**WHAT GREY CAN TEACH: EXPLORING MY *BLACK* AND *WHITE* IDENTITY DURING MY EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH *BLACK* STUDENTS**


By

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ABSTRACT

RUEBEN DAVID MOORE. What Grey can teach: Exploring My *Black* and *White* Identity During My Experience Working with *Black* Students.
(Under the direction of DR. BETTIE RAY BUTLER)

As Cornell West (1994) aptly determined, *Race Matters*. Although the origins and accuracy of what American society believes to be race is complicated, it is no less a prevalent force in human interaction and conflicts therein (Berry, 2013). As an educator, the contrast of my perceived racial and cultural identity has been the source of considerable attention inside my classroom. As a member of the majority or *White* population, at times it may appear I have been established in opposition to the minority and predominately *Black* students by the prevailing status quo (Helms, 1993). The growing research in the educational field continues to reinforce the conundrum of racial identity, especially between White teachers and students of color. What manner of predisposition is therefore to be expected when a teacher transitions to the role of a school volunteer tasked with engaging Black students outside of the classroom using restorative practices? This autoethnographic study serves to explore that phenomenon.

Utilizing Racial Identity Development theory as a framework, this study will draw upon the established credence of racial identity development with respect to the social construct of race and how it functions in the dynamic of a non-educator, White, adult, male working with Black students. My identity and the perception of its impact will be examined critically, in an attempt to expose any new knowledge that informs successes and challenges that I personally encountered engaging Black students in a restorative manner. Thematic analysis, in accordance with a rich descriptive (Ellis, 2010) construct of autoethnography, will direct a series of interactions with the target population during the course of a semester at an urban alternative public-school setting.

White teaching professionals have come under tremendous scrutiny in the last generation in regard to the racial dynamics of the classroom. As the educational field peers inward to examine the structural implications of racial identity and their association with educational outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010), the growing emphasis on how Whiteness (Hines III, 2017) impacts the classroom invites adjacent conversations in the space around the classroom. Additionally, the position of power a teacher holds affects this dynamic, doubling the impact a White teacher may have on these outcomes (Glimps & Ford, 2010). As a licensed public teacher with a racially diverse background, I am qualified and positioned to add to the growing field of investigation into the racial paradigms of education. However, that is not the only avenue through which I contribute. With respect to my upbringing and identity, I present a potentially unique and contrasting perspective on race in education. This is further enhanced by my desire to explore the space outside of the classroom, thereby doubling down against the two most common areas of examination in this racial renaissance of sorts in modernity;. structural White hegemony and the teacher's position of power (Chandler-Ward & Denevi, 2022; Talusan, 2022).

Combining a unique perspective with an alternative position may afford both a contrasting and complementary narrative to the growing data points of how race and the attributes of White identity are impacting educational outcomes. Utilizing an autoethnographic model of qualitative research, my hope is that this immersion experience and subsequent introspection will reveal more than something different; but by virtue of the aforementioned complement and contrast, will reveal a contributing factor of both White racial identity and educational support that will serve the continued evolution of education to encompass the diversity of backgrounds of all teachers and students without compromising the need for equality.

# DEDICATION

It is unreasonable to capture ten years of a journey through a life-altering experience such as this dissertation process. During these ten years, my family grew from five to ten, experienced unimaginable challenges, and overcame them through amazing grace. Even so, the three decades prior were an ocean of preparation filled with too numerous a cast to mention appropriately in this space. To those many hands I commit the promise of the first volume of my memoirs, proudly boasting the exploits of their investment that equipped me for scholarship.

As a temple unto the heavens commands the symmetry of its construction, so too have I been constructed through this process. My West stone was held fast by my father, Dr. Reginald A. Moore, who demanded perseverance with every triumph and tragedy of the journey. To the East where the sun rises, my mother, Zenzal Carr relentlessly renewed my hope each day that darkness seemed permanent. Her compassion and persistence that I not relent gave me strength to endure when I needed it the most. My South stone, like an anchor, my brother Christopher M. Gillespie, provided an outlet for every manner of rampant conceptualizing, processing, and digressing I could muster. Though I am certain he has aged terribly from the many hours listening to me process, he remained a stable corner to retreat to and reflect any time I needed. My North stone, like the star that carries the same truth has been my wife, companion, and friend, Katherine A. Moore. She deserves all the credit there is to give to my success in this process, but I of course, would like to still keep the degree.

The foundation of this temple has been the only true foundation there is. My rock, my fortress, my deliverer, in Whom my trust relies, my Savior and my King. To Him all glory, praise, and honor be, Jesus Christ. May my journey be an act of worship that honors Him and inspires others to do the same.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many committees formed to honor the potential of scholarship pursuant to the doctoral process. My committee, however, was forged through a tempest of challenges and triumphs which honor their perseverance and pain tolerance.

Dr. Erin Miller, though a later addition to my committee, was not absent from the experience of the challenge of my dissertation process. Dr. Miller jumped in with both feet to show support and did not hesitate to offer direction at a moment's notice. Dr. Merriweather, who introduced me to thematic coding and encouraged my journey into autoethnography, has graciously been a part of my journey when it was still beginning, and is still here to support me at its next stage. I would like to specifically acknowledge Dr. Bruce Taylor for his unyielding enthusiasm and unwavering support despite not being sure at times how to help my indirection other than to reassure me I was never moving backwards in this process. Dr. Hancock, to my knowledge, maintains an extraordinary ability to immerse himself in mania without himself succumbing. It is my belief that components of our relationship expanded his skill in this area. I am strangely proud to consider I may have imparted some sliver of positive impact in return for the extraordinary support his guidance has afforded.

Neither would I be in this program or any other without the extraordinary sacrifice and mental and emotional anguish of one Dr. Bettie Rae Butler. Dr. Butler and I have experienced a relationship that at times may have violated the boundaries of reasonable exchange of temperaments. As the unyielding force of her persistence was met with the equally unyielding strength of my insistence, the repeated clashes of the dynamic made for amazing collaboration for which I am deeply grateful. I acknowledge that no one aspect of this process would have been possible without her sacrifice, supervision, and support.

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"Pick a card," they asked, "any card will do;" the assumption being that my card was there, and I just needed to pick it. Lots of cards in the deck, but none of them me. "Just pick the one that's closest," they demanded, but I could not choose between the numbers or between the colors. The math did not work for me. The palette did not work for me. "You are being difficult," I was told, "truth is *Black* and *White*." Apparently not my truth. My truth is *Grey*, and so am I.

Being Grey is an awkward identity in a world fixated on binary things. Everything is supposed to be one side or the other. Is your skin light or dark? Are you male or female? Are you religious or not? Are you rich or poor? I had no parents, and no peers to tell me what I was supposed to be, so I didn't choose sides. I remained neutral, in the Grey area between distinctions, hiding out in the safety of obliviousness until in a traumatic turn I was forced to be categorized. As I grew taller and became exposed, society would not tolerate anonymity. I must be defined, classified, and confined.

The moment I stepped out of the streets and into view, into a middle school classroom, I realized I did not belong there. I did not fit in, but that was not a problem for anyone else. I was already labeled. Based on what people could see, they were generous with description. "White," okay, sure, "male," well, that makes sense, "Christian," um, sort of, "poor," no question there. Now what? I realized quickly that the labels were not there to support the function of an individual, they were there to direct it. There is no encouragement to operate outside of that which defines you. What is worse, you are most aptly distinguished by the weaknesses associated with the stereotypes of your identity. If you are White, you are an oppressor, never a victim (Wiggan, 2011; Diangelo, 2022). If you are male, you are a misogynist (Manne, 2017). If

you have faith, you are judgmental (Glaeser, 2002). If you are poor… well, you are White, so your mistakes must have made you poor (Diangelo, 2018).

I was always welcomed in the street, a euphemism for the impoverished urban community. In my experience in Southern California and numerous such communities in South-Central Los Angeles, San Bernadino, and Redlands, poverty and the often-involuntary simplicity of life promoted a strong sense of connection between people wherein your race, ethnicity, gender, and age were of little importance because each person was bound to another by socio-economic status. In each of the spaces of my young life I experienced this phenomenon. I was embraced without consideration for how or why I was there. Like a survivor on an island, unity transcended explanation. As an awkward and presenting child of retardation, somewhat disheveled, seemingly without the ability to speak and emblazoned with the recognizable features of Jewish heritage, if there was judgement passed on me it was over my head, and I was not tall enough to touch it. I was always cared for. Protected. Sheltered and fed. Everyone I traveled with was family, and we all looked the same; you take green away from any color and it turns into a shadow.

In the streets, where the light doesn't reach, there is no *Black* and *White*. Just *Grey*. The idea of being Grey evolved for me into an identity that would increasingly expose the juxtaposition between my history, my personality, and my appearance. The latter and least significant part of my identity, and the very thing to which I was increasingly exposed, that which was supposed to be irrelevant, somehow was not irrelevant if I was White. The contradiction between the complexity of my experience and acculturation with the Black community became increasingly juxtaposed by the growing discourse of rebuke toward White Privilege. Though the attributes of White Privilege did not escape my potential, being an

orphaned Jew raised in the Black community did not position me to be aware of or understand how to access this unearned privilege. My retreat into Greyness as a defense from the increasing antagonism toward my Whiteness would end up becoming an unintended foundation of my identity as an adult and professional.

No wonder I preferred living in the streets…alone yet surrounded. Impoverished, yet free. From the police that rescued me, to the doctors that healed me, the therapists who found my voice, the teachers that taught me, and even to the people paid to raise me, I was defined, categorized, and prescribed treatment based on appearance. So, I rejected the world I suddenly found myself in by retreating to the only place I felt safe, into the Grey. I would tell no one what I thought or felt. Whatever identity I was going to have, it was only going to grow on the inside. For all I cared the outside could be whatever people wanted it to be: different shades in different lights, but still Grey.

Much of the development of my idea of Grey came from operating within the religious space of Black churches throughout my childhood. The novelty of a White kid seemed both welcomed and at times even lauded. I did not understand the phenomenon. Much like the embrace that I experienced in the street coming from a position of poverty and homelessness, the church created an oasis of acceptance. In the churches I frequented in several different communities of my youth, and even when visiting churches out of town, there was always a welcoming and a considerate kindness. This stood out because when venturing to predominantly White churches I distinctly remember the contrasting coldness, rigidity, and even disregard. I may have had lighter skin, but when I encountered Christianity amongst other lighter-skinned people, my experience was not one of acceptance. It was in the Black churches that my appearance didn't seem to matter at all. Upon my legal adoption from orphanhood in a Black

community into a Black family in a predominately White community, I expected the integration of color in this new space to be welcoming to my Greyness. Like a child prodigy, the juxtaposition of my personality with my appearance, especially given my unique rhetorical style of communicating, both eloquent and eccentric with the rimshot flare of a Baptist orator, my voice was welcomed despite my appearance.

This acceptance disintegrated when I became an adult. The novelty somehow became offensive or at least uncouth. The church to which my family was committed dramatically shifted its support of my development from public to private when I asked for a formal endorsement to attend seminary. The final rebuke, in this private meeting with the elders, was to inform me that although my gifts were abundant and my commitment unwavering, my appearance would be a distraction and therefore a disqualification from not only future leadership, but my current apprenticeship as well. They felt the community would not be served by having a White pastor preach at a Black church. This shift in my reception surfaced as social discourse within the church appeared to be reacting to larger social trends of concern for cultural appropriation between the White and Black community. This phenomenon, though not specifically examined within the context of the church has become of wide interest in scholarly research and status quo (Diangelo, 2018; Jackson, 2019). The evolution of social integration has long been a factor of cultural exchange. However, the tension in the United States when the dominant European cultures manifested expressions of the minority cultures, Asian, African, or indigenous, the minority cultures tended to respond with a concern that these manifestations were less about honoring and more about assimilating (Hartigan, 2005).

Social commentary was aware of the conflict unique to White and Black cultural appropriation during the Civil Rights Movement and in 1957, Norman Mailer thought the

explicit investigation of the phenomenon would not grace the sphere of research, but along came the pioneering work of Freire (1970), Greenberg (1979), Fordham and Ogbu (1986), and Lewis (2004). As the stigma of White Power and Privilege ascended into the common space of American discourse, the welcome I had felt as a child in the church rapidly dwindled, culminating in the dramatic disenfranchisement of my internship within the Black church and any hope I had of serving the community in the role of reverend. This position was a reinforcement for the concern within the Black community, and specifically the church, that although White ministers or Missionaries (Hollenweger, 1988) meant well, their ability to maintain the integrity they were attempting to infuse with Christianity would inevitably come at the expense of those cultures. Out of a sense of preservation in response to this Whitewashing of sorts, more and more Black churches began to reject the prevalence of Christianity from a framework of Whiteness, even if in my case the individual serving was from the very community.

I was essentially expelled from the church and compelled to thwart racism in the White community by infiltrating in ways the Black church could not. Although this invitation may have seemed noble, for me it was a rejection from the community I had known all my life and forced me from the last place I felt I could be myself. I was now fully under the shadow of Greyness. Neither White nor Black. Somewhere in between; awkward, alone. Instantly deterred from the relevance of laboring in the ministry, I shifted my vocational interests from the pulpit to the classroom; a place I had experienced in the shadow of my father, a prolific educator, as being inviting of diversity and perhaps my particular shade of identity.

So, I chose to pursue a master's degree in education and become a teacher. This retreat became less manageable once subjected to the collegiate environment where the emphasis of

appearance with Whiteness once again denied the complexity of my identity. The entire curriculum, somehow universal, consisted of a constant contextualization of racial inequality, power dynamics, and numerous phenomenon exclusive to the White teacher paradigm. Even though my cohort was somewhat racially diverse, the constant emphasis on how Whiteness was a form of subjugation in the classroom, regardless of the ethnicity of the students was not what I expected. I quickly felt defensive being subjected to accusatory assignments that insisted I embrace the proclivities of my Whiteness to better work against their negative impact on my future students. For instance, in one of my literature instruction classes, the assignment was to write an essay describing how racial identity interferes with the lesson plan, and every example provided was of White teachers wronging students of color.

Not limited to my graduate work in education, but also in my undergraduate courses in counseling and ministerial studies, I was directly admonished for misappropriating Black culture with my supposed true White heritage and despite my upbringing and family, was told repeatedly to stick with my own kind and work actively to eliminate any prevalence of Greyness from my identity if I was to be successful as a White teacher. The conflict in these situations stemmed from a combination of cultural factors, primarily that as a child my education as a member of the Black community was defined by my family as a cultural construct, and not just one of ancestry. As a descendant of Jewish ancestry, though not a member of the Jewish faith, this juxtaposition between these conditions of Blackness were no more confusing for me than the obvious distinction between states of being Jewish. I was not confused as to what my skin color or heritage were, but my identity was wed to the community in which I had been acculturated. Therefore, I owned as a component of my identity, a moniker of Blackness in my youth which quickly exposed me to an onslaught of accusations of imposter-ism that didn't make any sense to

me at the time. As I aged through high school, college, and now graduate school, I began to recognize that in order to avoid hostility that was becoming increasingly aggressive, I had better retreat into a Grey space or risk losing my opportunity for education. Although I tried to gradually diminish what I had initially felt comfortable expressing as my identity, it became apparent that even the slightest components of Black culture were not welcomed from me. This space was welcoming and encouraged diversity, just not mine.

Despite the assaults on my character for maintaining what was deemed an inappropriate identity of Greyness, I unexpectedly found solace teaching in an urban high school remedial Language Arts classroom. Classes typically were well over half male, and mostly students of color. The classroom opened up a venue to breathe without my identity needing an apology. The honesty and insight of these students did not require façade or pretense. The subtle mannerisms of my cultural upbringing were easily recognizable, and met without an accusation of imposter-ism, but rather curiosity. My coworkers, however, offered no such quarter. Even expressions of art and cultural norms in my classroom were challenged as condescending to the Black community without any consideration that I had a connection to that community. For instance, I had a mounted section of Kente cloth from my family's heritage, and I was told I should take it down. In my classroom there were also expressions of my Jewish ancestry, my wife's European culture, and a display representing every continent. But only the presence of Black culture in my classroom was met with disdain, to include official admonition on performance evaluations when I did not take down my family's cloth.

