), who guided his students to produce a play that would force them to openly confront the ways they "live out

their whiteness in a white supremacist society" (p. 2), permitted them to express openly

racist sentiments in the course of their work although it made him extremely uncomfortable

to do so. In defending his decision to allow one of his student participants to include racially

inappropriate language in his contribution to the script, Tanner (2018) explained,

> As educators, do we really believe that if white students say the things we want them
>
> to say or do the things we want them to do in a school setting they will have
>
> achieved some sort of anti-racist outcome? Instead, might we not imagine a way to
>
> be in relation to our students as they explore what it means to be and become white
>
> in a white supremacist society? (p. 4)

I understand Tanner's (2018) point. I too subscribe to the tenets of second-wave

white teacher identity studies which stress the importance of focusing on the race-visible,

rather than the race-evasive, words and actions of prospective allies engaged in the process

of white identity development. I also understand Denevi and Pastan's (2006) careful

handling of their white participants' pain as they attempted to move them beyond the

conception of racism as a series of individual acts to an acknowledgement of it as a systemic

problem within our society. However, my ever-closer relationships with my students of

color and their families have given me a greater sense of *their* pain and frustration each time

they are faced with examples of what Diangelo (2018) referred to as "white fragility" (p. 2).

This made it hard for me to accept the unwittingly hurtful words of Tanner's (2018)

students, or the ease with which Denevi and Pastan's (2006) white teacher participants were

able to walk away from the discomfort they experienced in their white affinity group.

My Race Matters Alliance colleagues and I have experienced this same lack of

sensitivity on the part of some of the white teachers who attend our meetings. At a Race

Matters Alliance meeting not long before we began this study, after one of our Black student members read a piece aloud which detailed author Channing Brown's (2018) experiences with racism at school, one white faculty member raised her hand and shared that the reading had made her cry, although no one had noticed any evidence of that. Before I was involved with The Race Matters Alliance, I might not have observed the subtle looks of frustration that passed between the Black students in response to her remark. Now however, my colleagues and I were embarrassed at what we interpreted as our colleague's self-absorbed response. Later, we wondered together why it is that we, as white people, so often have trouble honoring the pain of people of color. We asked why we find it so hard to react to it by simply staying silent; why we are compelled to shift the attention back onto ourselves by voicing how being confronted with *their* emotions makes *us* feel.

As we were about to begin this study, I was at a point in my own white identity development in which I was often painfully aware of the feelings of my students of color in the face of white insensitivity, my own included. I constantly saw proof of Diangelo's (2018) observation that "Nothing in the experiences of people of color affirms their understanding or validates their frustrations when they interact with white people" (p. xv). I reminded myself that this was part of the difficult process of white identity development; this emerging awareness of the pain that racism inflicts, but my relationships with my students of color and their parents made me worry about how much patience they could possibly maintain as we slowly inched towards developing our white identities to the point where we were able to join them as legitimate allies; able to follow Diangelo's (2018) challenge "to break with white silence and white solidarity, to stop privileging the comfort

of white people over the pain of racism for people of color, [and] to move past guilt and into action" (p. 150).

From our study of the literature, I learned a great deal about the journey towards becoming race allies. I shared what I had learned with my co-participants in this study and we explored the qualities that we expected to develop, the best ways to navigate the process, and the importance of white identity development to achieving the role that we aspired to. Several years ago, I began our race work at our school by initiating a single conversation about race with the young women of color who became the founding student members of our Race Matters Alliance. Since then, everything that we have accomplished has been built on the strength of the many ensuing conversations we have had with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and professionals in the field of race studies. We believe that our journey as allies has been driven by the talk about race that we have engaged in. To support our goal of becoming race allies through initiating race conversations at school I examined the literature on the subject of race talk. As stated earlier in this review, the three themes that emerged from the sources analyzed were: 1. The importance of initiating and sustaining race conversations at school: Addressing the issues that divide us; 2. Methods of initiating and sustaining race conversations at school: Cross-cultural dialogue, counter stories, white teacher identity development and more; and 3. Barriers to initiating and sustaining race conversations at school: The dangers of white privilege and the colorblind/colormute approach. These themes are addressed in the last three sections of this review.

The Importance of Initiating and Sustaining Race Conversations at School: Addressing the Issues That Divide Us

The work that my colleagues and I have done through our Race Matters Alliance has increasingly made clear the importance of initiating and sustaining cross-cultural race conversations within our school community. Our monthly meetings, which are attended by teachers, administrators, and white students, as well as students of color and their parents, have been welcomed by our members and have led to much constructive conversation. However, they have also exposed the racial frustrations and misunderstandings that exist at our school and we are prompted again and again to turn to the literature for guidance on how to address these issues as we continue working to create a safe space to speak about race.

The scholarship I examined on the topic of race conversation at school supported the importance of engaging in racial dialogue in order to address some of society's most deep-seated problems (Cicetti-Turro, 2007; Greene, 2016; Michael, 2015a; Tatum, 2017). Greene (2016) noted that we struggle with race conversations both as a community of schools and as a society, but we must engage in them in order to understand the influence that systemic racism has on all of us. Tatum, in an interview with Richardson (2017), described race as the elephant in the room that creates many problems in our society that cannot be solved unless we speak about them. Michael (2015) posited that failure to speak about race issues maintains racism in education and reproduces racial hierarchies at school and within our society as a whole. Cicetti-Turro (2007) called attention to the fact that meaningful conversations across race are not taking place within our society's education system, and cited this type of dialogue as necessary in order to close the gap between the overwhelmingly European-American female teaching force and an increasingly diverse student population. In her opinion, cross-cultural conversation is critical to fostering

respect, and avoiding an us versus them mentality between white teachers and their students of color. She suggested that without participation in cross-cultural dialogue on race, even teachers who have been exposed to anti-racist pedagogy are capable of glazing over critical issues of race while genuinely believing their teaching is culturally responsive, thus unwittingly contributing to existing systems of discrimination.

The literature cited above clearly supported the premise that engaging in cross-cultural conversation is critical to the process of bridging the issues of race that divide us. However, it also revealed that racial discourse generates an enormous amount of discomfort for both Blacks and whites. Speaking to Richardson, Tatum (2017) theorized that white people are uncomfortable talking about race because they have little experience with it. Her conversations with them revealed that most had rarely discussed it, and that they had more often than not been taught that the subject of race was taboo; a lesson that had been repeated throughout their lives. Tatum (2017) also noted that not all Black people are comfortable talking about race, and went on to detail three different types of family approaches to the subject. She found some Black families to be race-conscious, believing that the topic is extremely important and feeling comfortable in addressing it. The children in these families, according to Tatum, grow up to be much more self-assured than those whose parents approach the subject of race in less open ways. Tatum (2017) referred to the second type of approach to dealing with race in Black families as race-neutral. The parents in these families see the importance of race, but have not been successful at finding a way to approach the topic with their children. Finally, she described the third type of approach to race exhibited by Black families as race-avoidant. The parents in these families were reluctant to talk about race with their children who tended to grow up without a sense of support when faced with

racism and prejudice. Many of the emotional struggles of these children could be traced to their parents' failure to have what Tatum (2017) referred to as "protective conversations about race" (p. 32).

Greene (2016) pondered the idea that most parents, Black and white, are reluctant to provide their children with the skills to know how to make decisions regarding race. He concluded that although white parents' avoidance of addressing the subject of race with their children would ultimately be detrimental to society, the same type of race avoidance on the part of Black parents might easily endanger the very lives of their children. Acknowledging not only the importance of initiating and sustaining race conversations, but also the consequences of avoiding them, Greene asserted that:

> Running from conversations about race because we'd rather avoid than risk offending, or shifting the context to other identities because we find them easier to discuss, will not save any of us from the challenges and dangers of racial injustice. We have to develop our cultural competency skills—and talk. Once we open up the conversation, we begin to increase understanding, mitigate guilt and blame, and help people feel better about themselves and their work. Parents are more effective in their parenting. Educators are more effective in their teaching, and children are better off for both. (pp. 91–92)

In order to develop the cultural competency skills of white teachers, and to prepare them to effectively "open up the conversation" for which Greene (2016, p. 92) advocated, some scholars maintained that it would be necessary for white teachers to develop their white racial identity (Delano-Oriaran & Meidl, 2012; Greene, 2016; Michael, 2015). Greene affirmed that to even get conversations on race started we need to develop teachers who are

conscious of their own cultural and racial identities. However, he noted that for most whites, even those who are just a few generations removed from their immigrant ancestors, their families' strong national identities have faded and "their sense of their own diversity has become subsumed and rendered invisible in the stultifying silence of unspoken racial identity" (p. 93). Delano-Oriaran and Meidl (2012) emphasized the critical need for open discussions around race, citing the important influence of white teachers on diverse students, and the effects of their teachers' lack of a racial identity on their ability to succeed at school. Michael (2015) found the act of engaging in conversations about race at school to be the most effective tool for developing teachers' positive racial identities, and for restoring the wholeness of spirit and community that is lost in the presence of racism.

Even as this study has ended, my colleagues and I continue to work closely with our students of color and their parents in attempting to foster race conversations at our school. We can see that we have gradually become more comfortable with our discomfort regarding race conversation. We have accepted that it will never entirely go away. We are less afraid of saying the wrong thing, more sure of ourselves in addressing sensitive issues, and completely convinced that the work we are doing is the most important of our careers.

For one of our Race Matters Alliance meetings, we chose to discuss the reasons that it is unacceptable for white people to say the N word, even if it is used in the lyrics to a song. The subject had recently resulted in disciplinary action at our school as white students had insisted on singing along to popular rap songs including the word. In one case, a white student had recorded a video of herself doing just that, loudly and repeatedly calling out the words to the song, and then posting it to Instagram. When her actions were reported to the school administration, she was suspended from school for several days, prompting a white

backlash. We felt that our group was ready to take on the controversial issue as the topic of our following meeting discussion. The meeting attendees included a Black parent who was a city police officer, our new school psychologist who was Black (and whose contract, was sadly not renewed after that first year), about 20 students of color, and ten white teachers and administrators. On that particular day, there were no white students in attendance.

The meeting was spirited and the cross-cultural conversation exposed some surprising differences of opinion between the attendees of color. People stayed longer than usual and everyone agreed that it had been an enlightening and valuable discussion. My colleagues and I lingered afterwards and one white teacher who was attending for the first time stayed to tell us how inspired she had been by the conversation. We were very pleased with her comments until she shared with us that when she had mentioned in the faculty lunch room that day that she was planning to attend our meeting, several teachers had asked her what there could possibly be to talk about. We were stunned and saddened. Later, one of my co-participants wondered aloud if we were just giving our students of color false hope that they would ever really be heard or that there was any legitimate possibility for lasting positive change. It was difficult not to agree. However, as I continued my research for this review later that evening, I was reminded by the writings of Pollock (2004a) that race talk in schools is complex and cannot be taken at face value. I learned from her that our colleagues' dismissive comments about that day's Race Matters Alliance meeting might not be "a pure description of reality but, rather, a type of scripted simplification obscuring race's shifting relevance and irrelevance" (p. 32). I thought of the post-structural feminist notion of multiple truths rather than a binary view, and remembered the admonishments from second-wave white teacher identity scholars to avoid focusing on the race evasive behaviors of

teachers and to concentrate instead on their race visible actions (Jupp et al., 2016). I took additional guidance from Oluo (2018) who said that race talk, although necessary, is not enough unless it is combined with action. I began to brainstorm ways to break through the racial apprehension of my fellow teachers, other than merely confronting them with evidence of their ignorance. I was sure that the answer would revolve around race discussion. Although I understood that it would require additional action, I knew it was the place that we would be able to start to make a difference. As Oluo (2018) advised, "Words help us interpret our world, and can be used to change the way in which we think and act. Words are always at the heart of our problems and the beginning of all our solutions" (p. 229).

Methods of Initiating and Sustaining Race Conversations at School: Strategies of Self, Cross-Cultural Dialogue, Inquiry, Book Discussion Groups, and Story Telling

The work that my colleagues and I did prior to our study with The Race Matters Alliance, coupled with the research I reviewed for this proposal, convinced me that initiating and sustaining race conversations is the most viable method for dismantling racial bias within our school community as well as within ourselves. However, we often feel the need for guidance in pursuing this goal. Just as the process of becoming a race ally is fraught with uncertainty, opening up a space to speak about race at school is a difficult task that can be unexpectedly derailed. Two years prior to beginning this study, while arranging for The Race Matters Alliance to make a presentation to a graduate education class at Montclair State University, I was shocked by a teaching colleague who approached me to complain that I was "going too far with this" by taking only students of color on the trip. Since that incident, my colleagues and I have experienced many such examples of white

teacher resistance to our efforts. We often feel as if we are flying blind with little prior experience to help us and few experienced allies to turn to for support. The literature I have examined on methods for achieving successful race dialogue has revealed some promising suggestions, although, alerted by second-wave white teacher identity scholars, I am ever mindful of the role that context plays in the success or failure of attempts to raise issues of race (Berchini, 2016; Jupp & Lensmire, 2016). We discovered this fact first-hand after conferring with a race group from a nearby high school, only to conclude that some of their most successful initiatives would be unlikely to work in the context of our own school environment. I know that timing is also a factor in race work, and what might not work for us today may fit our needs tomorrow. As a result, we stay open to revisiting promising strategies found in the literature while remaining discerning in our decisions regarding which suggestions we choose to employ at any given time.

As I reviewed the research on methods for initiating and sustaining race conversations at school, I found that the focus of the scholarship was divided between those researchers who concentrated on teachers fostering race conversations with their students (Bolgatz, 2005; Brown, et al., 2017; Murray-Johnson & Ross-Gordon, 2018; Tatum, 2017) and those who investigated talking about race as a form of teacher professional development (Caruthers et al., 2004; Delano-Oriaran, & Meidl, 2012; Michael, 2015; Singleton & Hayes, 2008). Bolgatz (2005) and Tatum (in an interview with Richardson, 2017), shared the belief that even more important than the subject matter being discussed with students, was the mere fact that teachers took the initiative to speak about race in their classrooms. Tatum (2017) suggested that these intentional efforts on the part of their teachers helped students to connect with one another across racial divides, while Bolgatz (2005) saw the teachers'

actions as motivating students to speak up about language variation, the meaning of race,

and racism. Acknowledging the considerable power that teachers have to foster race

conversations, Bolgatz (2005) concluded that "teachers' willingness to talk about race is a

funnel through which any curriculum that addresses issues of race or racism either flows or

is thwarted" (p. 34); a somewhat distressing analysis considering Bolgatz' admission that

she was able to find few examples in the literature that addressed teachers actually engaging

in curriculum involving race. Similarly, Brown et al. (2017), in a comprehensive review of

the literature, asked why there were so few discussions of race in classrooms considering

the pervasiveness of race in every aspect of life in the United States.

Like Tatum (2017), Brown et al. (2017) saw school as the perfect location for

addressing issues of race. Tatum (2017) described it as a place where people of different

races from different neighborhoods come together on a daily basis, while Brown et al.

(2017) saw it as offering a unique opportunity to examine the structure and context of race

talk as well as the particular ways in which students and teachers engage in conversations

that might develop their knowledge of the world and prepare them to fight against its

inequities.

Murray-Johnson and Ross-Gordon (2018) also explored the topic of race as it is

discussed between teachers and their students, but their focus was on the ways that graduate

education faculty navigate these difficult discourses. Their findings showed that, more

important than employing instructional strategies such as dialogue circles or small group

activities, the use of pairs of what they termed "strategies of self" (p. 142) led to the

creation of spaces of trust in which students and teachers engaged in highly effective and

sustained race conversations. Defined as "attitudinal techniques or tendencies faculty

intentionally draw on, manipulate, and maximize during race talk" (p. 142), "strategies of self" were found by the authors to require balance in their implementation. Illustrations of the technique included the pairing of patience and good timing as well as the matching up of prior learning with teachable moments. Creating a balance between opposing strategies was shown to be necessary, and also dependent on such things as teachers' lived experiences and their capacity for empathy. For example, teachers might enter into difficult class discussions on race because they believed that there was urgency in immediately addressing the topic, but they would model patience out of their understanding that race work takes time. Another example of the technique would be for a teacher to lead into the topic of race by first referring to prior instruction on other forms of oppression in order to more successfully generate effective dialogue related to racial inequities. Through their work, the authors seemed to parse out the necessity for the presence of emotive capacity in teacher facilitators who wished to initiate and sustain race conversation within the context of school.

The scholarship I reviewed related to race dialogue as a form of teacher professional development revolved around both cross-cultural discourse and segregated white teacher conversation. Singleton and Hayes (2008) offered guidelines for conversation between teachers of color and their white peers. They referred to it as "courageous conversation" (p. 18). They saw this form of discourse as a way to break down racial tensions by leading teachers into conversations which would allow those with knowledge of race issues to share it, thereby helping those who were lacking in that knowledge to learn and grow from the experience. They set out four rules for courageous conversation: stay engaged; expect discomfort; speak your truth; and accept a lack of closure. The authors cautioned that cross-cultural dialogue would be dangerous because it could expose emotions that we have all

been programmed to bury. They warned that, in these conversations, Black participants often express anger and frustration when they hold little hope that the work will bring any change, while white participants retreat into silence out of fear that their comments will be seen as racist. However, within the safe conditions created by their four guidelines for "courageous conversation", the authors posited that an environment might be created that would allow "safe exploration and profound learning for all" (p. 18).

Michael (2015) used Singleton and Hayes' (2008) concept of "courageous conversation" as a framework for her study into the raising of issues of race at school. However, she formed her approach using the strategy of segregated white teacher race conversations rather than employing the cross-cultural dialogue strategy promoted by Singleton and Hayes (2008). Michael (2015) explained the importance of her narrower focus on white teachers by providing statistical evidence of the overwhelming whiteness of the American teaching force. She considered the influence of an almost all-white teaching staff on students of color to be potentially damaging if these white teachers had no sense of their own cultural identity or the ability to recognize and reconsider their own biases. Her experience and research had shown her that white people, because they are not usually taught to talk about race, often wait to engage in conversations on the subject until they are in interracial social situations. She perceived this to be a problem, "as many white people are frequently hindered in such conversations by inexperience discussing race, ignorance about the legacy of racial injustice in the US, and underdeveloped racial identities" (Michael & Conger, 2009, p. 57). Suggesting that groups of white teachers participate in the process of inquiry— a commitment to engaging with a difficult query over an extended period of time, Michael (2015) aimed to prove that within the less threatening context of a white

affinity group, sustained inquiry could lead to self-awareness, growth and change. She maintained that rather than reinforcing guilt and discomfort, this process held the potential to "lead to antiracist classrooms, positive racial identities, and a restoration of the wholeness of spirit and community that racism undermines" (back cover).

In an effort to prepare white teachers for diverse classrooms, Delano-Oriaran and Meidl (2012), like Michael (2015), also turned to segregated white teacher conversations, but in the form of book discussion groups. Their goal was to develop their teacher participants' white racial identities through book discussions focused on race issues. Wishing to determine how teachers made sense of their racial identities, they set out to explore the influence of a professional development program involving book discussion on the pedagogy of teachers working in diverse classrooms. The authors found that after participating in book discussions, their participants wanted to seek out interaction with people of color which they had not been inclined to do before their involvement in the group. They referred to their book discussions as giving them a "sense of awakening" (p. 17), and, most important, they sought concrete ideas for facilitating change in their diverse classrooms. Delano-Oriaran and Meidl (2012) saw their study as revealing a critical need for open discussions about race and white racial identity due to their participants' heightened cultural awareness and desire to bridge the cultural gap between themselves and their students after their participation in the program.

Focusing on urban schools, Caruthers et al. (2004) offered storytelling as a way to go beyond addressing the biases of individual teachers to actually alter the inequities of overall school culture. The authors referred to this process as "reculturing" (p. 36) and suggested that it can occur when "educators reflect on, evaluate, and expand the assumptions and

stories that they hold, and that we all hold, about other people, institutions, and every aspect

of the world" (p. 36). The difference between this strategy and that of the cross-cultural

dialogue supported by Singleton and Hayes (2008), the inquiry process promoted by

Michael (2015), or the book discussion groups engaged in by Delano-Oriaran and Meidl

(2012), was that it aimed to engage white teachers in an examination of the underlying

principles that formed the racially inequitable structures of schools to begin with. Caruthers

et al. (2004) asserted that if we do not develop an understanding of these principles, the

result of any efforts to address racism at school will result in "change without difference"

(p. 36). In their view, storytelling had the power to create dissonance without generating the

type of defensiveness that is so often the result of attempts to raise white teachers' cultural

awareness. They maintained that when educators are presented with the stories behind the

inequitable structuring of schools, they become aware of the culturally constructed

ideologies that contributed to those structures, and no longer see them as unassailable. The

authors believed that through conversation, this deepening awareness might lead teachers to

challenge the status quo and in turn, to begin to reflect on their own unquestioned beliefs

and values, possibly asking why they were able to ignore incidences of racial, class or

gender bias in the past. It was the authors' view, that "only through the examination of our

beliefs and assumptions about cultural differences portrayed through teaching

methodologies, codes of discipline, administrative practices, and policy making can we

change the stories of urban schools from ones of despair to ones of hope" (p. 36).

Barriers to Initiating and Sustaining Race Conversations at School: The Dangers of White Privilege and the Colorblind/Colormute Approach

As we approached the third year in our efforts to open a space to speak about race at our school, my colleagues and I often found ourselves frustrated by our inability to reach many of the staff members who are more resistant than ever to addressing issues of race. During a recent day-long character-building event at our school, students and teachers shared personal feelings in small groups in an effort to foster caring and to dismantle the effects of bullying. In one of the groups, a Black student recounted a recent bias incident that had affected her brother. The following day, within earshot of one of my Race Matters Alliance colleagues, the teacher facilitator of this young woman's group complained to several of her peers that she was frustrated by what she saw as Black peoples' insistence on always making things about race. She expressed that this tendency, which she felt was exhibited by the young Black woman in her group the previous day, was divisive. My colleagues and I were particularly troubled by this teacher's willingness to so openly share her obvious bias with her fellow teachers. However, we were not surprised by her lack of empathy for the feelings of her student of color. We were aware of the racial anger that many of our staff members harbor, but we have continued to struggle to find ways to disrupt it.

Grounded by the conceptual framework of this proposal—Adichie's (2009) concept of the single story—we have fought our own tendency to apply a single story of outright racism to staff members who exhibit this type of behavior. Having learned from our reading of second-wave white teacher identity studies that merely forcing white people to acknowledge their white privilege is a dead end (Jupp et al., 2016), we turned again to the literature, seeking clues to understanding what drives the type of teacher resistance we continue to encounter. It seemed appropriate, then, that this review of the scholarship on the

subject of race conversation should conclude with an analysis of the findings by researchers regarding barriers to initiating and sustaining racial dialogue at school. From my analysis of the scholarship on the subject, three primary obstacles to the process have emerged consistently across the sources: the concept of white privilege; the colorblind approach; and colormuteness (Brown, 2018; Castagno, 2008; Lewis, 2001; Michael, 2015; Modica, 2014; Pollock, 2004; Tatum, 2017).

White privilege, a term that has become ubiquitous within the national race conversation, is one that often provokes resistance from whites. Jupp et al. (2016), in their comprehensive review of second-wave white teacher identity studies, cited numerous sources as noting that even when teachers were found to acknowledge their white privilege, they felt little responsibility to adopt anti-racist identities or to engage in anti-racist actions. This finding supported McIntosh's (1988) definition of white privilege as "an invisible package of unearned assets" (p. 1); assets that are often denied to exist by whites, who adopt instead a stance of race-evasiveness in their approach to dealing with diversity. This race-evasiveness and adherence to the concept of white privilege was understood by Castagno (2008) to be motivated by the overwhelming culture of whiteness and the fearful awareness of how the interests of whites might be threatened by a more open approach to speaking about race. Lewis (2001) viewed the resistance of whites to talking about race as the inevitable result of wanting to preserve the status quo of white dominance. However, the other authors examined for this review, took a less confrontational view of white privilege-motivated resistance to the practice. Tatum (2017) pointed out that people are resistant to information that challenges their deeply held belief systems. She maintained that the majority of whites live in all white neighborhoods, work in all white settings, and have been

taught from childhood that Black people are dangerous. She asserted that the country's changing demographic is presently challenging their understanding of their place in the world and their belief in the false concept of meritocracy. In her opinion, these assaults to their core beliefs are at the root of their understandable pushback against raising issues of race. Similarly, Michael (2015) alleged that we are byproducts of our upbringing, and contended that no one has taught whites how to raise race questions.

Brown (2018) underscored the dangers of white privilege to successful race discourse by pointing out that even after cross-cultural race conversations are initiated, it continues to have a detrimental effect on the process. In Brown's experience, Black participants in these conversations inevitably take on the role of helping whites to recognize their unearned privileges, thus placing the needs, thoughts, and feelings of whites over their own; an observation that caused Brown to lament, "It's amazing how white supremacy even invades programs aimed at seeking racial reconciliation" (p. 60). Despite her frustration, Brown emphasized the importance of initiating race conversation despite the obstacles presented by white privilege. She recommended that constructive race conversations should not be feared since failure to engage in them disallows members of the dominant white culture to begin to challenge the engrained belief that whiteness, on its own merit, makes them more deserving. Pollock (2004a) voiced a similar sentiment, stating that our habit of characterizing each other, and the categories of racial difference that we have placed ourselves in "are central to the most troubling power struggles we have" (p. 1). In Pollock's view, ignoring these struggles by repressing race talk only serves to reproduce the very inequities we are trying to deconstruct.The colorblind approach, which allows whites to ignore race while they claim to see people without noticing the color of their skin, is

dangerous because it allows them to ignore racial inequity while maintaining their status of privilege (Modica, 2014). Modica studied the implications of the colorblind approach at a mixed-race, suburban high school. Despite its seemingly friendly atmosphere, Modica uncovered a strong presence of racial tension within the school which the white community avoided by claiming to be colorblind. White teachers privately expressed tensions over possible accusations of racism from students of color, and the author observed that their desire for a colorblind environment masked resentment over this anxiety. Through their "safe" narrative and pedagogical choices, they managed to avoid race discussions, but ultimately created a tense and unproductive learning environment for both teachers and students. Modica (2014) concluded that the colorblind approach and "failure to talk about race ultimately makes race matter more, not less, as important questions regarding inequitable systems remain unaddressed" (p. 410).

Pollock (2004a) dealt with the complexity of the colorblind approach, describing how both students and teachers often say one thing on the subject and mean another. She discovered that whites often say that race doesn't matter, claiming that they are colorblind and that they see only people, not color. However, she also found that behind closed doors, in groups of whites only, their views shifted. Here, the teachers expressed deficit thinking regarding their diverse students, while white students resorted to using ethnic labels to describe their peers of color which they had not done when interviewed in cross-cultural settings.

Lewis (2001) examined the racial messages and lessons that students absorbed from their parents and teachers in a predominantly white school community. Like Pollock's (2004a) participants, the members of the community studied by Lewis (2001) denied the

importance of race in their town, but in reality, their maintenance of colorblindness concealed a consciousness of color that had a profoundly negative effect on their diverse students. Like Pollock's (2004a) teacher participants who spoke negatively of Blacks in private, Lewis' (2001) study participants complained about Blacks out of the public eye, claiming that they whined, or that they played the race card. Even a child as young as four years old was judged to be guilty of doing so when she told her mother that she was being bullied and taunted with racial slurs. Lewis noted that the community members' discourse was filled with a "blame the victim" mentality, but she adopted the stance of a second-wave white teacher identity studies theorist when she averred that her participants were not necessarily racist, but merely deploying commonly accepted ideological narratives of the dominant culture, and thereby sustaining the status quo. She saw the story of the community she studied, not to be one "of some 'bad White folks' who are in denial, but of our collective inability to confront racial realities in their everyday manifestations" (p. 805).

As a Black person, Brown (2018) recalled being a student in just the sort of school environments described by Pollock (2004a) and Lewis (2001). She explained that when teachers embrace colorblindness, claiming to see all children in the same way, they are blind to the instances of white culture dominating the curriculum. To illustrate this point, Brown (2018) gave examples of her teachers' assumptions that everyone follows white cultural traditions, "It's like when you're sailing . . . or, you know when you're skiing you have to..." (p. 53). Brown also recalled experiencing white resistance in the form of her teachers' desire for Black assimilation. The first step in this process was the expectation that she code-switch, "conforming to the cultural communication of white people when I'm with them" (p. 7). The ultimate expectation of her teachers was that she would, "come to realize

that white ways of thinking, behaving, communicating, and understanding the world are to

be valued above all else" (p. 79). As an adult, Brown now knows that it is important for

Black students to talk about what it feels like to be a person of color in white spaces, but

trapped in the environment of her high school, the colorblind oppressiveness of her teachers

robbed her of her voice as well as her culture.

The third and final obstacle to initiating and sustaining race talk that I examined for

this review was first described by Pollock (2004a, 2004b), who originated the term

"colormute," the practice of repressing race talk within our communal discourse. It was

inspired by the state of California's 1996 Proposition 209 (2004a) which sought to eliminate

race-based programs in education by outlawing the use of race words in official documents.

As an educator in the state of California at that time, Pollock (2004a) concluded that race

talk does very much matter, but even more important is the silence that comes from its

repression. In her view, "it is crucial that we learn to navigate together the American

dilemmas of race talk and colormuteness rather than be at their mercy" (p. 4). She predicted

that, left unchecked, a colormute approach in education would allow racial inequality to

spread throughout the country's classrooms.

Castagno (2008) explored that possibility by examining the ways in which a

colormute approach to race contributes to legitimizing whiteness in the American education

system. She noted that even though issues of race are always evident in schools, teachers are

notably silent on the subject and are consistently socializing students to be silent as well.

Tracking the patterns of those silences, Castagno found that teachers' silencing of students

was tied to a commitment to avoid touching on aspects of schooling that might generate

anxiety such as the topic of race. Additionally, she discovered that the silence exhibited by

teachers regarding race was tied to feelings of blame and guilt. Castagno's study of race talk in classrooms revealed 35 examples of teachers staying silent about race, or silencing their students on the subject while exposing just five examples to the contrary. Seeing this practice as having negative implications for students, teachers, and our society as a whole, she posited that "through the ignoring of race and power within schools, educators contribute to the hegemony of deficit thinking and meritocracy" (p. 322). Castagno perceived meritocracy as a force that directs our attention away from racial inequalities, allowing us to see ourselves as blameless within a system that focuses on personal success or failure regardless of racial limitations. However, she found hope for schools intent on deconstructing the hegemony she described if they would abandon colormute practices and commit to engaging students in conversation about race and racism. Pollock (2004a) also took a more hopeful viewpoint by choosing to view race relations at school as fluid rather than static and unchanging. She, "began to see that simple talk of student race relations was not always a pure description of reality but, rather, often a type of scripted simplification obscuring race's shifting relevance and irrelevance" (p. 32). For the purposes of our Race Matters Alliance work, findings such as those of Pollock (2004a) and Castagno (2008), combined with our second-wave white teacher identity studies perspective, will keep us from rushing to judgement as we analyze the racialized behavior of our administrators, students, colleagues, and ourselves.

My colleagues and I believe that our attempts to grow into race allies and activists have at least made us aware of the presence of colorblind and colormute behavior when we are confronted with it. However, white privilege is a concept with which we continue to struggle. When we discuss evidence of our own white privilege, it is often in the context of

its insidious nature, and the shock and shame we feel when we are called out on it by the student members of our Race Matters Alliance. We like to think of ourselves as marching shoulder to shoulder as equals with our students of color as we work to initiate and sustain race conversations in our school community; however, we recently received a check to this illusion of solidarity from one of our students. Speaking at a Race Matters Alliance meeting, she expressed frustration with the push back we were receiving from some of our resistant faculty members, stating that she sometimes believed we were just talking to each other to no real effect. This was an upsetting observation to my colleagues and me, but what truly caught our attention and put us in our place was the way in which she concluded her comments. She claimed that it was easier for us because, at the end of our meetings, we can walk away white, while she and her fellow students are stuck because they will always be Black. Her comment was like a blow to each of us and a powerful reminder of the white privilege that we, at times, still blindly and silently enjoy. As we moved forward with the work, we were aware that we had to keep in mind that our understanding of racism and the bias that our students experience will always be partial and that we must not congratulate ourselves on any progress we make, as it will never be enough. We were also aware that we needed to listen to the guidance of scholars and activists like Brown (2018) who reminded us that although our race talks are important, "too often, dialogue functions as a stall tactic, allowing white people to believe they've done something heroic when the real work is yet to come" (p. 170).

The body of scholarship I examined for this review provided my colleagues and me with valuable information that used in the informal and formal race work we began at our school. The literature offered guidance for aspiring allies such as us, including strong descriptions of what it

takes to become an ally, guidance for navigating the journey, and the importance of white identity development to the process as well as to the success of the other topic of our study, race talk. The literature on that subject strengthened our belief in the value of our work through its emphasis on the importance of initiating and sustaining race conversations at school. It also provided guidance for starting those conversations, and warnings of the barriers we would be sure to encounter. The most important effect of the scholarship I reviewed, however, has been the way in which it has prepared my colleagues and me for handling many of the pitfalls that might otherwise have broken our resolve. We have a deeper understanding of the motivations behind the racist beliefs of many of those around us, as well as the fears and inherent biases which we all harbor. Our efforts have convinced us that we cannot do this alone. We know that we must rely on each other, and that our connection to the scholarship on race must be deep and ongoing. In the following section I detail the specific methodology that we used to that end.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this dissertation study was to demonstrate what it looks like when teachers resolve to become race allies through their collective efforts to create a space to speak about race at school. My colleagues and I set out to determine how we, as teachers, might grow into collaborators, allies, and activists, through our communal work with our Race Matters Alliance. My review of the scholarship on race allyship had exposed a lack of research similar to that in which we engaged. Although I found that scholars acknowledged the importance of white allies in the struggle for educational equity, I discovered no evidence of groups of white teachers working together on their own, as my colleagues and I were doing, to set in motion change processes both within themselves and in the context of their schools. With this dissertation study, we believe that we have contributed in part to filling that gap. In this participatory activist research (PA*t*R) study I acted as both researcher and participant. In the section that follows, I describe PA*t*R, show how it was an appropriate research model for our work, and illustrate how we used it to conduct our study. I also detail the context of the study, its participants, and my own positionality. Finally, I define the types of data I collected and analyzed, as well as the ethical considerations I considered throughout the course of the study.

Participatory Activist Research

As previously described, PA*t*R (lisahunter et al., 2013), is a comparatively new addition to the action research family. It closely resembles participatory action research (PAR) which takes place in real-life situations and involves participants as researchers and researchers as participants working together to promote reformative change within existing social situations (Herr & Anderson, 2015; lisahunter et al., 2013; Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). What differentiates PA*t*R from all other forms of action research (AR) is its

promotion of an "emancipatory approach" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 18). Lisahunter et

al. (2013) acknowledged that the conceptual basis of PA*t*R is not new, drawing as it does

on certain elements of AR, critical theory (CT), and PAR. To promote a better

understanding of PA*t*R, and to illustrate its appropriateness for this study, I describe its

connections to these three research methods.

Action Research

AR is an overarching term that encompasses several forms of research and theory

including both PAR and CT. In its broadest sense, AR "is a research approach that works

with a community on a common topic of interest, that is, engaging the community in

finding answers and applying those answers to the point of concern" (lisahunter et al.,

2013, p. 17). Lisahunter et al. (2013) cited the researchers involved in two separate studies

as identifying three modes of AR: technical, practical, and emancipatory (Carr & Kemmis,

1986; Grundy, 1982). With its emphasis on locally relevant, context specific research that

is strongly connected to social action and social movement (Kemmis, 1993), it is the

emancipatory mode of AR that forms the basis of PAR the second method on which our

chosen methodology of PA*t*R is based.

Participatory Action Research

In PAR, members of the community as well as practitioners take on an action

researcher role to conduct studies "in their own communities to specifically challenge power

relations and initiate change in their communities" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 57). The

genesis of PA*t*R can be found in the basic elements of PAR which are rooted in the legacy

of Freire's (1970) theories. His view of research as a form of social action is evidenced in

the way in which PAR identifies issues that are important to community members and uses them as the basis for literacy instruction through collaborative study. Scholars have identified various characteristics of PAR including the integration of theory and practice, the combined efforts of community and researcher to achieve social transformation, and the use of a critical lens which "encourages participants to contest the ways they are positioned to view the world in particular ways" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 18). Each of these characteristics is also visible within PA*t*R, with the critical approach playing a particularly central role.