In response to what I have experienced as a phenomenon within the educational environment, being in conflict for being Grey has challenged me to explore how my perceived

Whiteness affects my perception of my relationships with my Black students and my Black co-workers.

## Problem Statement

Cultural studies in education have strengthened the argument that *White* teachers teaching *Black* students is more than just a social phenomenon, rather there is an impact beyond cultural influence that is occurring in the classroom (Landsman & Lewis, 2011). With respect to the *achievement gap* (NCES, 2014), researchers such as Fordham and Ogbu (1986), Ladson-Billings (2006), and Paris (2014) have for decades been trying to negotiate the contradiction between the academic performance of *Black* students and the racial identity of their instructor. Although the context of this phenomenon in education has been more openly discussed and explored from a racial identity construct (Cullen, 2014), research on the learning environment and the subsequent cultural components therein by Noguera (2003), continued to expose distinctions that are commonplace within the classroom of a White instructor of Black students. However, research has not resolved the tendencies of these teachers to discipline Black students at a higher rate than White students (Fordham, 1986; Wald & Losen, 2003), and for Black students to appear to perform lower than their White counterparts (Hilliard, 1992).

Well-studied by researchers such as Hyland (2005) and Horvat and O'Connor (2006), is the power dynamic that exists inside the classroom where Black students defer to their White instructor's cultural norms. Although the implications of this deference are not fully understood, Paris and Alim (2014) reveal that students' subjugation in this manner negatively impacts their identity development, and ultimately their academic performance. Research is continuing to test how White teachers can promote culturally sustaining practices specifically with Black students to reduce the impact of this cultural domination (Ogbu, 2008). There is a concerted effort in

educational research to find ways to sustain culture through sound pedagogy, "including the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of communities of color" (Paris & Alim, 2014), but the focus has primarily been in the classroom. However, as Cullen (2014) noted, the conflicts between race and education are not solely between teacher and student and may be impacted by larger forces such as the curriculum, the language, and the entire learning community (Gillborn, 2005).

Another component of this community is the school volunteers (Raposa, et al, 2017). As criticism of public education is more widely communicated through research and the media (Moore et al, 2017), a growing phenomenon of volunteerism has emerged (Brent, 2000). However, the source of this supply is predominately White (Nenga, 2011), which in turn exacerbates the already troubled dynamic between White teachers and Black students. Depicted in Ravitch's (2014) work into these evolving learning communities of volunteers, the marginalized students are caught in a cultural crossfire between the authorities in the classroom and the phenomenon of the *White Savior* complex (DiAngelo, 2018). The well-meaning intentions of White individuals rushing to the aid of marginalized youth fosters an awkward juxtaposition for the students who become overwhelmed by a sea of Whiteness (Nenga, 2011). Despite this seeming encapsulation, there is a little-recognized area of interaction within the academic environment between non-teaching professionals and the students. This group includes school leadership such as assistant principals or deans, counselors, resource officers, and Behavioral support staff. Within the framework of disproportionate discipline, both the leadership and the teachers have been increasingly examined though the individuals charged with facilitating and communicating assigned discipline are seldom noticed. Disciplinary facilitators occupy an unusual role in the lives of the students; they are responsible for maintaining behavior

expectations and ensuring adherence to behavioral policies, even though they are not responsible for assigning discipline.

The administration at Choices (the pseudonym for the alternative school in the present study) created the summer position of Restoration Specialist to allow me to conduct an immersion experience during the summer program without disrupting the program or assuming any official role that would require research approvals I was not positioned to gain. According to the published policies of Choices, the Restoration Specialist's job description is to supervise and regularly meet with each student in support of student interactions with teachers, counselors, and administrators, as well as monitor grades and attendance. The power dynamic of the Restoration Specialist offers a unique area for research in that it encompasses a position of authority, while removing the construct of the classroom and the potential stigma of the administration (Delpit, 2006). As a Restoration Specialist at a school that serves a student population that is ninety percent Black and male, I interacted mostly with Black male students as a White male non-teacher, in an academic setting. While still in a position of authority over students, this is a new Grey-ness; another in-between space. Being neither a peer to instructors, nor a peer to the students, I still bear some responsibility as an advocate to both parties. Neither trust nor loyalty specifically or consistently align with either party.

This liminal juxtaposition was exposed and even inflamed prior to the finalization of the immersion experience. As identified in DiAngelo's (2011) deconstruction of the phenomenon, an inherent obstructionism exists within the paradigm of White identity as both savior and servant, albeit without necessarily being a conscious effort on the part of the perpetrator. When given an opportunity in this particular incident to contradict the direction of numerous advisors and the school itself during a period of public protests over schoolboard policy relating to the alternative

school, I exercised an instantaneous compromise of what I had been directed to avoid by all parties concerned, which was to speak for and therefore represent, the community which I was endeavoring to serve. The immediacy of this opportunity, which happened to be with a member of the press, instantly thrust my credibility with the school into a state of controversy as I had heretofore developed my reputation as an advocate void of the deviancy of a salvation motif through White privilege or any degree of representation. In that single instance, I found myself stepping full body into the phenomenon of White privilege, which I had expressly studied and attempted to undermine as both a contemplative and social exertion in alliance with disciplinary constructs such as anti-racist activity (Kendi, 2019). When given the opportunity to speak, my lack of hesitancy in what I perceived to be beneficial to the school instantly exposed the transgressive nature of Whiteness I had for so long railed against.

The process of restoration for this single mistake nearly cost me the opportunity to conduct this immersion at the alternative school. Not only did it discredit my contribution to the school, culminating in a suspension from attending the school at all in a volunteer capacity, but severely damaged my relationship of numerous years with many of the staff and faculty. The journey of self-discovery from this instance was of no little consequence as it took substantial efforts by many in covenant with me to help me recognize that relying on the good nature of my intentions did not absolve me of having contributed to the very perpetrations of misappropriated authority I had committed to thwarting.

It is worth noting that although the leadership of the alternative school accepted my humility from the incident and welcomed my immersion, there is no resolution of the injury caused to my reputation and my relationship with the school, and following the immersion experience my relationship with Choices has essentially disintegrated. This explanation is not to

bemoan the circumstances of the immersion, but rather to expound on the circumstances around it and the less than extraordinary capacity for White Privilege to take advantage of naivete and subsequently Whitewash advocacy.

## Purpose Statement

As with any individual in a position of power, the impact of that position on those subject to that power is significant. The history of the power dynamic between White instructors and Black students (Douglas, et al, 2008) is wrought with teachers with good intentions subjugating their students' learning and identity development to the limitations of their perceptions of self and their perceptions of marginalized students (Michie, 2012). In a distinctly contrasting paradigm, the emerging world of the non-professional volunteer encompasses many of the same proclivities of the teacher-student dynamic, with the notable exception of not being licensed educators. Specifically, with marginalized students who have already been the recipients of disciplinary action and potentially exposed to Whitewashed volunteerism, the alternative school setting has the unique task of upholding disciplinary policy while promoting a culture of trust between students and the authority that assigned them to discipline. Like a defense lawyer, the Restoration Specialist has no power to grant guilt or innocence, rather operates as an ally to ensure the rights and needs of the individual are upheld. Within a very small space, a unique relationship is operating without the same critical lenses applied to teachers and volunteers. Even though I am an experienced and licensed educator, in this space I am assuming different responsibilities to allow that new role to contrast my identity between the two spaces. Utilizing the non-intrusive structure of autoethnography, I was able to pursue insight as I reflected on my interactions with Black male students in this space. Providing a critical lens into this Grey area

will contribute information outside of the common venue of educational research, and perhaps
contribute to more understanding.

<div align="center">**Research Question**</div>

My attempt to isolate the attributes of the phenomenon of how I perceive myself versus
how I am received in the classroom environment drew me to a unique space at an alternative
school setting where I operated in a supportive non-teaching role, rather than as a teacher. As
part of my role, labeled by the school administration as Restoration Specialist, I discovered an
opportunity to observe and record my interactions with students free of both the constraints of
the power dynamic in the classroom and familiarity with the students' histories. This role was
part of the summer program and consisted of shadowing each of the BMTs (Behavioral
Management Technicians) under the direction of the summer program leader, who was also the
school's resource officer, or SRO. I sought to understand more how I view myself being
different than both Black and White, and whether or how my self-perception is affected when
working with Black students outside the classroom. The research question guiding this study is:

As a non-teaching professional in an alternative school setting, how does my perceived
Whiteness affect my perception of my relationships with Black male students?

To answer this question, I propose to thoroughly evaluate my narrative responses to
interactions with Black students in this alternative school setting. My experience up to this point
has been that my reception, and therefore my own dissonance related to my identity, is different
from the interactions that are commonplace in my traditional classroom experiences. My
intention is to encompass qualitative research methodology to include multiple forms of narrative
collection including video journaling and artifact collection from each day's interactions over the
course of the summer school program. Every student in this program is attending as a result of

challenges in the traditional academic spaces of their home schools, including expulsion or suspension. My role of pursuing restoration will potentially allow me an opportunity to engage with them in a context that transcends both the classroom and academic spaces.

Once gathered, these narrative snapshots will provide a construct of examining and interpreting the phenomenon of my identity through the critical lens of autoethnography. Critical autoethnography (Ellis et. al, 2013) is a unique qualitative form of research that turns the attention of the researcher inward to examine the numerous attributes and phenomena occurring within them and around them from their perspective. This introspective and highly critical self-examination process uses the same constructs of qualitative thematic coding that would be applied to the voices of participants in a study, though instead pivoted to focus on the studier. Historically, this examination process can reveal unforeseen attributes of a researcher's identity, themselves being subjected to the critical lens of qualitative research and thematic analysis. It is my desire that this study helps me to unpack the nature of my identity as it relates to my ability to serve in urban education.

**Theoretical Framework**

Identity Development Theory is a cross-sectional discipline between sociological and psychological studies with origins in Erickson's (1950) pioneering work from the middle of the twentieth century. Bridging Erickson's work of Identity Development with the research of Cross (1971), the field of racial identity development emerged in the late 1960s and into the 1970s from the works of Katz (1978) and later Phinney (1989) to illuminate the complex intricacy between the established norms of the sub-social groups on the racial and even ethnic identity development of the individuals. As the population density and cultural integration following the American cultural revolutions of the 60s and 70s brought about a new height in racial tension

(Reiner & Cross, 1991), the response of science to these phenomena was to explore how the evolution of integrated and assimilated populations was forever changing the landscape of identity development in America (Phinney, 1990). Helms (1990) followed this process of examination, focusing primarily on the White Racial Identity Development with his introduction of the White Racial Identity Development Model. This model was not to exclusively examine the identity development of racially White people, but rather to identify the influence and subsequent underpinnings of White identity that were prevalent throughout American society as a result of being the majority and dominant group in numerous aspects of social and cultural influence.

Using the lens of White Racial Identity Development as the theoretical framework for this study, I am evaluating the same constructs of Helms' original model within the confines of a single immersion experience focused solely on my identity in that space. Helms created this model "to raise the awareness of White people about their role in creating and maintaining a racist society, and the need for them to act responsibly by dismantling systemic racism through a framework of power and privilege." This framework has developed into a reactive sociological space (Black, 2021),(Ashley et al, 20220, which provides a critical lens that isn't limited to the individual's perception, but includes their reaction to their own perception as well as their perception of the reaction of others to their behavior. The benefit of this framework with respect to my study is that it is built upon the established significance of White Racial Identity in multiple aspects of environmental conditioning. As my research seeks to examine the juxtaposition of my White and Black identity into a Grey space, the lens of White Racial Identity Development Theory serves as a perfect complement to expose the attributes of Greyness by filtering them through this lens. Utilizing this framework as a basis for validating my evocative

autoethnography, subjecting my testimony to the thematic analysis of narrative inquiry allows

the accounts from my experience to be credited as substantively relevant.

## Context of Study

I identified the following setting as a highly stimulated environment for contextualized

racial interactions stemming from individual identities. To be referred to as *Choices*, this

alternative school serves a metropolitan or urban (Wilson, 2012) population of 146,000 students,

as an alternative for those having been suspended or expelled from their assigned school. The

demographics of this large school district are diverse and include a population of 40% African-

American, 29% Euro-American, 22% Hispanic, 9% other. The schools closest to the center of

the city are predominately Title IX (United States Census Bureau, 2017). Within this large

district, of the less than one percent of the students required to attend Choices, 98% of them

come from lower income urban schools. Of that population, 75% are African American, 20% are

Hispanic. Immersing myself in this environment was an attempt to invite my identity to be

subject to introspective criticism as a result of my internal experience, as well as external

criticism, as I reflected on my encounters within this community, specifically with Black male

students. My Grey identity supported this by directly contrasting with the predominately

African-American population of the school. All the students in attendance at the school have

been the recipients of disciplinary action resulting in 30-day to full-year suspensions from their

home schools.

## Significance of Study

There are individuals who have struggled with their role in education. Their racial

identity has been marred by the confusion their identity has prevailed upon them. The fluidity of

who they are with respect to what they are trying to accomplish as a servant of the greater social

good has been White-washed by socially constructed norms and brainwashed by the educational literature of the status quo. These individuals may feel defensive and lack assertiveness to confront the needs of their student's identity development for lack of their own identity development. They are afraid, and at the least, uncomfortable with the idea of being exposed to their own feelings or subjected to the interpretation of other's feelings about them. They are the teachers of the marginalized, and they are consumed by the contradiction of their desire to liberate, meanwhile operating as primary or tertiary oppressors. This dissertation is for them. Beyond the scope of that breakthrough, I would hope that this research contributes to the growing complexity of the study of identity development.

With respect to the power dynamic often cited in the study of disproportionality in discipline, the structure of discipline is generally emphasized more than the structure of White cultural domination. Operating as an agent of Restoration outside of the confines of the classroom, the phenomenon of White cultural domination should still be present, allowing me to examine it using White Racial Identity Development Theory to potentially expose some connections between Whiteness and discipline. While the classroom in both preservice education and professional development needs to be the primary focus of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and the advancement of restorative justice through the abolition of disproportionate discipline, the numerous agents contributing to the phenomenon of disproportionality offer a unique study in contributing to that change.

**Positionality**

Born into the poverty of South-Central Los Angeles during the 1980s, I survived what has been speculated was a failed attempt at abortion, by someone whose rejection of the strict military family she was raised in led her to a liberated post-60s lifestyle, and the unfortunate

addiction and desperate means for obtaining income that followed. The heritage of this lifestyle granted me the lowest possible social standing, which at the time was environmentally relegated to the marginalized, and any other sense of privilege accompanying my light skin was invalidated by what was perceived as retardation. The truth was, my non-verbal communicative behavior and dysfunctional social mannerisms were the result of both prolonged homelessness and a complete lack of formal education.

The frenzy of a lifestyle dependent on either the charity of others or prostitution found me consistently occupying homes that graciously accommodated my care. The challenges of homelessness and single parenthood were commonplace in the Black community too, but were often earmarked by a different criterion of desperation. As a result, a woman whose lifestyle had taken this unfortunate turn was welcomed by the pity of the church in this community, even though she was rejected by the church in her own. The historical oppression of the Black community seemed to provide empathy for a lost sheep who was suffering from motherhood that the White community distastefully rebuked as folly. For whatever reasons, she found grace in the Black church, where she only found rejection in the White church. Thus began my journey of identity development, suspended from the White privilege I was born into, and embraced by a community that would eventually adopt me into their family.

Being raised in abject poverty, homelessness, and inconsistently dwelling in the care of numerous church families, thwarted any sensibility I had to connect with my natural mother in exchange for the fostered presence of the Black matriarch. The absence of fatherhood in this community did not impede my exposure to masculinity as the young men of these matriarchs took my care with extreme sensitivity, protecting my life in the dangerous and volatile circumstances of the growing gang culture of the era. Despite being victimized by racial violence

from other neighborhoods or "rival gangs" my understanding of family was created by this inclusion and uncompromising loyalty. My acceptance into the Black community, as both a descendant of a more privileged community and the victim of tremendous trauma and abuse, has yet to be rivalled by my biology even to this day.

Removed from the "ghetto" by social services due to life-threatening injuries caused by sexual abuse from my biological mother and her suitors, I began the long journey of trying to reconcile new cultures prescribed to me that never quite seemed to fit. Countless surgical procedures and years of physical and mental therapies afforded me an awakening that exposed a savant-ish intelligence in comparison to the speculated retardation of my youth. Still burdened by permanent disabilities from physical and mental injuries sustained in my youth, I was forced to navigate the life of an orphan whose skin tone belied the only cultural heritage I had been embraced by. This resurfaced contrast found my adolescence wrought with a violent rejection toward anything related to the White heritage that had rejected me as I sought to find a way back to the Black culture where I belonged.

The varying communities of the social services available to me did not provide me with an orphanage or a foster home that satisfied this need for validation, and even approaching adulthood, I remained orphaned from the community I was born out of and restricted from the community I had born into. Once again, the church came to my rescue, and in an unexplainable chiasm, validated the blessing of my childhood by legally adopting me as the progeny of an African-American mother and father. Having Black parents echoed the sensibilities of my childhood by reestablishing my identity in the Black community, though as a grown White man, there were new challenges to my identity. I could not identify as a Black man in my community any more than I felt I could identify as a White man. Raised by the Black community and

adopted by a Black family, I was twisted by the affection of my adopted culture and the animosity I had developed toward my White privilege. Although White guilt is a phenomenon I have learned to understand, it is a phenomenon that I have been unable to fully reconcile.

Having been accused of being an imposter by the White community as someone who is appropriating Black culture, as well as being accused of a similar disposition by the Black community, I find myself at times in a horrific space juxtaposed between the Black- and White-ness of my identity. Even the church, although incomparably accepting, has struggled to embrace the mannerisms of an ordained minister in the Black church with unapologetic White Jewish appearance. Three decades removed from the social and cultural orientation and acceptance by the Black community, I have never really been able to completely return to the chaotic bliss of the streets of Compton, San Bernardino, and Sacramento. I was never taught by my brothers or my surrogate mothers that my skin color was going to be an asset and a liability. I was loved unconditionally. However, such grace is no longer available to me as I awkwardly navigate a society that is generations removed from reconciling the dream of the Civil Rights Movement; where equality is ultimately limited to perception and I struggle as a Grey man incompetent in the proclivities of White privilege and immobile in the awkward embrace of my adopted culture. White and Black; a constant contrast of cost and benefit. I have exhausted myself into a corner where I have decided the safest moniker left to me is Grey.

I can operate within the White community by the wits of the vernacular I have developed since my adolescence, even though my doing so is ingenuine. Operating within the Black community is an altogether more difficult endeavor. Even though my heritage and identity has been formed by the Black community, it has not been formed by Black experience; a point I am often held accountable to by the expression on the face of someone who feels betrayed by what

they hear coming out of the face they are looking at. Being asked to abandon my identity for the convenience of avoiding the awkwardness of trying to exist as a Grey man in Black culture, has tormented me as a fish that learned to survive out of water only to be sentenced to pretend to breathe underwater by holding its breath. This suffocating reality has not been something I could have ever imagined beneficial. However, as I have grown as a pastor, a teacher, and a counselor, I have discovered that my experience is far more commonplace in the cultural enigma of modern society, as well as the awkward boundary lines that many people find themselves breaching between the labels placed around them and the truth of who they really are.

As I struggle to mature in the wisdom of what my identity allows me to empathize with in the identity development of others, I desire to explore how I can teach out of the uniqueness of my experience instead of trying to teach around it. I cannot introduce myself with simple monikers and generalities, which begs the question if any of us should. How might I equip the understanding of my students with the bold honesty of my experience? As I journey through the process of this immersion experience, I seek to identify and analyze my ability to develop relationships without these obstacles.

The very nature of autoethnography implies partiality to both the subject matter and the perspective garnered from narrative inquiry (Adams, Ellis, & Jones, 2014). In essence, the process of critical analysis subjects and exposes that perspective to the potential of all biases, which in turn reveals information about the narrator (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008). Therefore, everything about my research implies a bias in the value of my participation within this immersion experience. However, it is restricted by the conclusion of my narrative inquiry being subjected to Critical Analysis through the qualitative process (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). I may very well have prejudices and biases I am unaware of, as well as be uncomfortable sharing

those of which I am aware. The brilliance of autoethnography is it relies on my willingness to self-examine and materializes the substance of this introspection. As a member of the dominant culture with history with a minority culture, my experience having transitioned, at times violently, between these two cultures has heightened my sensitivity to the social and cultural conflict that exists between them. It is the very nature of that contradiction that I have had to wrestle with, which I hope to subject to this process, therein affording meaning to the attributes of my inherited privilege as well as those of my adopted experience.

## Limitations and Assumptions

### Limitations

This study relies on the collection of autoethnographic data via the immersion experiences of the author. While focusing on the interactions between myself and the target population at this alternative school, the emphasis was on examining those interactions and relationships which were limited by the number of contact hours over the course of a single academic term. Even though the value of autoethnography affords the opportunity to collect insightful data from a singular perspective, that key feature is also a limiting factor in that the onus is on the author to provide relevance and comparison to existing literature and other perspectives, whereas a larger study of multiple perspectives would already have that contrast built in.

### Assumptions

Foremost in the design of this autoethnographic study is the implication that racial dynamics of identity will exist in the academic environment and therefore will be observable within the framework of this study. Additionally, the assumption exists that the relationship dynamic between the Restoration Specialist and student will be adequately consistent and

personal to allow phenomenon related to race and culture within those relationships to be observed. Finally, any dissonance experienced between the subject and the student can be accurately interpreted on the basis of race and culture, and not limited to the dynamic of an adult in a position of power and a student enrolled in an alternative school under punitive circumstances.

## Organization of Study

This study is a qualitative investigation of racial identity and interaction, which seeks to explore the dynamics of race between a White Restoration Specialist and Black students in an alternative school setting. The current chapter provides the background for my racial identity. Additionally, this chapter provides framework for how I am positioned to interact with the target population and subsequently presents the theoretical framework, research question, epistemological orientation, and key definitions of the study. Chapter Two is an examination of the seminal and current literature and research pertaining to White Racial Identity Development Theory and autoethnography. Chapter Three outlines the methodology of the study. Chapter Four presents the results of the study through richly descriptive records of the immersion experience and the exhaustive reflections following the interactions between the students and myself. Chapter Five discusses the major findings in relation to the research question, addresses the implications of the study, and offers practical recommendations for educators and professional non-educators who navigate similar spaces of Greyness.

## Definition of Terms

**Acting White**: A derogatory term often used to describe a Black person operating a form of double-consciousness that is determined by the accuser to violate the sanctity of Black heritage in exchange for privileged White culture.

**Black**: A term variably associated with individuals having heritage from the African continent, and subsequently darker pigmented skin. Far removed from a rule, the term has socially been evolved to include Blackness as a cultural identity. The term will be used fluidly for both racial and cultural identification with appropriate contextualization to identify its relationship with either.

**Blackness**: The term often associated with the cultural norms of the Black community. Often generalized and without consensus to relate to any number of conditions for cultural identity within the Black community being from heritage or environmental circumstances.

**Capitalism**: According to Smith (Smith, 1776) the promotion of an economically based society from an agrarian society, which allows a corporate determination of value to promote prosperity. In modern context, this concept is reduced to the pursuit of money by whatever means necessary.

**Co-construction**: The development of a definition by virtue of two parties applying their perspective. For the purpose of this study, the term will primarily relate to identity development.

**Culture**: For this study, culture will be defined as the combination of an individual's internal identity development as well as an acknowledgement of the external and group components of that identity, for example, and individual can be a member of an affluent or White culture, meanwhile having an identity rooted in the Black community.

**Dominant**: Both a literal and figurative construct, the identity of the dominant population maintains a level of oppression over cultures, individuals, or groups determined to be intrinsically inferior (Blumer, 1958, Watson, 1996).

**Double-consciousness**: The ability of an individual to operate in and out of multiple identities as a result of adaptation to their environment. This was coined by DuBois (1903) as a survival technic for Black individuals trying to function within the expectations of White cultural norms.

**Elitism**: The determination by an individual that they are better than another individual by virtue of their social status, personal accomplishments, or intrinsic characterictics.

**Equality**: With respect to society, everyone being treated the same, and having the same opportunities, regardless of their history, identity, or ability.

**Equity**: The accommodation of opportunity to account for inequality of outcome such as an individual being given an advantage over another individual to balance out the advantage the former individual began with. Contemporarily, this has been enacted by legislation such as *Affirmative Action* (Kennedy, 1961).

**Eurocentric**: An expanded reference to Western identity to include the various European roots of American culture, i.e. French, German, and English.

**Grey**: For the purpose of this research, this term will accompany both race and culture as being any combination of Black- and White-ness. Akin to being multiplicitous, this term serves as a double entendre for that which is, by virtue of being outside of definition, awkward and unstructured.

**Hip-Hop Culture**: Originally regarding a style of music encompassing a combination of Rhythm &Blues and rap, Hip-Hop has evolved beyond music as a uniquely Black cultural norm of expression to include art, fashion, sports, language, and other attributes of popular Black culture.

**Identity development**: A term referring to the internal and external awareness of an individual as to who they are with respect to those around them.

**Incarceration**: The indefinite relocation of an individual into a government-controlled facility that restricts freedom. The prevalence of the incarceration of minorities with respect to the

majority population has drawn comparisons of similar institutionalized restrictions of freedom, not limited to prisons, but rather prevalent in society itself.

**Inferiority complex**: The inescapable determination of an individual that they are not as good as another or are somehow limited in their ability by predefined restrictions.

**Intersectionality**: Most recently utilized as a context for the complexity of oppression within the constructs of society (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013), the term will also be expanded to include attributes of that interaction between cultural norms.

**Marginalized**: Pager and Shepherd (2008) defines marginalized as a systemic form of racial discrimination which lends preference to the majority population in areas ranging from employment, to housing, to education.

**The "N" word**: Out of respectful deference to the historical context of this word, any reference to it will be euphemistically replaced by the word *Negro;* italicized for intentional reference.

**Oppression:** Mental or physical pressure or distress due to unjust treatment or control.

**Race**: A historically scientific classification (Blumenbach, 1828), invented as a form of differentiation between the perceived five predominate types of humanoid. The term has evolved substantially as the concept of racism or the superiority of one of these groups over another has developed. For the subsequent use of the term in this research, race categorically implies any manner of heritage relative to those five classifications, though contemporarily reduced to generalizations of skin color, i.e., anyone with light pigment is White, and darker pigment is Brown or Black.

**Racial Appropriation**: The adaptation of an individual from one ethnic or cultural background with the attributes of another ethnicity or culture.

**Racial Misappropriation**: A term loosely defined and derogatory, relating to an individual adopting attributes of another's culture without having any connection to the heritage of that culture, and subsequently committing disrespect or gaining undue advantage by associating with that culture.

**Restoration Specialist:** Payne and Welch (2015) define restoration, specific to the context of school discipline as the act of developing a relationship through interpersonal technics that allow both physical and emotional reciprocity and subsequent development to occur. Additionally, this construct identifies disruptive behavior as symptomatic of negative influence and victimization and serves to provide healing for these individuals who often manifest a dispensing of punishment and assignment of blame as a result of their conflict with the dynamic of injustice in the school environment.

**School to Prison Pipeline**: As a function of what are perceived as institutionalized restrictions to freedom in society, this pipeline (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010) is a tendency of public education discipline to condition individuals through inappropriate uses of negative reinforcement that lead to behavioral conditioning, inevitably resulting in incarceration.

**Slavery**: The forced labor of a group of people by another, contemporarily defined by attributes of Marxist theory that exists in a capitalist society to "enslave" the subordinate or working-class population. Typically relating to economics, modern slavery can also be a reference to environmental subordination such as urban versus sub-urban housing.

**Subjugation**: The oppression of an individual or group of individuals' identity in exchange for an adherence to the cultural norms of a dominant individual or group.

**Superiority complex**: The establishment of an individual within their identity that they are better than someone else by virtues that are insurmountable by the subordinate class.

**Urban**: A classification of population utilized by the federal government in census for the dense regions of cities (Census, 2014). Schools in these areas may be classified as *urban characteristic, urban emergent, or urban intensive.* In addition to population density, challenges of poverty are common (Milner, 2012).

**Western**: Most commonly associated with American Democratic Capitalism, which in turn implies a pursuit of individual gratification and a justification of identity development which does not require a direct route in biological or environmental heritage.

**White**: A term most commonly relegated to racial identity has evolved into an identification of culture often relating to generalizations of numerous aspects of European culture, and like "Black" maintains multiple meanings on the spectrum between race and culture. Each instance of the word will be accompanied with contextualization to identify its relationship with either.

**White Privilege**: The hereditarily and socially constructed complex of superiority given to individuals of the European diaspora. This identification is reinforced by members of this dominant population, and when challenged by individuals who are not in this population reinforced by socio-political, economic, and legal reinforcement (Kendall, 2012).

**CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This literature review will explore the current knowledge of Identity Development Theory as it pertains to White Racial Identity Development (WRID). White Racial Identity Development Theory operates as a psychological paradigm within the framework of Identity Development Theory, ascribing the attributes of the individual as a synthesis of both the individual's perception of self and the perceived reaction of the group or social environment to that individual. For the purposes of this literature review, the examination of WRID as it pertains to the individual's self-awareness and psychological perception will be the focus to connect the evolution of WRID to its modern implications, to include Whiteness and White Privilege. Although the social construction of race plays a significant role in the branch of racial identity theory pertaining to sociological and environmental factors of racial identity, the construct of autoethnography focuses primarily on the individual's perception of self (Ellis, 2004), and therefore this literature review will encapsulate the critical lens of WRID that pertains primarily to the view from the inside out.

This literature review is organized into sections, each reflecting a different aspect of my study. Identity Theory, being the most cogent to my study, is explored first. This is followed by sections on the Social Construction of Race, Whiteness, White Privilege, and White Privilege in Education. All these categories of literature inform, provide clarity, and create the launch point of my study about how my perceived Whiteness affects my perception of my relationships with Black male students.

**Identity Development Theory**

Erickson's (1966, 1968) pioneering work on racial identity was itself an evolution of the social and scientific constructs of race from the centuries prior of both taxonomy (Linnaeus,

1735) and the infamous Blumenbach classifications of race (1775). The digressions of anthropologists such as Boas (1909), as well as scientists such as Darwin (1859) continued to modify the perception and significance of racial categorization. The significance of identity as it pertains to the awareness of self was Erickson's paradigm shift during the cultural and social revolutions of the 1960s that laid the groundwork for understanding the view of race from the perspective of the individual as opposed to the construct of the social group. Although sociology would play a part as the environmental force depositing factors of racial awareness on the individual, the work of Cross (1971) expanded Erickson's self-awareness paradigm to examine the phenomenon of an individual's identity transitioning from "negro" to "Black." This conversion experience, as the focal point of Cross' numerous studies and research, examined the existential crisis inherent to the individual who struggled to reconcile their perception of self with the identity proscribed to them.

From the emphasis on Black identity, Katz (1978) shifted the conversation to White racial identity. Katz recognized the inherent sociological factors between White racial identity and Black racial identity, and in studying the collision of those two phenomena, began to unravel the deep and complicated relationship between what Black people were trying to resolve that simultaneously White people were unknowingly relying on. Phinney (1989) dissected this reliance into stages and cycles from adolescence through adulthood, relying heavily on Erickson's adolescent investigations (1950), but pivoted to include the concept of ethnicity. This significant contribution further elaborated on the components of identity that were not strictly scientific classifications of biology, but rather were complex inner weavings of identity development. In a return to the focus on White racial identity, Helms (1990) established the authoritative basis for White Racial Identity Development Theory with a fusion of Erickson's,

Cross', Katz', and Phinney's work, culminating in the critical framework of White Racial Identity Development Theory. The stages of WRID have become foundational to the subsequent research and critiques of Whiteness from scholarship of the 21st century. Critiques of Helms by contemporaries such as Rowe, Bennett, and Atkinson (1994) revealed the inadequacy of Helms to address the dynamic of historical oppression and the positivist approach to White racial identity at the time. Although the research of the time lacked such credibility, these critiques paved the way for deeper and broader research to examine Whiteness as a racial identity, a social construct, and a phenomenon.