Critical Theory

Research conducted in the CT tradition is described by lisahunter et al. (2013) as being "preoccupied with uncovering the ways in which social reality is variously negotiated and resisted 'from below' within established networks of power and authority" (p. 33). The authors saw it as a bridge between AR and practice, and therefore, as an essential feature of PA*t*R. They emphasized its importance by stating that, "Just as all spokes in a wheel emanate from the central hub, so too all actions in PA*t*R emanate from critical theory" (p. 33). With their research grounded in CT, PA*t*R practitioners attempt to uncover the potential for social transformation within the context of their study sites. Research based in CT such as PA*t*R differs from traditional research models in its emphasis on "critiquing and changing society rather than just observing, understanding or explaining it" (p. 34). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) perceived this type of research as a challenge to the status quo, and its practitioners as those who question the ways in which power is distributed as well how its structures are reinforced.As my colleagues and I informally engaged in race work at our school, we had become increasingly aware of the depth of opposition towards our

efforts. At times this resistance overwhelmed us and filled us with fear that our student

members of color might be even more unfairly targeted by the school community as a result

of our efforts, or that our group might even be pressured out of existence. Our relationships

with our students of color and their parents, however, strengthened our resolve, and brought

us to the realization that we had been cast, from the start of our involvement with them, in

the role of activists solely by the nature of our work. It was this understanding that drew us

to recognize PA*t*R, with its AR-based emancipatory approach, its PAR-inspired call to

collaborative social action, and its CT-centered challenging of the status quo, as the best

way for us to approach our study.

     The knowledge gained from my previous doctoral studies in statistical analysis had

already convinced me that our study must be PAR-based, with my role being that of both

participant and researcher, and my participants being actively engaged in the research as

well. Through the work of Herr and Anderson (2015), I had been introduced to the general

characteristics of PAR that clearly aligned with our efforts to create a space to speak about

race at our school and to document the effects of that work on ourselves and our school

community. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2015), the

object of PAR is to change the world for the better through "discourse structures" (p. 18); a

contention that I believed to embody our goals. However, it was not until I discovered PA*t*R

that I felt I had found a model through which we could set in motion the changes we hoped

to make regarding issues of race within ourselves and our school community, as well as gain

access to a framework which would allow us to sustain those changes beyond our proposed

study. This feeling was reinforced by my reading of McTaggart (2013), who portrayed

participatory activist researchers as being committed to changing themselves and their

situation, as well as to "making their work relevant, interesting, attractive, and compelling to others" (p. v).

Although my review of the literature on allyship had revealed the process of becoming an ally to be a virtually uncharted journey, totally dependent upon context and largely lacking in specific guidance, I believed that I had discovered a research model that clearly offered support for embarking on that journey, no matter how complicated and daunting it seemed. Lisahunter et al. (2013) provided a set of bullet points for organizing and managing its complexity, followed by a description of the PA*t*R process. The bullet points addressed areas including: (a) the forming of a team, (b) definition of the purpose and focus of the project, (c) development of a research question, (d) engagement in reconnaissance, (e) reflection on that reconnaissance, and (f) the turning of the research question into a project. The authors provided a description of the actual PA*t*R process that was limited to just four steps: (a) plan, (b) act, (c) observe, and (d) reflect, with a direction to repeat those four steps until an end of the project was decided upon, while stressing that there is no true ending to a PA*t*R project as the work is always ongoing. They warned that although the points and the process might seem neat and controlled, PA*t*R researchers should not let them get in the way of "developing a cautious, reflexive and holistic approach that embraces the messy iterative and generative character of PA*t*R" (p. 146).

In my view, the concept of an ongoing, constantly evolving research model with an unpredictable outcome provided us with an approach in keeping with our recurring search for multiple stories in our work rather than the acceptance of a single one. It also aligned with our continued use of a poststructural feminist lens, which kept us ever mindful of the need to repeatedly reevaluate our understanding of our work and to accept it as never being

more than partial. Finally, my colleagues and I were drawn to the iterative nature of the PA*t*R process which was designed to cycle any knowledge gained from it directly back into the process, thus positively influencing the ongoing nature of the study as well as the actions of the participants. Now that the study has been completed, we see this repetitive practice was the perfect support for our continuing development as allies and activists, as well as for increasing the likelihood of sustaining the process within the community going forward.

As we prepared to launch a formal version of our study my colleagues and I felt prepared to do so by the race work that we had engaged in for almost three years, as well as by the research that I had completed and shared with the group. As noted in the bullet points provided by lisahunter et al. (2013), PA*t*R guidelines stress the importance of a reconnaissance phase prior to engaging in the research process. The goal of this phase is to identify the purpose of the work to be attempted, and to increase understanding of the "context, issue, assumptions, and theory" (p. 64) behind it before it begins. By establishing familiarity with existing scholarship on allyship and race discourse, and by developing an awareness of the racial dynamic at our school, we had already been preparing for the type of study recommended by PA*t*R, which calls for change within both research contexts and the researchers themselves. My colleagues and I believed that our work to that point already constituted the reconnaissance phase required by PA*t*R.

When I submitted our proposal for this study, my co-participants and I reflected on our progress, noting that three years before, we had been discouraged from holding our first Race Matters Alliance planning meeting with parents and students at the school. Our administrators advised us instead to gather "off campus" due to the "sensitivity" of our

purpose. At the time of the study proposal submission, we had held our fourth Race Matters Alliance meeting of the year at the school. It was well attended by students of color, teachers, and administrators, although we continued to struggle to attract white students. At a recent school faculty meeting we had conducted a professional development presentation for our teachers and administrators which was surprisingly well-received. We had secured permission to host a movie night screening of the film *The hate you give (2018)* sponsored by our chapter of the New Jersey Educator's Association followed by a panel discussion. It is not exaggerating to say that none of these accomplishments would have been realized without the work of The Race Matters Alliance that began with a single conversation about race between a white teacher and three students of color. It was those students who encouraged me, the white teacher, to "go bigger" with that discourse, expanding it to include their parents and four of my colleagues whom they trusted to help us bring racial change to the school. I believe that these students chose us wisely. The collaboration that is required for this type of work, which lends itself so well to PA*t*R, requires a level of intimacy and trust that my Race Matters Alliance colleagues and I have always shared, and which has sustained us through the challenges that we continue to encounter. lisahunter et al. (2013) emphasized the requirement of intimacy and trust as well as the importance of creative dialogue that is part of the planning process of any AR project. What moves work such as ours into the realm of PA*t*R, however, is the way in which we are working as activists, "personally and collectively enacting the changes we want to see in the world on a day-to-day basis—even if such efforts are messy and imperfect" (p. 2).

PA*t*R is "a methodology for social change which is more dynamic, open, recursive, chaotic and unpredictable" (p. 8) than traditional research approaches, but lisahunter et al.

(2013) warned that, just as with these other methodologies, it can lead to reinforcing the status quo if those who use it allow their preconceptions and worldviews to affect the outcomes of the research process. To combat this tendency, they advocate for "an interconnected approach, one that is unashamed of its political and ideological foundations and is constructed through relationships to the 'other' as defined by shared place-based interests" (p. 8). From our first interactions with our students of color and their parents, we were instinctively following the tenets of PA*t*R without being aware of it. As we moved forward with our proposal, armed with the knowledge we had gained from scholarship and through personal experience, we felt ready to work as activists within the methodology, striving to achieve the changes we hoped to see in ourselves and our school community. Now that the study is completed, we see clearly that the structure of the study, with its requirements that we meet regularly and document our activities religiously brought professionalism and a much higher level of participation in our work. The methodology of PA*t*R provided the structure that we had not even realized that we needed, but it also allowed us space for creative field note generation and collective methods as well as the time for self and group reflection that we had been missing. Our work is ongoing. It continues, but it is impossible for us to return to what we were doing without the tools that we have learned to make use of through carrying out a PA*t*R study, as well as by using the methods of both narrative and thematic analysis that we relied on to process the study data.

Context, Participation, and Positionality

Context

I am a teacher in a middle/high school that was opened in 1966 as part of a regional district composed of five high schools. By 1993, with the end of the baby boom, enrollment

had decreased dramatically and the high school was closed. After a four-year court battle, the residents of the town succeeded in reopening their school and obtaining local control in the fall of 1997. Despite this victory, the issue of low enrollment persisted. In 1999, in an effort to solve the problem, the district commenced participation in the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program. Each year, slots are made available for 7th through 10th grade students from schools throughout the county. The vast majority of these choice participants are students of color. This fact has been a source of tension for the residents of the town, the staff of the school, and the students themselves.

The choice program has been a culture shock for the community. Before its inception, residents were accustomed to living in a largely white and segregated environment. Federal Census figures for the year 2000 show a white population of 92%. By the 2010 Census, however, that figure had dropped to 88%. For most of the town's white population, this small change represented a worrisome trend, and the middle/high school choice program merely added to that concern.

Many of the town's residents were, and continue to be, working class Italian-Americans who were part of what is referred to as the white flight of the late 1960s and 1970s. When the nearby city they had lived in for years became more racially diverse, these people moved to the town in which our school is located. I believe that this fact contributes to the existence of a palpable, deep, and irrational resentment towards people of color in the community, and a distrust of the motives of The Race Matters Alliance members. Adding to the community's charged relationship with people of color is its historical connection to the Ku Klux Klan. It has been documented that its affiliation with the group goes back to the 1920s when the Klan's state sect was located in the town (Adomaitis, 2017).

Participation

The participants in this dissertation study include myself and four other educators. All of us grew up within ten miles of the town in which our school is located. We are all Caucasian. Below, I provide our basic individual information, but will refer to my co-participants using pseudonyms.

Myself: Lead Researcher/Participant. I am a 66-year-old woman who has spent the last 31 years in art education. From 1989 to 1997, I taught art at a Catholic high school. For the last 23 years, I have been a middle/high school lead art teacher at the site of our study. I am the lead researcher and author of this dissertation I believe that the founding student members of what ultimately became The Race Matters Alliance chose me to begin a shared conversation about race simply because I showed an interest in their experiences as young women of color in a predominantly white school. They extended a challenge to me, and it is their continued involvement beyond graduation, as well as the involvement of the students who are presently part of The Race Matters Alliance, that has given me the courage to continue this work.

Melissa: Guidance Counselor/Participant. Melissa is a 34-year-old woman. She is a middle school counselor who has worked at our school for seven years. She completed her practicum and internship at the school before leaving to do her first year of counseling in a large nearby district where she worked in a K-5 elementary setting. At our school, she has held the position of both middle and high school counselor. Melissa grew up in the largely African American community where many of our choice students reside. Her father was a teacher in the district for over 40 years. She was chosen by the students to be part of The Race Matters Alliance program because of her background as well as her compassion and

commitment to racial equity.

Nancy: Language Arts Teacher/Participant. Nancy is a 39-year-old woman who has held the position of middle school language arts teacher at our school for the last 12 years. This is her first teaching position. After college, she worked in the pharmaceutical field before earning her masters in English education and changing careers. Nancy was chosen by the students for The Race Matters Alliance program because addressing cultural differences is part of her personal pedagogy. Her students of color and their parents have said that her expectations are as high for them as they are for her white students.

Christopher: Science Teacher/Participant. Christopher is a 49-year-old man who has been a science teacher for the past 27 years. He began his career as a high school science teacher at a large regional school with a mixed demographic. After five years, he joined our staff as a middle school science teacher, a position he has held for the past 20 years. Christopher grew up in a town that was part of the regional district then serviced by our school. He is therefore a graduate of the school in which he now teaches. He had a Christian bible chapel upbringing, which he feels has influenced his attitudes towards social injustice. He was chosen by The Race Matters Alliance student founders to be part of the group for his intolerance of any type of inequity in his classroom and his willingness to address difficult issues including racism.

Joyce: English Teacher/Participant. Joyce is a 37-year-old woman who has held the position of high school English teacher at our school for the past 6 years. After graduating from college with a degree in English, she worked as an administrative assistant for several years before earning a Master's degree in British literature. Her experience as an adjunct professor while pursuing that degree led her to pursue an alternate

route teaching certificate in English. She then taught high school English for four years at the high school she herself attended in an affluent town not far from our school. Joyce is a fearless social justice advocate who risked community disapproval for her involvement with The Race Matters Alliance before she had earned tenure approval. It is that type of courage, as well her willingness to stand up for any student who is a victim of injustice, that led the organizers of The Race Matters Alliance to call for her involvement from the start.

Positionality

In light of the town's conflicted racial history, the nature of our work and the context within which we are doing it made our positionality complicated. In one sense, we were insiders. We conducted our study within a school community that we have been a part of for years. Because of our relationship with our students of color and their parents, however, our position with our fellow white educators changed. A few of us were no longer welcomed into our former comfort zones. For Melissa and myself, who have always been the most vocal, an entrance into the teacher's lounge was now met with uncomfortable silence. Joyce has only been able to maintain her long-standing close friendship with two race-evasive fellow teachers by avoiding the subject of her involvement with The Race Matters Alliance. As she continues forward with her involvement in our Race Matters Alliance work this becomes more and more impossible for her. When she challenges what she now perceives as their racially insensitive remarks, she is often angrily dismissed. At the same time, our position with our students of color and their parents has been delicate and often hard to decipher. We are the recipients of their frustration when they feel that we are not pushing the administration hard enough for what seem like logical demands, and it is hard for them to understand our struggles to navigate the anger of our white colleagues who feel that we

are "going too far."

For me, as the lead researcher and facilitator of this study, there was an added level of tension. The school community is aware that I instituted The Race Matters Alliance and recruited the other participants based on the choices of the founding student members. I am viewed by many as the source of what they interpret as racial unrest. This positionality has often made it difficult for me to speak comfortably to the teachers themselves on the subject of race, but it has served as an entrée with the administration. A recent increase in racial incidents at the school has prompted the administration to turn to me for advice, an unexpected and promising development that I am already taking advantage of. I have been told by the interim superintendent that she values my opinion, and the principal has often asked for my input on matters concerning race. I believe that my position as a doctoral student is responsible for this trust. The research I have done and the knowledge I have gained through my doctoral classes has allowed me to assume the lead in the work of The Race Matters Alliance.

The five participants, including myself, are a team. We discuss most of our activities with one another as a group. However, as the facilitator and lead researcher on the project, I am the ultimate decision maker. My studies have taught me that race work is complex and that it must be examined from as many perspectives as possible. As a result, I value the opinions of each of my fellow participants and take them all into consideration when making decisions. However, I find myself most closely aligned with Melissa because of her interest in opening a space to speak about race at the school before I ever came to her with my notion of doing so. She is deeply involved by choice, and her counseling experience provides a type of perspective that is different from my own or that of the other teachers.

Most importantly, her counselor position at the school regularly requires her to work directly with the administrators. The positive relationship she has with them frequently benefits us when we need to be heard and supported, and her understanding of the politics of the school, coupled with my many years of experience there, has been essential to our work so far.

My positionality has also differed from that of my co-participants in that I was the group researcher, documenter of all field texts, and writer of the study. As a doctoral student who has focused on the topic of race in teacher education for over 6 years, our group depended on my knowledge and continuing study of the literature to help us to better understand the nature of our work. In addition to my access to research on race and teacher education, and my role as documenter of the study, we depended upon my connections with others who are leaders in the field who I had met through my doctoral program. These scholars and activists not only provided us with advice and support, but they allowed us to expose our students to the world outside of our school. Through our involvement with them, we gained a broader perspective of our work, and the courage to maintain our positionality as race activists in an environment which might otherwise have compelled us to abandon it.

Construction of Field Texts (Data Collection)

In engaging in the work of this study, I focused on the guidance offered by lisahunter et al. (2013) who cautioned that, as activist researchers, we must never lose sight of the fact that we are working to achieve social justice for a disempowered group. In light of that fact, they reminded us that all research involves strategic planning based on what we know about the issue we are addressing and those involved, as well as on the information we have gained from an examination of the literature of the field. Armed with the knowledge we had

gained from our work regarding race issues at our school, and the information from my

review of the scholarship on race allyship and racial discourse, we were prepared to take

deliberative action that was based on careful and strategic planning (lisahunter et al., 2013).

Throughout the phase of collecting data, or "construction of field texts" (p. 70), as it is

referred to in PA*t*R, I referred back to the seven features of PAR, outlined by Kemmis and

McTaggart (as cited in lisahunter et al., 2013) to ensure that our research remained involved

in a *social practice*, that our actions were *participatory*, and *collaborative* in nature, that our

aim was *emancipatory*, our lens *critical* and *reflexive*, and that we were working to

transform both theory and practice.

As I began to collect data, or in this case, to construct field texts, and attempted to

adhere to these seven features, I benefitted from the support provided by the theoretical

framework of second-wave white teacher identity studies which had taught us to focus on

the "race-visible identity" rather than the race-evasiveness of white teachers "who, with

more or less success, are each attempting to come to grips with their own complexity and

complicity in a white-supremacist system" (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016, p. 985). This

knowledge sustained the five of us and kept our research on track when we were met with

inevitable examples of resistance from our less enlightened fellow educators, as did

Adichie's (2009) concept of the danger in subscribing to a single judgmental story; in this

case one of ignorance and bigotry.

It is important to note that although there are some methods of field text construction

that are unique to PAR, the methodology does use traditional tools as well. Interviews or

surveys used in an emancipatory PA*t*R study, however, would appear quite different than

they would in positivist research methodology. Lisahunter et al. (2013) stressed that it is

important to recognize that PA*t*R techniques invoke more than just new understandings.

They are directly tied to theoretical and political orientations that lead to emancipatory

change. Those who conduct PA*t*R studies work to change practice. This action-oriented,

hands-on approach is behind its proponents' insistence on referring to data collection as

field text construction. Due to the important role that it played in our study, their lengthy

justification for the use of this term was worth citing in full.

> We prefer to use Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) term "field texts" to recognize, not
>
> only that we construct these texts but that they tell only a part of the story of what is
>
> going on. The term 'data' feels like something that is finite and definable.
>
> When dealing with human research, as you will find, 'data' is seldom finite nor
>
> easily definable. Similarly, different forms of analyses will ask different questions of
>
> the same field texts and therefore create one of the several possible research texts. It
>
> is for these reasons that 'the construction of field texts' seems a more honest
>
> description. (lisahunter et al., 2013, p. 74)

In the table below, I restate our research questions and name the field text construction

methods I used to answer them. The table is followed by a detailed description of each of

the field text construction methods along with an explanation of the way in which they were

put to use.

Table 1

Specific Purposes of Construction of Field Texts

Specific Purposes of Data Collection or "Construction of Field Texts" as it is referred to in Participatory Activist Research	
Research Questions: 1. How does a group of teachers grow into race collaborators, allies and activists as they work in opposition to the institutional and individual racism that characterizes their school environment? 2. What change processes are a group of teachers able to put in motion within themselves and their school as they work together to open a space to speak about race?	
Field Test Construction Tools	Purpose
Planning Meeting Transcripts: 3 spaced across the study. These transcripts will answer both research questions. Bullets one and two address our collaboration in disrupting racism and two and four will highlight the change processes we will go through as we work to open a space to speak about race at school.	• To demonstrate the ways teachers can work collaboratively to disrupt racism at school • To identify challenges teachers anticipate and experience in initiating race conversations at school • To document the evolution of the planning process teachers engage in as they work collaboratively to disrupt racism at school over time • To identify key themes and recurring issues involved in the process of initiating race conversations at school
Unstructured/Open Narrative Interviews: 1 conducted with each of the 4 teacher/participants at the start of the study. The interviews addressed both research questions by providing a baseline of participant attitudes towards race at school, what agency they had in disrupting it, and allowed us to add to what we had learned from the literature regarding the role of race ally.	• To obtain detailed information from each teacher on their prior experiences and attitudes regarding race, allyship, and activism. • To understand how teachers' backgrounds might influence their attitudes about these issues • To identify key themes in teachers' experiences and attitudes regarding race issues • To provide a rich, dimensional portrait of each teacher to better understand the role of ally and activist
Progress Logs/ Written Narratives: 4 submitted by each of the 4 teacher/participants. The narratives provided the clearest picture of our growth and our changing attitudes, as well as providing differing views of what was going on in the school and how we were influencing any attitudes with our actions. As a result, the logs addressed both research questions.	• To capture how teachers interpret the meaning of the experiences attached to their race work • To document teachers' experiences with their race work • To gain a broader understanding of the study context through the eyes of each of the teacher/researcher/participants in order to form a more complete picture of change processes that may be taking place within the school and ourselves
Critical Incident Files: As important incidents occur. The collection and analyzing of the critical incident files helped to answer research question 1. The critical incident files document incidents of racism and the way in which we and the school reacted to them which allowed us to see our growth. In a sense, the files also answered research question 2 because they allowed us to recognize any changes that have been put in motion within us and the school by our responses.	• To provide accounts of events that are indicative of underlying trends, motives and structures related to racial issues in the school • To reveal rich data related to race-related events at the school • To document and keep track of race-related incidents that, when looked at as a complete file, can provide a larger picture of the school's prevailing racial attitudes • To provide an understanding of the real-life problems that aspiring teacher allies and activists must address in order to achieve positive change

Artifact Collection This element addressed research question 2. It was concerned with the work that we did to open a space to speak about race at school. It illuminated the change processes that we were able to put in motion within the school regarding communicating about race.	• Facilitator/Researcher Journal	• To allow the Facilitator/Researcher to accurately document the daily progress of the study and to reflect on personal experiences, positionality, and overall direction of the work

Planning Meeting Transcripts

As we sought to examine the change processes that took place within ourselves and our school through our efforts to open a space to speak about race, an important source of evidence was our pre-study, mid-study, and end of study planning meetings. Our discussions at these three meetings focused on how we intended to disrupt racism at our school and on the evaluation of our ongoing work. A review of the meeting transcripts afterwards demonstrated the ways in which teachers were able to work collaboratively to address these concerns, as well as the challenges that were anticipated and experienced in the process.

Action research, of which PA*t*R is a part, differs from many other research approaches in that each of the participants can equally contribute to identifying problems and developing solutions. Sachs (as cited in lisahunter et al., 2013) affirmed that although this communal process is not easy, it is "forged in collective action to challenge forms of authority and control that perpetuate inequalities and injustice" (p. 7). We believed that the best place for us to begin to identify our individual problems and to plan our own form of "collective action" was through an initial planning meeting at the start of our four-month study timeline. Here we discussed plans for our monthly Race Matters Alliance Meetings as well as projected schoolwide initiatives such as teacher professional development workshops. The second planning session, halfway through the study, enabled us to monitor

and document our progress and to make adjustments to our approach where necessary. It is important to note that our group often communicated informally and spontaneously, and this practice continued throughout the formal study. These "between-meeting" conferences were discussed and documented at each of our three planning meetings. The final planning session, at the end of the study, revealed recurring issues and pinpointed key themes in our work that provided answers to our research questions and laid the groundwork for our continuing efforts to raise issues of race at our school.

We found that engaging in race work in a predominantly white, resistant environment caused a certain amount of uneasy hesitation within our group at times. Campbell et al. (2004) contended that one way to increase participation and to build a sense of community is to create safe spaces within the research process. To ensure our group's sense of privacy, community, and safety, our planning sessions were conducted off-campus, or in my classroom after school hours. At each of these meetings, I used a digital recorder to document our conversation. Within the following week, I transcribed these conversations and shared copies of those transcripts with my colleagues in the group. Each of the transcriptions were discussed at the subsequent meeting to aid in maintaining the ongoing PA*t*R cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection (lisahunter et al., 2013).

Unstructured/Open Narrative Interviews

We were a group of five researcher/participants whose family backgrounds and experiences related to race as well as our personal racial identity development varies. We found that a thorough documentation followed by an in-depth analysis of our personal stories provided accounts that may resonate with those who wish to address racism at their schools and provide them with "a way in" to developing their own processes by examining

ours. In keeping with Adichie's (2009) concept of the danger of the single story, the

documentation of differing personal narratives also illustrates the ways in which the

complex subject of racism consists of many "truths," rather than a single story of ignorance

and bias.

In order to construct field texts around our personal stories, we used the tool of

unstructured or open narrative interviews. Interviews of this type are most often used at the

beginning of a study when the researcher does not yet know a great deal about the

phenomenon and is seeking to learn enough about it to formulate questions for subsequent

interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; lisahunter et al., 2013). However, lisahunter et al.

(2013) asserted that an open narrative interview approach, when used after the researcher

has an established understanding of the research topic, can also be a source of rich and thick

information. In our case, we made use of open narrative interviews to explore our personal

histories and family stories. As the lead researcher, my aim was to identify the development

of our attitudes on race and to provide a rich, dimensional portrait of teachers engaged in

this type of work.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested involving participants in creating annals

and chronicles through the open narrative interview process in order to help them remember

experiences and to form an outline of a personal narrative. According to the authors,

establishing annals included making a list of dates of memories, events, and stories, while

creating chronicles consists of establishing a sequence of events around a topic or "a

narrative thread of interest" (p. 112). These ideas represented a less rigid form of interview

guidance than a set list of questions. I found them to be well suited to our purposes of

obtaining detailed information regarding our prior experiences and attitudes regarding race,

allyship, and activism, and of gaining an understanding of how our backgrounds might have influenced our views around these issues.

I conducted a single one-hour interview with each of my four colleagues at the beginning of the study. Melissa, who holds a master's degree in counseling, conducted my interview. We followed the same protocol as we had planned for our planning meetings. In order to ensure security and to establish a safe environment, the interviews took place off-campus, after school hours.

Process Logs/Written Narratives

The second tool that we used to construct field texts around our personal stories was that of process logs/written narratives. Each of us, as researchers/participants, submitted four process logs spaced out evenly across the four-month study period. These process logs were reflections on our individual roles in the study: how we saw our participation affecting us as individuals and the way we felt that our actions contributed to the group's communal work. The logs were written in narrative form. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) presented a convincing argument for the use of narrative in ongoing research such as ours that is worth citing in its entirety.

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

> This is exactly how we saw the work that we had been conducting informally for

several years. As we began our study, we expanded our participation to include formal documentation, and at the end of our research we returned to working as we had done before, continuing the process of "living and telling" the ongoing story of race at our school. Our process logs/written narratives provided documentation of our experiences with race work throughout the course of the study, and they captured the ways in which we interpreted the meaning of those experiences. In a broader sense, they allowed us to view the study through each other's eyes as we reviewed them as a group. This gave us a more complete picture of any change processes that had taken place within the school and ourselves.

Critical Incident Files

The source of this tool for the construction of field texts is a practice developed by Tripp (as cited in lisahunter et al., 2013) who suggested that teachers might enhance their professional judgement by cultivating an awareness of and subsequently analyzing the complex and sometimes emotionally charged events that take place in schools. As described by lisahunter et al. (2013), the construction of critical incident files involved the documentation of critical incidents that we as researcher/participants witnessed or experienced in the course of our PA*t*R studies. For us, these incidents provided accounts of events that were indicative of underlying trends, motives, and structures related to racial issues at the school. These incidents could obviously be critical, as was one episode that occurred during the course of the study involving a white student who pulled out one of our Race Matters Alliance student member's hair braids. His actions incited a widespread angry reaction from many students of color and their parents. Although the student who had committed this assault was suspended for several days, the students of color and their parents had hoped to see a monitored conversation take place between him and the student

he assaulted in order to bring about some understanding. Instead, it was swept under the rug. We found our critical incident file to be an excellent way to document this incident and many others that took place in the course of this study. The co-participants each documented this incident and others thus providing different perspectives on the same incidents, giving us a rich source of field notes for this study. Tripp (as cited in lisahunter et al., 2013), advises, however that researchers must not focus only on overtly critical incidents, although they should be examined. He suggested that it is the less obvious critical incidents, such as a school's awarding of music prizes on the basis of gender, which clearly signal problematic positions on the part of those in authority that should be brought to light and challenged. With our series of personal narratives, we were able to document more mundane but equally damaging everyday incidents such as a teacher telling a Black girl who said that she had a headache that it was probably because of "those braids." The message of both of these incidents, involving the sensitive topic of Black hair, although at either end of the spectrum of abuse between physical and emotional, was the same. Lisahunter et al. (2013) emphasized that keeping track of critical incidents, both obvious and concealed, will reveal rich data related to events within professional contexts, and that when looked at as a complete file, they can provide a larger picture of the prevailing cultural attitudes of an institution which was truly the case for our study.

    In doing research at our school, my colleagues and I maintained a file of critical race-related incidents in order to keep a record of events that we might not notice otherwise or that we could easily lose track of without a system of documentation in place. Maintaining a critical incidents file allowed us to use our research to bring attention to the real-life problems that aspiring teacher allies and activists must address in order to achieve

positive change.

Artifact Collection

Facilitator/Researcher Journal

Having already been informally involved in race work, I understood the importance of remaining organized and of documenting as much of my own actions, and those of my co-researcher/participants as possible. As the lead researcher/participant, documenter of field notes, and author of the study, I maintained a facilitator/researcher journal which allowed me to accurately track the daily progress of the study and to reflect on personal experiences, positionality, and the overall direction of our work. As the ultimate decision maker, I was the only participant to be keeping this sort of journal although I did share important parts of its contents with the other participants. Lisahunter et al. (2013) recommended that the researcher journal should record initial reflections on field texts, document actions, and detail any methods of observation. In addition to my personal reflections and observations, I made sure that my researcher journal addressed these aspects of the study as well.

Construction of Research Texts (Data Analysis)

Narrative Analysis

Herr and Anderson (2015) contended that ongoing data analysis is an inherent part of action research. They likened the data analysis process for action researchers to acting as both passenger and crew on a moving train. Required to make meaning and take action at the same time in ways "that will intervene in the site and test the questions being explored" (p. 90) put those involved in our chosen methodology of PA*t*R in the difficult position of constructing field texts and analyzing research texts while continuing to act as participants

in our own studies. In order to navigate this overwhelming process, we relied on narrative analysis to aid us in examining our field texts for answers to the research questions that formed the heart of our study.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the process of transforming field texts to research texts in narrative analysis as being layered in complexity. I understood that it is not a simple process of gathering field texts, sorting them, and analyzing them. Instead, I expected to spend a substantial amount of time repeatedly going over our field texts to create a summary of what they contained and how that information would continue to change. The authors explained that, in narrative analysis, the shaping of field texts into research texts is ultimately the result of the responses that emerge to questions of meaning and social significance. In other words, researchers who work with narrative analysis look for "the patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes either within or across an individual's experience and in the social setting" (p. 132).

It is this concept of the experience of individuals within social settings that drew me to the approach of narrative analysis. I reasoned that analyzing our field texts in this way would allow us to keep our accounts (narrative interviews and written narrative process logs) as wholes rather than breaking them down into components which we might be forced to do if using another form of analysis that was not focused on the experience of the individual within the larger society. As we examined our field texts, we remained conscious of the distinction between stories and narratives described by Carpenter and emerald (as cited by lisahunter et al., 2013). They contended that a story is used by a person to communicate a personal experience while a narrative is a structure that people use to add meaning to their experience, such as a cultural "myth." This line of analysis resonated with

me. I saw a connection between the authors' point of view and our own by way of our conceptual framework that was centered on the importance of the story to our lives and our perception of others. We were interested in analyzing our own narrative interviews and narrative process logs for evidence of stories as well as cultural narratives, and the relationship that exists between the two.

By examining our field texts for patterns related to the individual racial identity stories we told about ourselves as well as the cultural narratives to which we subscribed, we were able to come away with a rich source of well-developed field research around the topic of teachers and race. We saw this field research as ultimately enabling us to answer our research question which asks what changes we had been able to put in motion through our efforts to create a space to speak about race within the social setting of our school.

Thematic Analysis

Lisahunter et al. (2013), in presenting methods of analyzing field text construction that work well with PA*t*R, described Carpenter and emerald (2009) as combining a narrative analysis approach with thematic analysis. The field texts of thematic analysis are the aspects of a person's life that are observed such as their words or actions. I saw these observations of the outward manifestations of a person's thoughts and feelings become a powerful addition to that which we acquired by using narrative analysis in which we examined our inward personal and cultural perceptions. To all of the field notes, I applied the method of thematic analysis to search for signs within our own words and actions that showed us subscribing to a single story of some kind, or of being influenced by cultural narratives around race. As I worked my way through our field and research texts using both narrative and thematic analysis, I continually referred back to our research questions, always asking

myself what information I needed to answer them, and how I should look at the information

I had in order to gain the insights for which they called (lisahunter et al., 2013).

Narrative Coding

Coding is a process in which various items within field texts are categorized to

facilitate analysis. Narrative coding, however, differs from coding used for other forms of

research. It does not follow a series of steps. What is referred to by Clandinin and Connelly

(2000) as "the overall process of analysis and interpretation in the move from field texts to

research texts" (p. 132) is not linear. There is no one time gathering and sorting of field

texts that are analyzed all at once. Instead, field texts are seen as a rich source of research

potential that is returned to again and again to be "re-searched" (p.132), as co-researchers

gather to reread field texts throughout the course of their research and to change direction

when necessary. This is what occurred when we gathered for our three planning meetings,

and when I called unscheduled meetings in order to address questions related to the analysis

process that I was continuously engaged in. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the

process, "Plotlines are continually revised as consultation takes place over written materials,

and as further field texts are composed to develop points of importance in the revised story"

(p. 132). Although, in my role as lead researcher, I did the bulk of the analysis of the field

notes, my co-participants and I did work collaboratively with these types of field texts over

time, allowing the information to coalesce slowly, to ultimately both inform and guide us in

our efforts to foster change in ourselves and within the context of our school.

Identifying Themes in Thematic Analysis

Lisahunter et al. (2013) warned that when employing the method of thematic

analysis, "identifying themes is not a simple matter of wandering through the field texts and

picking out what looks interesting" (p. 119). Braun and Clarke (2006) advised that researchers using thematic analysis must be guided by three main points of clarification related to their identification and underlying understandings of themes. These involved making decisions as to whether the patterns revealed through thematic analysis were driven by the data or driven by the analysts themselves, deciding if the identification of themes recognized surface data or if they involved a more interpretative approach, and determining if the research could be described as realist, constructionist, or contextualist.

It is clear from my study of the process of identifying themes in thematic analysis that my colleagues and I had to develop a clear understanding of the technique before engaging in it. I relied on Boyatzis' (1998) book on developing codes within thematic analysis as we moved through analyzing our field texts. I chose Boyatzis (1998) after reading a description of the way in which his coding techniques were applied by various researchers engaged in thematic analysis (lisahunter et al., 2013). The use of grids of themes organized under topic headings allowed the researchers to record the stories of their participants in PA*t*R while demonstrating the tension between those accounts and the cultural narratives they were influenced by.

Boyatzis (as cited in lisahunter et al., 2013) defined a theme as "a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (p. 117). My colleagues and I found that the process of identifying the patterns that appeared in our work in the form of the five focus areas that we found ourselves returning to again and again, lent itself to the process of thematic analysis. Through this process, we were able to clearly see how our goals for our work had risen organically from the focus areas that kept drawing us in, such as the area of

faculty/student communication and the problem of school culture. We found ourselves addressing these areas through thematic analysis and the data that emerged from that process enriched the outcome of our narrative analysis, thus supporting our understanding of a rich and complex set of field texts.

Ethical Considerations

I obtained approval from Montclair State University's Institutional Review Board and adhered to the principles of ethical research of human subjects. All participants have been given pseudonyms to ensue anonymity and they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence or repercussion. I also used pseudonyms to protect my research site and its location. Lastly, I obtained informed consent and protected all of the participants from harm and deception.

Validity and Generalizability

Traditional academics have historically raised questions regarding the legitimacy of action research (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Herr & Anderson, 2015; lisahunter et al., 2013). Its practitioners have been called journalists or soft scientists, and their work has been dismissed as unscientific (lisahunter et al., 2013). Herr and Anderson (2015) surmised that the problem that academics have with action research is that the knowledge it generates is driven by practice rather than by theory. Greenwood and Levin (2007) concurred and suggested an alternative view of theory within action research in which "the role of theories is to explain how what happened was possible and took place, to lay out possible scenarios for the future, and to give good reasons for the ones that seem to be probable next outcomes" (p. 69).The differences in goals as well as methods between action research and more mainstream forms of study ultimately call for alternative ways to indicate its quality

than the established criteria of validity and generalizability. Herr and Anderson (2015) described a set of validity criteria developed by Reason and Bradbury (2001) based on their experience with PAR. Their criteria represent an educational process that engages self, persons, and community over time. To establish validity using these criteria, researchers must ask questions about their studies regarding enduring consequences, significance, multiple ways of knowing, outcome and practice, and relational practice. Heron (1996) called for cooperative inquiry in the search for research validity, asserting that the validity of a study depends on its researchers fully engaging their participants as "co-researchers in making sense of the data they provide and drawing conclusions from it" (p. 204). Herr and Anderson (2015), in their own analysis of Heron's (1996) ideas, pointed out his insistence that action researchers must push their study through as many cycles as possible by as many group members as possible in order to ensure well-grounded research outcomes.

In questioning the validity of action research, academics have criticized the finite nature of its findings, believing them to be non-transferable to additional research (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Greenwood and Levin challenged this notion, arguing that although knowledge generated by action research is context specific, it can be transferred to other locations through a process that includes "understanding the situation in which the inquiry took place, judging the context where the knowledge is to be applied, and making an assessment of whether the two contexts have sufficient processes in common to make it worthwhile to link them" (p. 66).

In order to ensure the validity of our research, I continued to revisit the criteria of Reason and Bradbury (as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2015). I applied their questions regarding the enduring consequences and significance of research to our study. I examined

our practices in relation to each other as co-researchers, and analyzed the outcomes of those

practices along with the multiple ways of knowing that we developed as a result of our

efforts. I believe that these actions grounded our learning process. I also followed Heron's

(1996) instruction to continue to push through the ongoing and repetitive research cycles

that we know to be part of PA*t*R.

However, because our study relied so heavily on narrative inquiry, the methods of

ensuring validity described above fell short of our needs. We also needed to focus on

criteria specifically designed for trustworthiness of narrative inquiry. Clandinin and

Connelly (2000) suggested that this should involve being "wakeful" (p.184), a term they use

to describe the ongoing reflection required in narrative inquiry. They also referred to good

narrative "as having an *explanatory, invitational quality*, as having *authenticity*, as having

adequacy, and *plausibility*" (p. 185).

As the writer of the final dissertation narrative, it was up to me to ensure that my

writing met these criteria. For this, I looked to Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), whose list

of four criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of narrative inquiry seemed tailored to

my efforts to bring the same credibility to my PA*t*R dissertation narrative. Richardson and

St. Pierre (2005) first emphasized the importance of creating a narrative that is true to life

and believable to others. They then advocated for the use of creative methods of analysis

that provide an aesthetic experience for the reader. I saw that the nature of our study and the

stories that emerged from the work of The Race Matters Alliance provided what was needed

to produce a believable narrative. To address the use of creative methods, I employed

creative writing techniques in the telling of the stories that are at the heart of our work.

Next, the authors called for a narrative that reflects critical reflexivity. In response to this

suggestion, I worked to capture the complexities revealed as my colleagues and I engaged in self-reflection and dealt with the emotional changes that brings. In this way, the "researcher allows for vulnerabilities and uncertainties that lead to new questions, doubts, and tensions" (Berry & Taylor, 2016, p. 603); an outcome that was in keeping with the tenets of our conceptual framework of the danger of the single story (Adichie, 2009) and our chosen lens of post-structural feminism. Finally, Richardson and Pierre (2005) underscored the importance of the power of the narrative to resonate with the reader. To accomplish this, I used several of the writing modes that the authors suggested, including descriptive-realist writing to bring our story to life, and the analytical-interpretive mode of incorporating theoretical and conceptual literature. By comparing our findings with those of other researchers, I was able to broaden the scope of the narrative and deepen both our own and our readers' understanding of it.

I remained conscious of the aspects of our study that constituted potentially transferrable traits and these were noted in the findings of the study. In all of these ways, I attempted to add legitimacy to our study and to ensure that our work, and that of all involved, had meaning and influence for our school community and for the wider audience beyond it.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

One evening in late February 2020, I composed an email to my study co-participants, Melissa, Nancy, Christopher, and Joyce, asking them to meet me after school the following day in Melissa's middle school guidance office. This was not an unusual request. From the beginning of our Race Matters Alliance work, we would often meet there on short notice to address critical race incidents, or to share new ideas, but the meeting I called for this time was different. Our study had ended almost six months before, and I was currently in the process of analyzing the data I had collected. While looking through some paperwork earlier that evening, I had discovered an old assignment submitted for one of my doctoral classes more than three years earlier. Completed with my then "future" dissertation study co-participants, the assignment represented the first documentation of our ongoing race work on which this dissertation study is based.

At that time, just one year after forming The Race Matters Alliance, I had asked my colleagues to assist me in locating several main goals within our work. Each of us had then labeled these goals in order of the importance we personally attached to them. As I read over this three-year-old assignment, I was overwhelmed by how much had transpired since we had worked on it together. I was eager to share what I had found with the group, and to discuss how our perspectives might have changed over the course of this study.

The next afternoon, I hurried from my classroom as soon as the final bell of the day sounded, hoping to make it up to Melissa's second floor office before the halls became flooded with students. As soon as I entered the stairwell, however, I could see that I was too late. Instantly, I was surrounded by a moving current of noisy adolescents, each one intent on racing down the stairs and out of the building as quickly as possible. I slowly pushed through the crowd

and slipped into Melissa's tiny office, pulling the door closed behind me with a sigh of relief. One by one, my four colleagues made their way into the room after me.

As we gathered around Melissa's small conference table, we were unaware that a global pandemic had already invaded our community. We had no way of knowing that a highly contagious virus was about to upend our daily lives, separating us from each other and from our students for the foreseeable future. Packed tightly together in Melissa's office, we could not have imagined that the threat of COVID19 would soon transform the annoyingly crowded hallways we had just navigated, from spaces to be avoided into spaces to be feared, or that simply by sitting together at Melissa's table we might be posing a serious threat to our lives.

As powerfully as the Novel Coronavirus would affect each one of us attending that meeting, there was an additional societal change on the horizon that would much more specifically influence our race work at the school. The change that was coming was nothing less than a revolution in American race relations that would soon explode in response to the murder of yet another unarmed Black man ("Another Unarmed Black Man Has Died", 2020). Inevitably, it would affect the work of The Race Matters Alliance as the white supremacist elements of our school community would begin to push back harder against us, and we would find ourselves to be far less inclined than we had previously been to temper our reaction to their resistance. Our resolve would be strengthened by the overwhelming increase in the participation of white people in the Black Lives Matter Movement after the murder of George Floyd ("Another Unarmed Black Man Has Died", 2020). This development would also begin to exert a perceptible influence on my data analysis process for this study. I would be able to clearly see the effect that a growing national conversation on race was having on the world beyond our school, and this would ultimately allow me to reimagine the way in which my research might be situated within

the field of educational race relations.

These developments were still in the future, however. That afternoon, as we were quickly and unwittingly moving towards the end of our freedom to come together in person, I still had the luxury of being able to physically witness my colleagues' responses to the all but forgotten assignment I had discovered the previous evening. I had given each of them a copy of the document, and I watched carefully as each person in the room read over theirs. At the onset of this study, we had set out to answer two questions. We had asked how a group of teachers might grow into race collaborators, allies, and activists as they worked in opposition to the institutional and individual racism that characterized their school environment, and we sought to discover what change processes a group of teachers might be able to put in motion within themselves and their school as they worked together to open a space to speak about race. The goals we had developed for the assignment that Melissa, Nancy, Joyce, and Christopher were then reviewing preceded the formation of those research questions, but clearly reflected our attempt to grow as allies and activists against the racist environment of our school and to work for change by fostering race conversations there. I scanned the list of our chosen goals once more myself before asking my colleagues for their reactions. The goals were:

1. Developing an awareness of the overall racist culture of the school and vowing to disrupt it.

2. Recognizing and addressing the communication disconnect between students of color and white faculty and administration.

3. Recognizing the importance of listening and the power of stories and using that knowledge to promote racial awareness.

4. Acknowledging the school's white-washed curriculum and committing to change

it.

5. Acknowledging fear of personal repercussions for challenging racial injustice and working to overcome it.

"Well?" I asked. My question prompted a discussion of our thoughts on the five goals which we had generated for my past assignment and which we were seeing for the first time since then. We all agreed that the goals continued to represent the challenges we faced as aspiring race allies attempting to foster positive change at our school, and that they each grew out of a different area of focus that we had recognized from the beginning as being most important to our work as aspiring allies. School culture, faculty/student communication, the importance of stories (which we now recognized as both individual and institutional), curriculum, and fear of disrupting the status quo were still the areas that challenged us on a daily basis, and threatened to keep us from realizing the goals we had developed three years before.

Our view of the goals had also changed. Our communal and individual experiences with race in the three years since we had created them had convinced us that they would never be fully realized. We were no longer naïve. Although we had formed The Race Matters Alliance a year before doing the assignment and we had by then gained a measure of experience in addressing race issues in our school community, we did not yet have a true understanding of what we were up against. At that time, we were new to the process of establishing relationships with our students of color and their parents around the subject of race, and still had much to learn about the extent of the racism that existed within our school community and the world beyond it. Most importantly, the anti-racist actions we had taken individually and as a group in the time since we first set our five goals down on paper, had expanded our understanding of what working to attain them would actually require of us.

I listened quietly while my four colleagues took a moment to discuss this fact, relaying incidents to back it up. Although they shared several examples of less than successful efforts to change the racist ideas of some of our fellow teachers and students and to alter our own racist behaviors as well, not one of them expressed a desire to stop engaging in our ongoing race work. These four educators and I were different in so many ways, but somehow our work, and especially our communal research, and the documentation of it for this study, had joined us together in a profound commitment to challenge racism at our school in spite of the obstacles we had come to understand that we would inevitably and continually face.

The five goals we had constructed offered us a framework for understanding our commitment to becoming race allies and activists. They provided us with direction at the beginning of our journey. However, the additional years of experience we had gained since we had collaborated on my assignment, coupled with the processes we had gone through in order to document this study, added a layer of understanding to our reading of the goals at our meeting that afternoon. Years after creating them, we recognized that these goals revealed where our journey had taken us, and highlighted our detours and stops along the way. As the lead researcher on this study, I also perceived an additional source of value to be derived from them.

I had been engaged with the study field notes for some time. However, listening to Melissa, Nancy, Joyce, and Christopher discuss the course of this study within the context of these five goals and the focus areas that they addressed, gave me an idea for presenting my findings. I realized that the work we had done and documented over the course of four months constituted a story; a story in which the five of us were all stakeholders. I posited that the story could be effectively told by organizing it around the areas of focus that the goals represented. Each area would represent a section within the story of our efforts to achieve our aspiration of

allyship and personal and institutional change with each of us playing both major and minor roles at different points throughout the story. I theorized that describing the sum of our experiences during the course of the four-month study, the story of that time organized around the five areas of focus that the goals attempted to address, would provide the key to understanding what we had been able to accomplish, illuminate the findings that emerged from the study, and render them valuable for others in the field.

After settling on this concept for the organization of my findings, I made one addition to the form. For a story to be compelling, it is imperative for the reader to come to know and thereby relate to its characters. In this case, I felt that it would be particularly important for our readers to observe each of us in our distinct roles within the study with the added insight provided by our individual racial history biographies. They would then be able to see the race-related changes that we had been able to set in motion, both within ourselves and within the context of our school community. I believed in the power of sharing our unique racial back stories, not just as co-participants in a study, but as Joyce, Nancy, Christopher, Melissa, and myself—relatable human participants in an ongoing real-life drama.

This study was all about stories, and I saw the findings chapter as the compilation of them all. If it were a film, the meeting that took place in Melissa's office at the start of the findings chapter would be the first scene. If it were a film, I could easily imagine the film maker moving on from that first scene to a series of flashbacks detailing the racial back stories of each of us in order to provide context and to offer alternative perspectives of the events depicted. Placed within the findings chapter, our individual stories—the individual racial history biographies of Nancy, Melissa, Christopher, Joyce, and myself, would be entwined within the story of the study itself, just as they were in real life. In this way, those who would read the study

could observe our differing efforts to develop as allies and activists and amongst our stories, they would be more likely to find a perspective to personally relate to. They might therefore be able to imagine a "way in" to their own version of the work.

Although I understood that participant biographies would commonly be part of the methodology chapter of a dissertation, in this case, I believed that including them within the "story" that was the findings chapter would expand the opportunity to reach a wider range of potential allies and activists beyond the confines of this small study.

In adding these written accounts of each of our individual prior racial experiences drawn from the recorded interviews that were conducted with each participant, and which I refer to as "race biographies," to the study findings detailed below, I have aligned my writing approach with that of Richardson and St. Pierre (2005). They support moving beyond the narrow and exclusionary ethnographic rules that, in their view, lead to qualitative writing which has validity, but is not particularly engaging for its readers. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) described our task as creative researchers to be one in which we should "find concrete practices through which we can construct ourselves as ethical subjects engaged in ethical ethnography—inspiring to read and write" (p. 965).

As I composed my own race biography, and those of my co-participants, I used Richardson and St. Pierre's (2005) practice of writing as a method of inquiry. These personal narratives did, as they had suggested, "evoke new questions about self and the subject" (p. 265) within me. Reflecting on and writing about the part that race had played in my personal development and that of my co-participants was revelatory. Understanding the individual journeys of each of the members of our group illuminated the sources of our strengths and weaknesses related to race. It also prompted me to revisit Adichie's (2009) concept of the danger

of the single story, revealed possibilities for avoiding it, and ignited my desire to put my findings down on paper.

No matter how instructional and engaging this novel approach to academic writing might be, that novelty is not enough (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). The narrative must also be trustworthy. The set of criteria that Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) recommended in order to achieve trustworthiness includes a requirement that qualitative writing contribute to its readers' understanding of social life even as it resonates with them in an artistically satisfying way. However, to me, the most important of Richardson and St. Pierre's (2005) criteria was that of retaining researcher subjectivity by holding oneself "accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people" (p. 964). By continually pausing to self-reflect on my methods and motivations while involved in composing these race biographies, I believe that I have, in fact, been able to maintain a position of an "ethical subject engaged in ethical ethnography" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 964) while, at the same time, creating a narrative that is more likely to resonate with my readers.

For the reasons stated above, I chose to begin the body of the findings section of this study with an account of each of the co-participant's developmental experiences with race. To do so I drew from the hour-long personal interviews that were done with each of them as part of the data collection phase of the study as well as from personal observation. Following these five "race biographies," I have shared the findings of the study by telling the story of the ways in which my co-participants and I attempted to grow as allies and activists within the racist environment of our school and how we worked for change by fostering race conversations there.

Co-Participant Race Biographies

Melissa

There must have been something that I knew about Melissa's views on race issues because she was the first of my four study co-participants who I approached with the purpose of recruitment into the future Race Matters Alliance in the spring of 2016. I just have no recollection of any such insight. I had a friendly co-worker relationship with her. She had been our middle school guidance counselor for a few years. She was about the same age as my son. I knew that her father had been a teacher in the elementary school of our district for 40 years before his retirement, but Melissa and I did not know each other well. However, our first conversation regarding my desire to work with three of my students of color to open a space to speak about race was, and continues to be, one of the most memorable of my life.

I approached Melissa in the hallway outside her office and explained my idea. She immediately told me that she was excited that I had asked her to be involved because she had always wanted to do something with the students of color in our school. She said that she had tried, in her position as guidance counselor, to make that happen, but that she just could not get anything off the ground by herself. I remember that the light in that hallway seemed to get brighter for a second. It felt as if something special was happening, and it was. She was right. At least in our district, it was impossible to "do something" substantive on one's own related to race relations.

 I liked Melissa. I knew that the students respected her as well, and I looked forward to working with her, but I had no idea that she would become such an indispensable partner in the race work I was then just aspiring to become involved with.

Melissa lived in a predominantly Black town for her entire life until she moved out of her parents' house after college. She attended a primarily Black elementary school and middle school. She often says that her experience as one of just a handful of white students at her school

prepared her to want to provide support for the students of color at our school. When asked how she first became aware of racial differences, she shared that it was a difficult question for her to answer.

As one of the only white students in the school, she was obviously aware of racial difference, but she chose to answer the question in a different way. She related an incident that she said had "brought to light racial differences" (Interview #1). She recalled that her elementary school teacher warned one of the boys in the class who was misbehaving that she was going to call his mother. The boy then told the class that when he got home his father or mother was going to tell him to go outside and bring back a stick. Melissa admitted to me that she had had no idea what he meant, but she described the rest of the class as nodding in an understanding way and sharing advice on the best way to pick sticks that would not hurt as much. Melissa remembered feeling sorry for the boy and frightened at the same time, but when he ended the classroom conversation by saying that he was going to rush home and put on as many shirts as he could to soften the blows, she became absolutely horrified. The memory is fresh over twenty years later.

Melissa shared another childhood race-related memory that clearly helped her to understand a hurtful and common experience of our students of color. Her teacher showed the film *Roots* (1977) to her elementary school class. Melissa said that she found herself saying that her ancestors were Italian and that she knew that her family had had absolutely nothing to do with slavery. She said that her Black classmates were very involved in watching the film, but she was so uncomfortable with what she was seeing that she wanted no part of it. This experience prepared her to assist our Black students who often complain that whenever a history teacher speaks about slavery, the whole class turns to look at them. They also relate that when the class

topic of discussion is Africa, everyone in the room, including the teacher, asks them questions and does not believe them when they say that they know no more about that continent than they do.

I am better about having these discussions with our students now in part because of what I have learned from Melissa. I am no longer as afraid of saying the wrong thing, and Melissa's confidence in addressing race issues, which stems from her experience, has given me additional confidence. Christopher has concurred with me on this issue, while Joyce, who struggles with dealing with race issues that involve other teachers or administrators, has turned to Melissa for support on numerous occasions.

Melissa did deal with guilt at times for not being able to permanently better the educational experience of our children of color. Once, when we were not getting the support we needed for our students and their parents Melissa lamented that she was sometimes afraid that we were just providing them with false hope. Many of these students were from the town where Melissa grew up which led her to want to help them even more. However, Melissa's strength, in most racial situations, was that she lent her support whenever she could, but readily admitted when she was unable to do so. Situations such as those were uncommon. Melissa's background, her position as our sole middle school counselor, and her competence at that job generally enabled her to satisfy the parents and students of color while managing to navigate the politics and systemic racism that characterized a large segment of our administration.

Of the four co-participants involved with me in this study, Melissa had assumed the most responsibility. I believe this was because we have shared the same dream of improving the educational experience of our students of color from the beginning, and we were both passionate about the work we are doing. In her role as middle school guidance counselor, Melissa meets all

of the incoming students and their parents, and as the director of the peer advisory program, she teaches a class that joins them with upper classmen, thus extending her connection to the students throughout their high school careers as well. Her workload is overwhelming because, in the absence of a middle school administrator, the high school principal and vice principal, the district academic director, the district guidance director, and the superintendent all depend on Melissa to an inordinate degree to be a bridge between themselves, the faculty, and the parents. All of these personal connections served us well as we attempted to advance our Race Matters Alliance agenda, often in the face of extensive resistance from a less than receptive white school community.

Melissa and I are generally in agreement on how to address the challenges that we face, but when we struggle to agree, it is generally over how hard we should push against the systemic racism that we encounter. Melissa is in a much more precarious position than I am in this regard. Although she works closely with each of the different district stakeholders listed above and can sometimes win approval for our initiatives because of her relationships with them, she cannot afford to alienate them. Her job depends on that. Increasingly often, I find myself wanting to abandon diplomacy and to make demands that I know will ultimately be ignored or turned against us in some way. It is difficult to face The Race Matters Alliance students who see us as authority figures and cannot understand why we cannot always make our superiors see the injustices that are being perpetrated against them.

Melissa and I spent a great deal of time discussing strategies for achieving our goals, and sharing our differing views on how to approach the challenges of our work. One approach that I learned from Melissa was to step back and allow the students of color to fight for themselves. She told me that we were not doing any of our students a favor by trying to solve their problems

for them. This was not always successful, but on at least one occasion it resulted in a major advancement for our students. Against my judgement, we encouraged one of our Race Matters Alliance students to pursue approval for designing an ethnic studies class. I had no faith that she would be able to have her proposal accepted, but Melissa encouraged me to let her try and she was right.

In the fall of 2020, a full year ethnic studies course became available to our high school students. I am disappointed that the course will not be taught by a teacher of color, but Melissa has urged me to give the teacher a chance to prove himself and to offer him our support. In this instance, as in many past situations, I will take her advice. Melissa's aim is usually true. I know that she is a strong advocate for our students of color, and whether or not I am always in agreement with her ideas, I have learned from experience that my ideas are often better for being combined with hers.

Christopher

Christopher is well-liked by his middle school science students. They admire his extensive knowledge of the material he teaches and they seem to thrive in the organized and structured atmosphere of his classroom. I have often heard students refer to Christopher as being calm and fair, and his room is filled with students before and after school. Some are there for extra help, but it seems that they gravitate there for the sense of security that they feel in Christopher's presence. Some of them are students of color who share their experiences of racial injustice with him. Before his involvement in the formation of The Race Matters Alliance, Christopher had always reported these incidences of racism to the administration, and he had garnered the trust of his students of color for his prompt and caring handling of such issues, even though they were not always addressed as well as he hoped they would be by the administration.

However, after our first meeting at the home of one of the founding student members of The Race Matters Alliance, Christopher found himself questioning his handling of race issues at the school.

We had just left the meeting and were walking to our cars when I noticed that Christopher had stopped on the front walk of our student's home. I turned and called to him but he stood still, shaking his head. I asked him what was wrong and he answered. "I always thought that I was doing a good job with my students of color. Now I know that I wasn't." He kept repeating the phrase "I just didn't know." That sentence aptly describes Christopher's earliest experiences with race as he related them to me in the interview I conducted with him as part of this study.

Much of Christopher's upbringing seemed designed to keep him from acquiring the sort of knowledge that troubled him as he left that first Race Matters Alliance meeting. He told me that his early childhood was spent in an exclusively white environment. He lived in a white town, went to the white elementary and middle schools there, and, with his family, was a member of a Christian church made up of all white parishioners. Because his small home town did not have its own high school, Christopher traveled three miles to attend the nearest one which happened to be the same high school where he now teaches; the same school that is detailed in this study.

Christopher's roots in the community run deep although he did not actually live in the town. His grandparents were residents, and his grandmother was employed as the high school's first bookkeeper when it opened in 1966. The Christian bible church that Christopher attended with his family is also located in the town and his parents are still members. His background qualifies Christopher to be thought of as a "townie," which gives him certain advantages. He has often spoken up to the power of the school board in defense of teachers during his twenty years

at the school as a union representative throughout the course of several contentious contract

negotiations. He seems to be trusted by the parents, and he is a respected teacher, which is not

the commonly held community view of educators.

Christopher noted in our interview that his first awareness of race took place when a

single Black family joined his church when he was thirteen years old. The family consisted of a

mother and father and five of the most well-behaved children he had ever met. He remembered

his mother expressing admiration for the parenting skills of the mother and father. However, he

told me that he noted a possible element of surprise in his mother's response, as if she did not

expect this type of capability from Black parents. He subsequently took note of some of his

grandparents' racist comments and he began to understand that his family saw people of color as

different from and less than white people.

As a teenager, Christopher worked at a sleep-away bible camp. The camp was attended

by a number of young people of color who were missionary exchange students from other

countries. Christopher was fascinated by their accents and foreign mannerisms. He was

unaccustomed to spending time with people who differed from those who were part of his

family, his school, and his church community. He told me that he remembered how confident

these young people of color were, which surprised him. Christopher had always felt somehow

different; like a fish out of water, and he was far from comfortable with the feeling. He was just

beginning to acknowledge to himself that he was gay, and it would be years before he came out,

even to his family. However, these visiting foreigners, with their aura of self-assurance regarding

their obvious differences, made an impression on Christopher that stayed with him after he

returned home and transitioned from middle to high school.

At that time, there were just a handful of students of color enrolled at the school, and

Christopher immediately noted a difference between them and the missionary exchange students he had recently met at bible camp. He did not detect the same sense of racial self-assurance in the demeanor of these American students of color; no evidence of confidence and pride in their difference. It seemed to Christopher that their race went unnoticed, or at least, unacknowledged, and that that was the way it was expected to be. There did not seem to be any racial tension in the school that he noted. From his inexperienced point of view, the few students of color there just seemed to seamlessly fit in. Only as we spoke years later, did Christopher consider what it must have been like for them to navigate such a white environment. He now acknowledged the huge effort they must have had to exert in order to achieve what he had then observed as their "seamless" integration into the school community.

College was the turning point for Christopher. In a racially and culturally diverse environment, he soon realized that he had been living in a bubble created by his family, his church, and his school. As his world expanded, so did his sense of his sexuality, but when he came out to his parents he saw that he had no choice but to distance himself from them. At the age of 19 he began to live on his own which opened his eyes to the world around him and to his true self. He remembers speaking to a Black college classmate about his predominantly Black church and realizing for the first time that there was variation in religious practices. He listened to students of different races and ethnicities in class and became aware of different points of view and of the existence of bias and injustice. Later, as a student teacher, Christopher heard his cooperating teacher lose her temper when a student called a classmate "gay." He told me that he had never heard her raise her voice before and was amazed at the fact that she was able to so quickly shut the offensive comment down without a moment's hesitation.

Through the course of our interview it became evident that all of these experiences

opened Christopher's eyes to the existence of injustice and undoubtedly contributed to his ability to address it in his life today, but I also came to realize that the lessons of his early life still run deep. Christopher noted that because of his cooperating teacher's guidance, he had soon been able to readily address injustice in his own classroom, but he admitted that it was not until our students and their families schooled us at our first Race Matters Alliance meeting that he recognized the extent of systemic racism in our school. He told me that their words had jolted him into awareness, but that he did not achieve a full understanding of what they meant until we attended events where we heard speakers of color, including Ijeoma Oluo and Theodora Lacey, urge us to wake up and stop waiting for them to fix white privilege and white supremacy. He was motivated by these activists telling us that those were white problems. Since coming to this revelation, Christopher has said that he has been determined to do the necessary research and to have the conversations that are needed to meet his responsibilities as a white ally.

As Christopher's colleague in The Race Matters Alliance work that we documented for this study, I know that it was not that easy for him. Because of the "insider" status that Christopher enjoys as a "townie," he said that he felt somewhat protected. This sense of security allowed him to speak out publicly against the injustice he often sees the school board and the community inflict upon the teachers, but to overtly challenge the systemic racism experienced by our students of color is a different story. The community might not think highly of the teachers, but we are all white. Addressing racial difference is much more dangerous. Christopher is also conscious of the fact that homosexuality is feared by a large portion of the community, and seen as unacceptable by the members of the Christian bible church to which he still has strong social ties.

Although he does not try to hide his sexuality, Christopher does not call attention to it

with his students or colleagues. The interesting thing is that the clues are there. Christopher has never been married and does not have children. He has a rainbow decal on his truck and during a long-term relationship with a partner he wore a wedding band on his ring finger, but many in the community never allowed themselves to acknowledge the obvious. It is not unusual for a teacher or a parent to suggest that they know a woman who he might want to meet. I once overheard a group of Black students talking about Christopher, who they greatly admire. One of the boys asked, "Remember when we thought for a while that Mr. Cerillo was gay?" The other students in the group all laughed heartily at his question and at what they saw as the ludicrousness of that idea.

Christopher's story reflects the complex nature of the systemic racism and gender and sexuality discrimination that exists in our school community. Documenting his personal experiences has helped me to understand his reticence in taking on more of a leadership role as one of the five founding teachers of The Race Matters Alliance and as co-participants in this study. Before doing so, I sometimes became frustrated that he was not as eager to address some of our fellow teachers regarding racist behavior, or to confront administrators on their obvious mishandling of race issues. I now see that my frustration reflected a single story of what a race ally and activist should be. Each of us brings a different background to the process and experiences the journey differently. Avoiding a single story of the role of race ally and activist allows me to analyze our study data from alternative perspectives and to recognize the findings that emerge through a broader lens.

Nancy

Nancy's middle school language arts students often report that her classroom is place where they feel welcome. She is at first mildly feared, then respected, and ultimately revered by

her students of all races and ethnicities. She expects them to work hard and holds them

accountable, but she also makes each of them feel heard and appreciated. During her classes, she

easily slips in and out of African American vernacular English, and often sprinkles her lessons

with fluent Spanish, thus creating a classroom environment that is comfortable for the majority

of her students.

Nancy's class is challenging. It is my impression that her grasp of her subject is deep and

her passion for literature is seemingly limitless. Soon after reading the novel *The Fault in our*

Stars (Greene, 2012) with her class, Nancy embarked on a trip that included a stop at each of the

geographical locations within the book. She detailed her journey on social media so that her

students could follow her progress and travel virtually across Europe and the United States along

with her. Providing unforgettable experiences such as this for her students is the norm for Nancy.

She spends her free time attending nationwide book and author events, introducing herself to

well-known Young Adult (YA) authors, and somehow convincing them to visit our school for a

fraction of their normal fees.

Nancy always goes to great lengths to make learning fun, but she also demands that her

students address topics that are often difficult for them to face. Many of the authors that Nancy

brings to the school are men and women of color, and their books deal with social injustice

which many members of our school community have always thought of as something that is best

ignored. Nancy is not afraid to confront discrimination of any kind in her classroom, and she has

fiercely defended her choice of literature when challenged. Once, when a parent demanded that

Nancy remove a book from her well-stocked and personally funded classroom library, she

contacted the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), obtained the information she

needed regarding the rules against censorship, and successfully defended her use of the book

against the parent as well as the rattled administration.

Nancy's students seem to feel comfortable in her classroom, but it is her students of color who view it as a safe haven from the systemic racism that they are faced with on a daily basis. Each morning before school, they gather in Nancy's room to socialize with her and with each other before separating from the group to go to classes where they often find themselves completely outnumbered by the white students in the room. One morning, when Nancy was uncharacteristically late to school, she found the students who usually met in her room huddled together in the stairwell because there was no other place in the building where they felt safe enough to congregate.

When I first joined with the original student members of The Race Matters Alliance, they provided me with the names of the white teachers they wanted me to ask to join us in creating a space to speak about race at our school. Although they were already juniors at the time, these girls had maintained their relationship with Nancy since middle school, and they did not hesitate to ask that she be included in our endeavor. She, in turn, did not hesitate to join us.

There is no doubt that Nancy's own experience with race has made her sensitive to the challenges faced by her students of color. Nancy is of mixed heritage herself. Her mother is half Japanese, while her father is of Italian and Russian descent. Nancy's parents are divorced, and her mother raised her in the same small suburban town where she also had grown up, and where she continues to live. Although Nancy identifies as white and does not look Asian, her mother does. When Nancy was a child, her classmates knew that her mother was half Japanese, and they would sometimes pull up the corners of their eyes to taunt Nancy, or make racist comments under their breath about Asians. Having felt the sting of this type of bullying racism, Nancy is very aware of it and she is extremely clear with the students that it will not be tolerated in her

classroom. Nancy now has her own home in the town where she grew up and where her mother still lives. It is only a few miles from the school where we teach and many of its residents share the same working-class conservative politics and racial biases as do many of the members of our school community.

Interestingly, the only other diverse students Nancy remembers growing up with in what she calls her "all-white town" were also mixed race. "My friend was half-Filipino. There was another girl who was part Puerto Rican, and another girl who was part Spanish, but that was essentially it" (Interview #4). There were no Black people in Nancy's community. She was exposed to Black culture at her dance class, however, and she was immediately drawn to it. She became friends with her Black classmates and she began to watch Black television shows and movies, and to listen to Black music. She did not socialize with her Black friends beyond their dance class interactions, but once she entered high school everything changed. Her small town did not have a high school and she was bussed to a much larger, more urban district with a very diverse student population. She spent her time with students of different races and developed friendships, but she noted with some surprise in her interview for this study that they never engaged in conversations about race.

It was when she entered high school that Nancy first became aware of her family's racist tendencies. She now wonders if their biases were always evident, but that they only became visible to her due to her growing friendships with people of color. As a freshman, she attended a dance with a boy who was Haitian and Puerto Rican American. Soon after that, Nancy's mother showed her relatives pictures of Nancy and her date at the dance. Her aunt commented that she would not have let her daughter go with the boy. With characteristic wit and feistiness, Nancy shot back that it was a good thing that she was not her mother. Not long after this exchange,

Nancy was visiting her father's family and was shocked to hear her relatives casually using racial slurs that she had never heard before. She remembered that her first thought was "Wow, you are all really racist" (Interview #4).

Nancy related that it was the work we first did for The Race Matters Alliance that prompted her to have this same type of incredulous reaction regarding many of her colleagues at our school. She explained that she had always just assumed that they addressed the needs of their diverse students, but when our group opened a space to speak about race with our students of color and their parents, she realized that the classrooms of many of her colleagues were not the safe spaces that she had imagined them to be. Since becoming aware of the depth of this problem, she has committed herself to addressing it through our continued work together as the teacher leaders of The Race Matters Alliance, as well as through her former role as an ambassador for NCTE, and her present position as the Advocacy Chair of the organization's New Jersey chapter. Haunted by the observation of one of her Black students that there was not one adult in a position of power within our district who looked like him, Nancy has made it her aim to research the ways in which we might successfully bring about the hiring of a more diverse teaching staff at our school.

Although Nancy had always been comfortable with her students of color, and she had created a classroom environment in which they felt respected and heard, she shared that it was not until she was engaged in her plus-30 graduate studies that she began to read the work of academics of color and to develop a broader awareness of what these students were going through. She stated that her studies, along with her racial engagement with the students and parents of color through The Race Matters Alliance, led to her desire to become more of a racial ally and activist.

In her role as one of the teacher leaders behind The Race Matters Alliance, Nancy is seen as the literary specialist. Even before her involvement with our group, Nancy read constantly, both fiction and non-fiction, and connected her students with well-known poets and authors. For our group, she has focused on race-related literature as well as writings on race in education. She is well-connected on social media and keeps us aware of what is going on with today's students of color regarding their racial experiences at school.

Nancy is an accomplished speaker, and she backs up her oratory skills with facts. At all of our Race Matters Alliance meetings she drives the conversation on whatever issue we are involved in addressing. In light of these strengths, I found it surprising as we progressed in our race work together that Nancy seemed less inclined than Melissa and I were to directly engage with the administration on issues of race. I have since concluded that this reticence is because Nancy's classroom is the area where she works hardest for racial equity, and the district administration has been known to make things difficult for teachers who frankly speak truth to power.

Last year, Nancy called out an example of incompetence on the part of the curriculum department and in short order was excluded from teaching a reading class for which the entire staff knew her to be the most qualified teacher. I believe that Nancy would repeat her actions in that situation because she knew that they would bring about positive change, and that the consequences would affect her alone. However, being aware of the attitudes of the school board members on the subject of race, I can see that she would be reluctant to give the administration an opportunity to turn its attention to the way in which she addresses racial issues with her students and to begin to question her practices. Nancy's students and the culture of her classroom are her primary concerns. She would never want to jeopardize them.

As I had done with Christopher, I reflected on Nancy's motivations through the lens of "The danger of a single story" (Adichie, 2009), and recognized that each member of our group brings both personal constraints as well as individual strengths to the race work that we do together. I realized that it would be impractical to insist upon a single interpretation of the role of ally and activist, and that to do so in our case would only serve to weaken the scope of our combined influence on the systemic racism which we are attempting to disrupt.

Joyce

By her own admission, Joyce, one of the high school English teachers, sometimes still struggles to understand her role as a Race Matters Alliance teacher leader. Although she was chosen by the three founding student members of the group to take on a position of leadership, she did not feel that she was ready to do so. She was wrong of course. The students chose her for good reason, and I have found her contribution to our work to be one of the keys to our success.

It is true that Joyce did not have a great deal of exposure to racial diversity in her life. In fact, she enjoyed a privileged childhood in an affluent, almost exclusively white town just a few miles from our school community. As she stated in her interview for this study, however, she was the victim of emotional and sexual abuse by a close family member which she believes has left her with an understanding of what it feels like to be powerless against injustice and victimization. That understanding is, in her view, the force behind her drive to address social injustice in an effort to lessen the pain of others.

Joyce's capacity for empathy is well-known within the school community. Students and colleagues alike are drawn to her for her ability to provide comfort and her willingness to listen to and help everyone with their problems and concerns. Many of those who turn to Joyce are her students of color, which was no doubt what led to her being recommended for a leadership

position with The Race Matters Alliance. That recommendation left Joyce feeling that she could provide those students with little more than comfort, however, since she saw herself as inexperienced and even fearful when it came to addressing issues of race. When I interviewed her for this study, it became clear that Joyce had in fact been faced with an important formative racial situation in the past and, through her work with The Race Matters Alliance, she was just beginning to come to terms with it.

Although there were no students of color in her elementary school, Joyce's older sister became best friends with a Black boy through their sports activities at the town YMCA. The young boy became a fixture at their home for years, and in Joyce's eyes he was like a brother, although, like Nancy and her school friends of color, race was never a topic of discussion between them. When Joyce's sister was a junior in high school, she made her confirmation which was, according to Joyce, a very big deal for their Italian American family. Joyce's parents planned a large party, but told their daughters with great sadness that their Black friend, the boy who had by then been like a son to them for years, could not be a part of the celebration because their grandfather, who happened to be the person who had abused them, would be there. Joyce's parents told them that their grandfather was very "traditional" and that although they did not share his views, they also did not want to put their friend in the uncomfortable position of being at the mercy of a racist.

Joyce does not even remember if her family had any conversation about this with their friend. She believes that she normalized their decision, agreeing with her parents that it was just done to protect him. She only remembers that it marked the end of their relationship with him, and that somehow she was able to put it out of her mind. Joyce told me that the message her parents communicated to her that day was that avoiding conflict and confrontation was more

important than friendship and doing what was right. She shared that she had been able to avoid

questioning the loss of her family friend throughout the years, until she began to work with The

Race Matters Alliance.