**Social Construction of Race**

According to the prevailing consensus within the research of race (Fuentes, 2012), race is real but not biological. It is a social phenomenon that, like culture, is a function of a transference of knowledge and experience. This is an important distinction as geneticists have contradicted the racial profiling that existed in previous societies and through both genome mapping and genetic sequencing revealed there is no unique gene that pertains to a Black person any more than to a White person (Long et.al, 2009). In fact, the genetic variations within the diaspora of Africa are more diverse than every other grouping combined (Harrison, 2010). The fact is race is both a psychological and sociological phenomenon consisting of predominantly historical, linguistic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds (Gravlee, 2009)(Tattersal and DeSalle, 2011).

The social commentary of early scientific literature of Western Colonizers speculated that a person's biology or that the observable tendencies within specific ethnic groups predisposition them to certain levels of ability. This inherent bias came into focus as Linnaeus (1735) created his taxonomy, and then Blumenbach (1775) used this taxonomy to delineate five primary "races" and argue that racial identity is a determination of biological factors arranged into five primary

categories. These categories attributed fields of competence, both physical and mental. Later work by Buffon (1788) elaborated these categories to include substructures of biological predisposition, therefore imposing attributes and limitations contrary to the influence of training or education. These elemental factors of breeding and origin, further reinforced by research of biological scientists and theorists such as Lamarck (1809), Darwin (1859), and Galton (1883) presented these variations in skill as a continuum wherein the grouping of racial identity is organized into a hierarchy with the White person resting dominantly atop the evolutionary spectrum.

Pioneering sociologists such as DuBois (1899) conducted studies into the impact of the structures of society on individuals and their potential. Concurrently, shifts in the narrative of "nature versus nurture" (Galton, 1883) research that supported the idea of the environment being the predominant indicator of behavior (Watson, 1913; Skinner, 1938) were challenged by Watson & Crick (1953) who were pioneers in the field of genetics and spawned theories of predisposition built into the very fabric of the human biology. Shockley (1966) and Jensen (1969) argued that it was these very genes that created segregation and the predisposition of human potential. This causal implication would branch into yet another field and became the focus of research by psychologists such as Flynn and Nitsch (1980), Herrnstein and Murray (1994) reinforcing the position that a divide existed between the prosperity of Black and White American citizens because of the difference in biological predispositions between the two. Though birthed from the colonialism of the British and French, the framework of modern racial identity has taken shape in North American history as a distinct construct of White superiority and Black subjugation (Jordan, 1968).

Social theory has prescribed the foundations for researching the complexity of identity development more from the outside in than the inside out (Tatum, 1992; McLean, et al, 2018). All the attributes of an individual's identity are subject to the complex negotiation of how they perceive themselves and how they respond to the perceptions of others (Phinney, 1989).

The fields of biology, sociology, and psychology continue to explore the argument whether a person's hereditary, historical, or intellectual inheritance is the greatest indicator of their future potential. However, the psychological examination of racial identity has granted the strongest substantive link between self-perception and WRID theory.

**Whiteness**

Whiteness as it pertains to the common vernacular encompasses two primary components. The first is the euphemistic reference to skin tone which is both a generalization and a non-scientific descriptor, usually referring to people of European descent (Jablonski, 2006). In the more prevalent sense, Whiteness is a sociological moniker pertaining to individuals in a position of power and privilege, that by virtue of their social standing maintain a role of influence over other groups (Duster, 2005).

The paradigm of Whiteness as a racial construct in society has consistently been the basis for an elitist structure inherently subjugating all other cultural norms beneath it (Bergerson, 2003). Duncan (2005) adds that as it has evolved from its Western European roots, this racial domination has continued to operate in the same manner as it did during colonialism, except that now cultures that immigrate to the United States are immediately placed under the umbrella of White racial dominance. Gillborn (2005) and Hunter (2002) agree that although the demographics of Whiteness are not empirical to the definition of Whiteness within the organization of race in society, any number of perceived or actual attributes of Whiteness can be

associated with dominance and subsequently are responsible as sources of White Privilege. These attributes may consist of various forms of social capital like hereditary wealth, business leadership, and higher representation politically and socially. Intangibly, these attributes may consist of cultural norms such as art and entertainment as well as abstract phenomenon such as a seeming disinterest or outright rejection that the subjugation of non-White people groups exists.

Katz' (1978) seminal work pioneered this characterization, emphasizing the sociological hierarchical factors and how they contributed formally to intended or unintended Black subjugation. The critiques of Helm's WRID, in that it overlooked or was unaware of these hierarchies, exposed the need for research to uncover the nature of the biases inherent within WRID, which laid the foundation for examining the subsequent position of power these biases afforded as a position of privilege.

**White Privilege**

White Privilege (DiAngelo, 2018) is a conscious or unconscious bias and subsequent privilege associated with one's social standing and association with the White race. For instance, a White individual may be given preferential treatment by a loan officer over a Hispanic individual based solely on their skin color. Inversely, a White woman might perceive a Black man as a greater threat than a White man based solely on his skin color. These harmful associations create a negative construct for members of the minority groups, which in turn experience varying degrees of oppression and subjugation by their White counterparts (DiAngelo, 2021).

White Privilege has, whether advertently, as with Jim Crow law (Thurneck, 1998), or inadvertently, as with Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (Mickelson, 2001), become ingrained in the fabric of the legal system, and therefore thwarted the wheels of justice (Lopez,

1997; Kivel, 2011). Members of subordinate racial groups being subjected to the cultural norms of the dominant White race through social institutions such as fashion can be a means for tertiary oppression (Helms, 1993), but are not directly responsible for economic inequality or injustice. As observed by Vaught and Costagno (2008) in their exploration of the White Social Contract, the greatest threat to equality is when preference is given to Whiteness, wherein two things being equal, such as two job applicants or two suspects, the White is given preference if the other is a person of color (McIntosh, 1989). This phenomenon has been attributed to undermining the very nature of equality the American Constitution prescribes, and thus requires a complete restructuring if every racial group is to be able to operate on the same level with Whiteness (Kendall, 2012). Cross' (1991) examination of the struggle of the Black conversion alluded to the resistance of normative attributes of Whiteness's reclassification of the "negro."

As Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado, 1995) emerged as a leading principle or lens by which to examine the structural components of race that exist within society, less emphasis was placed on the patrons of this structure. Examining the feelings of White people to better understand how their identities were developed from a Critical Race lens, Matias' (2016) pioneering work sought to better understand the role of identity development as it pertains to White racial identity. This seminal research shifted the conversation from the system of Whiteness and more to the process of the phenomenon of Whiteness.

Further into this lens, Lensmire (2017) examined the phenomenon as a cultural proclivity embedded in traditional communities without any diversity to challenge them as norms. In the Whiteness Project (Tanner, 2018) this phenomenon was again examined, but from an interactive lens of participatory action research (PAR) to identify the inherited or legacy nature of Whiteness as being ubiquitously tied to an individual's ethnic heritage. In both of the latter

research, the underpinning of identity development was intertwined with the norms of awareness; to the end that a person within this construct would develop a manner of thinking, perspective, and perhaps prejudices interchangeably associated with their White identity (Katz, 1978). This viewpoint being so intertwined with their very identity reveals a lens of Critical Race Theory to the embedded structure of Whiteness as a cultural diaspora and not just a social one. The benefit of this emerging field of research helps support the examination of identity and ultimately Whiteness.

As the conversation has evolved, a series of deepening explorations have exposed new factors of both new Whiteness Identity Development and elaborated on the identity attributes of Whiteness in Educational spaces. Jupp, Berry and Lensmire (2016) present a second wave of depth specifically into White teacher studies by synthesizing the previous decade of research and summatively extrapolating the tendencies therein that situate new implications for contemporary teacher education and further research. Although these implications operate within the traditional spaces of teacher education, the synthesis itself provides a critical lens that can be applied to other spaces adjacent to traditional teacher education such as my immersion experience. The primary critique of the 2016 study was a need for deeper extrapolation of teacher identity components and more thorough multicultural education which may include diverse critical and cultural inquiry as well as immersion. As a minority tenet of that conclusion, my study, however small, serves as a complementary investigation into a space that may also contribute to a third wave of White teacher identity studies presented by Akom (2008).

Akom proposed a new focus on the intersectionality which would present an opportunity for conversations of co-constructed identity development to be deepened in spaces such as Participatory Action Research or autoethnographic immersion experiences. This directly

confronts the convergence of Black identity development under the lens of Fordham and Ogbu's

(1986) seminal work on the burden of acting White in contrast to the progeneration of that

Whiteness from complementary and simultaneous exploration.

**Whiteness and White Privilege in Education**

As White racial identity research by Bell (2004) and Delgado (2010) sought to uncover

the social implications of Whiteness, the largest volume of research into the impact of Whiteness

on society has been funneled to the battleground of education where the phenomenon of White

Privilege is the most prevalent and seemingly at the crossroads of both indoctrination (Ladson-

Billings, 1998) and subjugation (Gillborn, 2005). The seminal research into education has

continued to evolve from the larger implications of racial identity by Bergerson (2003) to the

micro-implications of classroom management with the minutia of culturally relevant (Ladson-

Billings, 1995) and culturally sustaining (Paris, 2014) pedagogy at the forefront. This research

has provided a foundation or epicenter of what appears to be the catalyst of oppression

permeating from the classroom into both the dominant and minority members of society

(Ladson-Billings, 2016; Dematthews, 2016; Martin, 2017). All the authority proscribed to this

phenomenon has been laid atop the shoulders of the White teacher. The classroom door is closed

and within the security of four walls an injustice, intended or not, is being committed on the lives

of children to be segregated into a paradigm of either privilege, or everything else (Sleeter,

2017).

The extensive research of Ladson-Billings (1998) and contemporaries such as Paris &

Alim (2014) into the reflection of social inequality in the classroom has revealed that the same

preferences assigned to Whiteness in society, such as cultural norms including language, fashion,

and even behavioral customs, foster a structure of hostility between what is deemed White, and

everything else. One such example is in the education of the English language, where the roots of the language itself are tied to the White race and the cultural proclivities inherent in that language. Any people group that descended from a non-English speaking culture is instantly put at a disadvantage to native speakers. Even though this phenomenon exists as a form of social conflict between ethnic groups in many countries (Marx, Pennington, & Chang, 2017), in the United States it can be directly tied to inequality, as the academic performance of a race with English ancestry is immediately advantaged by having access to language and communication that is embedded in the information they have been exposed to their entire lives. Once this language becomes a basis for intellectual examination, individuals that come from families more familiar with the English language are deemed superior, and therefore White Privilege becomes exposed within the fabric of language acquisition in education (Freire, 1968; Morrell, 2002).

The prominence of White teachers in the classroom in the research of minority students (Landsman & Lewis, 2006), has uncovered deeper aspects of concern for the position of authority given to the teacher which promotes a tendency of the teacher to rely on the cultural norms of their White experience, thus instituting a culture of compliance towards Whiteness that is hostile toward the attributes of other cultures (Hyland, 2005). Further research of implied adaptation required to adhere to this model of instruction has revealed that students forced to submit to cultural norms outside their framework of identity development not only compromise that identity development but are prone to respond to those who are seen as traitors to their identity with hostility and alienation (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Diamond, 2006).

In the emerging field of co-constructed identity development, the relationship between teacher and student is being examined analogous to the relationship between the individual and society. These longitudinal studies, mirroring similar work by Ogbu's pioneering mixed-methods

research (1974), served to draw a comparison in the same environment between the identity of the students and their academic performance. When adding the variable of White teachers to the paradigm of that education, the role of the Whiteness becomes a factor of correlation with both the racial identity of the students, and their academic performance. The subsequent research into the complexity of that relationship exposed the pathway for communicating injustice between White privilege and Black subjugation (Duff, 2002; DeMatthews, 2016). At the core of this subjugation lingers the imposition of WRID (Helms, 1990) as a lynchpin for the power and subsequent influence structure of Whiteness within the classroom.

Likewise, with academic performance, the modality of discipline is expressed with preference to Whiteness. The very appearance of Whiteness, whether skin tone or cultural, attracts a bias in how discipline is addressed in the classroom. Extensive research by Smith and Chun (1989), Patton (1995), Kim, Losen, and Hewitt (2010), and Pullman (2012) have all exposed the blatant disproportionality of school discipline that can be reduced simply to the demographics of students who are being addressed for the same behaviors. The demonstration of disciplinary norms is contingent on the sensibilities of the individual responsible for interpreting whether they are being upheld. For instance, if a teacher interprets an expression from a student as disrespectful or insubordinate, it is a subjective determination, and susceptible to the internal bias of the teacher (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). The dynamic between authority figures and students in the classroom is subject to this bias along racial lines as a teacher who is White may interpret the behavior of a Black student as disrespectful, while not necessarily considering the same to be disrespectful from a White student.

Observations of classroom discipline as well as research into disproportionality between White and Black students by Hyland (2005), shows a consistent pattern of disciplinary referrals

by White teachers for Black students who are deemed to be disrespectful in how they are communicating to the White teacher (Skiba et al., 2002). Helms (1993) interpreted this phenomenon as being a condition of the White teachers being culturally disconnected from the Black students, and in some instances, intimidated by them (Dunn & Griggs, 1995). This particular occurrence has been observed by McIntyre (2003) to occur consistently between White female teachers and Black male students. A disagreement between the two may be documented as the Black male being aggressive to a degree wherein the White female teacher is afraid or expresses concern for the safety of other children (Hyland, 2005; Bradshaw & Mitchell, 2010; Howard, 2016). This perspective unfortunately lends itself to racist ideologies that attribute Black males toward habits of violence (Pullman, 2012). These stereotypes are rampant in the larger sociological conversation and are constantly the source of investigation with regard to police brutality, wherein the same notions are replicated that a White police officer is afraid of a Black male to such a degree that they feel the need to use extreme force to subdue the suspect, sometimes with catastrophic results (Winant, 2000).

This pattern of discrimination in the classroom subjects Black students to ridicule and exaggeration of their behavior that is not attributed to White students. A group of Black girls who are having a loud conversation may be accused of inciting violence or exaggerated to a level of aggression that is associated with their volume by a White teacher who is unaccustomed to the volume or the patterns of emotional expression within that group (McAlister & Irvine 2002; Blake et al., 2011). Herein are several examples where cultural norms that can be attributed to minority groups are subject to the interpretation and subsequent judgment of members of the majority group. In the power dynamic of the classroom, the White authority figure validates the interpretation of behavior for a group they are not members of. The premise of this injustice has

long existed within the American judicial system where suspects who were Black were supposed to be judged by a group of their peers in accordance with the Constitution, however, as people of color, were consistently subject to White jurors who are capable of expressing explicit and implicit bias toward individuals different from themselves; individuals who were not their peers (Nicholson-Crotty, et al, 2009). In this same way, a teacher is capable of harboring these same biases consciously or unconsciously, which create a potential for injustice even in what may seem to be insignificant conflicts.

Once discipline escalates to levels of suspension or expulsion, many public-school districts rely on alternative schools to support the disciplinary process. These alternative schools operate in many ways similar to the jails and prisons to which their demographics are consistently matched (Wald, 2003). Students are removed from their homeschools and restricted to these alternative schools where their education is disrupted, and they are surrounded by potentially negative influence from other students. The perception of these alternative school settings is that they operate much like jails, wherein bad students are sent there so that they do not distract the good students from learning. Inevitably this label of "bad" carries with it a similar stigma as criminality, and the students at the receiving end of these titles express feelings of inferiority and disrespect regardless of their circumstances (Wald, 2003; Monroe, 2005). The parallel between the criminal justice system and these alternative schools is the subject of considerable research in education over the last generation, where the seeds of prejudice in education have uncovered the structure of a school to prison pipeline (Foucault, 1977; Elias, 2013).