In high school, Joyce became more and more interested in Black culture. She listened to

Hip Hop music, and dated an Italian American boy who had recently immigrated to this country,

settling in the one small Black neighborhood of her overwhelmingly white town. Her boyfriend

adopted the clothing style of the Black boys who were his neighbors, and Joyce recalls that at

Christmas, she and her father would be the only white customers in the store in the mall where

they went to buy Ecko-Unlimited and Triple Five Sole clothes for him. Joyce did not change her

look, but was completely comfortable with her boyfriend's clothing style.

After high school, Joyce attended an affluent East Coast university where most of her

fellow students were extremely wealthy and competitive about the way they dressed. They wore

authentic Gucci and Prada clothing and looked down on anyone who did not. It was the first time

that Joyce had felt ostracized and she reacted by defaulting to wearing the same brands of

clothing that her high school boyfriend had worn. Not only were they familiar, but they made her

feel comfortable with exhibiting individuality in her new and impossibly competitive

environment.

As we continued our interview, Joyce related another key experience; this one related to

issues of both race and social justice in general which suggested to me that there had always

been signs that she would be a strong candidate to join my colleagues and me in our commitment

to attempt to develop into allies and activists. I discovered that Joyce had, in her previous

teaching position in the same affluent town where she was raised, been active in working to

establish a women's studies course. This work had led to a planning discussion with the one

Black teacher in the school. He hoped to establish an ethnic studies course and suggested to Joyce that they team up to present their ideas. Joyce was amenable to the idea, but left her job to join our district before their work could officially begin. Her willingness to consider a social justice alliance with the single teacher of color at her school belies her claim that she lacks the courage to wholeheartedly pursue active race allyship.

It is true that Joyce is an extremely conciliatory person who has taken her parents' lesson on the value of avoiding confrontation to heart. I have seen her desire to steer clear of conflict disrupted, however, by her commitment to making a difference in the lives of her students of color and others who are oppressed. Although Joyce finds standing up to her family's and friends' ignorant comments about race to be her biggest challenge, my colleagues and I have watched her steadily become more comfortable with doing so. She has on more than one occasion countered ignorant racial comments made by two of her close friends who also teach at our school. After these incidents, she has explained to me that in order to do this she has had to deal with pain, embarrassment, and fear, but she thinks of her actions as beginning the process of "unpacking a lifetime of small moments that, without my acknowledgement, reflect my inherent racist tendencies" (Interview #3).

Within the research on the characteristics of allies and activists that I examined in the literature portion of this study, I found evidence of a common desire amongst them to speak up for those without power (Munin & Speight, 2010), and an ability to trace the roots of their empathy and understanding of others' oppression to their own past experiences with injustice (Landreman et al., 2007; Paccione, 2000). Both of these traits are present in Joyce. Both are rooted in her past, but it is her profound ability for self-reflection that is now allowing her to examine those past traumas and to thereby become the type of ally that she aspires to be.

Finally, I believe that Joyce's greatest contribution to The Race Matters Alliance is the connection that she has with the entire staff. Everyone likes and trusts Joyce, and although they know that she is a leader within The Alliance, some of those who take issue with our work have shared their opposition to our efforts with Joyce, perhaps because they cannot really accept that she shares our views. Melissa and I believe that their candidness with Joyce has been an invaluable asset for us. If these teachers did not voice their defenses of their racist views to Joyce, we would not know what we are up against or from which direction it would be coming.

Somehow, Joyce has an ability to diffuse these thinly veiled expressions of hatred, without scaring the complainers away entirely. Because she is friends with almost everyone on Facebook, Joyce has also been able to capture and anonymously report a male school employee who posted an image of himself wearing a hijab, or another who uploaded an image of a two people with their eyes pulled up with tape, drinking Corona beers. Neither of these employees were teachers, but, knowing that this type of hatred is so close to us, has allowed us to choose the type of programs we might present at our Race Matters Alliance meetings, or to use the incidents to push the administration to take more of a stand against racial bias.

In a direct interaction with Joyce, one of our teachers complained to her after attending a Race Matters Alliance author visit/book discussion group. He told her that he was tired of the students of color complaining and that he wanted to tell them that they should dedicate themselves to academic achievement which, in his eyes, is a sure way for them to "get what they want." If Joyce had not been on the receiving end of this teacher's rant, we would have thought that the author visit was completely well-received, and we would not have begun to work with the administration on teacher professional development on race that directly addresses this type of misperception. Joyce's ability to avoid a single story of this type of ignorance makes it

possible for us to be more effective as allies and activists within our school, as it allows her to broaden her conception of what the role of a race ally and activist really entails.

Janice

As the lead researcher and author of this study, I have spent a great deal of time reflecting on my own racial identity development. This line of inquiry has always led me to the conclusion that I am a very unlikely candidate for the roles of racial ally and activist. My life experiences have been riddled with racism, and the fact that I was somehow unable or unwilling to address this for the better part of my life is stunning to me now. As I continue to pursue the goal of achieving greater racial literacy (Stevenson, 2014), I become more and more convinced that if I am in any way capable of contributing to positive racial change, anyone can do the same.

I am a first generation Italian American on my father's side, and I, like many Italian American children in the 1960s, spent every Sunday of my childhood at my grandparents' house. When I was about 10 years old, their neighborhood began to diversify. Many of the older Italians were passing away, and their children were quickly selling off their homes, fearful of the influx of poor people of color. My grandparents were the last to leave, and they lost most of the equity in their home as a result.

I remember whispered racial slurs being used at our Sunday dinner table as my extended family complained about the Black families who were moving into the neighborhood. They lamented the tearing down of their friends' former homes directly across the street from ours to make way for a Black church. I understood their fear. My cousins and I could no longer walk alone down the block to our family's soda shop because a group of Black boys had started to push us down and take our ice cream cones as we made our way home.

My grandmother began to accompany us to the soda shop then, with her hands gripped

tightly around our arms. In her grip, we felt an unspoken rage to which we were unaccustomed, but that we internalized and somehow felt compelled to adopt for ourselves. But, for me, it was not as easy as it was for my cousins to do so. I was the only grandchild who had not lived in my grandparents' home. Both of my cousins grew up there, and my sister had spent her first five years in the house, but I was not yet born when my parents moved out to make room for my newly married aunt and uncle. As a result, I did not have as much of an emotional attachment to the place, and, unlike the rest of my relatives, I was excited by the Black culture I was beginning to be exposed to by our new neighbors.

After Sunday lunch, while my family lingered at the table commiserating with one another over the changes taking place outside on the street, I snuck away to the front porch where I sat and watched the members of the new church greeting each other happily as they arrived for their weekly service. As a child who was bristling under the somber weight of 1960's American Catholicism, the exuberant voices and joyously loud musical accompaniment that I heard coming from the one story cinderblock building across the street was intoxicating.

At that time, I was being taught by nuns who were dressed from head to toe in heavy black habits. Only their unsmiling faces were visible, framed by the white border of their veils. These women resented having to instruct my fellow public school classmates and me who attended their weekly religious classes at the local Catholic school. Their derogatory comments about our public school education and frequent smacks to our hands with wooden rulers when we struggled to answer their theology queries made it abundantly clear that they believed we were already living a life of sin. What I saw and heard happening at the new church across the street from my grandparents' home was nothing like the religion these nuns were offering. This religion overwhelmed my senses and filled me with joy which was something that was in short

supply in my young life.

Like my study co-participant Joyce, I was enduring the emotional and sexual abuse of a close family member, and the happiness that I witnessed pouring from the Black church that had suddenly arrived in my family's neighborhood offered a welcome respite from my sadness. My joy and excitement were tempered however, by the shock I felt at the living conditions of many of the Black children who were moving onto our street. Houses once lived in by one family were now occupied by three or four. I watched the children who lived in these crowded houses as they played in the once manicured yards that were now deteriorating and littered with trash. They wore worn and often ill-fitting clothes and shoes, and had none of the bicycles and other toys that were owned by every white child that I knew. Where my family saw an endless stream of shiftless interlopers who were out to destroy their neighborhood, I saw children like me who were somehow in desperate need.

I believe that the awareness of Black culture and racial inequity I gained from observing the changes that had come to my grandparents' neighborhood, laid the groundwork for my future aspiration to become a race ally and activist. It also invested me with some understanding of the feelings of the townspeople in the school district upon which this study is based. A great many of the great grandparents and grandparents of the students I now teach were the product of white flight that took place from the city where they had lived since their arrival from Italy. It is now over fifty years since that flight took place, but the distrust and resentment harbored by their descendants still runs deep. Like my father's family, these people did not care about the injustices that the Black families who moved northward from the Jim Crow South were trying to escape. They did not care about the legacy of slavery or the hopelessness of poverty that it had generated. In their minds, their homes and gardens, as well as their way of life, had been

beautiful until these people of color came to town and destroyed them.

When my parents left my grandparents' home, they moved to an almost exclusively white community which is where I was born. Here, the Black culture that I was so drawn to in my grandparents' neighborhood was absent. In our town, I knew that there was one block known as "the colored street," but in my twelve years of public schooling, I encountered less than a dozen students of color, and I became closely acquainted with none of them. I do not believe the subject of race ever came up, at home or at school. I did have a vague awareness of the civil Rights movement. I had heard of Martin Luther King, and I remember knowing that he was killed, but I do not have any recollection of feeling anything in reference to his death. I do remember sometimes seeing brief black and white images of racial violence and demonstrations on television before my parents hurriedly changed the station. I heard some anxious whispering from the other adults in my life about the fact that there were riots and even tanks in a nearby city within our state (Rojas & Atkinson, 2017), but somehow this seemed to be far from our world.

 I was particularly aware, however, of a silent but palpable fear emanating from my mother. She was from the rural hills of North Carolina, and in retrospect, I realize that she was a quiet racist. I remember only two times that she said anything about people of color. Once, when I was in high school, rebellious, exposed to the world by a young and free-thinking English teacher, and now fully aware of the racial inequity around me, I lamented the unfair treatment of people of color. My mother quietly but firmly told me that "colored people" had come a long way.

Around that same time, I came across a picture of the trailblazing Black model Beverly Johnson in a magazine (Klein, 2010). I showed it to my mother and sighed that I would love to

be Black and beautiful like her. My mother raised her voice in way that I had not heard before and told me that I should never say anything like that again. There was no direct statement of her feelings, but my mother's message was clear. Without actually saying so, she communicated to me that we, as white people, were superior to anyone whose skin color was darker than ours. I obviously heard my mother because I remember this incident clearly, but I gave the subject absolutely no further thought at the time. I am now convinced that I was programmed by the white society of which I was a part to be intimidated by a response like my mother's, and to allow it to silence me. It would not be the last time that I would do so.

Almost thirty years passed before the subject of race again entered my awareness. I had been an art teacher in my present district for seven years, but race was never an issue because, as I have previously mentioned, the town was almost completely white, and its residents were happy to keep it that way. They had recently been forced, however, to agree to the designation of their high school as a "choice" institution. Our doors would now be open to a set number of students from throughout the county who were chosen by lottery to attend the school. This arrangement was entered into out of monetary necessity. The schools from which the "choice" students came paid our district well for this opportunity. Many of the townspeople were unhappy with the increasingly diverse student population of the school. A former student of mine commented that the school was getting "mighty dark," and one student's grandmother, who worked as a checker at the local grocery story greeted me by saying, "Oh hello, Dear. How's the N****r school today?"

It must have been uncomfortable for the "choice" students to be so racially outnumbered in a new school that had not one single faculty member of color. They did not express their feelings to me, however, and I was astonishingly oblivious to the possibility of any distress on

their part. In fact, I remember thinking only that coming to our town was a good opportunity for them to attend a more highly ranked school than those in their home sending districts.

The year after the "choice" students arrived, a group of them asked if I would act as the moderator of the step team they were forming. I agreed, and after two months, the team was ready to present their routine at our upcoming pep rally. I was so impressed with the drive that these girls had exhibited throughout their practice sessions, and I thought that their presentation was incredibly upbeat and innovative. I asked for and received permission from the administration to allow them to perform.

The step team performance was a great hit with the students. It was something totally new to most of them in those days before social media. The girls on the team were thrilled with the reception they received as was I. Shortly after the performance, I was summoned to the principal's office. He was clearly agitated, and asked me how I could have allowed a performance such as the one put on by the step team. He told me that I would have to disband the group because they were too "ethnic." I was shocked and saddened, but my overwhelming emotion was fear. I was fearful of the reaction of the other teachers, coaches, and administrators who were all white. I instinctively knew that I had broken the same type of white code that my mother had subconsciously promoted when she told me to never express a desire to be a person of color, or when she answered my charges of racial injustice by telling me that "colored people" had "come a long way."

In retrospect, the worst thing about this incident was that I allowed my panic to overtake me so completely that I ran away from the situation entirely. I told the girls that we were going to have to disband the team, but I do not remember giving them any reason for having to do so, and I have no memory of their reactions. My fear of the all-white school administration, faculty, and

staff left no room for me to consider the feelings of my students. Even now, years later, I am still overcome with shame when I think of how I treated them. My reluctance to address the racism at play in my principal's direction was fueled by the lifelong socialization that I had received as an inhabitant of a white supremacist culture, and I succumbed to the comfort and pressure of its seduction (DiAngelo, 2018). By doing so, I was complicit in reinforcing its power over my students. However, over time, I have discovered that being able to acknowledge my insensitive conduct around the subject of race has enabled me to be less judgmental of the unconscious racist behavior that I so often witness in my teaching colleagues, and to be more proactive in sharing what I have learned with them. Most importantly, the ability to engage in racial self-examination has made it easier for me to acknowledge the weakness that I continue to exhibit in my approach to the race work I am doing with my study co-participants and to attempt to overcome it.

Unlike Nancy, who is fearless in addressing issues of race in her classroom, but less daring in challenging the administration on the subject, I find myself to be the opposite. I charge into confrontations with my superiors and colleagues regarding anything to do with race, yet, I am reluctant to address the topic in my classes. Through reflection, I have come to realize that, just as I perceive Nancy to be apprehensive about challenging our administrators regarding race out of fear of being constrained in the way she deals with the topic in her classroom, I must acknowledge that I fear parental pushback for directly addressing race within my own.

I see my role as the leader of The Race Matters Alliance to be the one that I must protect, and, right or wrong, I view being racially outspoken in my classroom as an action that could put that role at risk. For different reasons, then, I believe that Nancy and I both harbor apprehensions about being silenced, although I wish it were not so.

The scholarship on the administrative barriers encountered by white teacher race allies does bear out these concerns. Phillips et al. (2019) described the pressure put on their participants as a result of their anti-racist teaching practices as posing legitimate challenges to their college level teaching positions. One participant described the situation by saying, "I'm sort of perceived by the administration as too outspoken on [anti-racism] issues and therefore somewhat dangerous" (p. 8). At the secondary education level, Berchini's (2016) first-year teacher participant abandoned her anti-racist teaching when pressured by her supervisor despite the fact that she had received extensive preparation on the subject during her college program and was eager to put that training into practice.

I am aware that the type of thinking detailed above, in which I reflect on my own racial motivations and those of my colleagues like Nancy is observational speculation. However, my involvement in this study has convinced me that it is necessary to reflect in this way if we are to be able to understand and develop our personal racial identities as well as each other's, and to thereby determine our most effective roles in the work that we are attempting to do together. To tell this story, it has been important for us to be in constant communication with each other as well as with the racially diverse allies and activists with whom we have become close through our work. We believe that it is through these relationships that we have been able to create change. I recognize that I must now take what we have discovered and compare it to findings in the existing literature in order to place ourselves and our work within that scholarship. I theorize that only in this way can we ascertain the changes that we have been able to make in ourselves and our school, and those that we hope to be able to realize going forward.

Individual Study Findings

In the following section, using a narrative analysis approach combined with thematic

analysis, I present the individual findings of this study. I do so by relating and analyzing the events that transpired within the four-month segment of time that we documented our on-going Race Matters Alliance work. The co-participants, whose race biographies are sketched out above, play various roles as I follow the story by analyzing the results of the written narratives that they each composed four times throughout the study, as well as the record of the three planning meetings that we held, and the lead researcher weekly journal that I kept. I also examined the critical incident file in which I recorded the race-related disciplinary incidents that occurred at the school during this time. The combination of these field note collection tools allowed me to construct an easy-to-follow framework for the study narrative as well as an effective showcase through which the roles of each of the co-participants become clearly observable.

Each of the study findings is presented below within a separate section. The section headings reflect the focus areas of importance to race work within which my colleagues and I developed goals for ourselves as aspiring allies early in our work together, and that we revisited during the meeting described at the beginning of this chapter. Each finding is listed as a subheading of the particular area from which it emerged. As mentioned above, the focus areas containing our goals for ourselves as aspiring allies were first developed when we worked together on one of my early doctoral assignments. They were the product of our communal examination of The Race Matters Alliance efforts that we had made in the first year of our work. In looking back on those early efforts, we had recognized five areas that we had unconsciously been drawn to focus upon in our race work up until that point. Within the areas of school culture, faculty/student communication, stories (which we later understood to be both individual and institutional), curriculum, and fear of disrupting the status quo, we had posited that our goals for

growing as race allies could be realized. In fulfilment of my class assignment, we had documented our goals within those five areas of focus. However, it was not until years later, after completing this study, and as I was analyzing the field notes that it yielded, that I came across that list of long-forgotten focus area goals and that I reconsidered them in light of the study data. I realized that it was within those focus areas that all of our efforts towards realizing our goals had taken place, and that from them, our findings had emerged. In the three years that passed after the development of those focus area goals for my assignment, and throughout the four months of the formal dissertation study that followed, we did not consciously address them. However, after rediscovering the assignment and sharing it with my co-participants, we realized that we had been correct in detailing those areas as the locus of our goals as aspiring allies. It is natural, then, that the findings of this study should have emerged from those five areas; the areas where we have automatically concentrated our efforts as aspiring allies from the beginning. They, and the findings of this study are inherently linked, and I have chosen to divide this chapter into headings and sub-headings that reflect that relationship. I feel that it makes a contribution to the work of aspiring race allies in the field of education to be able to see the focus areas that might be common to their fellow aspiring allies at work in other schools, and which they should therefore prepare themselves to address. It is my hope that in doing so, they would be able to learn from our experience in those areas, and to gain valuable insights into the nature of race work from the findings of this study.

Focus Area: School Culture

Finding: White Affinity Groups Are Effective for Fostering Awareness and Anti-Racist Action. When I gathered with my co-participants in Melissa's office for our first planning meeting of this study, we had already been leading The Race Matters Alliance

for three years. We knew each other even before we began that work. However, broadening our relationships with one another to include conversations on race, sharing our aspirations of becoming race allies, and then acting communally on those aspirations, had created a different kind of bond between us. Together, we offered each other a safe space, free of judgement, to share our anti-racist plans and accomplishments, as well the apprehensions and insecurities that accompanied them.

Melissa, Joyce, Nancy, Christopher and I did not refer to ourselves as a white affinity group. My research had led me to think of such groups as teacher professional development constructs that had little resemblance to the work in which we were engaged. However, in examining the research texts gathered for this study against the scholarship on the subject, it became evident that our interactions with one another did in fact meet the criteria for such a classification.

 As I read through the transcripts of our three planning meetings, and each co-participant's monthly narratives, along with my weekly journal entries and the critical incident files, I saw how closely our group dynamic coincided with Michael and Conger's (2009) definition of a white affinity group. In the ups and downs we went through during the course of our work, and the way in which we came together to process them, I recognized the authors' "assembly of people gathered with others who share a common element of identity in order to explore, celebrate, sustain and process experiences around that identity" (p. 56).

In regards to race, whiteness was our common element of identity, but unlike the white affinity groups described by Michael and Conger (2009), Denevi and Pastan (2006), and Reason and Davis (2005) who imagined these groups being run by researchers or professional development experts, our group was entirely self-led. My status as lead researcher of the study

did place me in a position of guidance, but my additional role as co-participant distanced me from my research at the time. As we were preoccupied with working and documenting our progress, we were not thinking of how our private group interactions might be classified. Only now, as I look back on our journey, do I find it important to describe us as a white affinity group in order to provide a model for those who are intent on pursuing a path similar to our own.

Michael (2015) viewed white affinity groups as a less threatening context in which white teachers could engage in sustained inquiry around race. As members of such a group, we were able to help each other sort out the challenges and doubts that we encountered in our individual racial inquiry efforts without fear of censure. The most valuable tool that grew out of our affinity group was an ongoing group text thread which we named the Race Matters Chat. We used this form of communication daily to call out critical incidents, ask for advice, compare notes, and to keep each other informed on anything related to our Race Matters Alliance work. The chat also served as, and continues to be, a way for us to connect socially, and through the contact that it provided, we grew closer as aspiring allies, activists, and friends. The group text thread became a safe, private, and readily accessible life line during the most difficult challenges related to our race work, and an invaluable source of support throughout the course of the study.

In addition to our three planning meetings, my co-participants and I also often met in Melissa's office on short notice to address critical race incidents as they occurred or when one of us had an idea that demanded a more in-depth group discussion than could be had through the Race Matters Chat. These meetings were documented in my weekly research journal. In retrospect, it was during both these spontaneous meetings, as well as those that were planned, that our collaboration as a group of white teachers attempting to disrupt their school's systemic racism was most effective. Each of us brought a different approach to the table, and our

individual and communal strengths grew with each critical incident or innovative idea that we addressed. In this way, we were able to fulfill the belief of Denevi and Pastan (2006) and Michael and Conger (2009) in the power of white affinity groups to develop more complex thinking skills in aspiring white allies. Through the development of these skills, our awareness of the systemic racism within our school community grew, and supported by our fellow affinity group members, we became more willing to challenge it, both on our own and as a group. It is this observation that has led me to conclude that within white affinity groups, its members' racial awareness and anti-racist actions are facilitated.

At our first planning meeting, I described to my colleagues the tools that we would be using to document our work over the coming four months of the study. There was no mention of the term "white affinity group." I did tell them, however, that my research had failed to uncover any other entities such as ours—a group of white teachers attempting on their own, without guidance, to create positive racial change within themselves and their school community.

After acknowledging that we seemed to be covering new ground, we spent some time reflecting on our progress to date, and touched on the importance that we each placed on having each other's support. I reminded Melissa that when I first approached her to work with me, she had told me that she had tried on her own to open a space to speak about race at the school, but her efforts had been unsuccessful. I asked her why working within our group was different. She responded that sometimes you just need someone else to "throw things out to, even if you know the answer; just to kind of say it out loud and hear someone else say, 'You're right. You know what you are doing'" (Planning Meeting Transcript #1). I countered by saying that although I valued the encouragement I gained from the group, I often did not feel confident because we had never done what we were attempting to do. Christopher contributed an insightful observation

with the response, "Yes, but it's the diversity of our insecurities that gives us our strength" (Planning Meeting Transcript #1). Everyone agreed that he was right. Melissa expanded on his point by saying that we all had very different qualities that balanced each other's and that if there were things that she felt she could not do, she would turn to one of us for help.

Nancy pointed out that we also drew strength from the things we had in common. We decided that the most important of our commonalities, and the one that enabled us to have the empathy that we felt was necessary to do this work, was the pain that we had each experienced in the past. Nancy, Joyce and I had endured sexual abuse. Melissa had struggled to fit in as one of the only white students at her predominantly Black elementary school, and Christopher had suffered through growing up gay in the same homophobic community where he was now teaching.

Our group's belief in the influence of our past experiences on our ability to successfully pursue race allyship was borne out by the scholarship on the characteristics common to aspiring race allies. Landreman et al. (2007) found a connection between the prior experiences of their participants and the ability to recognize and question social or moral injustice. For many of their participants, reflecting on experiences of mistreatment in their pasts "helped them gain an understanding of and empathy for others who also experienced oppression" (p. 281). Additionally, Paccione (2000) discovered that an important step in educators becoming committed to allyship involved the ability to engage in reevaluating established cultural norms; a step that was found to be facilitated by both positive and negative childhood experiences. Our conversation during the first planning meeting of this study revealed that we were already deeply engaged in disrupting such cultural norms that were entrenched in our school community, and which exerted an influence on our own personal racial identity development.

Before this meeting we had prepared the first of our monthly personal progress narratives which we now shared with one another. Each of us had written about how much work still had to be done within the school and within ourselves. At this point in our development, we were aware of the systemic racism that was around us and within us, and we were committed to addressing that racism, but we often doubted our ability to achieve true and lasting change. Our first narratives reflected these doubts as well as our commitment to dispelling them.

For Christopher, Joyce, and myself, there was a gap between being aware of, and vowing to disrupt the racist culture of our school, and the ability to actually implement that pledge. Because of their lifelong involvement with Black and Latinx people, and their comfortable relationships with our students of color, Melissa and Nancy had a much shorter learning curve than that of Christopher, Joyce, and me. Through witnessing their confidence, however, we could now see ourselves beginning to gain confidence of our own.

Before being jolted into acknowledging the systemic racism inherent in our school community by the three founding student members of The Race Matters Alliance, I had enjoyed a great deal of support from the school district and the residents of the town. Once I began to speak up about race and to encourage others to do so, however, I quickly saw that backing begin to erode, and I became unnerved. At times, I was only able to maintain the courage to speak publicly about race because of the support I was receiving from my study co-participants within the safety of our white affinity group.

Christopher struggled with the fact that until we began to work together with our students of color and their parents, he had thought he had been doing an excellent job of addressing race issues in his classroom. He prided himself on his perceptiveness regarding the emotional needs of his students of color, but after attending a planning meeting for the new Race Matters Alliance

at the home of the group's two student founders, he had shaken his head and lamented, "I thought I was doing a good job with this, but I was not" (Interview #2). It was not until the five of us attended an event at which we heard author and race activist Ijeoma Oluo admonish white people to stop waiting to be educated by people of color, and to get up and out to do the work themselves, that Christopher admitted realizing what he had to do. He found himself finally heeding the urgent call from Black activists for would-be allies to vigorously engage in practical anti-racist actions, both on their own and collectively, in order to be more effective in the role (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2008; Boute & Jackson, 2013; Dyson, 2017; Harris, 2017; McKenzie, 2015).

At this first planning meeting, Christopher brought up the recent increase in his awareness of his responsibility as a white privileged person to educate himself; to read and to attend informative sessions on the subject of race at school, rather than waiting for information to come his way. Within the safe confines of our small group, he felt that he was now becoming able to fully acknowledge the mistakes he had been making, to move beyond his feelings of guilt, and to finally be open to receiving the critical guidance of activists of color.

Joyce had close relationships with her students of color, and engaged in honest and frequent conversations about race, but her challenge was in taking that communication public. As the primary breadwinner in her family, she was worried about the repercussions of speaking out. Additionally, several of our fellow teachers who were most resistant to addressing race issues were her best friends. Joyce feared losing them if they discovered her true feelings in regard to race. Through our meetings as a group of five, as well as supportive phone calls and chat sessions during a bi-weekly shared hall duty between Joyce and myself, she was able to get the support and perspective she needed to feel comfortable with taking more public anti-racist

action, and to find the courage to stand up to her friends.

Although Melissa and Nancy had had far more experience with speaking out about racial inequality when The Race Matters Alliance was first founded, they too benefitted from participating in our group. During the first planning meeting, Nancy stated that her participation in the group was making her more audacious in addressing race in her classroom, and on her social media accounts. Melissa, as quoted above, saw our group as a space to obtain solutions to the race-related problems she found herself struggling to solve on her own.

With the launch of the study itself, our group, which had at first been merely a supportive and safe haven, became a think tank and a learning environment that broadened our perspective on race and enabled us to move past our reticence and insecurities. The formal planning meetings, authoring of narratives, and interviews we engaged in took our work to a more professional level and provided the push we needed to ramp up our relationships with anti-racist groups and individuals outside of our own school, including universities, authors, and an anti-racist group at a neighboring high school.

Our conversations at the next two planning meetings, which took place at even intervals across this four-month study, revealed changes in our attitudes and skills related to allyship and anti-racist action. We discussed the ways in which we had successfully influenced race relations within the school community as well as the situations in which we felt that we had been unable to bring about positive change. We talked about the fact that we had secured a contract between the administration and well-known author and educational race facilitator Ali Michael to lead three teacher professional development sessions in the following school year. The actual negotiation process involved in this project had been led by Melissa and me because of her position as guidance counselor and mine as the teacher leader of The Race Matters Alliance.

Melissa and I saw the win, however, as being solidified by the strength of the growing membership of The Race Matters Alliance, as well as the involvement of each of the co-participants in this study.

Our new superintendent quickly developed a respect for Christopher, Nancy, and Joyce based on their reputations as excellent teachers. He knew that Nancy was at that time acting as an ambassador for the National Council of Teachers of English, and that Joyce and Christopher were lead teachers of their departments. Undoubtedly, these positions lent importance to the work that we were doing together. We were also aware of the fact that the superintendent had come to our district from a town that had been willing to address the topic of race. He had personally led an ongoing teacher professional development program on race there and was very eager to continue the work in his new job. He was not yet aware of the level of systemic racism that existed at our school, and Melissa and I had worked quickly to propose our plans regarding Ali Michael (2015) before he realized the depth of the problem and might feel compelled to pull back.

Melissa, Joyce, Nancy, Christopher, and I also discussed, at our planning meetings, our inability to disrupt the ongoing failure of the administration to effectively handle the critical race incidents that were occurring at an alarming rate during the course of this study. The outcome always seemed to be the same. Incidents such as one in which a white student standing at her locker loudly asked anyone who would listen why white people were not allowed to use the N-word since "We were the ones who gave it to Black people anyway," were initially met with outrage by the administration. Suspensions were issued, but were then cut in length as soon as white parents began to push back. These occurrences always left us feeling guilty and frustrated as the students of color would come to us, convinced that we would be able to prevail upon the

administrators to do something. They expected that we would be able to convince them to hold an assembly where they would speak about racial micro-aggressions and profess their lack of tolerance for such hate. This never happened. The only difference between the race incidents that occurred during this study and those that had taken place before it began was that the administrators, conscious of the relationships that my co-participants and I had with the students of color and their parents, would come to us first, calling either Melissa or me to come to their offices. They would explain the way in which they would be handling a particular incident. They would handle it in exactly the way they had described, and would then, without advising us of their actions, quietly water down their response over the next few days.

The most distressing of the critical race incidents during this time involved a white boy who yanked a Black girl's braid, pulling it completely from her scalp. The ensuing report immediately came across Melissa's desk because of her role as the middle school guidance counselor. I was deeply saddened when she told me what had occurred, but neither of us fully comprehended the effect of the incident on our Black student and parent population as a whole, or the level of disappointment and frustration that was generated when it was minimized in exactly the same way as the critical incidents that preceded it had been.

Of course we understood that the young Black girl whose braid was pulled out had been deeply humiliated, but even we, who knew her well as the sister of one of the founding members of The Race Matters Alliance, did not have a complete understanding of how devastating it was to her. Soon after the incident I tried to speak to her about it privately. Usually open to discussing even difficult topics, she was completely unwilling to talk to me about this one. When I reached out to one of the Black girls who worked closely with us as an executive board member of The Race Matters Alliance, she explained that to do anything to a Black girl's hair was to "mess with

her soul." For that sort of action to be played down by the administration suggested a disturbing

lack of understanding and complete disregard for the particular issues affecting our students of

color who by then accounted for almost half of our student population.

Melissa worked hard throughout the course of this critical incident to provide support for

the girl who had endured the mistreatment. She was frustrated, however, because she felt unable

to make her superiors accept the seriousness of the episode. The fact that Melissa was close to

the girl and her family made it easier to talk to them about the situation, but harder to accept its

outcome. They wanted the school to set up an open dialogue between them and the boy and his

family to hopefully foster some understanding of the hurt he had caused, including both the

personal and cultural reasons for it. The administrators believed that this type of conversation

would be "divisive" and refused to allow it. They did suspend the boy for several days but the

family of the girl who was assaulted said that no minds would have been changed by that and

Melissa and I agreed. Like every other critical incident at our school, this one ultimately was

suppressed and forgotten by the majority of the white school community.

Frustration with the escalating number of critical race incidents and the way in which

they were being handled at our school was reflected in the monthly narratives of several of our

group members. Melissa expressed her regret at the fact that all of us as educators were failing

our students of color when she observed:

> When I think back to these incidents and events, the recurring theme is that they are all
>
> driven by adults; adults who are supposed to be there to educate, advocate for, and guide
>
> our students. I am not only disappointed, but embarrassed. (Narrative Journal #2b)

While in my journal, I expressed a similar sentiment, confessing that:

> I am ever-conscious of our failure to accomplish what our students of color most expect

of us. They want to be treated fairly and they don't understand why we as white people,

are unable to push the white people in charge to make that happen. (Narrative #1D)

Nancy's concern was with the inconsistencies in the handling of incidents by the

administrators. She worried about the mixed messages that were being sent to our students of

color, saying "In an effort to become allies, I worry that some administrators are doing more

damage than helping" (Narrative #4a).

Examining the transcripts of our final planning meeting, I sensed a more hopeful outlook

emanating from the members of the group. Nothing had really changed, but there was more

discussion about what we could accomplish by joining our individual perspectives and strengths

in the interest of achieving positive racial change. There was conversation about what we had

learned during the past four months through this study, and about the importance of the group

itself to that learning. Nancy, who would often share literature on race with us, as well as

personally introducing us to authors of color who she brought to our school, responded to our

appreciation for her contributions to the group by saying that she saw what was happening in our

school as a microcosm of racial issues in the world itself. She felt that the voices of our students

of color and the racial situation there were "reflective of the ripples outside" (Planning Meeting

#3). She went on to say that each of us represented a different lens in the way that we personally

saw what was happening, and that those differing lenses allowed us to broaden our perspective as

a group.

After nodding in agreement to Nancy's statement, we began to talk about the book, *Not

light, but fire: How to have meaningful race conversations in the classroom* (2018), by

teacher/author Matthew R. Kay, who would be coming to our school for an author visit in the

following school year. We discussed the ways in which he addressed race as a Black teacher in a

predominantly Black classroom: his emphasis on starting and sustaining difficult race conversations through creating "threaded" units that built on the speaking skills that were learned the year before. Ninth grade conversations might build on identity; tenth grade would then discuss systems and how they are created and defined, while eleventh graders would tackle the subject of change and how it can be initiated to address systemic problems (p. 84). Throughout this ongoing process, Kay would emphasize the necessity for teachers to listen to students and to allow them to locate their sphere of influence in order to become able to solve their own problems (p. 121). We theorized how we might be able to translate his methods to work for our teachers. This conversation led into a discussion of our annual new teacher orientation. Each year, for the past three years, the five of us, along with several students and parents of color had designed an orientation on the subject of race at our school for the incoming teachers. We had continued to follow the same format throughout the first three years, but it was during this meeting that we decided to rework it. We discussed how we had grown and how we saw things differently; more clearly than before. This made us want to move beyond the previous format of focusing on the topics of how to develop an inclusive classroom, and how to acknowledge racial and ethnic differences. We now felt that we had to push beyond that introductory phase. The specifics of the changed format were not worked out during this meeting, but we knew that we would make changes.

We acknowledged that a one-session orientation on race would not necessarily inspire our new teachers to embark on the process of becoming race allies. We talked about the importance of time and how long it had taken us to reach the point we presently found ourselves to be in. We also observed that it would always be an ongoing journey. Our hope, however, was that the new teachers might make connections at our orientation that would lead them to interact

with each other as we had, spontaneously, and by choice which would allow them to benefit from the type of group interaction that we now enjoyed.

In his last narrative, Christopher wrote that working within our group of white teachers attempting to become race allies had been the cornerstone of his learning, and expressed the importance of sharing that knowledge. He described his experience in the following way:

> We have the opportunity in a safe space to clear the air. I am grateful to have a supportive group that I can collaborate with on a continual basis. We openly and honestly vent frustrations, share success and failure, discuss new information, and peel back the emotional layers with which we all have to deal. I would be lost at times without the reinforcement and challenges coming from my colleagues. To broaden our efforts within the school community we need to bring other white teachers similar opportunities for growth and involvement (Narrative #3d).

My examination of the field notes that emerged from this study, as well as my own experience as a co-participant, has convinced me of the value of white affinity groups to the growth of aspiring white race allies. As noted earlier, our group of five white teachers exhibited Michael and Conger's (2009) vision of a white affinity group as being an "assembly of people gathered with others who share a common element of identity in order to explore, celebrate, sustain and process experiences around that identity" (p. 56). Our group also reflected Denevi and Pastan's (2006) definition of these groups as places for "white on white dialogue" (p. 71). Theoretically, the type of affinity groups described by these scholars would offer a safe space for aspiring race allies to develop their racial identities and to become experienced in speaking about race. They would then be better prepared to participate in race/ethnicity intergroup dialogue, a skill that had already been proven to foster engagement in social justice actions, the ultimate goal

of white advisors engaged in guiding ally development (Alimo, 2012).

I now believe that our white affinity group differs from those detailed in the above research in important ways. Unlike those cited above, the affinity group attached to this study was independently formed and entirely self-directed. I believe that this fact enabled us to avoid the type of fate of some of Denevi and Pastan's (2006) participants who abandoned their affinity group "unable to deal with the guilt or sense of accountability it fostered" (p. 71). Because we chose to attempt to become race allies together, I believe that we had a deeper investment than those who did not, and our struggles with guilt and a sense of accountability were able to be dealt with as part of a supportive group rather than on our own.

Another way in which our white affinity group differed from those that were reviewed for this study, is that they were formed to raise the racial awareness of white people in the hope that it would lead to social justice actions (Alimo, 2012; Denevi & Pastan, 2006; Michael, 2015; Michael & Conger, 2009). My co-participants and I came together specifically to take action. Prompted by a challenge from a group of students of color who specifically chose us to work with them to form The Race Matters Alliance (there were no teachers of color in the entire school at the time), we formed what I later recognized as a white affinity group in order to create a space to speak about race at our school. In our case, the action came first. Through that action, our group was able to maintain the type of sustained inquiry that ultimately did lead to our increased self-awareness, growth, and change (Michael, 2015), as well as to the on-going development of our anti-racist racial identities (Denevi & Pastan, 2006).

Embarking on this study added structure to our work, as well as more importance in the eyes of the administration, but it placed more demands on the members of the group. Time was, and is, what we most lack. After documenting five one-hour interviews, the structure of the study

demanded that we manage to come together for three formal one-hour planning meetings, that we each compose and share four monthly personal progress narratives, and that I keep a written journal as well as a critical incident file. We were always pressed for time. Our Race Matters chat text thread and the spontaneous short meetings we were able to squeeze into our daily schedules helped, but the greatest assistance came unexpectedly from the administration. Our new superintendent reinstated the concept of teacher's professional learning communities (PLC) in the district. We submitted an application as a group to build our PLC around this study and were approved. Over the course of the study, this allowed us to gain the three one-hour meetings allocated for PLC work during which we could gather in our already established group.

The PLC is a collaborative professional development model described by McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) as one in which "[T]eachers work collaboratively to reflect on practice, examine evidence about the relationship between practice and student outcomes, and make changes that improve teaching and learning for the particular students in their classes" (p. 4). As such, PLCs exclusively focus on student learning. Melissa, Nancy, Joyce, Christopher, and I were surprised that our application to use our race work for our PLC was accepted since we were familiar with the traditional form of the model, and we did not think that it described us. However, we did not waste time questioning our good fortune. It was not until I investigated the research on PLCs to provide background for this finding that I discovered the work of Servage (2008) who imagined PLCs in a broader context. She wondered if the concept of the PLC could not be seen through the lens of both transformative learning theory and critical pedagogy in order to "build committed, thinking professional learning communities able to reflect critically upon both their own actions and the social and policy contexts within which these actions are framed" (p. 2).

Servage (2008) contended that the idea of teachers working collaboratively to develop best practices, with the sole aim of promoting more positive student outcomes, was just not enough to overcome the divisive societal problems that affect all schools. Rather, she posited that PLCs founded on a combination of transformative learning theory and critical pedagogy might be able to realize the more transformative aspects of the PLC model. By expanding the existing focus of PLCs on the mastery of technical skills to include communicative learning in which teachers back up those skills with a foundation of shared norms and values, Servage (2008) believed that both students and teachers would benefit. Describing the challenges involved in attaining this type of transformation, she admitted that,

> Transformative learning for teachers requires that they be willing and able to critically explore, articulate, negotiate, and revise their beliefs about themselves, their students, their colleagues, and their schools. Only through this level of self-awareness can teachers, in turn, understand their colleagues' foundational perspectives. In this way, transformative learning theory locates systemic transformation in the transformed educational visions of individual practitioners. (p. 2)

In Servage's (2008) findings, I recognized aspects of the work in which Melissa, Nancy, Joyce, Christopher, and I were engaged. I realized that we had been able to achieve the same type of transformation that she described as a result of our participation in a white affinity group. I believed that our group shared the same "hopeful, critical, and creative dialogue" (p. 4) that she held up as a model of what a transformative PLC might include. It was through engaging in the kind of communicative learning described by Servage (2008) that we had broadened our relationships with one another around the subject of race, and as our relationships deepened, so did our level of self-awareness and our understanding of the systemic racism within our school.

This understanding, combined with the foundation of our expanded relationships, allowed us to sustain our collaboration in the way that Servage (2008) posited that providing teachers with opportunities to engage in conversations oriented to communicative learning would enhance the sustainability of a PLC (Servage, 2008).

Meeting the additional requirements of the PLC demanded by our district which included submissions of forms detailing our group's plans, goals, and accomplishments, added a more structured focus to our activities. The generation of the interviews, narratives, journals and files we created for this study did the same. This documentation organized us as a group and allowed us to analyze the work we did. Through my analysis of the accumulated field notes described above, I was able to conclude that our participation in a self-directed white affinity group, as well as a PLC based on aspects of transformative learning theory and communicative learning, allowed the co-participants in this study to create a combined model of a PLC and a white affinity group which differed from the traditional forms of both.

Through our participation in a combined PLC/white affinity group, my fellow white teachers and I had "re-formed" our relationships with one another to include open, honest, and on-going attention to the topic of race. It had transformed us. The catalyst for this transformation, however, had been the challenge that was given to me by three young Black students when I naively asked if they could spend "a minute" explaining their experience as Black girls in a predominantly white school. Their response started my journey towards racial awareness; a journey that will continue for the rest of my life. It was that same response that led Melissa, Joyce, Christopher, Nancy, and me to form our as yet un-named white affinity group, thus changing our relationships with one another forever.

Focus Area: Faculty/Student Communication

Finding: Opening a Space to Speak About Race at School Fosters More Effective Interracial Communication Leading to Improved Levels of Racial Understanding. When Joyce, Nancy, Melissa, and Christopher assisted me with an assignment for one of my early doctoral courses, the result was the creation of the five themes that I have now used to organize the findings of this study. At that time, we had been working together on developing The Race Matters Alliance for just one year. It was already clear to us, however, that there was an almost complete communication disconnect between the totally white staff and administration of the school district and our students of color and their families. With each Race Matters Alliance meeting we learned more about the ways that our teachers and administrators, as well our white students, both knowingly and unknowingly, frequently assaulted the feelings of almost half of our student population with racial comments, or ignorant observations. From the time the buses of the students of color entered the school driveway, which entailed passing by a neighbor's prominent display of a huge Trump flag with the added phrase "No More Bulls**t," to their check-ins at the school office where they often faced a mangling of the pronunciation of their names, to the myriad of unaddressed micro-aggressions they went on to experience throughout the day, these young people endured a level of racial disrespect that we found impossible to comprehend.

From the beginning of our efforts at race work, we knew that these students were not being engaged in the type of meaningful conversations that they needed to be having with their white teachers and classmates in order to feel comfortable within the school community. Joyce confessed that, for the entire length of her first year at the school, she had not even known that the majority of her students of color were not residents of the town, but were instead part of the county "choice" student program that enabled them to attend the school. This fact was not

included in any orientation meeting or training program that she had participated in. The head of

the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), when told that the "choice" students often felt

unwelcome, commented that all they had to do to fit in was to "act white."

We believed that the absence of communication and lack of understanding of our

students of color by the adults charged with their well-being was one of the most important as

well as daunting issues that we needed to address if we were to have any hope of becoming

effective race allies. I later discovered through my research that, in this belief, we were aligned

with the thinking of Michael and Conger (2009) who maintained that the biggest challenge for

developing race allies was that whiteness had been strategically made invisible within our

society. As a result, "much of our training as white people has taught us to see racism and racial

hierarchies as normal" (p. 59). In my continued review of the literature for this study, this

persistent perspective emerged as one that those who hope to become educational race allies

must recognize, reevaluate, and alter in order to improve the school environment for their

students.

Nancy, Joyce, Melissa, Christopher, and I had decided to include "Recognizing and

addressing the communication disconnect between students of color and white faculty and

administration" in the list of themes describing our work when we collaborated on my early

doctoral assignment. Although I had not yet been fully exposed to the research that would

support that decision at the time, the knowledge we had already gained through our interactions

with our students of color supported the choice. Three years later, after finishing the

documentation portion of this study, we still recognized it as one of the most vital goals of our

continuing work. For that reason, I have positioned it as the title of this section of the study,

followed by a subheading that describes the finding that it revealed. What we found through our

efforts to address the communication disconnect between our students of color and their white teachers and administrators was that, by opening a space to speak about race at school, we actually were able to foster more effective interracial communication which ultimately led to improved racial understanding. As more white teachers and administrators began to attend our Race Matters Alliance meetings, students became more comfortable discussing race issues in class. This was not welcomed by all members of the school community however. I was told by one colleague that I was "going too far", and Joyce was told by a parent that using literature that addressed race was divisive. However, we were told by the students at our meetings that they did feel heard and more supported. As we established relationships with organizations such as the Princeton Prize Organization and Melanin Minds, a club at a nearby school of the same type as our Race Matters Alliance, the comfort level of the parents and students of color continued to grow. When two of our students were recognized by the Princeton Prize Organization we began to sense the more resistant members of our school community backing off, even if it there was still a level of hostility towards us.

The level of trust that we developed through speaking about race with the student members of The Race Matters Alliance and their parents also fostered better inter-racial communication between the parents, and the teachers and administrators. We were surprised to see that these two groups actually began to tentatively communicate with one another, often leaning on us to act as intermediaries. When a critical incident related to race would arise, the principal would usually speak to one of the five of us, in our capacity as leaders of The Race Matters Alliance, to take the emotional temperature of the district's community of color. At the same time, the parents of color would often come to us initially rather than approaching the administration directly in order to inquire about the way in which the incident was being

handled. This was the case in the incident of the young white boy pulling out our Race Matters Alliance member's braid. These types of conversations that revolve around emotionally charged situations related to power were addressed by Brown (2018) and Pollock (2004a) who were in agreement on the subject. Brown (2018) emphasized the importance of initiating race conversation despite the obstacles presented by white privilege. She recommended that constructive race conversations should not be feared since failure to engage in them disallows members of the dominant white culture to begin to challenge the engrained belief that whiteness, on its own merit, makes them more deserving. Pollock (2004a) voiced a similar sentiment, stating that our habit of characterizing each other, and the categories of racial difference that we have placed ourselves in "are central to the most troubling power struggles we have" (p. 1). In Pollock's view, ignoring these struggles by repressing race talk only serves to reproduce the very inequities we are trying to deconstruct.

The race conversations that we had opened through the creation of The Race Matters Alliance had laid bare the systemic racism that silently ran below the surface of our school community. Once we began work on this study, we recognized that, despite the positive changes our previous efforts had brought about, the system often seemed impervious to change. We had attempted to disrupt it, and had been able to contribute to a level of better understanding through more open conversation on the subject of race, but we continued to struggle personally with establishing truly open and honest relationships with our students of color. This was due to the fact that, in the scope of their day to day school life, little seemed to have really improved. There was more open communication around race issues, at least in our Race Matters Alliance meetings, yet the micro-aggressions continued. Although they were addressed by the administration now that we had established a school-wide conversation on race, the disciplinary

actions that accompanied them were often quickly re-examined when questioned by white parents, and subsequently reduced. It was also clear that the topic of race was still not something that our teachers were comfortable speaking about. Even those who attended our Race Matters Alliance meetings tended to remain mute on the subject in their own classrooms which was disappointing to our student members. However, a few of these teachers confessed that becoming more knowledgeable about what the students of color were going through at school, and developing empathy for their situations, had only made them more afraid to address the topic of race for fear of saying the wrong thing. As these teachers continued to come regularly to our Race Matters Alliance meetings, they shared that this fear did slowly become less crippling, but they still struggled to address issues of race when in their classrooms on their own. That reluctance is consistent with our last stated goal that acknowledges fear of retribution for addressing issues of race at school.

Feeling encouraged by his attendance at a few Race Matters Alliance meetings, one student member asked her history teacher if he would show a video memoir that she had created of her grandfather's experiences with racism while working for the New York City longshoremen. She shared with him that her grandfather had found the racism he encountered in that job to be worse than what he had experienced in the South; a place he had left in the hope of finding a more equitable employment situation. This was in direct opposition to her history teacher's contention that the North offered Black people better treatment on the job. They had argued about her grandfather's account of his experiences. Her teacher informed her that her grandfather was mistaken in his assessment of the situation. He ended the heated discussion by telling her that he was the history teacher and therefore the expert on the subject. The video was still not shown, and I, as one of the teacher leaders of The Race Matters Alliance, received a visit

from the history teacher. He informed me that if "these kids" continued to respond in "this way" to their white teachers' efforts to address the topic of race, the teachers would not want to continue talking about it. It quickly became obvious that he was unhappy over the fact that I did not agree with his assessment of his student's behavior, and our conversation, although cordial, quickly came to an end.

I was surprised and disappointed by the history teacher's reaction. I did not have a discussion with him about this. He made it clear that he did not want to address it by walking out of my room before I could say a word. As previously mentioned, he had attended Race Matters Alliance meetings before, and the students of color genuinely liked him and were glad for his participation. Clearly, however, he was unwilling to discuss race in this instance, either with me or with his student. Ironically, Cicetti-Turro (2007) maintained that cross-cultural dialogue is exactly what is needed in order to avoid an us versus them mentality between white teachers and their students of color. She suggested that even teachers who have been exposed to anti-racist pedagogy are capable of glazing over critical issues of race while genuinely believing their teaching is culturally responsive, thus unwittingly contributing to existing systems of discrimination. After consulting with my study co-participants, I approached the principal on the subject. She ultimately forced the history teacher to show the video, but it did not result in an open and honest addressing of race in the class, nor did it mark the start of any sort of continued discussion of the subject going forward.

It was difficult for the students to understand what had happened. They had shown similar frustration the year before when the district's then acting superintendent had expressed surprise that there was no plan for the teachers to address Black History Month in their classes. She had asked the principal to have them do so. The request had set off a wave of resistance. One

teacher said to me that no one had ever told her that she had to talk about "that" in class. In response to the pushback, the directive was removed and participation in the initiative became voluntary.

The students had been hurt, but they were mostly surprised by my reaction to the backlash, as well as that of Melissa, Joyce, Nancy, and Christopher. We told them that we also had been reluctant for the teachers to incorporate the subject in their classrooms with little notice or preparation on their part. We had frankly been afraid of the result. Our communal feeling was that forcing teachers who were resistant to the idea might result in lessons or activities that the students would find insulting and even more hurtful than doing nothing at all. We had in mind an incident from several years before in which a well-meaning white teacher, thinking that it would be a way to foster racial understanding, had asked each student of color to stand and relate an experience of being prejudiced against at school. That had not gone well, but these students had not yet been at the school then, and they had no knowledge of the event.

The conversation that we had engaged in with the students about this issue was very difficult for us all. They had been unwilling to view the directive that was given to their teachers to address Black History Month as anything but positive. When I explained to one student that it would have been difficult for his history teacher, who knew little about Black History, to prepare a suitable lesson in just a few days, he responded by saying, "He's a grown ass man. Can't he look it up?" In our relationship with our students of color, we could not always maintain the level of trust that we hoped for when we were so often unable to bring about the outcomes they expected and deserved. Now, having to see them disappointed again, this time by a well-liked history teacher's lack of empathy for their feelings, was difficult.

In establishing the Race Matters Alliance, we had embarked on this task of opening a

space to speak about race at our school with little thought to the obstacles we would face other than what we expected to be the superficial annoyance of the school's white community. In the process of documenting our work through this study, we had spent time reflecting on our attitudes and actions as a group and as individuals, and we had been surprised to discover what had been our own complicity in the workings of the existing school environment, and the difficulty that we often faced in confronting it. Many of the student members of The Race Matters Alliance assumed that once we had established our ongoing conversation around race with them, we would see how we too had been guilty of bias. We did, and we tried mightily to change that, but the devil was truly in the details. As I have already noted, Nancy and Melissa, because of their life-long exposure to people of color, had never been as blind to the workings of racism at our school as Joyce, Christopher, and I had been. However, they had not been able to bring about system-wide change on their own.

Initially, we had all felt excited and freed during our Race Matters Alliance meetings, but when the students had begun coming to us with disturbing stories of ongoing expressions of student racism, expecting us to be able to put an end to them, we often felt that we were not in a position to do so. In many cases we felt obliged to back off in order to survive to fight another day. While engaged in this study, we had clearly become better about standing up to the administration in matters such as this. Specifically, Melissa, as a guidance counselor, and I, as a teacher of long tenure, now backed up by the growing support we had from our parents of color, demanded that these incidents be addressed by the administration. Dealing with racist attitudes exhibited by our fellow teachers was harder.

During the documentation phase of this study, I visited the room of one of the other art teachers, where a Black student showed me an autobiographical collage that she was working on.

She had added a small newspaper cut-out to the piece that included the title of the well-known song *Fuck tha police* (Ice Cube, McRen, The D.O.C., 1988, Track 1). We discussed whether or not she would be able to show her piece at the county art festival because there was a "no obscenity" rule in place. I told her that I would call the director of the festival and get back to her. I then left to return to the art office. Waiting for me there was one of the leading student members of The Race Matters Alliance who I knew to be highly pragmatic and rarely surprised by the behavior of our white teachers. I shared the discussion I had just had in the art room with her. While I was talking, an aide who had been in the art room during the discussion in question tapped on my door. She looked upset and I quickly realized why. I remembered that her husband was a policeman. I opened my door and braced myself. I was ready when she told me that there should not have been a question about whether or not that song title could be used. I was prepared to talk to her about the origins and history of the song, but the look of incredulousness on her face showed me that it would be fruitless to do so. I could not bring myself to try. She said, "You know why I'm so sad, don't you?" I answered irritably, "Yes, and do you have any idea why a young Black girl might be so angry?" I remember the woman's surprised expression. I knew that, as a fellow white person, I was expected to feel her pain. Instead, I closed the door in her face and turned my back on her. She quickly left, I later discovered, to complain about my reaction to her friends.

I turned to the 17-year-old Black girl sitting in my office and felt a wave of inadequacy. Her words and her calm demeanor just gutted me. She said, "You *do* know that you did not handle that well, don't you?" Truthfully, I had no idea how to handle the situation, but I definitely knew how to express my anger about it. It was so much easier to take that approach than to admit my feelings of helplessness over my failure to even try to make a white colleague

see how hurtful she had been to a Black teenager who was merely trying to express her pain through her art. As my student sat quietly listening, I ranted about how racist many of my colleagues were, especially the woman who I had just treated so rudely. I had unmistakably lost sight of Adichie's (2009) warning to avoid subscribing to a single story of someone's character. I also fumed about the fact that I would now undoubtedly be reported to the administration and would have to deal with them about this. Throughout my tirade, I gave not a single thought to how unsettling it must have been for my student to hear about her other teachers' racist attitudes, or to be forced to worry about any trouble I would be in with my superiors. I really do not know how she felt because I did not even ask her. I was too absorbed with my own feelings. She quickly left my office, and I immediately called Melissa to discuss what had occurred with the aide. I barely even noticed that she had left the room.

McKensie (2015) described the behavior espoused by white people who have a need to let everyone around them know what good allies they are as "ally theater." In her view, those who "perform" allyship are merely engaging in various ways of saying that they are better than other white people, and are therefore entitled to pass judgement on them. She advised that aspiring white allies should check themselves before engaging in possible ally theater by asking themselves if any statements they are contemplating making will in any way benefit the person they are thinking of saying them to. When I discovered McKensie's (2015) cautionary words for white people like myself, it was not long after my own personal exercise in what now seemed to be a clear example of ally theater. I was mortified. I truly believed that my aim had not been to gain the recognition of my student for my commitment to the cause of allyship, but I wondered if that really mattered. The outcome was the same. Whatever my motive had been, my behavior had not been helpful to her.

When I had reached Melissa by phone to relate the incident, I had found that my fears of recrimination had not been unfounded. Melissa had already heard of the incident, but said that it had not yet been reported to the administration. We discussed how I should handle it. As always, we worried that pushing the envelope in the wrong direction might put a stop to our Race Matters Alliance activities, and we hoped that I had not just done that. It happened to be a Friday afternoon which gave me some time. That weekend, I spent a great deal of energy composing a letter to the aide in which I apologized for the way I had treated her. I expressed my understanding of her feelings as the wife of a police officer. Then, carefully choosing my words so as not to upset her further, I tried to explain how the experiences of the young Black artist may have led her to choose to include the angry song in her piece. I sent the email on Saturday afternoon, but by Sunday night I still had not heard from her, and I never did. The incident was never discussed. When I saw her the following week, she treated me in the same friendly way that she had for the several years I had known her, and, to my surprise, the incident went unreported.

After examining what I now saw as my "ally theater" performance, I compared it to the way I had handled my interaction with the aide whose feelings I had hurt, and which I had then worked so diligently to soothe. How could I not have seen what I was doing? Oluo (2019) described an encounter following a professional development seminar she conducted on race in the workplace. She was approached by a participant who informed her that her talk was "good" but that it should not have been given in that particular space. The insinuation was that it was too difficult for the white participants to hear. The presenter's reaction captured her frustration with the type of white attitude towards being forced to contemplate racism that I had reinforced in my interaction with the aide who I had offended. According to Oluo (2019):

Once again, what might have been a discussion about the real, quantifiable harm being

done to people of color had been subsumed by a discussion about the feelings of white

people, the expectations of white people, the needs of white people (para. 9)

I look at this incident as a missed opportunity for everyone involved to engage in racial

dialogue; something that has been endorsed as a way to address nothing less than some of

society's most deep-seated problems (CicettiTurro, 2007; Greene, 2016; Michael, 2015; Tatum,

2017). Michael (2015) posited that failure to speak about race issues maintains racism in

education and reproduces racial hierarchies at school and within our society as a whole. Just as I

questioned my motivation for the way I treated my young student who witnessed the rant in

which I allowed myself to indulge as she quietly watched, I wondered if I could have tried to

reengage the aide in further conversation about this matter. What would have happened if I had

simply asked her if she had received my email? Greene (2016) reminded us that running away

from having meaningful conversations about race "will not save any of us from the challenges

and dangers of racial injustice. We have to develop our cultural competency skills—and talk" (p.

91). As I continue to work to foster spaces for race talk, I endeavor to adopt the type of posture

of open-mindedness exhibited by second-wave white identity scholars in their insistence on

meeting white teachers wherever they are in their racial identity development, as difficult as my

colleagues and I find this to do. To this end, I attempt to focus on the "race-visible identity"

rather than the race-evasiveness of white teachers such as those observed by Jupp and Lensmire

(2016), "who, with more or less success, were each attempting to come to grips with their own

complexity and complicity in a white-supremacist system" (p. 985).

Initially challenged by the three founding student members of The Race Matters Alliance

to open a space to speak about race at the school, our effort to meet their request became, and has

remained, the driving force behind our work. It is staggering to me now to think that when one of those young Black girls pointed her finger in my face after I asked her to take "a minute" to tell me what it was like for young women of color to attend a predominantly white school, and told me that if I was going to do this, I had to "go bigger," I had absolutely no idea what "this" was. Although I was studying issues of race in my doctoral classes, it just had not occurred to me to engage in meaningful conversations on the subject with my students of color which is in keeping with Michael's (2015) contention that we are byproducts of our upbringing, and that no one has taught whites how to raise race questions. I would add to this idea by speculating that my many years of working in the race-evasive environment of my school, coupled with my upbringing with its underpinnings of racism, had combined to stifle my ability to perceive the systemic racism that was so evidently playing out in front of me every day. It was not until I was pushed into speaking about race by my three determined students of color, that I began to understand and to act.

It has been out of our painfully slow process of initiating and sustaining the race conversation that those students so insistently requested, that everything else we have accomplished has grown. I listened to their demand that we "go bigger" in order to include their parents and the four teachers who ultimately became my co-participants in this study. This allowed us to expand on the conversation together, thus creating the type of environment in which "Parents are more effective in their parenting. Educators are more effective in their teaching, and children are better off for both" (Greene, 2016, p. 92).

Opening a space to speak about race has paved the way for us to establish a base of communication between the races in our district which has been reinforced and sustained by the relationships that have grown around our many and ongoing conversations. As a result of our

efforts, we now have regularly scheduled monthly Race Matters Alliance meetings throughout the school year. These meeting have grown in attendance from just a handful of Black students and Melissa, Joyce, Christopher, Nancy, and myself, to diverse groups of teachers, parents and students made up of over 50 people. The five of us also lead an expanded version of the district-wide yearly new teacher orientation program we started as one of our earliest efforts at race work. The purpose of the program is to familiarize our incoming teachers with the racial context of our particular school and the ways in which The Race Matters Alliance has navigated it as we have worked to establish a more positive environment for our students of color.

Creating a space to speak about race through the Race Matters Alliance has cleared a way for us to connect, not only with each other, but with the world outside of our school system as well. Those connections, such as the ones we had established over the years with the Princeton Prize in Race Relations Committee and our contacts at the NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, have grown in scope over the course of this study. They lend a legitimacy to our mission to initiate race conversations, and have been an important factor in our ability to sustain them. We believe that it has been much harder for the administration to ignore our demands, such as the establishment of an ethnic studies course or district supported Race Matters Alliance movie nights in light of the public attention we now receive from such respected educational organizations. It has been through our recognition of the communication disconnect between the completely white faculty and administration of our school and our students of color, coupled with our efforts to open a space to speak about race in order to address it, that we have been able to put in motion new and measurable changes in ourselves and in the racial environment of our school.

Viewing our efforts through a poststructural feminist lens throughout this study has kept

us ever mindful of the need to repeatedly reevaluate our understanding of our work and to accept

it as never being more than partial. We have benefitted from observing our progress from this

perspective which, as St. Pierre (2000) explained, can be used to examine ordinary situations in

order to be able to think about them differently. The use of the poststructural feminist lens also

does not yield simple definitions, and we now know that we must be patient in that regard. I have

personally come to understand that the work of opening a space to discuss race is both messy and

unpredictable, but over time, and with the accumulation of some measurable successes, such as

the growth of The Race Matters Alliance to include the participation of a greater number of

white teachers and students of all races and ethnicities, I have learned to derive hope. I have

come to accept the aspects of poststructural feminism that describe the ever-partial nature of our

understanding of our work and its status as never being finished. Through that acceptance, I have

been able to focus more closely on the perspectives of the aspects of the theory that are aligned

with those of Foucault (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000), who suggested in his theory of discourse that

ways of thought *can* change when people have other ideas and speak out about them.

Focus Area: Individual and Institutional Stories

Finding: Racial Awareness Grows at School When Diverse Personal Stories are Shared and Heard. At the same time that I began analyzing the completed field notes of

this study, I discovered the above-mentioned theme that Christopher, Nancy, Joyce, Melissa,

and I had originally chosen to describe our work years before we thought of formalizing it.

Even then, we understood the importance of listening and the power of personal stories, but

we did not fully understand the responsibility that we had as aspiring allies to respond to the

stories of the members of our school community with appropriate action. We had formed

The Race Matters Alliance the year before at the request of our students of color, and, in

retrospect, I think that we believed, at that time, that our participation in that organization would be enough. We were not yet aware of the literature on the subject of guidance for aspiring allies such as that offered by Oluo (2018) who said that race talk, although necessary, is not enough unless it is combined with action, or Brown (2018) who would remind us that although our race talks were important, "too often, dialogue functions as a stall tactic, allowing white people to believe they've done something heroic when the real work is yet to come" (p. 170).

The real work was definitely ahead of us. Our small Race Matters Alliance meetings consisted of a handful of students of color, and Christopher, Melissa, Nancy, Joyce, and me. At that point, the students were just getting used to feeling free to tell us about the micro-aggressions that they experienced on a daily basis, and we were spending our time engaged in seemingly fruitless attempts to get the resistant administration to address them. Any serious thought of race-related professional development for the teachers and administrators was still far in the future, as were connections with organizations, universities, and schools beyond our doors. It would be years before the diverse personal stories of our students of different races and ethnicities, their parents, and those of our white teachers and administrators would be shared, listened to and responded to with action.

As the lead researcher of this study, I have analyzed the field notes that the documentation process has yielded, and at its core, I have found this study to be a rich compilation of personal stories. These stories tell of the individual ways in which my co-participants and I experienced the four-month course of the study. They document the interactions we each had with the diverse members of our school community, whose stories thereby became embedded within our own. In this way, the documentation of our personal

stories, has allowed us access to the story of the greater school community as well. It is through

the information that these multiple stories have revealed that I have been able to track many of

the changes that we were able to set in motion, both within the school and ourselves.

Over the four months that we formally documented our ongoing Race Matters Alliance

work, we shared our personal stories with one another, using the knowledge they revealed about

our developmental experiences with race to determine which tasks each of us would be best at in

our current work. We did the same with the personal stories shared with us by our student

members, using what we learned through them to determine assignments for our planned

Conversation Matters student-driven talk show as well as for choosing participants for

interactions with outside organizations and universities.

The personal race stories of some of our fellow teachers came to light during the planning

meetings for this study, where my co-participants and I shared our ongoing race experiences with

one another. Each of us had relationships or interactions with teachers, administrators and

students who the other members of the group did not have personal contact with. This sharing of

information allowed us to make sound decisions regarding the way in which we moved forward

with some of our programs. Melissa and I, who were tasked with choosing teacher participants

for our annual New Teacher Orientation, and for the approved race professional development

workshops to come, used the information that was shared between the five of us in considering

teachers for participation in these programs. Overall, the sharing of the personal stories that

documented each of our daily race interactions broadened our perspective of the cultural climate

of the school and increased our ability to navigate it.

In one notable instance, our practice of sharing our personal stories in this way uncovered

racist social media messages posted by a member of the district support staff. As was detailed

within her race biography, Joyce is liked by all members of the staff because of her kind and non-judgmental nature. As a result, she has an extensive Facebook friends list which enabled her to view the offensive posts and to share what she had seen with us. We then reported the posts to the administration. Our knowledge of the racist behavior exhibited by one of our staff members, and its acceptance by many other district employees, forced the administration to agree with our contention that a race problem did indeed exist within the district, and allowed us to push them to support several Race Matters Alliance initiatives that were important to us at the time. If Joyce had not been privy to the online activity of these colleagues, with whom the rest of us did not have contact, we would not have had this opportunity, nor would we have been aware of the true extent of the systemic racism that we were attempting to disrupt.

Knowledge is power, and it was through the diversity of our connections with the members of the school community that we were able to expand our knowledge through the sharing of our race-related personal stories and to use that knowledge to push for anti-racist action on the part of the administration. In doing so, we gave credence to Adichie's (2009) contention that "Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize" (17:37). Through Joyce's sharing of the story of a colleague's attempt to "dispossess and malign" a group of our students of color, we were able to confront the administration, demanding support for some of our racial justice initiatives, and to thereby change a story of degradation into one of empowerment and humanization.

Long before we began this study, we chose to conceptually frame our work with Adichie's (2009) notion of the danger of the single story. As the years passed, despite the growth of our racial awareness, my co-participants and I still had to remind ourselves to follow

Adichie's guidance in refusing to relegate our more resistant school community members, such as the one who Joyce reported, to a single identifying story of racism. As frustrating as this often was, we knew that to do so would negate the progress that we were continuously striving to realize.

Although we had long known that hyper-focusing on a single story of others' racism has the potential to stifle communication and pose a threat to any efforts to bring about change, in the course of this study, we learned that expanding our perspective to include the personal stories of others has the potential to lead to more positive outcomes. As we spent time documenting, sharing, and reflecting on our interactions with the school community during the four months of this study, we discovered that the sometimes haphazard way in which we had approached our work before engaging in this process had hindered us in our efforts to reach our goals. Before we were forced to make time for meetings, and to communicate more often and more efficiently with each other about the many stories we were each involved in every day, we were missing the opportunity to broaden our understanding of the roots of other school community members' biases as well as to recognize their potential for anti-racism. It was not likely that we would ever be able to change the racial attitudes of the staff member who posted the racist photo of himself wearing an hijab, but we found that we could discuss the incident with other colleagues who might not have found it as offensive until we shared with them the ways in which it could personally affect their students. Developing an understanding of the personal stories of our more race-resistant colleagues allowed us to meet them where they were on their individual social justice journeys (Waters, 2010), and to focus, not on their race-evasive attitudes, but rather, on the context in which we are all trying to make sense of the complexity of race relations at school and our power to deal with them (Jupp et al., 2016).

The finding detailed in this section revealed that sharing and truly listening to each other's personal stories allowed us to take action to raise racial awareness at our school, but my analysis also showed that this attention to personal stories raised our individual racial awareness as well. Because people communicate, hear, and respond differently, Christopher, Melissa, Joyce, Nancy, and I each manifested an increase in our racial awareness as a result of our encounters with the personal stories that spoke to us individually. As evidenced by the individual race biographies presented at the beginning of this chapter, we each came to this work from a different background, and with a different story to tell. We embarked on a journey together in an effort to develop as white teacher allies and activists. An important part of that journey required us to share our own stories and to listen to and respond to the stories of others as well. In the course of this study, however, we had not all been attentive to the same stories. For each of us, there had been stories that had resonated for us more specifically; that had made us more aware, and that had elicited a deep response from us. These were the stories that raised our personal racial awareness. As the unique stories that each of us heard, and responded to emerged from the field notes of this study, I was able to form a more complete picture of the value of our work, and to further develop the finding presented here.

In the following section I present an account of the particular type of stories that each of my co-participants and I listened to most intently, and the way in which what we heard affected our individual racial awareness. In this way, I am better able to achieve one of the initial aims of this study, which was to identify the development of our attitudes on race and to provide a rich, dimensional portrait of teachers engaged in this type of work. The headings attached to our names include the particular type of story voice that each of us listened to, followed by the type of action it motivated us to pursue.

Christopher: Stories Told by Experienced Voices Lead to a Sense of Duty.

Christopher graduated from the same school in which we teach. He grew up surrounded by the systemic racism that we have been attempting to disrupt, but at the onset of our Race Matters Alliance work he was hopeful that his positive relationships with the students of color in his classes meant that he would be able to add a meaningful perspective to our work. In his first personal narrative which was written at the start of this four-month study, Christopher admitted that he had quickly come "to realize the depth and complexities of the work, which was beyond what my white and male privilege allowed me to perceive originally" (Personal Narrative #3a).

Christopher's doubts did not stop him from contributing a great deal to the success of our group. His position as a trusted "townie" meant that he was listened to and did his best to educate when questioned by skeptical and even resistant white colleagues. In attempting to help them understand the educational experience of the students of color at our school, Christopher let himself be guided by the stories that had been shared with him by those same students. When a close friend and colleague stated that she did not see race because she was colorblind, he told her that he had been taught by one young Black student that if you could not see color, you could not see her. When his friend responded that it should not matter because she treated all of her students in the same way, Christopher reminded himself that each white person approaches the subject of race through the lens of their individual life story with its attendant baggage. In doing so, he adhered to the tenets of second-wave white teacher identity studies which took into account the variation of white teachers' identities as well as the social context of the environments in which they lived and worked (Jupp & Lensmire, 2016). Christopher had instinctively taken a more nuanced approach to race work with this teacher which was likely to be more effective. He shared that the incident changed his view of white allyship, admitting that

"My mind and eyes are now open to the reality of this journey turned marathon. In order to affect true personal growth, you have to keep investing every day" (Personal Narrative #3a).

Christopher's willingness to attempt to reach race-resistant white teachers despite his lack of confidence in his experience to do so was in keeping with the guidance for white allies offered by Loewen (2015), who suggested that "If we wait until we are ready, we may wind up old and feeble before we ever *do* anything" (p. 31). Additionally, his determination to commit to doing the work of an aspiring white teacher ally in the face of resistance reflected the characteristics of the role as described by Munin and Speight (2010). These scholars cited faith and a realization of otherness as common qualities of the aspiring allies who they studied. Christopher's youth spent as a member of a strict Christian church and the fact that it led to him being temporarily estranged from his family when he came out as gay while in college, were both factors that were in alignment with the traits listed by the researchers. They found that, on the whole, their participants "desired to be at the forefront of a group, expressing the views of any silenced voices" (p. 253); a description that could easily be applied to Christopher.

Christopher continued to speak out for our students of color and, as he said, "to listen, learn, and expand my perspective of what this journey is asking of me" (Narrative #3b). However, it was not until we attended a series of events where we saw three famous women of color speak that there was a shift in Christopher's development as a race ally. It was through listening to the stories of these three women that Christopher reached what he referred to as "a tipping point." We first attended an author event featuring Ijeoma Oluo, leading a discussion on her book, *So you want to talk about race* (2018) and the racial disparities within American healthcare. She charged white people who called themselves anti-racists to work to disrupt the structures that support racial health disparities. The following month, at an awards ceremony for

a Race Matters Alliance student member who had won the Princeton Prize in Race Relations, we heard Theodora Lacey tell her story. A civil rights activist who helped organize the Montgomery bus boycott and who fought for voting rights, she was also a close friend of Martin Luther King Jr. Lacey spoke about the importance of the participation of white people in the fight for racial equality in this country and expressed annoyance over their over-dependence on Black people to educate them on the subject of race. Lacey challenged all of the whites in the room to do better. Finally, the author Elizabeth Acevedo held a writing workshop at our school which was arranged by our co-participant Nancy. Again, we heard the message that white people have a part to play in the struggle for racial equality.