Dramatic research has explored the myth of elementary grade performance indexes and disciplinary rates being used to determine the budget for the prison space that would need to be

available for these students in approximately ten years (Sealy-Ruiz, 2011). This horrific practice has been seen by many sociologists as well as educational scholars (Wilson, 2014; West, 1994) as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead of identifying the root cause of discrimination that is disproportionately sending Black students, especially males, to alternative schools and subsequently prisons, the emphasis has been on improving the alternative schools so that they rehabilitate the students better, so the students don't end up becoming criminals (Kennedy-Lewis, 2015).

**Restorative Justice in Education**

Restorative justice (Hopkins, 2002; Losen, 2003; Gonzalez, 2012) is an emerging concept which in response to the construct of the school to prison pipeline interjects a legitimate solution for promoting conflict resolution that does not require individuals, or in the case of education, students, to be incarcerated for their behavior, perceived or otherwise. The tenets of restoration are continually evolving as social scientists seek to better integrate this discipline as a resolution to disproportionality (Eggleston, 1999; Zehr, 2015; Zehr & Micah, 2017). Given the high rate of referral of Black students by White teachers, restoration would seek to reveal the unspoken racial conflict between these two parties and bridge that gap with communication and mutual respect (Payne & Welch, 2015; Gregory, Clawson, & Davis, 2016; Gregory & Evans, 2020). This process requires significant effort and an unusual degree of humility by the authority figure. Both of those expectations have proven challenging in the adoption of restoration as alternative to punitive justice. However, the potential of restoration through its many evolving forms remains largely untapped in education (Schiff, 2018).

Once the student sets foot outside of the classroom, there are forces at play which either challenge or reinforce their identity. Such elements are school disciplinary policy (Lynn, 2006),

peer or co-constructed racial identity (Langlie, 2009), and a third heretofore unstudied factor of the adult non-educator. Beit the counselor, the coach, the volunteer, or the tutor, these roles have gone seemingly unnoticed by researchers as the more significant implications of the White teacher have been studied.

In this space the phenomenon of how students experience education is virtually untapped as a point of research. The outcomes of student performance and behavior are far easier to qualify and quantify within the classroom. However, if restorative justice only exists inside of the classroom, this implies a vacuum that rejects any influence, positive or negative in any of the adjacent spaces. Education, according to Duncan (2018) is a function of society as a whole from the family unit to the federal government, and although the focus of educational research tends to be in the classroom, there is an untapped resource of information as to how the ancillary spaces of education affect the student and the learning experience as a whole. Due to the highly subjective nature of this space, a qualitative autoethnographic study lends itself well to the potential of gathering insight, albeit anecdotal, that contributes to understanding what else is at play in the life of the student, especially those of color. Without knowing in advance what this potential will be, it is the hope of this research to profit at least my experience as a lens by which to compare the established wisdom and contemporary research of classroom phenomena and by virtue of comparison inspire others to add to it. As the field of educational research increases, it is my hope that research such as this finds a place of relevancy to help better meet the needs of students and help better prepare educators to meet those needs.

# CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

## Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to examine how my perceived Whiteness affected my perception of my relationships with Black male students at Choices, and then to parlay this examination into an autoethnographic contribution to research literature relating to the Grey space in education between the instructional faculty and the administrative faculty. The Grey space is the nexus of tension between normative constructs, be they personal or professional identities, where I find myself not fully fitting into the established criteria for any of the norms. As a function of thematic analysis at the micro- level, and qualitative inquiry at the macro- level, the analysis of this information will serve the following purposes; first, to identify attributes of my identity as well as any unknown phenomena prevalent throughout the course of my immersion experience, second, as a function of the autoethnographic process, the introspection and subsequent analysis of my recorded experience is capable of revealing insights about my identity and behavior in these spaces that I was not expecting. The research question is as a non-teaching professional in an alternative school setting, how does my Whiteness affect my perception of my relationships with Black male students?

Autoethnography as a research approach provides the most effective method for describing personal experience and subsequently provides a structure for analyzing that experience through a qualitative framework such as thematic analysis (Adams, Ellis, and Jones, 2016). Particularly with cultural immersion experiences, the autoethnographic approach is a unique lens for understanding that in turn is validated as research through the methodology (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011) Thus, autoethnography, within the framework of Identity Development Theory and supported with thematic analysis, guided the design of this study. The

use of IDT, autoethnographic methods, and thematic analysis provide an overlapping framework for interpretive analysis, demonstrated in the Venn diagram (See APPENDIX A). Autoethnographic journal entries, both written and video, will be analyzed thematically then triangulated with the analysis of the artifacts to reveal underlying themes. This study consists of rich descriptive narrative transcriptions collected from daily journal entries before and after each immersion experience, notes collected during interviews with students, and notes collected from colleagues attending said interviews.

During the analysis process, these data will be coded using a combination of open, axial, and selective methodology, in adherence to grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) for analyzing qualitative data. Thematic analysis will also be employed using a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding to establish themes once the grounded theory coding has provided interpretive groups (Fereday and Cochrane, 2006; Merriam, 2002). The supplemental data collected by member checking was collected in adherence to qualitative standards for member checking data (Candela, 2019) to include cross-referential experiential notes from collaborative participants of student interviews. The subsequent coding of these particular data will function as participant validation in accordance with qualitative research standards (Birt et. al, 2016; Motulsky, 2021).

This chapter begins with an overview of autoethnography, supported by thematic analysis, as research design. The theoretical framework of this research is Identity Development Theory as interpreted through the theoretical lenses of Whiteness and White Privilege. An outline of the setting and target immersion population is discussed to establish the attributes of the autoethnographic experience. In conclusion, the methodology of the analysis protocol is presented, followed by the construct for the thematic analysis of the triangulated components.

**Design**

This study is autoethnographic in design. The purpose of autoethnography is to elicit introspective reflection and process it through epistemological analysis to promote ethical consideration as qualitative research. According to Ellis (2000), there is no definitive criteria for autoethnography; rather a flexible construct of qualitative ethics which enable the researcher to reflect critically on their experience, and by virtue of subsequent analysis, contextualize validity, which presents narrative insight of a particular phenomenon. With respect to autoethnographic studies deemed credible through the vetting of qualitative design (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), the format of my immersion experience follows the primary attributes of those studies.

Identity development theory (Erickson 1966, 1968) as the framework for this autoethnographic study provides the template of interpretation of these autoethnographic data pursuant to the subsequent theories of Whiteness (Duncan, 2005) and White Privilege (Vaught and Costagno, 2008). Whiteness Theory, described by Duncan as a Critical Race Ethnography, serves as a framework or epistemology for understanding Whiteness as an identity as well as a social construct with respect to its impact on an individual and how they perceive themselves, and how they are perceived by others. White Privilege builds on the framework of Whiteness but elaborates from the predominately individual components to encompass the larger sociological ethnography, which, like Whiteness, contends a duplicitous relationship between the individuals and the function of White Privilege within society. Holistically framing the distinction of Whiteness and White Privilege within the construct of how they impact all other identities undergirds the study to thereby complete the picture of Whiteness and all of its impacts. These theories contextualize the interpretation of these autoethnographic data and in turn provide the

lens by which to glean the themes, and analysis of those themes in conjunction with additional artifacts.

Thematic analysis is a complement to autoethnography in that it provides the basis for exposing the underlying themes of an individual's recorded testimony. In this study, that testimony is documented in both a narrative journal and video diary. The evolution of thematic analysis from Houlton's (1973) pioneering research to what is most commonly utilized as the basis for thematic analysis in qualitative research by Braun and Clarke (2006) provides a framework for autoethnographic research to prove validity through coding. The coding process identifies the same themes in an individual's testimony and artifacts as is provided by coding data throughout qualitative research styles. In conjunction with a phenomenological approach, thematic analysis as a lens by which to process the interpretive design of an autoethnographic study provides a tool for focusing the subjective experience, perceptions, and feelings of the author (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This study utilizes an inductive approach to its coding methodology which asserts the bias of the interpreter as being a structural component of enhancing reliability as long as the center of the coding framework is derived from an existing template (Boyatzis, 1998). To enhance the validity of the coding methodology, this study provides complementary data sets and artifacts from objective sources of analysis confirmation to facilitate the triangulation of this inductive reasoning with respect to the inherent biases of being both the thematic subject matter source and coder of the data. Boyatzis (1998) presents this approach as a bridging methodology that allows a preexisting structure of coding methodology to maintain its credibility, even if it is being utilized in a self-inferential study.

The combination of the components of autoethnography, Identity Development Theory, and thematic analysis are layered to construct a holistic view of the subject matter through the design of this research immersion. The journal data as autoethnography, the analysis of said data as triangulated through field notes and corroborative participants' written accounts. The combination of these artifacts and journal entries are to be thematically analyzed, thereby determining correlative themes and root determinations of emphasis and significance extrapolated from the coding process. Combined with the rich, descriptive nature of the source material, this analysis will allow for a fusion of these qualitative attributes within the construct of the autoethnographic self-reporting process, thereby providing insight into the immersion experience. As this study focuses on seeking to understand the perspective of the author, this three-tiered approach supports the validity of the research as well as maintains the integrity of the interpretive methodology with respect to thematic analysis.

## Study Context

Choices is an alternative school located within a large centralized urban school district in the south consisting of over 100,000 students. The school serves as a resource for students that are suspended from their home-schools with terms of 10, 45, or 120 school days. The interplay between this alternative and the students' home-schools creates a highly transitive school environment where students are newly arriving as well as departing on a daily basis. The service of rigorous student learning is facilitated by small class sizes of under 10 students, and constant accountability facilitated by a large team of BMTs who have a group of students they are responsible for supporting. The rituals and routines of the school mirror that of the traditional home-schools with the added prevalence of armed resource officers, highly attentive learning facilitators, and extremely visible and interactive administrators.

Although the basis for enrollment at this school is disciplinary, the leadership of the school promotes a supportive and rigid operational environment that does not mimic incarceration facilities. However, Choices works in tandem with the juvenile detention center, also central to this metroplex, which inevitably operates as a consequence for students who struggle to meet the expectations of the alternative school environment. According to research presented by Wald and Losen (2003), this alternative school, as a participant in the greater construct of disciplinary modalities within public education, potentially supports what is known as the *School to Prison Pipeline*. The mission statement of Choices does not acknowledge this potential. It seeks to promote a culture of academic success for every student. As a volunteer for the summer program, my responsibilities adhered to this mission statement and excluded any preconceived notions or research-based biases that I may have regarding the potential of the aforementioned pipeline.

**Study Participant**

Based on the constructed design of autoethnography, I will study myself using narrative inquiry within qualitative research (Ellis, 2013), during an immersion experience over the course of a summer school program. Although the numerous interactions with the student body are the subject of my reflections and journal entries, the only recorded voice in this process is my own. The purpose of this strict design is to eliminate speaking for others, directly inquiring into others, which would be a non-autoethnographic study, but rather qualitative, and maintain the emphasis of attention on my experience and the potential outcomes of analyzing the record of those experiences through the White Racial Identity Development framework and autoethnographic thematic analysis lens.

As the sole participant of this study, the focus is on my immersion experiences each day of the program, collected both before and after each day's interactions. Based on the established prevalence of themes of racial identity the subject matter of each of these reflections focused on my perception and reaction to that perception each day. After the course of the summer program was completed, all of these journal entries were captured electronically and in writing and will serve as the basis for this study. Via video journal, personal diary, and written notes.

### Data Collection Process and Procedures

Data was collected from a period spanning the summer school program lasting approximately ten weeks. For the purpose of this study, the data analysis will focus on the first ten days of full-time student activity. The collection method of the data consisted of a daily before and after video journal entry, daily written journal, daily field notes, video recording of student interviews with an observer, the observer's field notes, student activity records, and student participation log.

My role at Choices during data collection was that of a non-educator volunteer. For the sake of avoiding dissonance with the students or presenting my participation as a distraction, my official title to the students was Restoration Specialist; Assistant BMT. My purpose was to daily interact with students to discuss their participation in the program, support their completion of the program, and eventually support their return to their homeschool. For each day, based on the agenda and activities for the day, a video journal was recorded both before and after the immersion experience focusing primarily on my expectations for that day.

To explore the inquiry of my research question of examining how my perceived Whiteness affects my perception of my relationships with Black male students, my immersion experience during the course of the summer program consisted of a daily routine of assisting

with the roles of the BMT by providing facilitated interactions and discussions regarding student placement in the program, goals for reunification with their homeschools and reflections on the processes on a daily basis about those goals. A set number of students were assigned for me to meet each day, following this cyclical routine to allow multiple meetings with each participant in the summer program over the course of each week. This repetition allowed for consistent journal entries before and after each day's participation as a restoration specialist, as well as promoting consistency in the interactions with the same students over the entire summer program. In alignment with my research question, my reflections I included how I perceived expectations were met or whether I was surprised by new information. My secondary entries, or reaction entries for each day emphasized any degree of dissonance I experienced throughout the day, as well as an emphasis on my perception of my identity as is the research question of this study. This research question was held at the forefront of every entry to support the primary perception and reaction entries.

Following each day's immersion experience, I utilized *thick description* (Goodall, 2000) and *narrative ethnography* (Tedlock, 1991), to provide an esthetic and evocative (Ellis & Ellingson, 2000) reflective record of my experiences with respect to the epistemological framework of Identity Development Theory, and pursuant to the exploration of my research question. Having completed my immersion experience, I will utilize thematic coding (Creswell, 1994) to provide qualitative analysis to my autoethnography and help interpret my experiences.