After attending these events, Christopher wrote in his final narrative for this study that each of these famous women had echoed a message to which he had been listening, but that he had not really been hearing clearly. This message was that white people had created white supremacy and that it was up to them to fix it. He wrote about what he believed had contributed to his realization that he had a duty to work as a true ally for racial equity:

> Repeated exposure to multiple voices of color and purposeful involvement in events that address, celebrate, and highlight race . . . I cannot say enough about the importance of breaking out of the single story comfort zone and letting other perspectives enter into your mind. These structured events allowed me to see and hear other voices in a way that I would not otherwise have had access to. These experiences have had a permanent and transformative effect on my personal growth. I am continually challenged to be a better advocate/ally for students of color. (Narrative # 3d)

Although each of us involved in this study attended these events together, the stories of Ijeoma Oluo, Theodora Lacy, and Elizabeth Acevedo were heard in a much more personal and

powerful way by Christopher. In his case, the stories that he heard raised his racial awareness, "each experience building on the other in ways I could not predict" (Narrative #3d), and inspired him to answer the storytellers' communal call for action.

Nancy: Stories Told by Expert Voices Lead to a Campaign to Enlighten. Nancy was, and continues to be, our group's resident scholar on the subject of race activism. Her strength lies in her ability and commitment to provide us with the latest research on all aspects of the field, including what student and teacher activists throughout the country are currently engaged in at their schools. This does not mean that Nancy believes that we will always be able to follow in the footsteps of these activists. She is a pragmatist who has been at the school long enough to know how far we can push, but she also knows that shooting for the stars, at least amongst ourselves, can keep us from sinking into despair when we are so often met with ignorance of the needs of our students of color and resistance to our ideas for racial reform from both our faculty and administration. During this study, Nancy shared the story with us of one such activist who wrote "I argue that our students should be talking race all year, as part of a curriculum that views race relations as human issues and as one of our most powerful and relevant analytical lenses" (Kay, 2018, pp. 91-92). As we were in the midst of pushing for the acceptance of an ethnic studies course at this time, Nancy's sharing of this quote gave us the confidence we needed to counter the negative response to our efforts that we had heard voiced by some members of the school community.

Nancy provided the back story for our work throughout this study. Because of her tireless researching and documentation of information, as well as the personal connections she has made with authors, scholars, and activists who she often brings to our school to share their stories with us in person, our group was better prepared to handle some of the race issues that arose which we

would otherwise have found to be daunting. Through her research and knowledge, Nancy has

always been connected to the voices of the experts in the field of race and she remains

determined to use their stories to enlighten those who want to learn or to silence those who

would cause harm to our students of color through their ignorance.

Within the four monthly narratives that Nancy wrote and submitted for this study, that

determination was clearly on display. Here, in writing was the account of her annoyance with an

administrator who had attended a Race Matters Alliance meeting, only to unwittingly make some

appallingly insensitive racial comments. In response to a student member's lament that we had

no teachers of color on our staff, the administrator had somewhat defensively stated that

applicants of color *had* been interviewed but had not performed well when asked to do demo

lessons. She followed that comment up by saying that the district is always required to hire the

best person for the job.

Rather than resorting to a simple recounting of this unfortunate incident in her narrative,

Nancy wrote a constructive critique of the administrator's behavior and then went on to

counteract the ignorance behind it by replacing that lack of knowledge with the scholarship that

would be required in order for us to attempt to disrupt it. Nancy detailed the copious research she

had done to address this one issue. She reported that she had been able to attend a briefing on

Capitol Hill on student diversity at which Randi Weingarten, the President of the American

Federation of Teachers (AFT), had shared the abysmal national statistics on the number of

teachers of color in our schools, and then promised to work with historically Black colleges and

universities in an effort to improve them. Nancy cited several articles which highlighted the lack

of teachers of color in this country and offered a number of viable solutions. She included bullet

points within her narrative that organized all that she had learned from her research. She finished

the narrative with a description of her plans as a newly elected board member of the New Jersey

Council of Teachers of English (NJCTE) to establish a Black Caucus like the one that exists at

the national level, with the aim of drawing more teachers of color to participate in the

organization. This was the research that Nancy had completed for her first narrative alone.

In another one of her narratives, Nancy spoke about the work of Black author and

educator Matthew R. Kay, who we hoped to host for a discussion of his book, *Not light but fire:*

How to lead meaningful race conversations in the classroom (2018) in the following school year.

In contrast to the aggressive manner in which Nancy had responded to the words of our race-

evasive administrator, her reaction to the expert guidance of Kay (2018) was one of appreciation

and self-reflection. Despite Nancy's interracial background, her lifelong relationships with

people of color, and her successful cross-cultural classroom interactions, the stories that Kay

presented made her question her qualifications to handle the issue of race with her students.

These stories from his classroom prompted Nancy to write in her narrative "As a white teacher, I

am not sure that I would be as effective as Kay, in terms of both credibility and knowledge, but it

doesn't mean we don't continue to try and get better" (Narrative #5c). Because I stand in awe of

the way that Nancy addresses race in her classroom, I was startled by her expression of self-

doubt. However, I was inspired by her determination to learn from Kay (2018) and to work to

improve.

Nancy is a researcher who believes in using the knowledge that she gathers to foster

change in herself, her colleagues, and the school itself. The voices that Nancy is always attuned

to are those of the educational experts, whose stories she analyzes and then transforms into a

powerful campaign to enlighten others. In following this path, she answers the call of scholars of

color who direct aspiring white race allies to learn as much as possible from the literature on

racism and cultures of people of color (Boutte & Jackson, 2013; Harris, 2017). The power of

Nancy's researching skills and her passion for sharing them provided us with the knowledge we

needed to support us throughout the course of this study and the inspiration we will need to

maintain our progress now that it is done.

Melissa: Stories Told by Voices of Students in Pain Lead to Steps to Provide

Support. Melissa has told me that she wonders if she will ever stop being surprised;

if there will ever come a time that she is no longer blindsided by the depth of the systemic racism

that she witnesses daily in her position as the middle school guidance counselor at our school.

The voices that Melissa hears are often the voices of students in pain. All of their stories are

difficult for her to deal with, but she is a well-trained and experienced counselor who feels

confident in being able to handle most of the problems that she encounters. It is the stories of her

students of color and their families however, that Melissa struggles with the most. She often

finds that despite her life-long relationships with people of color, she is still at a loss for how to

help her students when they are confronted with the racism that lurks directly below the surface

of our school environment and that emerges often and without warning.

There is literature that suggests the importance of aspiring white teacher allies seeking

out the advice of fellow educators of color in matters related to incidents of racism at school

(Boutte & Jackson, 2013; Harris, 2017). However, this has never been an option for Melissa

since she has had no colleagues of color with whom to consult. Boutte and Jackson (2013) and

Harris (2017) do suggest that a review of the literature would also be helpful to white educators

faced with racially charged situations. Melissa has relied on Nancy's understanding of the

scholarship on the subject, and I have also been able to provide her with information because of

my related doctoral studies, but Nancy and I are neither school counselors nor administrators.

We are not qualified to help Melissa make decisions around matters of discipline or mental health that affect her students. Considering the lack of support that Melissa receives from within the school district regarding matters of race, it is not surprising that she feels a sense of inadequacy when it comes to handling the racial incidents that are happening there with more and more frequency.

In the narratives that she submitted for this study, Melissa recounted numerous stories of racism, but there were two that affected her more deeply than the others. The first involved two 7th grade students; a white girl and a Black boy. They had been on the same volleyball team in gym class, and when the boy missed a return, causing the team to lose the game, the girl called him the n-word. The boy fled to the safety of the art room office. In her narrative, Melissa wrote that by the time she got there, the tiny room was filled with students of color who were gathered around the boy. No one was speaking, which was unusual since this room was known to be a space of comfort for them; a place that was usually filled with conversation and laughter. Now she described it as feeling more like a "holding cell" (Narrative #2a). All that Melissa could bring herself to do was to touch the boy's arm and whisper, "I'm sorry" (Narrative #2a). She wrote that she had wanted to tell him that there would be consequences, but that she could not be sure that there would be. She recounted that her words "I'm sorry," echoed in her ears within the silence of that room.

The second incident that had been so disturbing for Melissa came quickly after the first, taking place during one of the peer advisory classes that Melissa had inaugurated in an attempt to foster a support system for her middle school students. It was during an ice breaker activity in which the high school advisors instructed the middle school students to say their names and one thing that they liked, and to then toss a ball to another student. Some of the students began to

make comments such as "My name is Shaniqua and I like watermelon," as they threw the ball to the only Black peer advisor. A few of the other peer advisors told Melissa about the incident afterwards. She was shocked that the teacher in the room had done nothing, and mad at herself for not being there. She summoned the peer advisor to her office and recalled in her narrative that once again, she found herself apologizing. This time, however, her apology was not met with silence. She was told by the student, in no uncertain terms, that she wanted Melissa to let it go. Melissa said that she could not allow that kind of behavior to go unpunished. Visibly upset with her, the student left Melissa's office and shortly thereafter made the decision not to return to the school as a senior the following year. She chose to re-enroll in the all-Black school in the town where she lived.

That afternoon, Melissa approached me during my hall duty assignment. She didn't speak. She just stood with her back pressed up against the wall, and then slowly slid down to a sitting position on the floor. Her eyes filled with tears as she told me that she was worried that our work was just serving to give our students of color false hope that things would get better; that we would be able to change things for them. I had not seen Melissa like this before. When I was feeling discouraged at our inability to win over the administration or our fellow teachers to the cause of achieving racial equity within the school community, Melissa would always tell me that we didn't need them to agree with us, we just needed them to get out of our way, but the two incidents she described in her narrative had worn her down.

There is advice in the literature on race allyship for dealing with the kind of inadequacy that Melissa was feeling. It revolves around reflection and support. Helms (1992) and Tatum (1994) suggested interaction with fellow aspiring white allies. Tatum (1994) advised that "allies need allies" referring to those "who will support their efforts to swim against the tide of cultural

and institutional racism" (pp. 472–473). Kivel (2011) reminded us that racism would not end in days or even years and advised that the best way to deal with despair and the temptation to give up was to create time to reflect on future actions. In retrospect, this is exactly what we did. We huddled in our white affinity group and shared our frustrations and grief for a short period of time, and then we got back to planning ahead. In this way, Melissa's discomfort was mediated to an extent, and she was able to get beyond the pain of her students' stories to do what she does best: move forward again and get back to forming a system of support for them.

The stories that Melissa wrote about in her narrative were extremely painful, but with our white affinity group's support and reflection, she was able to turn her energies to positive planning for the future. She began to think about the creation of a virtual wellness website designed by her peer advisors. Its aim would be to offer techniques for diffusing the kind of anxiety that all students experience, but that is particularly intense for those exposed to daily racist micro-aggressions of the type that her two students had been faced with. She set her mind to determining the best way to address racist incidents such as these at our Race Matters Alliance meetings. She also did not give up on lobbying the administration to deal more consistently and firmly with the systemic racism that had caused these interactions. In these ways Melissa was able to listen to and respond to the painful personal stories of her students of color with actions that would not overwhelm her, but, would instead have the potential to raise the racial awareness of the entire school community.

Joyce: Stories Told by Race-Evasive Voices Lead to Efforts to Educate. When I approached Joyce to tell her that she had been chosen by the three founding student members of The Race Matters Alliance to be a teacher leader of the group, she was stunned. She did not feel that she was qualified. Several years after taking on the role, Joyce was still hard on herself

regarding her racial identity growth. She focused more closely on her proximity to the race-evasiveness of her family and friends than on the race-visibility that she herself had developed through her Race Matters participation. Although Joyce worked to educate herself on racism by engaging in cross-cultural race talk with her students and their parents, and by pursuing anti-racist actions with The Race Matters Alliance teachers and student members, she struggled with the idea of speaking up to her less than enlightened family members and her friends at school. She worried that their open, although arguably unintentional, acts of racism classified them as forever racists, and that her relationships with them were evidence of her complicity with that racism.

There was some evidence that this opinion was shared by race experts and by other aspiring race allies. Boutte and Jackson (2013) contended that "silence on issues of racism is not an option" (p. 10). They also insisted that if you are serious about becoming a true ally, you must be prepared to lose friends as you take the necessary steps forward into the role of "action-oriented ally" (p. 13). Harris (2017) called for aspiring allies to "speak up" (p. 3), maintaining that to do so is to exercise their most important function as an ally. Additionally, she challenged them to "take action" (p. 3), insisting that it was up to allies to act within their sphere of influence to foster change.

Within our own group of co-participants, Nancy and Melissa, who enjoyed life-long relationships with people of color, had little patience with Joyce's friends, who they saw as having exhibited no potential for developing an awareness of their racism and moving beyond it. As a result, they harbored some annoyance towards Joyce for maintaining her ties with them. Once we began the formal course of this study, Joyce had more of an opportunity to process the challenges she faced as an aspiring ally. When we gathered in our white affinity group for our

planning meetings or to share our personal narratives, she listened to Nancy and Melissa's concerns and absorbed the personal stories that we each shared about our individual experiences as part of the study. She was open and honest about her concerns regarding the way in which she should handle those closest to her, and about her attempts to overcome those struggles.

Although I agreed with the contentions of Boutte and Jackson (2013) as well as Harris (2017), I did not think that they applied to every instance. Joyce openly, and I thought quite bravely, addressed issues of race in her classroom and fielded complaints from some parents as a result. She provided guidance and support to our students of color when they had to deal with the racial micro-aggressions with which they were continually faced, and she, on several occasions during this study, did take issue with ignorant comments made by her friends. As Joyce sought to fulfil her responsibilities as an aspiring ally, while at the same time acknowledging her difficulty in doing so. She wrote:

> Now I see that racism is present in my inability to speak up. I have failed to correct
> certain colleagues and extended family members who make comments I am
> uncomfortable with. In recent weeks, however, two instances come to mind that reflect
> both my inability, and my attempt to overcome it (Narrative #4a).

She went on to describe separate exchanges that she had had with each of her two good friends who were both teachers in our history department. In the first exchange, she listened to the story that one of them shared with her regarding a discussion that she had had with me about a former student of hers whom she loved, but who I referred to as having racist tendencies. Unbeknownst to me, her friend was dumbfounded by my statement and told Joyce that she had never found the student to be at all offensive. Joyce had had the student in her own class and was also aware of his biases. She wondered how her friend could teach the Civil Rights Movement

and not notice the student making racist comments under his breath as she had known him to do and was sure that he was continuing to do in her friend's presence. She expressed annoyance with herself that she had not told her friend that she agreed with me or shared her own feelings about what she described as his "obvious prejudice" (Narrative #4a). Although she tried to rationalize her failure to speak up by telling herself that her friend was too sensitive to handle it, she was unable to do so. She vowed to begin to stand up to what she saw as her friends' racist attitudes.

Joyce did not have to wait long. Two days later, she sat next to her other friend at a school pep rally where the nominees for the homecoming court were announced. For the first time, there were quite a few students of color included on the list of nominees. Joyce and her friend were seated next to the soccer team which included a number of Black and Latino boys. With each announcement of another nominee of color, the boys erupted in expressions of joyful surprise. They yelled things like "Yes! That makes another one of us on the court!" and clapped and cheered loudly. Joyce was thrilled for them and laughed and cheered as well. Her friend chastised Joyce for her behavior. She asked her if she thought there was anything funny about this, and told her that she was being as rude as the boys on the soccer team. Joyce was stunned into silence at first, but she then became angry. She wondered how her friend could not see how important this was to the students of color. She thought about how sensitive both of her friends were, and she almost let this second opportunity to speak up pass by. Then she remembered how she had held back from expressing her feelings a few days before. She also thought of the work that she had been doing with The Race Matters Alliance and she decided that she could no longer stay silent. She said, "What? The diversity is amazing, and they are just happy about it, which is why they are cheering. I think that it's great!" (Narrative #4a).

Although her friend did not react at the time, the following day she approached Joyce and said that she could not believe the way in which the students had behaved. Again, Joyce stood up for them and said that she shared their views. Although she reacted with angry silence, Joyce's friend dropped the subject and did not bring it up again. Joyce realized that the world had not ended, and neither had her relationship with her friend. She felt proud of herself, and wrote in her narrative that "Although it was only a small gesture, I feel that it's a step in the right direction for me" (Narrative #4a).

Kivel (2011) advised that there is more at stake for aspiring allies who have to deal with friends and family members who are outspoken regarding their racist tendencies. He acknowledged that it may become impossible to continue these relationships, but contended that, in most instances, "there exist grounds for engagement" (p. 137). This guidance was in keeping with the tenets of second-wave white teacher identity scholars who believed that white people must be met where they are in their racial identity development. It is also aligned with Adichie's (2009) insistence on the danger of harboring a single story of someone else's identity.

I believe that Joyce's empathy and willingness to engage with those who might disagree with her opinions on issues of race benefitted the work we were trying to accomplish during this study and beyond. Without the trust that many of our more race-evasive colleagues had in Joyce, we would never have discovered some of the racist views that were circulating within our school community. We would not have had the information we needed to back up our demands for action from the administration. If Joyce had not shown us the racist posts that were shared to her Facebook account nor told us about the way in which she challenged the angry racist statements made by her friends, we would not have understood the depth of the racism that we were committed to disrupting. Joyce provided us with a view of our school community that was not

otherwise available to us. Although she had confessed to me that she felt she had been unable to contribute as much as she had hoped to our Race Matters Alliance work because of her reluctance to challenge the racism of those closest to her, I believe that she underestimated herself. I stood with Boutte and Jackson (2013) in their claim that:

> White allies are in a very powerful position in which they can often sway decisions one way or another by their actions. They also have the advantage of being aware of or knowing insiders' viewpoints (other Whites); although over time they may not be privy to information once they are identified as a threat to the status quo. (p. 17)

Throughout the course of this study, Joyce provided our group with an important service through her ability to access this type of important information. By listening to and sharing the stories of her race-evasive friends with our group, she successfully educated us, herself, and hopefully her friends.

Janice: Stories Told by Youth Activist Voices Lead to an Awareness of White Oppressiveness. In writing about the work of The Race Matters Alliance soon after we started, I described it in the following way: I imagined myself standing in an empty hallway lined with doors. Behind each door was a different faction—students of color and their parents, white students with theirs as well, faculty, administration, and all those who had been involved in the formation of the racial identity of each group throughout their lives. The doors flew open and words jumped out and rushed into one another, becoming jumbled and impossible to understand. I strained to see inside the spaces behind the doors where each group remained, unsure about entering the hallway, perhaps afraid to leave the private spaces they occupied, and I was overwhelmed and unsure how to proceed. Was it even possible to understand this dissonance, much less do anything to disrupt it?

Years after asking myself that question, I sat in my office analyzing the field notes from this completed study. After having had dozens of interactions with many different stakeholders in our drive to realize racial equity at our school, the swell of voices I had written about so long ago had separated and become easier for me to distinguish and listen to. My confidence in my ability to make progress towards becoming an effective race ally had grown, although I could now see that my understanding would always be partial. I would always be white and could therefore never truly appreciate the experience of my students of color, no matter how close to them I thought I was. My notes showed that it had taken the patient work of two brave student activists to finally succeed in forcing me to not only listen to their voices, but to truly hear them, and to understand that my work was to help them to tell their stories, not to decide how they should be told.

Sarah and Jocelyn, who were both Black, were juniors during the documentation portion of this study. Jocelyn had already won the Princeton Prize in Race Relations for her work related to The Race Matters Alliance after being chosen as a finalist for the award the year before. Sarah was involved in a project that I felt sure would garner similar honors for her. These young activists had become central to the work that I was doing along with Christopher, Nancy, Joyce, and Melissa. They were involved in almost every major decision we made related to our Race Matters Alliance work, providing us with key insights into the way in which our actions would be received by the students and their parents, and offering their opinions as well constructive criticism when we asked for it, which I often did. I personally spent a great deal of one on one time with Sarah and Jocelyn. I would often forget that they were high school students. Their confidence in the value of their ideas, and their drive to implement them was inspiring to me. Yet, in the following two instances I found myself actively trying to discourage their plans.

Jocelyn dreamed of establishing an ethnic studies course at the school. The story of that endeavor is addressed in depth in the next finding. I bring it up now however, to illustrate the way in which, I, as the white adult in the room, used my position in an attempt to defer Jocelyn's dream. Sarah's ambition was to establish a regularly scheduled, student-created, panel discussion forum to be streamed from the school website. Both of these endeavors frightened me. I knew that there was already resistance from teachers whenever the idea of showcasing Black History Month was suggested by the students. I could not even imagine the reaction of the faculty and community to the creation of a full course of ethnic studies. I was also sure that the concept of a live broadcast discussion show dealing with race issues would be similarly received. I told Jocelyn and Sarah that I approved of their ideas in theory, but suggested that we go more slowly. I felt that we should spend more time in planning so that we would not appear unprofessional rather than jumping right into filming. I knew that there were quite a few school community members, including some teachers as well as students, who had a deficit view of our capabilities and were always expecting us to fail. Joyce often heard the negative comments that were made about The Race Matters Alliance although Melissa, Christopher, Nancy, and I did not.

Jocelyn and Sarah independently took things into their own hands. Jocelyn connected with a professor at St. John's University whom she had met when we attended an educational race symposium at NYU several months before. The professor had expressed admiration for Jocelyn's dream of establishing an ethnic studies course and had invited her to contact her if she should need help in persuading the school board to support her plan. Jocelyn did not share this exchange with me, knowing that it would fill me with anxiety. She did not have any intention of taking the professor up on her offer to speak to our school board, knowing that it would be counterproductive. She did not need me to explain this to her. Instead, she used the professor as a

sounding board for her ideas related to the actual production of an ethnic studies curriculum and quietly began to research and plan a curriculum on her own.

Sarah independently reached out to the Black public relations person who represented Ali Michael, the race facilitator who would be working with our teachers the following year. I had told Sarah how impressed I was by Ali's representative, and she took it upon herself to connect with her. Unlike Jocelyn, who felt it would be better to proceed privately, Sarah excitedly told me about her conversation with Ali's representative. I am filled with embarrassment when I recall that I was somehow surprised that she had wanted to share her ideas with a stranger rather than with me. Remarkably, it did not occur to me that she would obviously feel more comfortable conferring with a Black woman in planning a program for students of color. I felt a similar wave of hurt a short time later when Sarah spoke at a Race Matters Alliance meeting about the experience of attending a tour of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). She spoke of the sense of relief she had felt at being surrounded by people like her, and noted that the administrators of the institutions had made the prospective students feel incredibly welcome and supported. Sarah commented that she had been overcome with emotion by this and had reflected that her years at our school without that kind of support now seemed like somewhat of a waste. She stated that she realized that she had had to stop being her true self in order to survive at her own school. Because I truly cared for her, Sarah's revelations ultimately filled me with empathy, but my initial reaction was one of hurt that she had not found me to be a source of comfort in this regard. In my reactions to Sarah's revelations, I now see that I exemplified behavior typical of an oppressive white race ally who was privileging my pain over hers, and making her story about me, but I did not see that at the time. I should have recognized my reactions as oppressive from having repeatedly read the account of McIntosh (1988) who, while

engaged in women's studies, noticed the unintentional oppressiveness of some of the male professors with whom she worked. She was reminded, by the way their behavior made her feel, of the "frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive" (p. 3).

If I had allowed myself to question my obsessive worry of being shut down in our social justice efforts, I would have recognized my own oppressiveness. DiAngelo (2018) described the most damaging form of pressure that we exert on people of color to be "minimizing their racial experiences to accommodate white denial and defensiveness" (p. 153). She explained that, as a result, they are reluctant to share their pain with us, because we cannot handle it. She stated that, ultimately, "this accommodation requires a profoundly unfair degree of inauthenticity and silent endurance" (p. 153) which perfectly describes the feelings that Sarah spoke of in relating her HBCU tour. Oluo (2019) went so far as to state that, "If your anti-racism work prioritizes the 'growth' and 'enlightenment' of white America over the safety, dignity, and humanity of people of color—it's not antiracism work. It's white-supremacy" (para. 8).

At that time, I was lucky enough to be completely unaware of my manifestations of white supremacy, for although I had read all of the aforementioned literature, I had not truly heard or absorbed it since I certainly saw no connection between the behaviors it described and my own actions. It was left to Sarah and Jocelyn to make me finally see what I was doing. Jocelyn, who, on her own, and without my support, had secured school board approval to begin work on her ethnic studies course curriculum, had been told that our principal would assist her during the summer. However, the principal had been privately alerted to the fact that her contract would not be renewed. Although Jocelyn had had one short meeting with her, the principal did not follow up with her.

Later that summer Jocelyn contacted me, worried that she still had heard nothing from the principal. I investigated and discovered that she was already gone. Unlike the former principal, I had no training in curriculum, but I had at least created curriculum for my classes and I was able to show Jocelyn how to sort through existing curricula online and to choose components from them that fit with her vision of her course. We looked at the new ethnic studies curriculum that had just been adopted by the state of California and decided that it might be easiest for her to draw her ideas heavily from that document. I did not hear from Jocelyn for the next month, but I assumed that she would follow the format that we had discussed. When I finally met with her again, however, I was awed by the fact that without any help from an adult, Jocelyn had made the decision to follow her own instincts in creating her curriculum. Her actions are described at length in the next finding of this chapter. What is important to the point I am making here is that she did not inform me that I had been oppressive throughout the process she had followed in creating her curriculum. She did not tell me how it had made her feel when I told her that I didn't want to see her disappointed, but that I did not think that an ethnic studies course would ever be approved in our school district. As I read over her curriculum, I was stunned by the way in which she had managed to do exactly what she had dreamed of doing and had created one of the strongest course curriculums I had ever seen. She had not needed my approval. She had just needed me to get out of her way.

In the meantime, I met with Sarah to discuss her planned student-led talk show. Before school had ended, Sarah had asked to borrow my copy of the book, *Not light, but fire: How to lead meaningful race conversations in the classroom* (Kay, 2018). When she returned it to me, she had marked a page with a post-it and asked me to take a look at it after she was gone. What I read was transformative for me. Here, Kay addressed the importance of providing students of

color with the chance to locate their sphere of influence; to explore their own solutions to hard

problems regarding race. Kay suggested that if we expect them to be able to consider these hard

problems, we must invite them to solve them on their own. It is worth citing his quote in its

entirety.

> This balance reminds them of their agency. Without it, the discussion of race
>
> controversies is likely to make students feel a bit like punching bags, peppered by jabbing
>
> misery narratives that set up a knockout conclusion. We teachers, with all of our
>
> sanctioned agency, can be surprisingly blind to this barrage. Worse, our students often
>
> don't feel comfortable telling us when they feel beaten up. (p. 121)

I realized that asking me to read this quote was Sarah's way of requesting that I provide

her with agency. She was asking me to listen to her voice, to believe in her story as she wished to

tell it, just as Jocelyn had done in her own way. I was humbled and incredibly impressed by what

these two young activists had been able to do in spite of the teacher who was supposed to be

their ally, but instead, had acted to stifle their agency. I discussed my realizations with both

Sarah and Jocelyn and told them that I had gone back over the literature on allyship that I

thought I had understood until they made me see it and myself in a new way. I told them that I

had settled on one quote to ensure that I would not lose sight of the lessons they had taught me

by their determination and creativity. It was the words of Ashley Ray, a white mother of bi-racial

children quoted by Harris (2017) that embodied what I knew I must not forget. Ray told Harris

that allies must "challenge themselves to listen to marginalized people and to trust them, even

when that means confronting their own prejudices and inaction" (p. 2). I have listened to many

voices in the course of this study, as I did before, and as I have continued to do since, but it was

the voices of these two young activists and the stories that they told that forced me to

acknowledge the nature of my personal form of oppression, and changed the way that I have and will approach race work.

Focus Area: Curriculum

Study Finding: Relying on Student Involvement and Outside Influence to Overcome Resistance to Change. As I present this finding, there is currently a bill awaiting the New Jersey governor's signature that would require public schools to include multicultural education and to infuse African-American history and the history of other cultures into the general school curriculum, while also teaching them as part of U.S. history. Currently, New Jersey requires history to be taught, but districts decide the content of their courses (Burney, 2020). It has been hard for my study co-participants and me to imagine that, if passed, this bill would actually be implemented in our district as it was designed to be. The history department, in particular, has always reflected a lack of understanding of the importance of addressing anything other than a Eurocentric pedagogy which pays only slight additional attention to basic topics such as slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. There has been little awareness amongst the all-white teaching staff at the school of the importance to students of seeing themselves reflected in the materials that they study, although the research bears this out. Sleeter (2008) observed that attendance is increased, and students participate and learn more in schools where they and their communities are visible within the curriculum. Scholarship has also shown that teaching that exposes students to the experiences of other racial groups, particularly to experiences of racism which those groups have been able to successfully challenge, has had "a positive impact on the intergroup attitudes of both children of color and white children, providing a foundation for shared citizenship in our democracy" (Sleeter, 2008, p. 151).

In the past in our school, even when some faculty members had attempted to address race within their curricula, their lack of experience with the material, and absence of understanding for the sensitivity of perpetually marginalized students had led to communication breakdowns. As soon as we began to document this study, one of our history teachers approached me with pride to tell me that she had added a unit to her course for which she had asked each of her students to pick an African country. They were then to showcase their chosen country with an independently researched PowerPoint presentation. The teacher had provided the students with fact sheets taken from her textbook that compiled lists of the facts and features for each of the African countries that the students could choose to focus on for their projects. The next day some of the students complained to me that the fact sheets that they had been provided with, in their view, contained only negative stereotypes of Africa. The majority of the students of color in the class were "choice" students who had attended elementary school in their hometowns. Most of these schools were all-Black institutions where, according to those who came to me to complain, the teachers taught the students of color that they were descended from kings and queens. Now they were reading only negative facts about the countries on which they were reporting.

The students were discouraged and the teacher was frustrated because she had expected (and felt that she deserved) a more positive response for her efforts. This same teacher had told me the year before that it was upsetting to her that she had taken the time to create a bulletin board in honor of Black History Month, only to have the students of color critique her work. Both of these incidents seemed to me to be proof of what we had long believed— that our teachers felt that Black History was not American History, or, at least not the American History that they were required to cover.

Not long after the African country research project became problematic, Joyce was with

her two history teacher friends when they were defensively discussing the fact that they *did*

cover Black history because they taught slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. Joyce spoke up,

stating that covering those two topics alone was not considered to be teaching Black History.

One of the teachers stood up angrily and left the room. Joyce called me and said that she was

sure that she had lost a friend. The next day, however, her friend surprisingly acted as if nothing

had happened. It was clear that Joyce's friends were subscribing to the white approach DiAngelo

(2018) referred to as "being nice" (p. 153). She explained that all our system of racial inequality

needs to be maintained is for white people to be nice to and about people of color, and to carry

on. It seems obvious that these two teachers felt that by merely teaching about slavery and the

Civil Rights Movement, they were being nice enough to merit gratitude from their students of

color. This type of educational approach would obviously never touch on racism. As DiAngelo

(2018) continued, "In fact, bringing racism to white people's attention is often seen as *not* nice,

and being perceived as not nice triggers white fragility" (p. 153). This was exactly what Joyce

had triggered in her friend.

When my student Jocelyn approached me with her idea of requesting approval for an

ethnic studies course at our school, I could only think of the response of these two teachers, and

the history teacher who had become so irate about his student's grandfather who had dared to

disagree with his declaration that racism was worse in the South than in the North, as described

earlier in this chapter. While Nancy, Joyce, Melissa, Christopher, and I maintained that an ethnic

studies course would never work with our history department in control, Jocelyn chose to find a

loophole. While we, her white teachers, allowed ourselves to become discouraged and to spend

time focused on a single story of the race-evasive attitudes of our history teachers, Jocelyn

decided to reach out beyond us and beyond the district. She made contact with the St. John's

University professor mentioned earlier in this chapter. She also conferred with a NYU doctoral student who we had met at a Montclair State University conference. These contacts were able to give her the support and guidance that she needed to create a formal proposal, and she ultimately obtained a commitment from the school board to allow her to develop a curriculum for an ethnic studies course to be launched in September 2020.

Nancy, Melissa, Christopher, Joyce, and I were so excited for Jocelyn, and incredibly proud that she had worked around us. Acknowledging the considerable power that teachers have to foster race conversations, Bolgatz (2005) concluded that "teachers' willingness to talk about race is a funnel through which any curriculum that addresses issues of race or racism either flows or is thwarted" (p. 34). In my unwillingness to talk about and support Jocelyn's plan to secure approval for an ethnic studies course, I believed that I had come close to thwarting the flow of knowledge that our students of color needed most. I had greatly underestimated Jocelyn.

Rather than learn from my error, however, I repeated it two months later when Jocelyn called to tell me that she had not heard from the principal, who was supposed to be helping her to create the curriculum. As mentioned in a previous section of this chapter, the principal had been fired, leaving Jocelyn on her own to write the curriculum for her course. Not wanting to interfere with her decisions, I decided to merely give her some suggestions. I worried that she would not have any idea of how to approach the task of curriculum writing, so I pointed her in the direction of the newly published California state mandated ethnic studies curriculum. Jocelyn thanked me and went to work. I had not asked her about her thoughts on the matter, or even wondered what she had in mind. I expected that she would basically reproduce the California curriculum, as so many other schools throughout the country were doing at the time. When Jocelyn completed the curriculum and emailed it to me I was stunned at her creativity, confidence, and bravery. She had

not merely cherry-picked portions of existing curricula from the internet as many of my colleagues did on a regular basis. She explained that she had thought about what she had disliked about her history courses throughout her time at our school. It had not occurred to me that she might have wanted to design a Black History course precisely because she knew exactly what she wanted and needed to learn. After years of teaching, I sometimes feel a bit nervous about creating a curriculum for a new course. I now realized that Jocelyn had been preparing to write her curriculum for the bulk of her high school career. That realization humbled me.

The decision that Jocelyn had made was to center her course on the very same units of information that she had been taught throughout her high school history courses, but she had changed them to be taught from a Black person's perspective. She drew sources and materials from the NJ Amistad Commission (NJ Rev Stat 52:16A-88, 2018) which focuses on educational programs that bring awareness to the African slave trade as well as the many contributions that Africans have made to American society. She studied the New York Times 1619 project which attempts to reframe much of our nation's whitewashed history (Hannah-Jones, 2019), and she shared that she had been reading articles and books in preparation for writing this curriculum for the last three years. The result of her research was a beautiful course that, in my opinion, was far more elegant than the curriculum that I had suggested she use as inspiration. Gillborn (2008) observed that:

> At times we must acknowledge that racial-ethnic minority students experience the world differently and consequently many have important perspectives that will not occur to teachers . . . Youth, especially those belonging to racial-ethnic minorities, often have a more sophisticated understanding of the specific issues than do their teachers (p. 250).

Thanks to Jocelyn, our school now had a well-designed ethnic studies curriculum, which

would never have been approved if not for her. I am sure that the students who take her course will learn a great deal from doing so, but none of them will learn as much as I did from the effort that one determined student of color exerted to make her dream of that course a reality. Boutte and Jackson (2013) advised that white teacher allies needed to make substantive changes to their courses and methods of instruction despite resistance on the part of white students and administration. "In other words, allies will need to exert as much passion for this cause as they do for others—even when the cause is unpopular" (p. 16). This was something that my co-participants and I had not been able to do. In order to fulfill our commitment to acknowledge the school's white-washed curriculum and to change it, we had relinquished our responsibility by relying on a student's involvement and the outside influences from which she drew the support that she could not obtain from us.

Focus Area: Fear of Disrupting the Status Quo

Study Finding: Examining the Diversity of Our Insecurities to Develop Anti-Racist Resiliency. The work of white allies is not without risk. Boutte and Jackson (2013) warned aspiring social justice advocates to prepare to lose friends and to understand that the results of their labors may not be what they would like them to be. They cautioned that "The nature of this work involves working through difficult spaces, beyond most allies' comfort zones, and may not result in resolution where everyone holds hands and sings Kumbaya" (p. 14). In this observation, I recognized the poststructural feminist thinking of Foucault (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000), who suggested that "we must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces" (pp. 139–140).

In the days leading up to Trump's inauguration, Harris (2017) spoke with several people who she described as "everyday activists" (p. 2), believing that worried race allies might be able

to able to draw comfort from them. Reflecting a perspective similar to that of Foucault, one woman she interviewed maintained that allyship demanded "committing to pushing past the point of comfort to take effective and impactful action to change things—even if that action is messy" (Ray, 2017, p. 4). Harris (2017) concluded by declaring that "Most Americans are not activists. And not all people can take the same risks. But everyone can work within their sphere of influence to make change" (p. 3).

In the introduction to their book, *Everyday white people confront racial & social injustice:15 stories* (Moore et al., 2015), the authors share that they asked their well-known anti-racist contributors how they came to the field of social justice. In each case the answer was uniquely different and each contributor represented a personal story. From the varied responses they received, the authors determined that:

> There is no right way to come to this path; . . . no one was born into it. Yet one by one, in their own unique ways, these contributors found their way . . . Many of them have received hate mail, been publicly criticized, and their work has been demeaned. Whites who enter this field need to recognize the link between privilege and supremacy and be willing to speak for what is right, enduring the criticism and vitriol reserved for those who challenge the status quo. (p. 3)

Christopher, Joyce, Melissa, Nancy, and I each wrestled with our own commitment issues throughout the course of this study. Just as the themes that we developed years before we started to document our work in any formal way had retained their relevance, the personal barriers to our individual race ally development progress had remained the same. In private, as revealed by the personal narratives that we had submitted for each of the four months of the study, we had harbored doubts and fears about our effectiveness as allies for different reasons. Before our first

recorded planning meeting, I printed out each of these narratives and shared them with the group so that we had an idea of where we all were in our ally development at that point, and we would be able to discuss them. At that first meeting, as described earlier in this chapter, Christopher coined a term to describe our varied but communal concerns. He referred to them as the "diversity of our insecurities." Melissa, Nancy, Joyce, and I had immediately responded in the affirmative to his description. Christopher had gone on to say that the sharing of the diversity of our insecurities strengthened us…that as we threw our stories of insecurity out into the group it created a net that gave more substance to our process (Planning Meeting #1).

We had admitted that we needed each other on this journey, with Melissa observing that we balanced each other out. She had said that there were things that she knew she could not do, so when faced with those issues, she would turn to the rest of us for support. She had gone on to say that it was interesting that the students had chosen for us to be together so many years ago when one of them pointed her finger into my face after I asked her if she would mind sharing what it felt like to be a young woman of color attending a predominantly white school. We had shaken our heads as we remembered that those three founding members of The Race Matters Alliance had told me that if I wanted to do "this" I would have to go bigger, and then she and her friends had told me to enlist Christopher, Melissa, Nancy, and Joyce to join us. We had fallen silent for a moment as we remembered this, and then Melissa had expressed her belief that there was something magical about our group. Joyce had agreed that it was magical, and Nancy had observed that we did also have things in common. After some discussion, we had agreed that the strongest common link between us was the fact that we had all experienced pain which we felt allowed us to feel empathy for others who were suffering. We had decided that the most magical aspect of that was that we had not fully known each other's back stories when the students

brought us together and neither did they.

As I read over these field notes, and reviewed the literature on the challenges faced by aspiring allies, specifically fear of retribution, I was struck not only by the diversity of our insecurities, but by our commitment to support each other as those insecurities continued to threaten our development as race allies. In preparing the literature review for this study, I had been struck by the uniqueness of our group. I had not found a single study that followed a group of white teachers, brought together by students of color, as they worked on their own, self-directed, and unsupported. In this regard, I began to see that our unique make-up, including the variation of our stories and our differing paths, might offer a valuable opportunity for other aspiring allies to see themselves in the diversity of our insecurities as well as through the strength of our unity. As I reflected on our progress, our problems, and our successes, what emerged was the same sort of realization that race activist Paul Gorski offered in the forward to *Everyday white people confront racial & social injustice:15 stories* (Moore et al., 2015). Gorski invited the readers of the book to:

> Learn from our "detours" (Olsson, 1997), from the unjust reliance so many of us had on people of color to nudge us along. Remember, there are no heroes in this book. We are tripping and stumbling along, full of contradictions. In my opinion, it's in the tripping and stumbling and the leisurely pacing where the most important lessons in this book hide. It's in the recognition, once again, that White supremacy and structural racism inform *everything,* including the ways White people known for their contributions to racial justice choose to tell their coming-to-awareness stories and engage in racial justice work. (p. xi)

> I knew that no one in our group thought of themselves to be as racially aware as the

contributors included in that book. However, I now understood the commonality between us all. Even the well-known race activists represented in those pages shared a diversity of insecurities. We were all, in our own ways, continuing to struggle to overcome our particular challenges. Our paths, as detailed in our interviews and our narratives, determined our personal insecurities. Because of their relationships with more resistant family members or friends, Christopher and Joyce had faced concerns surrounding the nature of their roles in our group. For Christopher, the catalyst for his realization of his agency came through the stories of experienced race activists of color. With the support of their stories he entered into more conversations with his mother and co-workers regarding race issues, and created a focal bulletin board in the school dedicated to the unsung Black female scientists who had played such an important role in the history of the NASA program. He felt no insecurity in stepping forward with these anti-racist actions despite the fact that his close co-worker commented that there were many other female scientists who he could have celebrated instead.

Joyce's voice also became stronger, and her insecurity lessened each time she spoke up to the unacknowledged racism of her friends in the history department, and she realized that it did not end their relationships. Despite her doubts about her contributions to the influence of The Race Matters Alliance, Joyce's ability to keep the trust of those friends and other co-workers had been shown to be invaluable to our ability to understand the racial climate of the school. As Boutte and Jackson (2013) noted, however, that at some point, this access might be shut down if she was "identified as a threat to the status quo" (p. 17). Until that time, we would continue to benefit from her work.

Melissa and Nancy, because of their history of enjoying relationships with people of color, and being unhindered by unsupportive friends and family, did not suffer from the same

sort of insecurities regarding their race work as those shared by Christopher and Joyce. Instead, their worries stemmed from knowing exactly what they should be doing, but being thwarted by the entrenched systemic racism within the school. Both Nancy and Melissa however, were capable of employing a method Nancy described as "finding the loopholes." She had first learned about this technique when she attended a book festival, although she could not remember when or where, at which she heard the author Jason Reynolds describe the ability of people of color to make use of the practice. Reynolds described the way in which the architect of the National Museum of African American History in Washington, DC was able to get around the ordinance that no building in the city could be illuminated at night other than the monuments. He coated the building with a "skin" of metal perforated in a pattern that echoed the lush tree foliage of the South. This allowed the sunlight to shine through into the building during the day, creating the illusion of being beneath the type of trees that the slaves had labored under. To create the same sort of beautiful effect at night, the architect had lit the outer "skin" of the building from within, thus creating a powerful glow that emphasized the unmistakable presence of the museum on the mall without installing a single outdoor spotlight. Nancy was inspired by this story to make use of the method in her work as an aspiring ally, and with Meg, they had been able to put it to good use.

Nancy maintained a strong anti-racist presence on social media, and continued to center anti-racist teaching in her classroom. As already detailed in this chapter, she acted as resident researcher for our group, keeping us current in our understanding of the ways in which issues of race were being centered in our field. Her greatest concern continued to be the fact that our diverse student body was not taught by a single teacher of color. Although I cannot classify this concern as an insecurity, it did serve to make Nancy feel helpless to fight back directly against

the administration in this regard. Therefore, she turned her efforts elsewhere and found a

loophole in fighting to create a Black Caucus in her role at the NJCTE to attract teachers of color

to the state, if not to our school.

Melissa, overcame her occasional bouts of despair by creating projects and platforms to

strengthen her white students' awareness of systemic racism, and to provide her students of color

with a way of feeling seen and heard in the classroom. In this way, she mediated the sense of

insecurity she harbored over her inability to control the existence of racial inequity within the

school.

My own insecurities had always stemmed from the worry that our Race Matters Alliance

platform would be shut down, just as the step team I had moderated so many years before had

been. However, because of my ever-deepening relationships with my students of color, I now

had a new insecurity with which to deal. Sarah and Jocelyn's caring actions had made me aware

of the oppressive nature of my worry over being silenced by the administration. At the end of our

study, I was embarking on a long overdue path of reflection which included academic research of

my own, consulting with Nancy to discover any information she might have that could help me,

initiating conversations with the other Race Matters Alliance teachers on the subject, and

engaging in a great deal of self-reflection. I was determined to use the realization that these two

young women had provided me with to grow as an ally. Just as the other members of this group

were doing, I would use our group and my individual examination of my insecurity to build

resiliency for my continuing effort to become an effective white ally and activist.

In this chapter, I related the story of our ongoing attempt to disrupt the systemic racism at

our predominantly white school and described the results of our efforts. Our group of five

aspiring white teacher allies had been working to open and maintain a space to speak about race

for over three years. This study formally documented a four-month-long segment of that work. In organizing my findings, I aligned them to a set of five themes that our group had developed several years earlier, but that we believed to have continued relevance. These themes were based on what we had perceived, and continued to see, as the most important goals of our work. The themes related to the following: our desire to disrupt the overall racist culture of the school; to recognize and address the communication disconnect between our students of color and their white educators; to acknowledge the importance of listening and the power of personal stories and to use that knowledge to promote racial awareness; to commit to transforming the school's white washed curriculum; and to overcome our fear of personal repercussions for challenging the existence of racial injustice within the school. The study findings aligned with those themes and revealed the following: (a) the capacity of white affinity groups to lead to the interruption of racism, (b) the positive effect of interracial race conversation on school culture, (c) the power of the sharing of stories to promote racial understanding, (d) the importance of reflecting on personal fears regarding race in leading to racial resiliency, and (e) the potential for student and outside involvement to achieve curriculum transformation.

In analyzing the findings, I relied on a process of narrative inquiry. The use of narrative inquiry as a way of understanding experiences such as ours was described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as a collaboration over time in which an inquirer enters a sort of "matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social" (p. 20). In my case, the use of narrative inquiry meant that I was not only living and telling the communal story of The Race Matters Alliance teacher leaders. I was uncovering many stories and hearing multiple voices; each of them leading me to view our

group's story in a different way.

In our responses to the push back of resistant students, parents, teachers and administrators, I detected what I now describe as "white race anxiety." Continuing to be observant and allowing the information within the field notes to coalesce slowly, I noticed so much white hand-wringing within our close-knit group. We worried about everything to the detriment of our ability to fully address the systemic racism that we had vowed to disrupt. Over and over, our planning meeting notes, our personal narratives, and my researcher journal, revealed our tendency towards worry that was often unwarranted.

Throughout it all, our students of color were tolerant. In the accounts of the many critical incidents that arose over the four months of the study documentation, I saw the extent of their patience and their hope. The sum of all of our findings showed that their understanding and willingness to stand by us, in spite of our frequent inability to accomplish measurable change, or to deal well with our own disappointment over it, had been and continued to be transformational. Of all the stories embedded within this study, their stories and the way in which they have handled the ever-present weight of racism throughout their high school experience with dignity, grace, and power, has been the most instructional.

As we continue in our efforts to grow into white race allies and activists by preserving the space we have now opened to speak about race at our school, what we owe them is to learn to stand completely on our own. We must stop allowing our white race anxiety to overwhelm this work and to move forward instead in the spirit of resilience and bravery that they have always maintained. In the following chapter I will discuss the implications of these findings in the hope that the story of our efforts to disrupt racism at our school will resonate with teachers, teacher educators, and administrators who, like us, have sought to foster racial equity and to bring about

lasting change.

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this participatory activist research study was to determine how my four colleagues and I, a group of middle/high school teachers, would grow as aspiring race collaborators, allies, and activists as we worked in opposition to the institutional and individual racism that characterized our school environment. Specifically, we were interested in discovering what change processes we could set in motion within ourselves and our school as we attempted to open a space to speak about race through exploring the stories of the various stakeholders in the study. This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings and related conclusions that emerged, associated with the literature on navigating the process of becoming race allies, as well as initiating and sustaining race conversations at school. Also included is a discussion of implications that may be valuable for use by teachers, teacher educators, and administrators who are interested in disrupting racism within their particular educational settings, as well as for researchers who may choose to pursue a similar line of study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ways in which my co-participants and I were affected by this work, including our growing understanding of the importance of stories to developing and sustaining us as allies and activists.

The growth that my co-participants and I experienced as aspiring race collaborators, allies, and activists through our efforts to disrupt the racism that characterized our school environment, and the changes that we were able to set in motion through opening a space to speak about race are evidenced by the five findings that emerged from this study. Each of these findings is focused on authentic human interactions centered around the sharing of stories and the subsequent formation of relationships that occurred as a result. The five findings that emerged from the study are: (a) organic and sustained engagement in white affinity groups by

aspiring white teacher allies leads to the interruption of racism; (b) organized interracial and cross-cultural race conversation has a positive effect on school culture; (c) sharing of personal stories provides a powerful tool for promoting racial understanding; (d) contested efforts by teacher allies to change white-washed curriculum can be facilitated by encouraging student participation in the process and enlisting involvement of outside entities; and (e) sharing personal fears of retribution (the diversity of our insecurities) with other aspiring race allies is important to developing the resiliency necessary for engaging in authentic race work. The combination of these practices creates a systems level collective that provides opportunities for aspiring allies such as the five of us involved in this study to broaden our relationships around the subject of race with each other, our students and their parents, faculty members outside of our group, our administrators, and teachers, scholars, and race activists beyond our school community. It is through these relationships that we have been able to set in motion the changes that we hoped to achieve through the original formation of The Race Matters Alliance, and which we were able to more fully (albeit never completely) realize through the process of implementing this study.

Interpretation of the Findings and Conclusions

The study focused on a four-month segment of time within an ongoing project that had already been in progress for several years when my co-participants and I became engaged in its documentation. As I analyzed the field notes of the completed study, it became clear that the documentation process had changed the dynamic of our work. The elements I used to collect the field notes, which included recorded personal race history interviews and written narratives supplied by the co-participants, recorded planning meetings, my researcher journal, and a critical incident file, all contributed to providing structure for our efforts. They also enabled us to fully review the events that took place throughout the study. Prior to formalizing our work by

embarking on this documentation process, memory of individual daily events was often lost in the whirlwind of critical race incidents and interactions we experienced, both individually and as a group. The structure of the study also forced us to gather on a regular basis to share our stories and to reflect on the direction of our work. This was a practice that was difficult due to our full schedules and lack of communal free time, and one that we had, as a result, not engaged in regularly before working within the parameters of this study.

Throughout the process of analyzing the study findings, I employed the method of narrative inquiry. It has altered my understanding of our work in multiple ways. Clandinin and Connelly (2002) described narrative inquiry as "a way of understanding experience" (p. 20), while Chase (2005) described researchers who use narrative inquiry as narrators who "develop their own voice(s) as they construct others' voices and realities" (p. 657). As the researcher/narrator of this study, I have developed a deeper understanding of the experiences of others, and I have found my voice on the subject of race as I have listened to the voices of the multiple stakeholders with whom I have been involved. Their stories have resonated with me. They have, at various times, inspired me, frustrated me, and even angered me, but ultimately, they have humbled me. They have forced me to accept the magnitude of what I do not know and what I will never know about race.

I began this study inspired by Adichie's (2009) concept of the danger of the single story. I ended it with a deeper understanding of the meaning of that concept. As my co-participants and I worked to avoid a single story of others by centering race within our public and private discourse, we formed the sort of relationships we would not otherwise have developed. This included those we *re-formed* with each other by opening them up to include the subject of race, those we *formed* with our students of color, their parents, and race activists and scholars of color

outside of our school community, and those that we attempted to *transform* with our resistant white fellow educators, students, and their parents. Using narrative inquiry to trace our growth as aspiring race allies, and to determine the changes that we were able to realize within ourselves and the climate of our school, revealed the importance of relationship formation to both of those processes.

In speaking about disrupting racism at school, former Superintendent of Princeton Public Schools, Steven Cochrane, asserted that "You cannot read your way out of racism. You cannot workshop your way out of racism. You have to relationship your way out of racism" (Long-Higgins, 2019, 6:42). The validity of this statement is borne out by the conclusions that have emerged from each of the five findings of this study. The process of opening a space to speak about race at our school led us to form relationships through sharing and listening to stories. These relationships and the stories that they were built on ultimately formed the core of the findings of this study, and the conclusions that have been drawn from them which are described in detail in the following sections.

Self-directed and Sustained Engagement in White Affinity Groups by Aspiring White Teacher Allies Leads to the Interruption of Racism

My first action, after being challenged by the original three founding student members of The Race Matters Alliance to open a space to speak about race, was to recruit Melissa to work with us. The students had asked me to bring her on board, along with Christopher, Nancy, and Joyce. Melissa immediately told me that she looked forward to joining us and shared that, in her role as guidance counselor, she had tried to organize a similar project which she had found impossible to implement on her own. This first admission of the need for assistance in facing the complex task of engaging in race work was later addressed in our group throughout the course of

this study in repeated references to the strength we each drew from one another and our reliance on our white affinity group for support. Incidences of our mutual dependence on one another appeared throughout the study field notes, and are documented thoroughly in the previous findings chapter. It is therefore not surprising that the conclusion that has emerged from this finding is that effective anti-race work in education cannot be done alone.

This conclusion is aligned with the findings of McManimon and Casey (2018), a pair of teacher educators who "began an experiment in living out second-wave whiteness studies" (p. 395) by implementing a two-year-long anti-racist teacher professional development (PD) program in the Midwestern U.S. area. They were prompted, in part, by discovering, as I had, a lack of scholarship on anti-racist interventions for practicing teachers. Seeking to fill that void, they designed their anti-racist PD curriculum for a group of eight white teachers employed in eight different school districts. Although the teacher participants in this study benefitted from the support and guidance of McManimon and Casey (2018), they designed and implemented their own reflexive, anti-racist practices. Thus, their work came close to resembling the sort of organic, self-directed activities in which Nancy, Melissa, Christopher, Joyce, and I engaged.

McManimon and Casey (2018), motivated by the principles of Freire (1970), viewed their work "as a liberatory, humanizing, dialogic space" (p. 396) in which to support one another. Like Freire, they saw it as ever unfinished and ongoing, and themselves and their participants as always existing in a state of "(re)beginning and becoming" (p. 396). They believed this state of "becoming" to be the result of the sense of accountability towards each other that developed between them in the course of their anti-racist work. I saw similarities between their relational experiences in this regard and those that my co-participants and I had shared. These were detailed in the previous chapter of this study and showed that our interactions with one another in

our white affinity group often kept us from giving up specifically because of our commitment to

one another and to our communal work around race. There is no doubt that without our feelings

of accountability to one another, Nancy, Christopher, Joyce, Melissa, and I would not have been

able to grow as aspiring allies or to set in motion changes to the systemic racism embedded

within our school environment. Like McManimon and Casey's (2018) participants, we

developed the strength to grow and to stimulate change through the process of "becoming," not

just within ourselves but as a group.

　　As we grew in confidence and joined our voices in guiding the direction of both The

Race Matters Alliance and the Conversation Matters talk show to include more and more

interaction with organizations and activists outside of our school environment, we became a

force within the community; one with which the administration had to reckon. Having the

support of several universities, and becoming involved with recognized members of the field,

such as Ali Michael (2015), gave us credibility and made it harder for the district to shut us down

even as President Trump called for the cancellation of anti-racist activities at school. The act of

slowing "becoming"; of expanding our role as aspiring allies to include that of aspiring activists

was slow and will always be ongoing. The state of having reached another level of "becoming"

cannot be completely secured and must be constantly reinforced through the type of reflection

and action which cannot be done alone.

　　The honesty that my co-participants and I displayed in our race biographies and personal

narratives represented vulnerability, which is necessary for participating in authentic race work.

It is not possible to achieve any measure of anti-racism without putting oneself out there in

actions rather than merely in words. To understand what this level of growth calls for, my co-

participants had to first reach a level of self-assurance through our work with one another within

the security of our white affinity group. Only then did we become confident enough to develop

relationships with our students and parents of color that centered on the work of disrupting the

structures of racism within our school and within ourselves. It is the development of these

interracial relationships, coupled with a commitment to attending to the guidance of scholars and

activists of color, that has enabled us to broaden the comfort zone of our white affinity group in

order to tackle the authentic work of anti-racism.

With the strength that we first began to develop in our white affinity group, we have been

able to overcome the obstacles placed in our way by the institutionalized racism that was and is

always present within our school community. In the next section I explore the district-wide

cross-cultural conversation that we were able to open as a result of our "becoming in

community." From our initial growth as part of a white affinity group, through our development

into racially conscious beings, we expanded our influence on the race-resistant culture of our

school district. We were able to act together to challenge the injustices we had not at first felt

strong enough to address, bolstered by the diverse relationships we had formed, and from which

we could now draw strength.

Organized Interracial and Cross-Cultural Race Conversation Has a Positive Effect on School Culture

Every change that my co-participants and I have been able to set in motion regarding

issues of race within ourselves, and within the context of our school began with our efforts to

open a space to speak about race. The ongoing race conversations we have now established

within our white affinity group, with our students and parents of color, with our administrators

and teaching colleagues, and with allies and activists beyond our school community, have

allowed us to share our stories with these stakeholders and to listen to theirs, thus leading to the

formation of relationships. It is the interracial and cross-cultural relationships that we have formed through fostering race conversations that have shaped our development as aspiring allies and activists and determined our sphere of influence within the school. These outcomes were described in detail in the previous chapter and include the growth and diversification of The Race Matters Alliance, the establishment of an additional forum for student-driven race discourse through the creation of a video-taped panel show known as Conversation Matters, and in the commitment we secured from the administration to schedule a professional development program for teachers with race activist Ali Michael. On a personal level, the relationships that I have formed with Jocelyn and Sarah have transformed my understanding of anti-racism and developed my confidence in whatever role I am able to play in disrupting it. Conversations around race have also deeply affected the other members of our white affinity group, as evidenced by Christopher's visceral response to the directives of race activists, Theodora Lacey and Ijeoma Oluo, and by Melissa's sense of despair at the thought that by creating a space for race conversation, we might have been merely providing our students of color with a false sense of hope.

The positive developmental effect that the race conversations we have started has had on our school community and on my study co-participants and myself is undeniable, but it has often been accompanied by a level of discomfort that we, as white people, had not previously been accustomed to. We have had to continually fight our ingrained impulses to avoid some of the race discourses in which we have been forced to engage such as the incident described in the previous chapter in which the students disagreed with us regarding our stance on administration-mandated individual teacher lesson planning for Black History month. We have struggled to control some of our Race Matters Alliance meetings from devolving into passionate, but

unproductive, sessions in which some students have emotionally confronted certain administrators who have then declined to return, and we have often been faced with complaints from non-Black students of color that the dominant discourse of our Race Matters Alliance meetings is more attentive to the concerns of our Black students than to the larger student community of color.

The process of reflecting on the incidents mentioned above has led me to determine that the conclusion for this finding comes in the form of a demand for a structured approach to race conversation for those who would attempt to open a space to speak about race at school. My co-participants and I, along with our Race Matters Alliance founding members, went into the process blindly. I do not blame us for this. Our unpremeditated and naïve approach was one that has been supported by well-respected scholars in the field. Brown (2018) recommended that constructive race conversations should not be feared since failure to engage in them disallows members of the dominant white culture to begin to challenge the engrained belief that whiteness, on its own merit, makes them more deserving. Pollock (2004a) voiced a similar sentiment, stating that our habit of characterizing each other, and the categories of racial difference that we have placed ourselves in "are central to the most troubling power struggles we have" (p. 1). In Pollock's view, ignoring these struggles by repressing race talk only serves to reproduce the very inequities we are trying to deconstruct. Although I agree that we were right to go forward in establishing a space to speak about race before we were truly prepared to do so, our experiences in implementing that space have formed my conclusion that we could have done better by first creating a tangible structure for the work. It became clear as soon as we began our formal study, that the process of documentation elevated the nature of our work and made it much easier for us to ascertain our progress and to strengthen the lines of communication between all stakeholders.

I must admit that the scholarship I examined on the topic of race talk for the literature review portion of this study did include guidelines for imposing structure on race conversation, including that of Murray-Johnson and Ross-Gordon (2018) who suggested employing a technique which they referred to as "strategies of self" (p. 142) which were found by the authors to require balance in their implementation. Illustrations of the technique included the pairing of patience and good timing as well as the matching up of prior learning with teachable moments. Creating a balance between opposing strategies was shown to be necessary and also dependent on such things as teachers' lived experiences and their capacity for empathy. For example, teachers might enter into difficult class discussions on race because they believed that there was urgency in immediately addressing the topic, but they would model patience out of their understanding that race work takes time. Another example of the technique would be for a teacher to lead into the topic of race by first referring to prior instruction on other forms of oppression in order to more successfully generate effective dialogue related to racial inequities. Through their work, the authors seemed to parse out the necessity for the presence of emotive capacity in teacher facilitators who wished to initiate and sustain race conversation within the context of school.

Singleton and Hayes (2008) offered guidelines for interracial talk that they referred to as "courageous conversation" (p. 18). They saw this form of discourse as a way to break down racial tensions by leading participants into conversations which would allow those with knowledge of race issues to share it, thereby helping those who were lacking in that knowledge to learn and grow from the experience. They set out four rules for "courageous conversation": (a) stay engaged, (b) expect discomfort, (c) speak your truth, and (d) accept a lack of closure. The authors cautioned that cross-cultural dialogue would be dangerous because it could expose

emotions that we have all been programmed to bury. They warned that, in these conversations,

Black participants often express anger and frustration when they hold little hope that the work

will bring any change, while white participants retreat into silence out of fear that their

comments will be seen as racist. However, within the safe conditions created by their four

guidelines for "courageous conversation," Singleton and Hayes (2008) posited that an

environment might be created that would allow for "safe exploration and profound learning for

all" (p. 18).

I had not yet done this research when we initiated The Race Matters Alliance, but I could

have attempted to initiate some of these suggestions at our meetings once I had. Here is a perfect

example of the disconnect between theory and practice. With little preparation time for our

meetings, and large groups of participants who we did not always know personally, we often

succumbed to our lack of experience and went into our meetings without a solid plan. As every

experienced teacher knows, going into a group discussion without a roadmap is asking for

trouble. We did have access to a powerful support system, however. It was one that we had

completely overlooked out of what I now refer to as white hubris. It did not occur to us, but it

was Jocelyn and Sarah who were able to offer the help that we needed. They finally suggested

that when addressing volatile topics, we might break into smaller groups to discuss the issues

before discussing them with all of the meeting attendees. The first time that we tried this

technique, we broke into groups defined by race and made a list of our individual concerns. After

an agreed upon amount of time, each group shared these concerns with the rest of those in the

room. It was amazing how everyone seemed to respond favorably to the structure. We have since

employed variations on the theme of breaking the larger group down into smaller units with

success, and we have attempted to remain focused on Singleton and Hayes' (2008) four rules for

"courageous conversation": (a) stay engaged, (b) expect discomfort, (c) speak your truth, and (d) accept a lack of closure (p. 18) which have lent much needed structure to our meetings.

In addition to the guidance offered in the literature, our growing store of knowledge based on experience added to our conclusion for this finding. We support the importance of engaging in exclusively authentic dialogue, committing to dedicated listening, and creating a safe space in which those with alternate views feel safe to respond without fear of being met with negative overreactions. As teacher leaders and aspiring allies, we acknowledge the need for us to be willing to sit in our own discomfort, to reflect on our motivations, and to always question our actions. We know that we must be careful to give our students of color the voice and agency that they deserve, and to acknowledge our mistakes in this regard because we will undoubtedly continue to make them. I believe that the answer to the tendency of white teachers to lose sight of the deep understanding of race issues held by their students of color is to constantly engage them in race conversations—not to burden them, or to ask them to teach us, but to simply allow them to find their voices and to have their say.

Sharing of Personal Stories Provides a Powerful Tool for Promoting Racial Understanding

Through the course of this study, I became aware that sharing stories was the catalyst for the race-related changes I observed both within the context of our school environment and within ourselves. In interpreting the five findings of this study, I recognized the concept of sharing stories woven through them all. I have therefore concluded that the sharing of personal stories must be centralized within any effort to disrupt racism in order for it to be successful and sustainable. That is because it is the most effective way for us to get to know one another, and the one that is least likely to generate resistance.

In the BBC documentary, *Two women, one big conversation* (2018), Princeton professor

and race activist Eddie S. Glaude shared a quote from the comedian DL Hughley in which he asserted that "the most dangerous place for a Black man or woman is in the imagination of a white man or woman" (Long-Higgins, 2019, 4:47). Glaude suggested that the reason for this is that we don't know each other. In the course of the race work that I have documented for this study, I have seen that we learn most about each other's racial identities through the sharing of our stories, and as we absorb that knowledge, I believe that we are able to develop our own racial identities as well.

As my white affinity group members and I shared the stories of our racial histories and our ongoing racial experiences with one another in the discussions of our individual interviews and written narratives around the subject of race, I observed aspects of my co-participants that I had not previously been aware of and developed deeper relationships with them as a result. I had known Christopher for years and was aware of his rigidly conservative, white Christian upbringing. However, hearing the story of his deeply thoughtful teenage observation of Black culture upon meeting a few Black church members at his religious youth summer camp, and learning about the way it slowly led him to question the racism embedded within his church caught my attention. I saw the parallels between that experience, which was his first real encounter with racial difference, and the reflective and serious way that he responded years later to the call for white participation from the activists of color whose talks we attended as a group. His patience with the process taught me to be more patient with my own racial identity development. I became aware that, in my rush to become an effective ally, I was not always hearing the voices of my students of color, their parents, and the scholars and activists that I should have been listening to. I learned similarly from listening to the personal stories of each of my other co-participants. Inspired by their stories, I began to imagine the possibility of

developing different aspects of myself that I would have been less likely to have considered on

my own, such as the more reflective approach to racial identity development that I adopted from

listening to Christopher's personal story of racial identity development.

Our interactions with our students of color and their parents, which we were

documenting and discussing with each other in our group throughout this study, also took on

additional layers of importance for the development of our racial awareness through the power of

storytelling. In reflecting upon their personal stories, we began to see the existence of systemic

racism within our school and the greater community much more clearly. We compared the

stories of our Race Matters Alliance members of color to those detailed in the literature that both

Nancy and I shared with the group, and viewed them through the counselor's lens that Melissa

brought to the table. In one such example of this practice, our understanding of a Race Matters

Alliance parent member's feelings as she described her apprehension and fear as the mother of a

Black boy amid the pervasiveness of police brutality was enhanced. We were able to recognize

the parallels between her personal story and that of race activist and poet Clint Smith which he

shared in his TedTalk entitled, *How to raise a black son in America* (2015). The discussion we

engaged in after hearing our Race Matters Alliance member's story, and then watching the Clint

Smith video, highlighted the existence of systemic racism that for most of our community

members was hiding in plain sight. As we acknowledged the deep pain of the mother of one of

our own students and connected it to Smith's powerful account of the realities of Black

parenthood, the similarities between their stories revealed the terrifying danger that our students

lived with daily, and reinforced our commitment to race activism within the context of our

environment.

I also became increasingly aware of the importance of sharing and listening to stories as I

engaged in eye-opening conversations with our Race Matters Alliance student members Jocelyn and Sarah. Our talks, in which we each admitted our unacknowledged racial biases, and those in which we shared our vastly differing takes on race-related situations, such as our expectations for teachers' handling of Black History Month, established trust between us and cultivated a sense of what needed to be addressed in our work. The sharing of and listening to each other's stories was uncomfortable and even painful at times, as detailed in the findings chapter of this study, but it was ultimately engaging, liberating, and imbued with a sense of importance and purpose.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, many of the personal stories that my co-participants and I heard from our race-resistant white teaching colleagues and administrators filled us with anger and frustration. Hearing more than one of our white colleagues complain that if their students of color were going to criticize their efforts to address race, they would simply refuse to focus on it, highlighted the difficulty we faced in attempting to avoid ascribing to them a single story of racist hate.

My engagement with the idea of the story in relation to race dates back to my choice of Adichie's (2009) concept of the danger of the single story as the conceptual framework of this study. Throughout the documentation process that followed, I developed a belief that an in-depth analysis of the personal stories of my co-participants and myself would resonate with those educators who might wish to address racism at their schools and provide them with "a way in" to developing their own processes by examining ours. However, it was not until I began to analyze the study findings that I recognized the true necessity of centralizing the sharing of personal stories within any form of race work in order for it to be authentic, and therefore sustainable.

Contested Efforts by Teacher Allies to Change White-Washed Curriculum Can be Facilitated by Encouraging Student Participation in the Process and Enlisting Involvement of Outside

Entities

As described in the previous chapter, almost three years before my co-participants and I engaged in this study, we worked together on an assignment for one of my doctoral classes in which we compiled a list of themes/goals for The Race Matters Alliance work which we had begun the year before. Even then, we realized the importance of diversifying the curriculum to reflect the presence of people of color, both in the past and present. In the years that followed, Christopher, Melissa, Nancy, Joyce, and I often discussed the lack of attention to diversity within our overall school curriculum. During the course of the study, while teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1999), Joyce wanted to present a lesson on the prevalence of lynching in the South during the time in which it took place. Her lead teacher saw a book on the subject in Joyce's bag and told her that she would not be allowed to teach anything on the subject. She said that it would be too divisive. At the time, with President Trump decrying anything that he defined as such, there would have been a major backlash from our mostly Trump supporting parents, if Joyce had chosen to push back against her lead teacher's direction. Reluctantly, she withdrew her lesson from the unit on the book. There were few teachers who Joyce could have shared her frustrations with regarding this incident beyond Melissa, Christopher, Nancy, and me because, other than the five of us, she would have been hard pressed to find any teacher who would have been compelled to add instruction on race to their curriculum.

The Race Matters Alliance student members often shared their frustrations with us regarding the lack of diversity in the curriculum, and there had been several occurrences in which they had tried to push back unsuccessfully on their teachers who then reacted negatively to their voicing of these concerns. The most notable example of this was the incident in which the grandfather of a Black student disagreed with his granddaughter's social studies teacher by

challenging his contention that racial conditions in the South, from which he had fled North, were better than those he encountered upon securing a job with the New York Longshoremen. In this instance, the student had recorded an interview with her grandfather in which he shared his memories of the racism he had experienced on that job. The teacher refused to share the video with the class until forced to by the principal. The fallout from this incident could be felt for the rest of the school year in the continued resistance of the teacher to the idea of addressing this issue or any other issue of race with the class other than those included in the school's white-washed social studies curriculum.

Jocelyn was a student in that class, and the incident influenced her to pursue permission to design and secure approval for an ethnic studies class to be added to the social studies department curriculum. As previously noted, I tried to discourage Jocelyn from this pursuit. I could not imagine any way that the course would be approved and I did not want to see her work hard on it, only to be disappointed. She stopped talking about it, bypassed me, and pushed forward to make it happen on her own with some guidance from a St. John's University professor she had met when we attended an NYU student race conference, and with whom she had shared her dream of establishing an ethnic studies course at our school.

Jocelyn's successful bid to win approval for her course was remarkable to us because she succeeded at something that no teacher in the district would have been able to accomplish. Choosing to approach the school board on her own *after* being named a finalist for the Princeton Prize in Race Relations for her efforts and aligning herself with a university professor, she made it hard for the board to deny her approval. She told them that she was going to change the world and that she was going to start with our school. Upon receiving permission to write the curriculum for her course, which was slated to be added to the schedule at the start of the next

school year, Jocelyn surprised us all by refusing to model her curriculum on that of an existing

school's. Instead she designed it to include everything that she had been longing to learn about as

she had sat in her history classes over the prior three years, unable to relate to the material

because within it she had been unable to see any evidence of herself. She designed her own

curriculum to cover all of the same time periods and overarching events of the courses she had so

disliked, but she found teaching materials and lessons that presented the information from a more

afro-centric perspective. She included musician Steve Van Zant's TeachRock.com teaching

program that integrated contemporary music with culturally responsive teaching, and she relied

heavily on the interactive materials of the Amistad curriculum. The result of her work in

preparing a framework for her course was a vital and dynamic curriculum that provided a mirror

for students of color to see themselves in the history of their country.

Bolgatz (2005) and Tatum (in an interview with Richardson, 2017) shared the belief that

even more important than the subject matter being discussed with students, was the mere fact

that teachers took the initiative to speak about race in their classrooms. Bolgatz (2005) concluded

that "teachers' willingness to talk about race is a funnel through which any curriculum that

addresses issues of race or racism either flows or is thwarted" (p. 34); a somewhat distressing

analysis considering Bolgatz' admission that she was able to find few examples in the literature

that addressed teachers actually engaging in curriculum involving race. Similarly, Brown et al.

(2017), in a comprehensive review of the literature, asked why there were so few discussions of

race in classrooms considering the pervasiveness of race in every aspect of life in the United

States. I would answer their question by describing the invisible wall of whiteness that had

stopped Joyce from connecting a lesson about lynching to her instruction of *To Kill a*

Mockingbird (Lee, 1999), and that had almost kept our student's grandfather from sharing his

memories of racism on the New York docks because they threatened her teacher's stock story of the difference between Northern and Southern bias. The scholarship detailed above reveals the monumental nature of what Jocelyn was able to accomplish, especially within the context of our school. She succeeded where we, her teachers, had been unable to even imagine a way to disrupt the racist status quo.

The finding that I interpreted through these events showed that our school's white-washed curriculum could be changed through dynamic student participation in the process coupled with the involvement of outside sources such as university professors and/or organizations. The conclusion I have drawn from it, however, is that white teacher allies must be willing to step back and loosen their hold on the process of attempting to diversify educational curriculum when progress can be better served by relinquishing power to stakeholders of color.