### Data Analysis

The triangulation of data will consist of three sources in accordance with triangulation methodology (Ellis, 2014). The first source is the analysis of video journals which provide an autoethnographic reflection of each day's immersion experiences. The second source consists of

The schedule for this analysis will be in adherence to the methodology for autoethnographic coding and analysis guidelines prescribed by Ellis (2014) and take place over the course of approximately six weeks. Per these guidelines, and with respect to the large volume of material, thematic coding will take approximately four weeks with up to three sets of daily journal entries; before and after each immersion experience per the outline below:

| Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Narrative & Thematic Analysis Coding: June 17 - 19 | Narrative & Thematic Analysis Coding: June 20 - 21 | Narrative & Thematic Analysis Coding: June 24 - 25 | Narrative & Thematic Analysis Coding: June 26 - 27 |
| Video & Written Journal, Field Notes | Video & Written Journal, Field Notes | Video & Written Journal, Field Notes | Video & Written Journal, Field Notes |
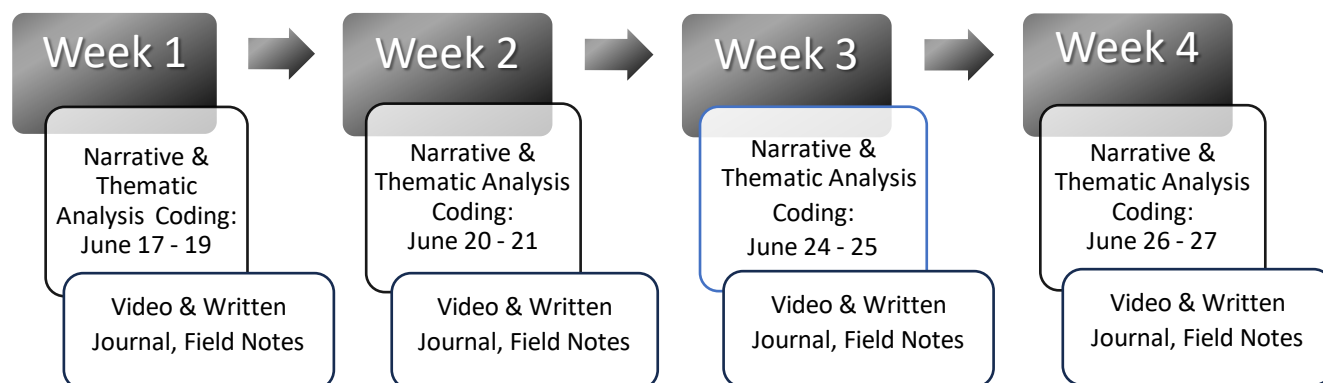
Figure 1. Coding Schedule

Based on the length of each entry, coding time will vary, but maintain this schedule by allowing flexibility in how long each day's coding session will take. For the final weeks of the coding process, the field notes, interview videos, artifacts, and colleague materials will be added to provide the appropriate triangulated data. Once coding has completed by week four, the subsequent process of analyzing the themes will begin. Pursuant to a strenuous daily timeline of two weeks, the thematic coding process will yield subsequent data intern as the foundation for the reflection and conclusion components of the writing process. A formal draft will be completed within the following two weeks and submitted to the committee in advance of the dissertation defense per the schedule below:

| Week 5 | | Week 6 | | Week 7 | | Week 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Write Results | | Write Results | | Submit Draft | | Preparation for Dissertation Defense |

Figure 2. Writing Schedule

**Trustworthiness and Limitations**

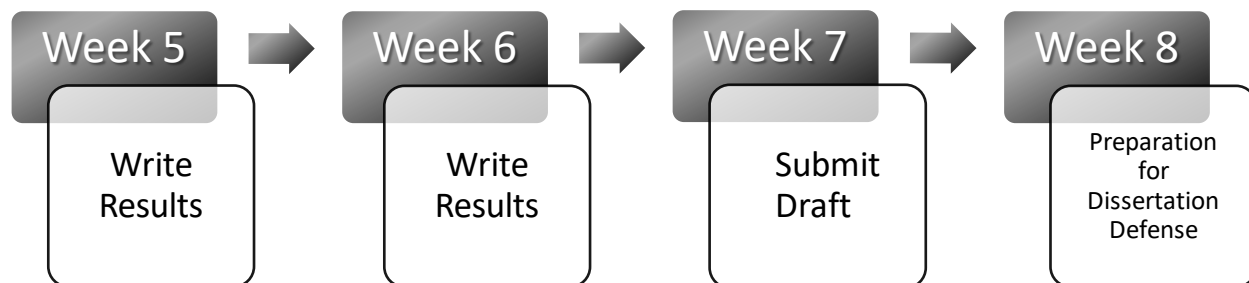In accordance with the attributes of autoethnography established by Ellis (), the simple integrity of a study that is qualitative but focuses on a singular individual bears relevance even in the minute sample size by capturing an honest account of the participant's perspective of their experience. in my case the limitations are inherently obvious as I am limited by my own biases as they are irrevocably tied to the accounts provided by each journal and reflection and the inevitable prejudices present both affirming and altering of my perspective, present with each student encounter. Although the research question reduces that prejudice to a single implication of its impact on my perspective, it is still reliant on my perspective solely to amass credence and ascertain relevance.

Likewise, the coding and interrogative nature of interpreting my experiences is subjectively limited to the framework of my perception. With respect to    Le Roux (2017), this interpretive limitation is not disqualifying of credibility in that it yet presents data, however skewed toward the author's biases, into what the author's experiences were. In my case, even the most rose-colored reflection and data analysis will still serve as an appropriate qualitative capture of my experience from my perspective toward the end of answering my research question as to how that perspective impacts my interactions.

**Conclusion**

Having served in a volunteer counselor and observer capacity, formally titled Restoration Specialist, at Choices, as well as having served as a licensed classroom instructor at a traditional school within the district, I have prior experience, knowledge, and inevitable bias toward the alternative schooling environment, as well as how students find themselves in those environments. Although my experiences will be relevant in supporting my reflection process, I will attempt to suspend them during my analysis to further validate my role of Restoration Specialist, and organically reflect on my experiences.

**CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS**

If you want to know the truth, absent of the transgressive veil of civility, respect, or even kindness, ask a teenager what they think of you. Such honesty is embodied in a vessel that wrestles with identity and perception in its greatest awakening, alternatively known as adolescence. The ritual conformity of dignity that comes from withholding disclosure is a slow-moving custom that takes the teenager years to master. Once acquired, the transition into adulthood is almost complete; having established the ability to withhold opinion.

This phenomenon, albeit terrifying on the surface, provides an unmatched threshing-floor for adult insecurity to be thwarted and reduced to the chaff of perception and the seed of reality. Everyone wants to be liked or at least appreciated for who they are, and being given a clean slate and a position of power with impressionable children would seem a convenient environment for any person struggling with a feeling of disembodiment from social or cultural accusations of misappropriation. Although this posture is effective with impressionable young children, once those innocent children begin to wrestle with their own identity as they navigate into adulthood, they are not interested in supporting the mischievous underpinnings of adult insecurity, nor are they un-obliged to thwart even the most subtle attempt of imposterism.

This was my experience having taught in a classroom throughout the primary grades, high school, and college. The turning point of how I functioned through my perception and subsequent presentation of my identity was in the unique space of an urban freshman classroom, composed predominantly of Black male students. It has not been my intention to present a façade or posture my identity in any particular way in this space, and yet, uniquely, when operating within it with new students every semester, the same interactions would prevail.

"Yo, Mr. Moore, what's your deal?" A curious hush would inevitably follow, barely containing an eagerness to erupt in shock or hilarity depending on the response, to which my knee-jerk, Socratic response would always be, "What do you mean, 'deal'?" I imagine this volley may have seemed a deflection or a setup, but as a facilitator I was always inclined to avoid interfering with a student's ability to process their own perception. "You don't act like a White guy," or some derivation of this analysis would inevitably follow, still accompanied by anxious silence.

In these moments, I was forced to again confront a lifetime process of encountering my identity and perceptions from the most innocent to the most convoluted. Invariably I resort to a tense Grey space, attempting to thwart both extremes by hovering between them. It is in this unique nexus I have found the potential for autoethnographic research a wellspring of developing self-awareness. Presenting myself in a support role to the educational process, what exposure of the Grey tensions I carried would find similar or perhaps even more clarified inquiries from the young Black male students? In some way I identified with them, as if a lynchpin for where my identity development as a young Black man was thwarted by the reality that not only was I White, but not *only* White. To this formula I have assigned an identity of Greyness, demanding further scrutiny and a potential contribution to educational scholarship. Thus, my research question was born from this liminal space; *as a non-teaching professional in an alternative school setting, how does my perceived Whiteness affect my perception of my relationships with Black male students?*

The data from the immersion experience over the course of the summer session at Choices alternative school consisted of a daily before and after video journal, a written daily reflection, a dozen student interviews with peer-check observer, and daily notes from activities

and interactions. To accommodate the effective and timely analysis of the data, my thematic

coding process focused on the first two weeks of the video journal and three randomly selected

interviews. The journals were thematically coded (Ellis, 2013). In this process, in alignment with

Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006), the transcripts of the journals were analyzed linguistically for

repetitive words, consistent or redundant elements, overarching themes, and juxtapositions or

contradictions. Additionally, from the video segments, behavioral components married to the

language were extrapolated to include pauses, changes in inflection, expressions of elation or

disappointment, complemented by tonal quality, and notation of any significant physical

mannerisms such as wild gesticulation, emotional upheaval, or facial expressions.

The same analysis was applied to the interviews, to include note of the interactions from

the peer observer, but excluding analysis of the student participant, which is not a component of

the research question. Neither is an analysis of the observer's contribution to the interaction

pursuant to the research question. Specifically, as it pertains to the peer observer, analysis was

conducted as to the timing of their interjections and contribution to the interview process.

Although they were not conducting the interview, their contribution as a peer check was to freely

interject, which as a point of data, was capable of presenting additional thematic coding, were

there to be any arising patterns of what I said or did at any particular time that presented a

consistent response or interjection by my peer check participant.

The journal and interviews were analyzed initially in raw format by an exhaustive

charting of key words. Subsequently, many emerging themes were identified from those data sets

and the patterns were evaluated by prevalence. I found mannerisms in the video data and

juxtapositions in the transcripts that were unexpected, and while I knew I have always

encouraged students to work hard to gain opportunity, I did so in a way that was surprisingly

self-inferential. From the numerous data, I have found threads of commonality and a building

structure that I have organized into three themes of; awareness of self, awareness of strata, and

awareness of others.

**Themes**

**Awareness of Self**

I have always considered myself to be a very self-aware person. By this I mean I try to

consider, in detail, the words and mannerisms I am projecting out to the world and the effect they

have on those around me. I also am pointedly aware of the spaces from which I've been molded

and those effects of childhood trauma and vagrancy I could perceive. An effect of this awareness

and background is a constant vigilance over the motivation with which I do and say anything.

Video-journaling has been an eye-opening experience in that I find myself to have many

mannerisms and verbal norms I was not aware of. Within the awareness of self I found

overlapping and intertwined themes of verbal awareness, visual awareness, and motivations; the

latter primarily in the two areas of desire for control and sense of urgency.

In every reflection, both pre- and post-, with no exceptions, the opening verbal statement

was "Alright." In each instance the statement was accompanied by a look of thoughtfulness,

concern, and on three occasions disappointment. Despite the tone of those entries being different,

the same word was used every single time. Had I been asked, before seeing the evidence, I would

never have agreed that my language is redundant in any way. Although this is a seemingly

insignificant mannerism, the redundancy stands out consequentially against the backdrop of my

research question and the subsequent consideration of my perception. Repeatedly saying the

same thing does not bear great significance, however it does lend to the characterization of my

tendency to frame my experiences against the backdrop of my expectations. In essence, every

time I said, "alright" it was as if I was saying, "well, here is how I am uncomfortable with my interactions today."

Also, the word "interesting" occurred fifteen times throughout the video-journal, but only in the post-reflections as a description of the day going other than I had expected. In each instance "interesting" was accompanied by a pause and an expression of thoughtfulness denoted by furled eyebrows, squinting, and sometimes tenting my fingers. As with the repeated mannerism of "alright" as an introductory phrase to begin my reflections, the repeated prevalence of the term "interesting" served as a clear euphemism for surprise with an undertone of disappointment. What is curious regarding this machination is the lack of variation or simple account that I was surprised or caught off guard, but chose instead to withhold my true feelings in exchange for a subtle but noticeable description.

The physical mannerism I discovered that most concerned me was prolonged eye contact or camera contact. Eye contact has been explained to me in various ways throughout my life. One perspective is that eye contact conveys confidence and respect; another is that eye contact is intimidating and controlling. Prolonged stares are a consistent feature of the data. Although these prolonged stares include facial expressions during the journals and nods of agreement during the interviews, they are long, occurring frequently for thirty seconds or more at a time, and over a full minute during one of the interviews. The significance of this mannerism against the backdrop of the research question does not directly answer the question regarding my perspective, however as a source of data as to my behavior during these encounters that I did not seem to be aware of, this exposes a potentially significant factor in how I am perceived by others, especially with the potential of a cultural norm being violated wherein an individual in a

position of power and privilege gazes intently on someone who may interpret it as domineering or provocative.

I spoke in Black cultural colloquialisms nineteen times in the journal entries, not counting quotes or paraphrases from students across the two weeks of entries. In the three randomly selected interviews there were sixty-four instances of Black cultural colloquialisms. The least number was fourteen in a six-minute interview, the most being thirty-two in a thirteen-minute interview. Speaking to the camera during the pre-interaction video journals, I used no slang at all seven times. On the first day my post-interaction video also contained no slang, but all other post-interaction entries did.

In five of the post-journal reflections there are instances of students being quoted by me; in each instance I imitate the voices and gesticulations of the students I am quoting. On one of the Monday videos, I quoted the students as they reacted to a brake-check. "I'm gonna need a check! I'm gonna sue because I'm injured! My nose is bleeding! I'm gushing blood!" The emphasis of tone bore a significant increase in accent, and the gestures included in my storytelling were hyperbolic.

Having never watched myself on video outside of scripted performances, these verbal and visual mannerisms had never been of much note or notice. After processing these transcripts and videos I am beginning to perceive myself differently than before and find myself more aware of repeated phrases and facial expressions.

The ideas of desire for control and sense of urgency are so tightly connected they frequently bleed into one another. Desire for control is a reflection of wanting to know what to expect. My preference is to know what is going to happen, when, with whom, where, how and why. Though I like to surprise others, I feel a need to right a wrong when I am surprised. The

sense of urgency found in the data was a similar expression of needing to complete tasks on the day they were scheduled to occur. This is easier said than done when the occurrence is dependent on the cooperation of a large group of teens. Still, the motive of trying to keep all these students together and on track to successfully complete this program is evident in my actions and words.

In each of the journal entries there is a constant flow of self-identification combined with a stated hope for the day. For instance, "I [am] kind of hoping that this [will] result in…" was a redundant phrase in the preliminary daily journals, whereas, "I was hoping…" was a redundant phrase presented in the post-daily video journals. I also expressed discomfort in various situations; "I want… I anticipate… I am going to… I expect…" were preliminary statements in each day's journal. Conversely, in the reflective post-entries, the phrases "I wanted… I didn't know… I wasn't expecting… I had to…" showed anxiety over a lack of control and sense of urgency to establish said control. These two groups of phrases were accompanied by expressions of desire for things to happen or play out a certain way and thus the appreciation or disappointment exclusively based on whether those expectations were met. The perception of value for interactions and activities was primarily presented based on the alignment between expectation and reality.

Despite the numerous indications of my desire for control, there is a redundant framing of the expectations for each day's activities and interactions that presents an optimistic perspective of potential to meet said expectations. Upon reflection when expectations were not met, the resulting outcome or perceived possible outcome was likewise framed by an unyielding optimism for potential, still pursuant to the initial expectations.

On day four an activity was scheduled for students to create art in the form of music or literature, with the expectation of stimulating activity and introspection. Additionally, the

expectation was that this activity was going to be significant and beneficial for each of the

participants. However, during the course of the activities, a student presented disinterest and

rejected participation by violating boundaries and leaving the supervised area. When confronted

for truancy from class, the student became enraged at being subjected to an activity they were

not interested in, and this escalated to expulsion from the program.

> And he wandered off and happened to run into one of the BMTs, and the director of the program, one of the officers, and just mouthed off. And everybody's got a heart for these kids. I mean, nobody's trying to push their buttons and create conflict and be hostile and, you know, but they can't tolerate that.
> And they stepped to him and he clapped back at them and gave attitude and that was it. Obviously that's not going to work. You can't tolerate certain levels of disrespect, or else you just lose order completely. And that was- I did get a chance to talk to him afterwards and … he was bummed and devastated as a young man.

Despite the extensive criticism of the activities and the program by the student, the

incident was framed as a net positive for accountability in both challenging the student to

confront their feelings about their situation and benefit of experiencing what was presented as

being potentially necessary for the student to receive the lesson and be positively impacted in the

long run.

> "It's not a 'we lost one' situation because I think he'll be back, not in this program, obviously, but I think he'll be back into school and hopefully bounce back and learn from this mistake. This isn't an "end of the road" kind of situation where once they don't make it with us, that's it. They're out on the streets and school's over and their life is over, not at all. I mean, this is a summer program."

No other instances of conflict over the two weeks resulted in a student being removed

from the program. Each of the seven conflicts that arose during the timeframe were reflected

upon as having potentially positive results consisting of statements such as, "This is probably

going to… Ultimately this will…There will likely be…" No situation pertaining to student

behavior was presented negatively. This was especially prevalent in each of the interviews as

each of the three students presented the consequences of the behaviors that led them to be in the

program were framed by me as being positive and subsequently pursued through the interview process for agreement with that positivity.

In five of the ten days of journal entries, there were instances where I reflected in the post-journal entry regarding my desire to support students as a Restoration Specialist, but I questioned my motivation for communicating with the students in regard to a situation we were in or a reflection they were making on a previous situation. In each of the instances, I questioned my motivation as it pertained to my perception of the students and a concern for what their perception of my actions or statements would be. Although engaged in this program as a Restoration Specialist whose primary purpose was to facilitate introspection of both immediate and prior behavior, I presented a passive response. This behavior is contradictory to the preliminary reflections of each of the ten days where the advocacy for the students' success and potential is detailed in the expectations for that day.