Sharing Personal Fears of Retribution with Other Aspiring Race Allies is Important to Developing the Resiliency Necessary for Engaging in Authentic Race Work

Throughout the course of the study, my co-participants and I drew strength from our interactions as part of the white affinity group that we did not set out to form, but which somehow developed naturally out of our need for each other's support in the "doing" of this work. Gathered in the security of Melissa's small private office, we came together to develop our plans for The Race Matters Alliance, as well as the formation of the Conversation Matters talk show, and the annual new teacher orientation. We also brainstormed about our hopes for developing teacher professional development on the subject of race, and our worries about the student members of The Alliance. These gatherings were all recorded and documented in the form of three, scheduled, hour-long planning meetings. Less organized, were our spontaneous gatherings which took on the feel of emergency meetings to deal with the critical race incidents

that seemed to blindside us on an almost daily basis. We came to depend on the sharing of our very different approaches to issues and the unique skills we each brought to the table in dealing with the complexities that these critical race incidents raised. They might involve the hurling of racial slurs or more subtle micro-aggressions. Sometimes they involved staff members as in the incident of the maintenance man who put on a hijab and took a picture of himself holding a Corona beer. Discovered by Joyce, the finding prompted her to send an urgent text to Melissa, who immediately came to her classroom. The support might run the other way as well. A message sent through our Race Matters group chat could send us running to Melissa's office, as long as we were free at the time to be there for each other in the service of our communal work.

There was another form of interaction that took place in our group however, that was not documented and not designed to be a formal part of the study, but was perhaps more important to the likelihood of our being able to sustain our involvement in The Race Matters Alliance, and our growth as aspiring allies and activists. This type of interaction grew out of our "diversity of insecurity"—that phrase coined by Christopher that we joked about, but that we actually took quite seriously. The interactions that I am describing are those in which we helped one another with the issues that were affecting us personally. Our race work had brought us closer and we were there for each other. These were the meetings that took place on the fly, in the hall, while walking out to our cars, or often on the phone. These interactions were not always about our race work, but they were almost always affected by our race work, because the unacknowledged truth is that the work did and still does take a toll on us. We talk about self-care, but there is not often time for it. What we discovered, however, is that the nature of our relationships as allies created a level of comfort and trust between us that offered an unexpected depth of support.

In my role as the lead researcher and author of this study, I naturally have had the most

investment in the work. Melissa has been a close second to me in her level of engagement. I believe that the reason for this is two-fold. Melissa is a counselor and she always wants to help. She also had wanted to form a group similar to The Race Matters Alliance long before I invited her to be a part of ours. Therefore, she has had a sense of ownership for our work that means that we are often handling more than the other members, not because we are more dedicated, but because we are more engaged in it. The close relationship that I have with Melissa has led to some of the most important interactions of this study. The time that she slid to the floor in despair at the thought that we might just be giving our students of color false hope comes to mind.

As previously mentioned, in the process of engaging in narrative inquiry, realizations emerge that might not otherwise break out the subconscious. It is not surprising, then, that I have found myself thinking, as I have been writing, that the work we have now been involved with for years; this stressful work, bears a similarity to that of soldiers in combat. It is true that it is not in any way as dangerous, but it can be dangerous to the psyche.

To better understand my thoughts on this, I examined the existing literature on the nature of the relationship between soldiers who serve in combat together. I discovered that the strong bond that they often form is referred to "unit cohesion" (Langerholc, 2010, p. ii), and is defined in this way: "Unit cohesion evolves from mutual loyalty, trust, and compatibility of norms, values, and goals" (Langerholc, 2010, p. ii). This line of reasoning has led me to conclude that the communal work of attempting to become race allies might tend to generate a form of unit cohesion.

Based on this finding, I conclude that we know that the ongoing job of the working, aspiring ally generates tension. I am sure that there are more stressful settings in which to work

towards allyship than that of our school, but I know that the continuing work has taken a toll on us. To deal with the waves of tension and depression that we all experienced at various times throughout the study, we organically formed additional, more private branches of our white affinity group that morphed and changed as individual needs arose. We often communicated with one another through our private text chat or we met in pairs or groups of three to process our feelings related to this journey of discovery that always led towards allyship, but was constantly in flux and partial. A state of mind that is always changing is difficult to deal with. I believe that that is why we were often in communication with one another, even when we were not actively engaged in the work of aspiring allies.

Once again, the common thread of race conversation led to the sharing of stories, which led to a deepening of our relationships. Out of the safety of those communal relationships we organically formed a community in which we were no longer afraid to expose our fears and anxieties related to our race work. Somehow, and in different ways at different times for each of us, there was a connection to a fear of retribution from a variety of sources, but our relationships with one another had slowly developed over the years to become spaces in which we could retreat to let go of our fears.

Implications

The findings that emerged from this study, and the conclusions that I have drawn from them, do suggest that a group of middle/high school teachers can bring about change in themselves and their school environment when they engage in research that draws on the power of stories to disrupt racism. The act of facing down racism, however, defies predictable solutions. What worked to bring about change during the course of this study could not be applied in the same way within the context of another school community with the expectation of generating the

same outcome. Communities vary by characteristics such as demographics or social identity. The town in which this study took place was predominantly white and overwhelmingly resistant to any change in that status. However, in 2000, out of financial concerns, the community members had reluctantly agreed for the school to be designated as part of the county "choice" program, accepting students from any town in the county in order to be reimbursed by their sending districts in return. Because the majority of the "choice" students were African American and Latinx, by the time of this study, the school demographic had become over 40% diverse while that of the town remained 90% white.

Although the "choice" program had been in existence for almost twenty years, it continued to create a tension within the school community that was unique unto itself. As a result, the race work that my co-participants and I were engaged in was both complex and full of contradictions. One example of this was the fact that the community members reveled in the town's successful soccer team due to the addition of Latinx players who were far better-trained than the white students who lived in town. Yet, there was no afternoon bus to take these valuable "choice" student players home after practice because the administration saw it as an expense that should be handled by the students' home towns. The "choice" soccer players were often not allowed to wait inside the building for their rides to arrive. If an evening community event was taking place at the school, they would be told to wait outside, even if it was dark or the weather was inclement. It was a not so well kept secret that, at these times, those in charge did not think it would look good to have students of color "loitering" in the halls.

Despite circumstances such as this one, which was quite site specific, I strongly believe that teachers, teacher educators, and administrators who are interested in disrupting racism within their particular educational settings have something to gain from reviewing this study.

This is because, in addition to learning that the work of setting racial change in motion at school cannot be done alone, this study revealed that there is no single way to bring about the sort of progress that raises the racial awareness of a school community. It is about finding ways in, even when the obstacles seem impenetrable, and by coming towards a problem from multiple angles. This approach can be universally applied to race work in any educational setting, regardless of the unique problems that the aspiring allies attempting to disrupt the existence of racism there may be forced to face.

In the case of the five educators, including myself, who participated in this study, each had different approaches to our communal work and different strengths to contribute. In attempting to open a space to speak about race, we were continuously pushing against the school community for time, space, and support for our initiatives as described in the previous chapter. Melissa, sometimes with my assistance, paved the way with the administration. I was able to garner the support of the students and parents of color, as well as making connections with outside organizations. Joyce made headway with the resistant white students and teachers. Nancy provided us with research and outside literary connections, and Christopher deftly analyzed our goals and helped to put them in perspective during our planning sessions and our more spontaneous critical incident discussion meetings. Each of us represented a different type of educator. Each of us worked within a different academic discipline, and each had historically different experiences with racial identity development. I believe that it is in these differences that those who would look to this study for guidance would be likely to see some aspect of themselves reflected in our diversity as aspiring collaborators, allies, and activists. I theorize that through that sense of recognition, and the observation of our attempts at change making, they would find a way in to design their own methods of pushing against the systemic racism that

exists in every school environment in its own unique way.

I also suggest that those who choose to examine our work will recognize parts of themselves, as we had to admit we did, in the resistant teachers whose stories appear in the pages of this study. The road to allyship is slow and often halting. As previously discussed, each of the five of us contend that we now recognize that we all began at some level of ignorance, that our work will always be ongoing, and that our understanding of race issues will always be partial. We see the term "ally" as problematic since, to us, it suggests equality with those people of color who we wish to support. I believe that it should always be prefaced with the word "aspiring" as true allyship will never be fully realized. I also am partial to the term "aspiring activist" because it suggests the idea of agitating for change which includes attempting to change ourselves.

With each step, Nancy, Melissa, Joyce, Christopher, and I have covered new territory. There has been a sense of vulnerability to our work, and we believe that there always will be. We have had to be willing to expose ourselves and to face our weaknesses and our failures, as well as to be able to recognize our successes, in order to capitalize on them. Petal Robertson (2021), a local Black high school teacher and activist has advised that "If you are really serious about this work, then you have to be really serious about the truth" (P.Roberton, personal communication, March 23, 2021). I believe that this quote refers to forcing ourselves to see the truth about racism in the world, but also within ourselves. I suggest that, in different ways, teachers, administrators, and teacher educators can take away valuable information from the truthfulness and vulnerability of our personal stories. They might also learn from the personal stories of others which were revealed through the telling of our own: (a) those of the students and parents of color with whom we interacted, (b) the white teachers and administrators with whom we worked, and (c) the scholars and activists who played a role in our stories by inspiring and pushing us to reach

toward our goals of race allyship and activism.

In the following sections I detail the separate implications of this study that I feel are of specific value for: (a) teachers, (b) administrators, and (c) teacher educators. I follow these sections with a short summary of the implications for doing the type of research that this study represents, including what my co-participants and I learned, what we would share with others, and what we can now say supports aspiring allies and activists like our group of five educators who initially set out to see what changes we could set in motion through opening a space to speak about race at our school.

Implications for Teachers

Race work is understandably site specific. What aspiring teacher allies working in a supportive, race-visible school environment are confronted with as they attempt to expand their racial identity and to affect positive racial change differs from the challenges faced by those working in a race-evasive setting. There would also be variation in the circumstances that teachers hoping to become race allies encounter depending upon the racial demographic of their schools. Those working in a school with no students of color might not see the need for race work on their part, even if they were open to it, since many white people think of race as a problem specific to people of color. Author and race facilitator Oluo (2019) expressed frustration with this attitude by lamenting:

> Every time I stand in front of an audience to address racial oppression in America, I know that I am facing a lot of white people who are in the room to feel less bad about racial discrimination and violence in the news, to score points, to let everyone know that they are not like the others, and to make Black friends. I know that I am speaking to a lot of white people who are certain they are not the problem because they are there. (para. 8)

Oluo (2019) was not alone in these feelings towards aspiring white allies. In a posting of the blog Black Perspectives, (Burgin, 2018, para. 1), Roxane Gay was quoted as stating that she was done with the concept of allyship through which she believed that white people were allowing themselves to keep their distance from doing the real work of supporting people of color. This sentiment was echoed by the Nashville Chapter of Black Lives Matter which refused to risk participating in a counter-demonstration against a White Lives Matter march, announcing to aspiring white allies that the work should instead be done by them, in their role as white allies, as it would be much less dangerous for them to do so (Burgin, 2018, para. 2).

My experience in working with our diverse student and parent members of The Race Matters Alliance exposed me to this type of frustration from people of color towards aspiring white allies, including myself, and I had come to understand and accept the fact that I had to step up. Before engaging in the documentation portion of this study, these reactions would have unsettled and confused me, because I was not brought up to notice racism much less to fight against it. As mentioned in the previous chapter, my ongoing review of anti-racist literature written by people of color has continued to expose me to this persistent perspective, forcing me to see that those who hope to become educational race allies must clearly recognize, reevaluate, and alter their perspective in order to improve the school environment for everyone. However, my growth as an aspiring ally, forged with the passage of time, and reinforced by the conclusions I drew from this study, forced me to take a step back from the calls to action by the people of color around me, both in person and within the literature, and to adjust my view of what might be possible.

In contemplating the implications for teachers regarding the role of aspiring allies, I knew that what many of our Race Matters Alliance members and the activists whose words I

cited above were asking for was impossible for white teachers new to race work. It was clear to

me that only after five years of doing the work did I feel ready to respond to Roxanne Gay's

demand that white people "get their sh*t together" (Burgin, 2018, para. 1). My close

relationships with Jocelyn and Sarah had shown me that they could not fully understand the cult-

like beliefs around race that our white-dominated society had instilled in us. I could not explain it

to them, because I found it hard to understand it myself. In Tre Johnson's (2020) explanation of

his anger towards the white inability to clearly see the truth about racism in this country, I found

a direction for how to share the implications of this study with teachers in a way that would give

them realistic suggestions and guidance. Johnson (2020), in an article for the Washington Post

entitled *When Black people are in pain, white people just join book clubs,* voiced similar

concerns as those mentioned by Gay (2018) and Oluo (2019), but he offered a glimpse of some

confusion and uncertainty on the part of people of color towards race relations as well when he

advised that:

> The confusing, perhaps contradictory advice on what white people should do probably
>
> feels maddening. To be told to step up, no step back, read, no listen, protest, don't
>
> protest, check on Black friends, leave us alone, ask for help or do the work—it probably
>
> feels contradictory at times. And yet, you'll figure it out. Black people have been
>
> similarly exhausted making the case for jobs, freedom, happiness, justice, equality and
>
> the like. It's made us dizzy, but we've managed to find the means to walk straight.
>
> (Johnson, 2020, para. 11)

Johnson's assessment made me see that we are truly all in this together; that we, as white people,

have to stop expecting the process to be easy, and definitely to stop expecting acknowledgement

for our anti-racist actions. If we could do this, I believed that we too could embrace the

messiness of the process and "find the means to walk straight" to which Johnson was referring. With his perspective to support me, I was able to focus on the framework that had guided my co-participants and I from the start of this study and to move forward with the implications for teachers that I had confidence would have the potential to foster ally development within them.

The results of this study suggested that teachers who aspire to develop as aspiring race allies can do so by following the steps that my colleagues and I had done. Although the process for different teachers working in different school districts would vary greatly, as previously described, it would include the same basic steps to ensure that the teachers would progress in their development as aspiring allies and activists. These steps would include engaging in self-reflection on one's personal history, cultural background, and biases in order to understand the effect that these would have on interactions with students of color, and initiating conversations related to aspects of race with students of color. For white people unaccustomed to this step, it should be remembered that my journey to aspiring allyship began when I posed this simple question to three of my students of color: "What is it like to be young women of color in a predominantly white school?" Their responses started a conversation that has now been going on for over five years. I suggest that these conversations are where teachers can educate themselves on the topic of racism including the difficult topics of white privilege and systemic racism by reading as much scholarship on the subject as possible and where they can speak to trusted colleagues and friends about experiences of racism. In this way, aspiring allies find their comrades in the journey towards allyship and activism, and as relationships that are centered around race work begin to form and grow, they can engage in outreach to educational institutions and organizations for support and guidance. They also should remember to listen to what the students of color and their parents are saying and complete the loop of self-reflection repeatedly

to assess the validity of their responses. Finally, once a white affinity group has been formed, sustaining it involves organized connections such as a dedicated group chat and regularly scheduled meetings to evaluate both individual and group progress towards allyship and activism.

Implications for Administrators

I believe that the results of this study offer valuable implications for administrators if they are willing to work closely with students and teachers in order to take the steps necessary to disrupt the systemic racism within our schools. As has been shown through the stories of relationships detailed in this study, my co-participants and I missed opportunities to move our anti-racism initiatives forward as quickly as we could have by overlooking the wisdom and experience related to race that our students had to offer. I stood in the way of Jocelyn's plan of securing approval for an ethnic studies course because I thought that it would never be approved by our school district. I was oppressively negative regarding Sarah's design of her Conversation Matters panel talk show for the same reason. Both of these young women worked around me and managed to reach their goals with both initiatives being recognized by the Princeton Prize in Race Relations committee. Sarah's accomplishment also earned her the attention of race activist Ali Michael which led to one of her essays being published in a book that Michael co-edited titled *Teaching beautiful brilliant Black girls* (2021).

As I reflected on the implications for administrators to be found in the results of this study, I realized that my fellow teachers and I often discussed our perception that the district administration leadership team, which has gone through a complete personnel turnover four times in the last 20 years, often failed to make use of the funds of knowledge that its teachers had to offer. We frequently observed that we were their best and most overlooked asset. Their

attitude towards teachers was similar to that which I had exhibited towards Jocelyn and Sarah, and it was just as counterproductive to the growth of racial progress and understanding in our district.

In order to avoid a similar outcome, administrators can follow several steps that emerged from this work to stimulate the development of productive anti-racist action within their individual schools and districts. For example, they can take steps to self-educate on the subject of racism in education by reading, viewing films and documentaries, and staying on top of all news and legislation related to the topic of race. They can also take the time to listen to the stories of teachers as well as students of color regarding their perceptions of race relations within the school district and ask what would make them comfortable. It is possible that the changes they hope for would also make the environment of the district more comfortable for all stakeholders through getting to know the teachers and students in a new way by working together to improve the racial atmosphere of the district. Viewing teachers and students as allies can be a great support in dealing with outside resistance to anti-racist change. Administrators can arrange for district-wide teacher PD that truly addresses the racial issues of the school community. This cannot be a "one-off," "check the box" form of PD. When finances are an issue, a simple panel discussion composed of volunteer experts and students under the guidance of a professional moderator can allow community stakeholders to ask questions and to begin to learn about anti-racism without feeling exposed and vulnerable. Finally, they can encourage teachers to form PLCs around the subject of race and provide them with the time to do so. These PLCs must be formed with an element of independence and free choice since the groups will be more likely to be productive and sustainable if their members know and trust one another.

The work of social justice for school administrators is challenging as they are required to

address the disparate and often conflicting concerns of numerous school and greater community

stakeholders. The results of this study, however, have shown that the current racial conflicts that

are playing out in this country are also reflected within its school communities, and must

therefore be addressed if we are to adequately prepare our students for the challenges of an

increasingly racialized society. The implications for administrators that are detailed above are

supported by Kelley (2020) who underlined the need for administrators to heed implications such

as ours by describing the important opportunity that they can provide.

> While navigating the nationwide demands for racial justice can be challenging for K-12
>
> institutions, this is an historical moment where school and district leaders can begin to
>
> undo generations of systemic racism. School and district leaders can pave the way for
>
> their communities to speak up about systemic racism by calling attention to the issue,
>
> discussing collective community action to combat systemic racism, and engaging
>
> students at the center of racial justice initiatives (Kelley, 2020, para. 13).

Implications for Teacher Educators

Berchini (2016) described the dilemma of a young high school English teacher in the first

teaching assignment of her career. The teacher was unable to put the racial awareness she had

developed in her preservice teaching program to use under pressure from the head of the English

department at her new job. She was forced to disallow a Black student from exploring the

connection he had made between the historical oppression of Blacks in America and the plight of

the Jews during the Holocaust. As a result, the new teacher was unable to connect with her

student on the subject of racism in this instance, and therefore missed an opportunity to confront

it in a meaningful way with her class as a whole. Isolated from the support system of her

preservice program, she discovered what surfaced as a finding of this study; that the work of

addressing race in the classroom cannot be done alone.

Like us, this young teacher was unsupported in her efforts to address racism, but Melissa, Nancy, Joyce, Christopher, and I were able to come together, joining forces to confront the racial inequities that we saw within the context of our teaching environment. Although our white affinity group was able to work together to successfully create change within the context of our school, we ultimately found that we benefited greatly from establishing strong relationships with several universities in the area. Ironically, Jocelyn was able to initiate work on her ethnic studies course curriculum with the help of a university professor after I neglected to support her efforts. Several other students gained confidence and credibility with their peers after we were invited to visit another university and engaged in panel discussions with preservice teachers in their college classrooms. These outside connections reminded us that our efforts to develop as aspiring allies and to disrupt the systemic racism within our school were difficult goals to achieve, but that, with support, they were within reach. They also provided us with credibility in the eyes of our school and district administrators, and the greater community as well. Although these stakeholders might not have agreed with what they believed to be our divisive race conversations, the respect that The Race Matters Alliance was able to garner from universities and social justice organizations made it more difficult for the disapproving members of our school community to discount our work.

The professors who invited us to speak with their preservice teachers may have been unaware of the implications that their actions would hold for the ability of a group of high school teachers and their students to make progress in the race work that they were struggling to implement at their school. However, the influence of these teacher educators on our group was undeniable and should be seen as representing a valuable tool for supporting the anti-racist

efforts of practicing teachers. In some cases, it is likely that that a connection with the field of teacher education could easily be the only form of support they would be likely to receive for their anti-racist efforts. We do believe that the interactions we had with the preservice teachers, graduate students, and professors were mutually beneficial based on the feedback we received from them. As such, a second implication for teacher educators would then be that when they bring high school students and their preservice teachers together, it does positively influence the racial development of the preservice teachers.

In addition to the value that teacher educators could derive from fostering interactions between high school students and their preservice student teachers, another implication yielded by this study would be the importance of sharing stories. The study results emphasized more than any other factor that the sharing of stories matters. Throughout this study, we came to understand others by sharing our stories with them and by listening to theirs. This is what our students did when we visited the campus to interact with the preservice teachers. The action of sharing their stories in the college setting where they were acknowledged and respected stood in stark contrast to what they were experiencing at their own school. There, they had only recently been given permission to gather together as The Race Matters Alliance. In the early days of the group, we had met at the home of one of our founding members after the superintendent had suggested that it would not be a good idea for us to come together on school grounds. Based on this information, one implication for teacher educators regarding the telling of stories would be to acknowledge their power in providing a platform for high school students of color to speak up and to be heard and respected.

Another application of the story that would benefit the practice of teacher educators would be its use within their own curricula to foster the culturally responsive competency (CRC)

of their preservice teachers (Bersh, 2018). Numerous scholars have advocated for developing the cultural awareness of teachers in order to increase their understanding of how their own backgrounds and biases can impact their interactions with students whose cultural experiences differ from their own (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Nieto, 2013; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Bersh (2018) maintained that "uncovering and recognizing cultural biases are necessary to understand 'the other' and develop CRC" (p. 33), and she laid out a compelling case for the writing of autobiographies as a successful strategy for doing so. Through participating in the process of composing their personal stories, preservice teachers would be forced to face their biases as well as their true beliefs about others and the ways in which these factors would surely impact their future students of color.

Nancy, Melissa, Joyce, Christopher, and I developed a better understanding of our racial identities when we created our biographies in the form of interviews which we participated in at the beginning of this study. Sharing them with each other led to a deeper understanding of the reasons for our involvement in The Race Matters Alliance and gave us a greater appreciation of each other's capacity to do the work. The concept of the story appeared again and again through the course of this documentation process, and its transformative power emerged as one of the five findings of this study. The opportunities that it presents for tapping into the voice of whiteness that is embodied by the American teaching force, and for finding ways to expand our awareness of all that is represented by that voice, offer implications for every stakeholder in this study. For teacher educators, the implication is that the use of personal stories could facilitate their preservice students' racial identity growth, and thus hold the potential to do nothing less than transform the educational experience of their future students.

Implications for Research

The most unexpected part of this research, for me, was the difference between the work that we had been doing for three years prior to embarking on the study, and the nature of what we were able to accomplish once it began. The two experiences could not have been more different. Until we formalized our efforts by engaging in documentation processes, including individual co-participant interviews, co-participant personal narratives, critical incident files, planning meetings, and journaling on my part as the lead researcher, our work was often hectic and unmanageable. We were often not in control. Instead, we spent a large portion of our time reacting to racial incidents, or addressing push back from resistant colleagues and administrators. We were able to accomplish some positive change, but it required much more effort. Without the scheduled meetings that were required during the study itself, it was sometimes hard to track the other members down, and Melissa and I often ended up handling critical incidents together, then filling in our co-participants after the fact. Once our study schedule of meetings and deadlines for written personal narratives and journals was in place and we adhered to it, we were able to work less because we worked more efficiently.

The choice of participatory activist research (lisahunter et al., 2013), demanded that we take an "emancipatory approach" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 18). This meant that we had to place an emphasis on our roles as activists and we took this requirement very seriously. Before the formalization of our work into a participatory activist study, I don't think that I would have engaged with the aide who confronted me about our art student's use of the rap song *Fuck tha police* (Ice Cube, McRen, The D.O.C., 1988, Track 1) which I detailed in chapter 4. I remember that as I was thinking about the fallout that I expected from that confrontation, I actually said out loud to myself, "Well, I guess I'm an activist now!" Without the organization and co-participatory aspect that our methodology lent to this study, I do not think that I would have felt

secure in imaging myself in the role of anti-racist activist so easily at that time. The structured

involvement with my co-participants as we engaged in participatory activist research gave us a

sense of purpose and drive. Even Joyce, who often worried about losing her race-evasive friends

over her participation in this study, grew bolder once we became involved in the true research

process. There was a sense of reality to our work and dedication to what was expected of us as

co-participants in this study.

Another area of surprise for me revolved around the frameworks of our study. I did not

expect that the three concepts I originally chose to organize our thinking would play such a

supportive role in the way we came to view our work or that we would so often refer to them in

our meetings as we thought back over our handling of critical race incidents or administrative

conflicts. Once the study ended and I was deep into analysis of the field notes, or later, as I was

writing the final chapters, I was again surprised at how the tenets of our frameworks helped me

to understand the complex workings of racism and our efforts to disrupt it. When I looked back

over the study proposal, I was validated in my choice of theoretical and conceptual frameworks

and the way in which we had been able to use them to make sense of our work throughout the

process of analysis and interpretation.

I had chosen Adichie's (2009) Danger of the Single Story as our conceptual framework

and, although the author's words resonate with me deeply, I never expected that Melissa, Joyce,

Christopher, Nancy, and I would refer to the concept of the single story so often, that we would

use it to remind each other and ourselves to avoid ascribing a single story of racism to our most

race-evasive colleagues, or that we would so often complain about the way in which they viewed

our students of color through a lens that consisted of a single story of deficit.

We used the reflexive approach of second-wave white teacher identity studies (Jupp et

al., 2016) in our investigations of white teacher privilege and white teacher identity development. The willingness of second-wave white teacher identity study scholars to deal with the complexity of these issues emphasized, for us, the importance of avoiding an us versus them mentality in dealing with racial identity. This allowed us to theorize in our group meetings about the ways in which we might begin to dismantle the effects of white privilege at our school, not by merely calling it out, but by seeking, in the same way as these researchers had done, to develop a better understanding of its roots and manifestations.

The third framework that we used as a lens to gain a clear view of the effects of systemic racism on our students of color, and to develop strategies to address it was the theory of poststructural feminism. The lens of poststructural feminism allowed us to recognize the complex, flexible, and continually evolving narrative of the single story in our group's ongoing race work, while the framework of second-wave white teacher identity studies, which offered a nuanced way of analyzing everyday racism at school, benefited from being observed through a poststructural feminist lens which, as St. Pierre (2000) explained, can be used to examine ordinary situations in order to be able to think about them differently.

This type of alternative view of the familiar also allowed me to be able to be completely involved with my co-participants in the study as a facilitator, but to act as a researcher as well. Because we used the methodology of participatory activist research, I rarely felt that I was on a different level than my co-participants. In the years before working on this study, my co-participants and I were not yet able to step back and analyze, not just react to the events that we dealt with in our efforts to open a space to speak about race. We learned to use the tools provided by our methodology and our frameworks in order to learn from what we observed and to share what we learned with others.

Now that our study has ended, I feel comfortable in offering implications for this type of research to those who would choose to pursue similar work. I now know that race work cannot be done alone. This study offers many examples of anti-racist actions that can be undertaken by groups of like-minded co-participants who are willing to commit time to the process, and who understand that aspiring allyship is a never-ending process. Good intentions are not enough to bring about social justice, however. A study of this kind must be structured, as ours was, with a supportive framework that allows its participants to gain multiple views into the workings of the racism that they are attempting to disrupt. Whatever frameworks a group of anti-racists intent on doing race work might choose, they must be reflexive and flexible, allowing study participants to analyze all angles of the study.

Conclusion

When my co-participants and I set out to document a four-month segment of our ongoing group project to confront racism at our school, we did not foresee the ways in which this study would affect us. As previously mentioned, the data collection tools that we began to implement, such as interviews, written narratives, and scheduled and recorded planning meetings, organized our work and ultimately allowed us the time and space to take a broader view of our actions and our progress. As I reviewed the results of the study with Joyce, Nancy, Christopher, and Melissa, it became clear that what we had learned had allowed us to move beyond assessing our success by just what we could see, such as, the recognition we had received from universities and social justice organizations, the implementation of an ethnic studies course, and the creation of the popular student-led talk show, Conversation Matters. The study findings, and the conclusions that I was able to draw from them, now let us pull back and reflect on the changes that we could *not* see. They allowed us to assess how we actually felt about the changes that we had been able

to set in motion within ourselves, and how those changes had affected our relationships with one another, with our students of color, and with the remaining study stakeholders.

The original working title of this study was, Teachers as allies and activists: Addressing race issues at a middle/high school through participatory activist research. However, when the data collection portion of the study had ended, and I began to analyze the field notes, I realized that the title did not reflect the true nature of our work which the data had begun to reveal. As previously detailed in Chapter 4, I recognized that we were engaged in more than "addressing race issues." I understood that we were involved in a story. Our work had always been about living through a story, and it was through telling that story that I felt I would be able to provide the key to understanding what we had been able to accomplish, illuminate the findings that emerged from the study, and render them valuable for others in the field. This was the approach I took throughout my work on Chapters 4 and 5, and with the written portion now complete, I felt confident that my decision to use the concept of the story as my guide had been a good one. However, this study still had one last surprise for me. In keeping with my use of narrative inquiry, through which I have continued to learn with every page I have written, I pulled back again and saw the final product of this study as not just the telling of a story, but rather, the sum of many stories.

This realization led me back to review the last two chapters of the study. In Chapter 4, I recalled that during the first years of forming The Race Matters Alliance, I had written about the confusion the race work that I had recently begun had caused me. I spoke of the many voices that I heard all at once, making it impossible at times for me to know how to react. In remembering this feeling, I detailed how those voices had quieted over the years but went on to describe that I still had trouble actually listening to them. I wrote that it had taken the persistent voices of

Jocelyn and Sarah to make me not only listen to them, but to actually hear their stories, and to understand that it was my responsibility as a true aspiring ally "to help them to tell their stories, not to decide how they should be told." I hit CtrlF and typed in the word story. I should not have been surprised at the number of times it came up. So much of the scholarship on anti-racism, and the experiences of the stakeholders that I have detailed in these chapters, points to the fact that our work is all about stories because they are the means by which we can find our way towards one another; that we can form, re-form, and trans-form our relationships with each other and through those relationships, truly disrupt the racism that threatens us all.

What this last realization proves to me is that the work of the aspiring ally is to continually circle back to the lessons we have learned. It means that in order to stay focused and engaged, and to sustain our work, we must be involved and always learning. The results of this study bear this out along with the need for us to work to strengthen our existing relationships. Within them, our stories are written and rewritten—for better or worse. Christopher once described the importance of our stories by saying that it is through the sharing of our insecurities with one another that we are all strengthened. He went on to say that as we threw our stories out into the group, it created a net that gave more substance to our process and tied us closer together.

The results of this study show that there are many supports for aspiring white allies and activists. The body of scholarship that provides guidance for allies is detailed in the literature review portion of this study, and it continues to grow. Christopher's description of we, as allies, providing each other with strength supports Tatum's (1994) contention that "allies need allies" (p. 472). I have found the guidance from scholars and activists of color to be particularly important, although not always easy to hear, such as that of Boutte and Jackson (2013) who

advised aspiring allies that they should prepare to lose friends.

So what is it that keeps aspiring allies like my co-participants and I involved in this work, when clearly, it is so difficult? The answer to that question is that it does carry a risk of loss, but it also holds the possibility for the achievement of something transformative through the sharing of stories. In describing the work of the characters at the center of the documentary *Two women, one big conversation* (2018), Joy Barnes-Johnson suggested that "they are putting stories ahead of everything else and I think that that is the thing that is actually going to be the most transformative—listening to each other's stories and then developing compassion for how to create solutions" (Long-Higgins, 2019, 6:58). Barnes-Johnson's (2018) assessment rings true for me. The sharing of my story and listening to those of countless other stakeholders in this study has changed my perspective on everything, and my co-participants have shared the importance of the process for them as well. "Stories matter" (Adichie, 2009, 17:36). We have found them to have the power to lead people to communicate when they otherwise would remain silent, and have seen them encourage people to create solutions as Barnes-Johnson (2018) suggested.

I also believe that support for aspiring white allies can be found in unlikely places. I recently received a complimentary issue of a magazine that I would not otherwise have seen. In it was an article about a successful entrepreneur who, as a poor teenager in the 1990s, had struggled unsuccessfully to earn enough money to fulfil his dream of attending college by selling vacuum cleaners. One day, as he was leaving a house after making a sale to the woman who lived there, he ran into her husband who was just coming home from work. He was sure that the man would void the sale which apparently was a frequent occurrence. Instead, the man said to him, "If this doesn't work out for you give me a call," which he did when the vacuum cleaner company went out of business several months later. The man then offered to pay for the future

entrepreneur's entire college education as long as he paid him back when he was able to. As a

business owner, the entrepreneur now makes a point of attempting to "pay it forward" for his

own employees, years after being the recipient of someone's kindness that was transformative

for him. The magazine story ended with a quote by the entrepreneur that is worth including in its

entirety because it completely captures my experience as a co-participant in this study and as an

aspiring ally and activist.

> One thing I love to ask is, "Tell me your story." There's so much unspoken background
>
> to people all around us. I am living proof of how a life can change when someone takes
>
> the time to get interested in who a person is beyond what they see at first glance. And
>
> that's a legacy I'm committed to carrying forward. Because you never know what's
>
> waiting for you on the other side of the door; and you never know how someone's story
>
> might change your own. (Sykora, 2021, p. 84)

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Appendix A

Unstructured/Open Narrative Interview Instructions

You are being asked to participate in a one-hour (approximately) interview to provide data for *Teachers as allies and activists: Addressing race issues at a middle/high school through participatory activist research*, a doctoral dissertation study in which you have agreed to take part as a co-participant. I anticipate that the data gained from this interview will lend support to our efforts as we begin to document our growth as race allies working together to open a space to speak about race in opposition to the racism that characterizes our school environment.

An unstructured/open narrative interview format, which is based on conversation rather than a set of formal questions to which you are expected to provide answers, has been chosen for this interview. I believe that this will allow for our shared exploration and reflection throughout the process despite our roles as interviewer and interviewee. Through this collaborative effort, we should be able to identify the development of our individual attitudes on race more effectively than if we attempted to do so independently. At the same time, we may also be contributing to a rich, dimensional portrait of teachers engaged in collaborative race work.

The unstructured/open narrative dialogue allows a framework-free exchange of information and reflections. I will follow the lead of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), however, who suggest involving participants in creating annals and chronicles as part of the unstructured/open narrative interview process in order to help them remember and organize experiences. According to the authors, establishing annals includes making a list of memories, events, and stories, while creating chronicles consists of examining a sequence of events around a topic or following "a narrative thread of interest" (p. 112). I will therefore ask that you take some time before our interview to reflect on your background with race issues and to prepare

some personal annals and chronicles for us to discuss when we meet. I will do the same. I believe

that contemplating our individual race narratives prior to the interview will help both of us to

organize our thoughts and will allow for a deeper, more illuminating conversation. I will begin

the actual interview with the open question, "What can you tell me about your background and

attitudes regarding race after the reflective thinking you did for this interview?" Combined with

our thoughtful preparation, I expect that the balance of the unstructured/open narrative interview

conversation will offer an opportunity to generate enlightening perspectives on our racial

identities, and to document our growth as aspiring race allies and activists.

Appendix B

Interview Instructions and Questions, adapted from Roulston (2010)

You are being asked to participate in an interview to provide data for *Teachers as allies and activists: Addressing race issues at a middle/high school through participatory activist research*, a doctoral dissertation study in which you have agreed to take part as a co-participant. The data gained from this interview is meant to lend support to our efforts as we begin to document our growth as race allies working together to open a space to speak about race in opposition to the racism that characterizes our school environment.

I am providing you with a set of five questions to consider beforehand. This line of questioning was inspired by the narrative interview process of oral and life history researchers as described by Roulston (2010) which encourages inquiry that elicits data to answer questions concerning who, what, where, when, how, and why. I believe that reflecting on these questions prior to the interview will help both of us to organize our thoughts and will allow for a deeper, more elucidatory conversation. With this thoughtful preparation, I expect that we will be more likely to be able to fulfil our aim of generating in-depth descriptions of our perceptions and experiences around the subject of race and of gaining an understanding of how our backgrounds might have influenced our views on the subject. I therefore ask you to take some time to reflect on the following questions before we meet. They are merely meant to be thought provoking conversation-starters for our interview. Please do not allow your reflections to be limited by them in either direction or scope.

- When and how you did you first became aware of racial differences?

- What memorable experiences have you had related to race?

- Who has been influential in the development of your perceptions regarding race issues?

- What do you think of as the role of an educational race ally/activist and why do you aspire to it?

- What do you view as obstacles to being/becoming a race ally/activist and how do you deal with them?