**Awareness of Strata**

I found the data to include many references to my perception of poverty or socioeconomic status and its impact on myself or the students. In every instance where the element of financial challenge was presented, there was an authoritative reference that was self-inferential as a point of awareness or directly self-referential as a point of shared experience. "I had" or "I used to…" were present at least once each time a reference to poverty or the advancement of opportunity was mentioned. "Having come from those places and having been the recipient of charity and outreach many times in my childhood…" is not a description contextualizing the student's situation, but rather is a description of my situation being authoritative as having been there and done that and therefore knowing better. Each of these entries were sharply presented as past tense to infer a present tense of enlightenment and

superiority. There were no references to the challenges of the students' environment that weren't

contextualized by an academic positioned commentary or personal reference.

The perception of poverty framed the interactions that were recorded as student

interviews and not just casual interactions. The agenda of each of the interviews was framed as a

transference of knowledge from me to the student, who is clearly represented by the narrative

voice as being of low socioeconomic status, and subsequently in need of my support to escape.

> "in higher academics we call that "cultural capital" and the problem is in the White community a lot of that cultural capital is taught from parent to child. And they teach you, look, you got to make your money work, you got to invest. That's all it is. There's a lot of times that racial divide is because their families teach their kids how to do money right. And then there's families where the kids just don't know because nobody's telling them."

This statement clearly reflects the perception of poverty and further implicates the objective of

an undertone of self-aggrandizement, that while well-meaning, may reinforce stereotypes of the

Messiah Complex (Mattias, 2023) and self-determination of rescuing those less fortunate.

On day three, the students and staff had a service opportunity of creating sandwiches and

serving them to the homeless. In my post-journal reflection of this experience, my initial

observation related surprise that my personal experience with homelessness did not become a

reference point for any conversations with students. The tendency of self-inferential preference

in this reflection is consistent with this theme of "awareness of strata" in that my intention with

the activity was predicated by a desire to relate to the context of the situation from my own

experience. Although this perspective was not to aggrandize the experience, but rather to provide

validation or credibility for struggles perceived commonplace to this population, my insistence

on personalizing the encounter overlooked any subjective interest in the students' experience and

completely ignored the relevance of the homeless population entirely.

Albeit not a tendency emblematic of narcissistic personality, per the DSM-V, the habitual centering of my own experience as a reference point to my interactions with students reinforces the degree of insecurity for my identity that this "awareness of strata" exposes. The opportunity for the encounter to elicit any number of shared experiences in the moment, which may or may not have occurred, was overshadowed by an insistence to gratify my need for relation in the situation. Whether or not the students would have responded positively to this intention did not materialize as was reported in the reflection being that even though I set out with an anticipated desire to interject my story into the activity, the opportunity did not arise; and my reflection instead of emphasizing the curiosity of this intentionality was more focused on the disappointment or surprise as the outcome.

**Awareness of Others**

The theme of awareness of others includes the perception of student behavior and perception of others' reactions to me, and they continue to build on the ideas of the personal nature of perception. The data showed I have a great interest in how I am perceived by others, but also included many assumptions as to the nature of motivation or desire on behalf of the Black male student population I was serving.

The pre- and post- journal entries presented no less than nine references per day to student's desires or motivations, and as many as fourteen in a single day. In each instance, the speculation of what the motivating factors for the students are presented as a precursor to what activities were to be presented during that day as well as for each reflection and analysis of the effectiveness of the activities. Likewise, the interview questions repeatedly inquired as to what the student's motivations were. In each of the three interviews, the direction of the conversation was steered until the student presented an explanation or an agreement as to what their desires

and motivations were. In each of the three interviews there were instances where self-inferential examples of desire and motivation were presented to the students as the pursuit of an explanation for desire and motivation was conducted. The following is such an excerpt:

> I almost feel like because I know a little bit about your story and observed you last year, I feel like that was a bigger shift for you last year. I feel like this year was more refinement and you had more of a leadership role. What was challenging this year that wasn't?.. Because last year you went through a lot and there was a whole lot of stuff that came at you and you took on a leadership role. This year I almost feel like it was easier for you. So what was some of the stuff that stood out from this year that you'd be like, okay, I wasn't ready for that.

This question, which is clearly more statement than question, contextualizes the student's behavior for them and goes so far as to compartmentalize the context for them to perceive their behavior the way I perceived it. Inasmuch as the reflection may be valid, it embeds a supposition of meaning to the student's experience that does not invite them to self-awareness, but rather a deference to my perception of their behavior and thus pursues an explanation from them.

During each of the selected interviews there is at least one instance, and as many as thirteen, of the peer observer affirming statements of encouragement I made to the student. Each of the selected interviews contains an example of the peer observer providing clarification to statements made by myself or the student that lacked specificity or detail. This interjection only occurred while the process of introspection was being introduced during the beginning of each interview as well as reflected on toward the end of each interview. In at least one case per interview, the interjection was made to provide clarification when there was a pause in the student response.

Each pre- and post- journal reflection contained references to perception of other's reaction to me. Each post- reflection contextualized the circumstances of interactions and the outcomes with references to other's perception of me. However, the entry on the first day, both

pre- and post- did not include any such references, whereas the following day approximately

fifty percent of the reflection was presented in the context of my perception of others' reaction to

me. This perception of others' reaction to me was presented at least once per reflection

thereafter, and as many as three times on two separate occasions.

> I don't know that I have any right to tell the student, "Hey, this is a long shot." How honest should I be? And if I happen to be somebody that comes from a different ethnicity, you know, I'm the white guy in the room. I'm telling a black kid, you know, "This is going to be hard for you. I'd love to support your success, but it's going to take a lot for you to go through this journey and come out where you think you might." I don't feel like I can do that. And I don't know if that's my problem, if I'm just not being honest because I'm uncomfortable or if it frankly is just inappropriate to say anything like that, to a child.

This statement encapsulates the latter interpretation of perception of others' reaction to self,

wherein I, as the subject, am perceiving the reaction of others on the basis of my racial identity.

The notable attribute of this perception is the subsequent interpretation of conflict and

prescriptive reflection that my actions need to accommodate what I believe to be limitations of

others to see beyond the stereotypes of my Whiteness. Further, this statement implicates a racial

bias toward others, implying that their racial identity dispositions their perception of my

Whiteness toward a particular reaction.

Each of the incidents descriptive of this theme entails a tendency to defer value for my

identity from a perceived reliance on others' perception of me. This phenomenon acts as a

dependent consciousness wherein I am relying on the perception I have for others inversely of

me to prescribe my subsequent behavior with those individuals. I was waiting to see how the

students reacted to me and then using my perception of that reaction to determine my next

choices. Instead of walking into the room and being natural, I was dependent on my perception

of other's reaction to me to determine my choices and behaviors to include such things as use of

cultural colloquialisms, or even the volume of my speech. This tendency stems from a history

relating to my Greyness as previously described, where what felt like acting natural to me became awkward in different spaces where the reception to my behavior was not always positive and would be met with disdain or scorn, accusations of imposterism, or open rebuke. Although this was not common at Choices, going into that space organically, I brought with me the baggage of all those historical encounters, specifically with other Black male students in my teaching career. Not wanting to foster conflict or broach the reality of my awkward co-constructed identity, I resorted to hypersensitivity.

In one such example, a student exclaimed "don't touch me!" during an innocuous encounter. I immediately read this as some sort of racially driven conflict, and although I did not ascribe it to the student operating in a manner that was racist toward me, rather that my unusual persona or behavior had somehow triggered him to disfavor contact with me in any way, I was prompted to consider how my racial identity factored into the encounter. I did not, for reasons to be considered later, evaluate the situation as if the student was responding merely to my presence as an authority figure or adult, or potentially something less grandiose.

Although these tendencies may be normative to any social interaction, especially between different cultural or racial groups, in response to my research question, my response to how I am perceived racially by others impacts my perception to such a degree that the evidence from these immersion reflections and interviews exposes an almost complete reliance on what I am perceiving the students to be perceiving about me.

In the concluding chapter, the reflection relies on an understanding of the prevalent patterns these tendencies reveal. This conclusion reveals a limitation of the research question, albeit unintentional to be skewed, and then exaggerate the negative implications of the phenomenon which redundantly recurred during my immersion experience. Although the

thematic analysis yielded categorical significance for the redundant occurrences of self-reference, it is framed by the research question in a manner that leads to interpreting only negative implications whereas the desire for commonality can promote empathy and incur trust between teachers and students. Before the gavel is applied in judgement to the outcomes observed during this immersion, it is worth noting that a second research question such as "how did my experience in the Black community help me feel more comfortable interacting with Black male students" emerges as another lens which could be applied in the future with the same data.

It is apparent that the surface has only been scratched in this what is now appearing to be an initial analysis of the data and will be subsequently presented in the findings in chapter five. Nonetheless, an invisible chapter six awaits another glance into the immersion experience to explore yet another shade of grey.

## CHAPTER 5 – MAJOR FINDINGS

As a non-teaching professional in an alternative school setting, how does my perceived Whiteness affect my perception of my relationships with Black male students? The greatest challenge of this autoethnography for me was this research question. There is a vault somewhere on my computer with a novel worth of variations on this question, and dozens of other questions that did not make the cut. Wrestling with this question became such a tempest in its framing of the research that at one point I spent a year trying to figure out how to articulate the concept of introspection served by this question while simultaneously validating that the introspection was not occurring in a vacuum. There is an underlying assumption to the question that thwarted my comfort in this reactionary approach; was there an impact at all, or was I somehow conjuring up the phenomenon in my own mind?

The danger for me in self-reflection through autoethnography was opening a pandora's box of possibilities that I was not eager to embrace. Like exploratory surgery I wanted to focus my attention on things that I was comfortable examining to avoid the exposure of things I was not. It is a trial of emotional stability to question one's sanity in that the very question acknowledges the potential for insanity to exist. Instead of asking if I was crazy, the question was really an invitation to explore how crazy, not if. There is an equivalent assumption in the initial supposition of my research question, which is to establish that something is unusual. For me, this assumption was accusatory and implied a fault of ill-begotten identity. When my childhood had led me awkwardly into adulthood without stability in this identity, I had resorted to a blind obedience to my interpreted narrative of self and ignorance as to whether or not that interpretation affected my behavior, especially with my students, especially the ones that didn't look like me. What resolved my struggle with this question was a gracious reframing by my committee and chief-most, my chair, who patiently waited for me to lean away from the

comfortable pride of assuming that my reality was an indictment against my identity rather than an opportunity to explore it objectively. I felt that in addition to some sort of undoing, I was going to have to answer to any inerrancy I had evolved. Perhaps the awkwardness and discontent with my identity was a refusal to negotiate these spaces in a way, stepping out of the Grey and into a light unrepentant in its exposure of things as Black and White.

This was not to imply I was wrong in being Grey, but rather that my fear of being White and not being Black was not in equal measure, and so I had become comfortable hiding in between. I imagine every educator wrestles to some degree with this façade between who they think they are and how they are perceived by their students, but for me I was afraid that I may have slipped past the precipice of relying on a co-construction for my identity rather than a confession, albeit complicated, of its true self. This was to be the catalyst of my research through my immersion experience; not merely a justification for gauging my reaction to each encounter with my Black students in these liminal spaces, but an acknowledgement that there was going to be an impact on my perception, whether I wanted there to be or not.

The findings of this immersion and subsequent reflection experience may stand juxtaposed with the observations of those in my community both personal and professional, and yet it is necessary and subsequently exciting to finally be afforded the opportunity to examine my perception as more than a catharsis of healing for an awkward identity development, but also a scholarly contribution to the field of educational research with the potential invitation for others who wrestle in these spaces to find value in the struggle to separate perception from reality to better serve the objective in the noble pursuit of education.

My research question juxtaposes the inherent components of the psyche (Freud, 1923) with the manifestations of identity development that are an amalgamation of self-awareness,

interaction, and co-construction. As it pertains specifically to White racial identity development (Helms, 1993), my approach to evaluating the phenomenon of experiencing various degrees of my Whiteness heavily relied on what others thought of me. My research question, therefore, simplified to this dynamic, invited an examination of my interactions to determine how much of that identity development was a result of actual feedback from others, verbal or nonverbal, versus how much of it was just in my own imagination. The simple answer to my research question is that the impact of my perception is absolute; not only is it a potential hinderance to being present in the interaction with others, but it consequently frames the objectives of my interactions with a hypersensitive reliance on racial identity. Although this reliance can be justified in reflection of the social conflict that has arisen from my unorthodox identity development, the precipice of growth for my identity requires scaling the next mountain of self-confidence that does not so eagerly rely on the affirmation of others.

Having established that my perception of myself indeed does affect my perception of my relationships with Black male students, the following findings are a description of how so.

**Awareness of Self**

According to Helms (1994), awareness of self is introspective consciousness subject to the interpretation and perception of one's identity. The subsequent framing of this identity forms a further perception of how an individual believes they are being perceived by others. The basis of this phenomenon creates a hybrid cyclical structure wherein opinion itself informs the perspective of other's response to that opinion of self, which in turn affects behavior, which creates new responses from others, which are perceived again from that same lens, and the cycle continues. The relevance of this Identity Development Theory serves as a foundation for White Racial Identity Development, where the repeating filter of self-perception is subject to the

individual's understanding of Whiteness adjacent to their perception of self. Therefore, a White person attempting to understand their interactions with others is prone to interpret their understanding of those interactions from a White lens.

Pursuant to the research question of the impact of that perception, there is a considerable if not emphatic disposition prevalent in these immersion journal entries that places the "I" at the forefront of interpreting every situation. The tendency to state, "That was different than I expected…" directly relates to Phinney's contribution to the social construction of race, wherein a person's perspective of who they are is not able to be detached from their view of the outside world. Were this reference of "self" not as prevalent, one could surmise that the conflict of Co-constructed Racial Identity (Langie, 2009) and self-awareness were being held in tension.

However, in this case, awareness of self dominates and therefore subjugates all interpretation of the environmental experiences of the immersion through the lens of self. Being that this perspective of self is rooted in a Greyness and conflicting racial identity, returning to Helm's Racial Identity Model, this prevalence establishes that in this case the embodiment of filtering everything through self in essence Whitewashes the perspective of everything that is seen.

> If you don't create that accountability, you may not really be helping these individuals. And those are the tough choices we have to make, and that only took a couple of days. I'm glad it was handled with as much dignity as it was and I support the people that made the decision, but obviously it's always disappointing to just, even if they don't understand in the moment, we feel their loss for them and it feels like a missed opportunity. It's unfortunate, but it's necessary, and if you care about somebody, you will hold them accountable and allow those boundaries to sometimes be the consequence they need to be or else the lesson isn't learned.

To summarize this theme with respect to the research question, the awareness of self as it pertains to Whiteness appears from the data to be the baseline of the perspective for every encounter throughout the immersion experience.

As a result of the theme "awareness of self" from the data analysis in chapter four, the conclusion can be drawn from White Racial Identity Development (Helms, 1990) that there is a clear component of Post-traumatic Stress related to the declared emotional experiences of racial identity confusion from chapter one. In turn, this operates as a disordered function of identity development wherein the self-awareness becomes so prevalent that it interferes at worst with the individual's perspective of others, and at best shapes their perception of how they are being perceived by others. In this case, the tendency to associate understanding for every interaction through the filtered lens of self-awareness implies a categorical symptom of PTSD with respect to the DSM-V (2013) according to the observable prevalence of an indistinguishable disconnect of situations outside of the filter of one's own trauma. Although the tendency of such post-traumatic symptoms can range in significance based directly on their impact on an individual's behavior as it pertains to the research question, it is evident there is an observable relationship between my experiences struggling to identify racially as a child and young adult being unresolved, and that subsequently impacting my ability to perceive my identity when immersed in this racial group outside of my awareness of self.

The implications for this phenomenon as it relates to the impact referenced in my research question and the body of research holds two components of relevance with established literature related to identity development. The first is within the foundational elements of White Racial Identity Development in that a person who associates their Whiteness as an accepted form of identity is thereby subject to the stipulations more prevalent in the research related to social Constructs of Race (Phinney, 1989). However, in my perception of self within that framework of White Racial Identity Development, there is a contention to reject the prevalence of Whiteness that interferes with an accurate perception to the social construct of race. Therefore, by going

into an immersion experience without being willing to accept the social norms of racial identity creates a vacuum for each encounter to agitate the disconnect between the identification of Greyness and the identification of Whiteness. This can be further extended to act as a contradiction that potentially requires the participant in the encounters to concede their own awareness of the prevalence of Whiteness or even ignore that the individual they are interacting with is uncomfortable with their own Whiteness. How the manifestation of this disconnect impacts the relationship has the potential to support further research into the phenomenon of dissonance with White Racial Identity as it pertains to individuals who through their awareness of self, have come to disregard or even reject elements of their Whiteness to the point they are not aware of their impact on others.

This also lends itself to Whiteness Theory (Katz, 1978) where the implications of privilege are also capable of creating dissonance for participants in these encounters because the individual is unaware of the impact of their privilege because of the distraction of the tension of their identity. This stress extends from their awareness of self and damages the potential to be aware of themselves accurately as it pertains to their privilege. Categorically disordered, this is a result of their limited perception.

With respect to educational spaces that are commonly liminal where the phenomena of White Privilege and authority with any number of subjugated groups, not exclusive to Black male students in an alternative school setting, already exists, further research is warranted to explore how aspects of White Racial Identity Development connect the implication that an individual with tension related to their White Privilege needs to not only acknowledge the prevalence of unconscious bias to better examine its impact (DiAngelo, 2021), but additionally examine the potential of trauma related to that individual's identity development that may be

interfering with aspects of their awareness of self. This unresolved trauma may be a contributing factor not only to educators' awareness of self, but also their awareness of others.

Within the "awareness of self" in chapter four, I found a strong underlying current of motivation in the data. This motivation most frequently presented as a sense of urgency or a desire for a sense of control of situations. According to DiAngelo (2018), a strong desire for a sense of control is a manifestation of insecurity. Albeit not exclusive to a racial construct, this insecurity presents a complex wherein one will rely on personal preference over the needs of others with the potential outcome of subjugation (Gillborn, 2005).

The idea of "desire for control" presents an intriguing development within the scope of the research question. Whereas "awareness of self" stems from a hierarchical need (Maslow, 1973) related to the impact of perception of Whiteness, "desire for control" presents a contrasting insight less derived from an internal function, and instead presents as an external insecurity. Erikson's (1968) and subsequently Helm's model of identity development (1993) present control complexes as an attempt to intervene on one's behalf or pursue an outcome relative to their intrinsic motivation. Although insecurity can be justified as a contributing factor to such a control complex, the classic models for such behavior in a psychological context operate as a defense mechanism related to some method of harm (Sue & Sue, 2012). The manifestation of this tendency can be interpreted as having a far more sinister outcome. As a White man, clinging to the virtuous imposition of servitude to a subjugated population, the tendency to control conversations and situations is a demonstrative form of subjugation. The very thing that I am attempting to address in a macro or restorative approach is being compromised in the micro; perhaps not directly as an aggressive response (Sue et al, 2007), but nonetheless contradicting the implications of restorative justice.

The ends justify the means mantra has long been a justification of compromise or contradiction, especially pertaining to historical matters of social conflict (DuBois, 1903). As this autoethnographic study operated as an immersion experience under the umbrella of restorative justice in liminal spaces, the prevalence of a subjugating tendency stemming from a desire for control stands in opposition to this seemingly innocuous task.

The prevalence of these indicating factors for control present a consistent preference for order and subsequently control based on individual determination. This idealism as Matias (2013) asserts is an espousal of preference to one's perspective over a careful examination of the facts and investigation into other perspectives. Consider the journal entry, "It's not completely clear how things are going to work out. We have a plan and it's organized to a degree, but you can't anticipate everything." Although this tendency is rooted in similar components of good intentions (Hyland, 2005), as with self-esteem the desire for control (Glimpse & Ford, 2010) is a recipe for domination. Furthermore, the prevalence of reflective insight on one's surroundings as a matter of pedagogy also fosters environmental conditioning and aspects of subjugation where restrictive practices such as formal greetings, i.e. Sir and Madam, can cause cultural conflict and Whitewashing of individualism (Freire, 1968).

Unfortunately, the seemingly hyper-sensitive awareness of self and unresolved insecurities presented by this theme from the reflective journals and interviews present a case pursuant to the research question that I had no business attempting to serve this marginalized population, being that my desire for control was likely to interfere with if not outright contradict the positive impact of my interactions. An argument can be made that positive and negative outcomes are not mutually exclusive, but a strict interpretation of the research question as to what the impact of my perception of Whiteness is as it pertains to the prevalence of a desire for

control can be interpreted plainly as dysfunctional. This can be further interpreted as a prescription for similar interactions, whereas the well-meant intentions of an authority figure must be disregarded out of a preferential insight to whether the individual is potentially harming the subjects of their immersion due to unresolved issues of identity development.

**Awareness of Strata**

Kim et al (2010) contend that the perception of poverty extends beyond the socio-economic and attributes a false correlation of impoverished mindset. The determination of one's value therein, having been interpreted as financial prosperity, implies in the pejorative sense that poor people are not smart. The veracity of such an implication dangerously aligns one's perception of another's supposed poverty as likewise being a perception of their mental ability or lack thereof.

The perception of poverty presents two findings upon analysis. The immediate echoes the same conditions of ego-driven self-identification (Sue & Sue, 1981) that are common to immersion experiences, whereas a person attempting to relate to another overcompensates for their insecurity by trying to establish credibility for their own experiences or authoritative competence. In the case of this immersion however, the presentation of crediting my prior experience advances beyond establishing familiarity and ventures into a space of projection. Wald and Losen (2003) define this phenomenon under the umbrella of the Messiah complex, laterally presented by Matias (2016) as a mechanism of White Privilege whereas the individual in the veracity of their attempt to help or "save" someone implies that their determinations are the principle truth that the subjects need to adhere to for their deliverance. This can commonly be referred to as the "bootstrap" construct (Seidl &Hancock, 2011).

Distinctly, in each of the interviews with students, I presented this exact determination without reservation, assigning a credibility to my experience with poverty and subsequently projecting that this shared experience entitled me to prescribe the behavior that would benefit the students if adhered to. Upon reflection of this theme of poverty, a subsequent dichotomy emerges wherein the research question exposes the contradiction that I, being of White principled desire to serve a Black student's needs, have determined that the path to deliverance for the student is the same or at least parallel to my own.

Beyond the abhorrent presumptiveness of the position that I could interpret the student's situation accurately in the first place, the supposition that my recipe for their growth is accurate is horrifying. Albeit not the purpose of this study to extrapolate the contradictions between good intentions and outcomes, within the commonplace tendencies of White cultural domination in Black cultural spaces the significance of this inerrant perception stands as the gravest result of the tension presented by my Grey identity, which is to brazenly assume that I understand a student's Black experience in the first place, but to further discredit that perception by implying that their impoverishment can be thwarted by following my lead as a White person who is uncomfortable with my own Whiteness.

This may not outright delve into the categorical space of racism, but nonetheless operates under the umbrella of racial bias, almost in a perversity wherein as a Black acculturated White man I am dictating my experience to young Black male students as a means for prosperity. Good intentions aside, this impact presents yet another case for greater scrutiny by purveyors of immersive support whether in traditional classroom spaces or not, to work against the perpetration of a White person prescribing solutions to the problems they perceive as paramount to the Black experience.

**Awareness of Others**

The construct of behavior as defined by Maslow (1973) in the context of perception is defined as a facet of a greater social construct, wherein uniform standards of behavior are conceded by a majority of a group, thereby defining the boundaries of what is acceptable and unacceptable. These standards further disseminate into expectations which can curry favor, or likewise, discipline. Unfortunately, these perceptions are also self-referential in that an individual can conduct themselves in a similar manner as another but perceive the other's behavior differently than their own. Especially in educational spaces (Matias & Mackey, 2016), the perception of behavior operates as a form of social justice wherein the adult will interpret behaviors they find displeasing or unattractive to be evidence of impudence.

The research question, pursuant to an autoethnography, squarely puts the focus of my perception on myself. However, within the theme, my perceptions of student's behavior juxtapose that perception from being about how I perceive myself, to how I perceive others being a result of how I perceive myself. This finding presents a less obstructive tendency to self-perception; rather it reveals a secondary filter for my identity where instead of only questioning what I perceive to be a response to my identity from others, I am also questioning the behavior of others in response to me. This is almost to imply that I am justifying the basis of others' behavior toward me through some amalgam of my self-awareness and the racial identity through which I assume others perceive me.

The ambiguity of my declared racial identity as operating in a Greyness, therefore implies that others, especially the young Black male students I am interacting with are reacting to my Greyness when in fact they may merely be reacting to my Whiteness or potentially no factor of my racial identity at all. Being that I cannot explore that potential within the confines of this

study, it is still accurate to infer from the consistent interjections of my perception of others'

behavior that it is likely my sensitivity and potentially my insecurity toward my own identity that

is promoting this perceived bias.

In the literature pertaining to the dissonance of Black students in culturally White

environments by Fordham and Ogbu (1986), the motivation for students to reject the cultural

norms of their White authority figures is presented as both a function of self-determination for

Black culture and a rejection of the dominant culture, the assimilation of which presents a

potential compromise of the aforementioned Black culture. In a striking contrast to this

phenomenon of "acting White" as a perceived exercise with oppositional defiance, my

immersion experience presents an alternative representation of this phenomenon wherein I am

"acting Black" in response to my perception of the behaviors of others which I am interpreting

based on the perception of my own Whiteness.

This rather twisted vantage point is reinforced in the journals where my commentary

regarding student behavior is less directed toward how that behavior manifests in the students'

experience, but rather how their behavior affects my perception of self. Although some of these

interpretations are presented to promote expectations for the students to improve their situation

from their self-declared challenges, the tendency of my perception of their behavior is less about

them and more about me. Although DiAngelo (2018) and Mattias (2013) alike attribute the

coloring of perceptions of behavior along racial lines as a function of Whitewashed perception,

Helms attributes this perception more to what would be framed as a classical narcissism as

opposed to a co-constructed sociological phenomenon.

In my case, the conclusion is as potentially ambiguous as my racial identity wherein my

expectations for the behavior of others is filtered through the unusual responses I have perceived

from my own behavior. The tendency toward self-inferential recommendations is a simple function of introspection and is in itself not harmful as individuals are prone to filter their advice through their own experiences. However, in the literature related to this phenomenon in educational spaces, the act of advising from a position of power incorporates an inherent subjugation or preference wherein the culture of the authority dominates the culture of the minority (McIntire, 1997)(McAllister & Irvine, 2002)(Matias &Mackey, 2016). As with classroom dynamics with White teachers and Black students, this occurrence presents a dangerous precedent where in the attempt to relate to a Black student's experience, the White teacher either subjugates the student through the filter of their White experience or culturally appropriates their relationship with Black culture in an attempt to establish credibility for their relationship and subsequently permission and credibility for their advice (Jackson, 2019).

It appears from the consistent relating of student behavior from my own experience that this appropriating tendency is just as prevalent outside of the classroom with the added element in my situation of not only trying to relate my struggles to those of the young Black male students I'm interacting with as a counselor for restorative justice, but also that my insecurity that borders on narcissism is interpreting the students' reaction to my racial identity as justification for my perception of their behavior.

Projection is a psychological phenomenon wherein the individual posits meaning and motivation behind their perception of another's behavior, which is in and of itself more of a reflection of their perception than an accurate account of a situation. Lewis & Volkmar (1990) interpret this phenomenon as a psychological disposition wherein a person exudes sensitivity toward what they perceive as a reaction to their behavior in contrast to their perception of self. In contrast to Maslow's description of self-awareness, the perception of others' reactions to oneself

has the tendency to value the interpretation of that reaction over the motivations or intentions preceding the reaction. Although being considerate of others' feelings is a benign attribute of social interaction, it has the potential to compel an individual to over-rely on their perception and thereby project meaning to a situation that may not be accurate. Matias (2013) notes that this phenomenon can take root as an implicit racial bias where an "othering" effect develops a tendency of a White person to interpret the reaction of subjugated populations as a reaction to their Whiteness as opposed to just their behavior.

Within the theme of "awareness of others," my perception of other's reaction to me presents an extension from the research question related to my perception of self into a more elaborate co-construction where I am relying on my perception of others to form my perception of self. This tertiary formula requires a further tension from hovering within the liminal Grey space of White racial identity and the liminal authoritative space outside of the classroom where I am relying on both the perception of my identity and my perception of others' reaction to the presentation of my identity to form my perception of self. The internal conflict of being outside of a traditional norm of my self-described White experience is further complicated by the implication that I am relying on, in the case of this immersion experience, every young Black male student's reaction to my identity as an explanation for how I perceive myself.

From the introspective foundation of Helms' (1994) White racial identity development theory there is a reasonable assumption in the value of acknowledging one's Whiteness in any component of their identity. Albeit abstract in its conjunction with an adoption into the Black community, it is evident that there are elements of dysfunctionality at least in the internal process of my racial identity. This dysfunction is presented in two forms, the first being a clear insecurity in my own racial identity presented by a hypersensitivity to any attributes of ethnicity or culture

that relate to racial identity. In fact, the very pretense of my immersion experience ostensibly stems from a need for validation for any portion of Blackness. The prevalence of this insecurity is most abundant in the interactions with the Black male students where a redundant tendency existed to relate with student experience contrary to what would be necessarily based on the value of empathy.

From this critical vantage point, the phenomenon is less of White loathing, but rather an inherent hunger for connection with my adoptive parents and the community to which I have grown as an adult White male steadily less comfortable in as I perceive the reactions of society at large.

It is inevitable as an interpretation of this social anxiety that the construct of disenfranchisement from my family of origin disparaged me from my roots and thwarted me in a shallow, clinging graft to my adopted identity somehow tertiarily unwilling to find a balance between the two. It appears to me that the involuntary expulsion from this community and subsequent sense of abandonment did not compel me as I came to discover my identity to any degree of attraction to Whiteness that for me represented the attributes of a broken home, severe child abuse, and an upbringing of homelessness, whereas by contrast Blackness represented belonging, acceptance, and affection. In the Black community I was welcome to explore the grief of my abandonment through the rich cultural tapestries of music and art that were foreign to me as disciplines of White culture. This estrangement of my origin story appears to have conditioned as much my affection for my Blackness as my displeasure toward Whiteness.

**Implications of the Study**

I cannot present a prescription for how to access restoration for this reality, morerather I delight in the irony of an individual entitled by the pursuit of serving restoration in others,

meanwhile dysfunctionally engrossed in their own need for restoration. I believe that "hurt people, hurt people" as much as I believe that "broken people have a heart for others who are broken." It has been difficult to even approach contention with my own brokenness as being unresolved while emphatically pursuing the restoration of others. It is not any less noble in my estimation to derive joy having been through a struggle to want to help others do likewise, but it is dangerous to attempt to heal while yet bleeding.

The challenge of an autoethnography as an exercise in introspection, subjectively pertinent to oneself is in turn presuming that the examination justifies projection of that process onto others. In order to validate the benefit of this research beyond the confines of what has become my own catharsis, I humbly present the invitation for my struggle throughout this process to any educator in a position of direct influence or not. It is a generalization to presume that every teacher would benefit from some degree of introspection into their identity and how their perception of their identity impacts their relationships with students, but it is without hyperbole to believe that such an exercise would allow any person taking up the mantle of such a responsibility over others to desire an awareness of self whether it is positioned laterally or advantaged vertically with social privilege of identity.

In addition to the themes bearing relevance for introspective process for preservice education of professional development for both traditional and nontraditional educators, i.e. those occupying the nontraditional spaces as I did, I believe this autoethnographic study invites the potential for a qualitative exploration of a larger scale where the phenomenon of my dissonance is contrasted with a larger sample of individuals operating as co-educators or in support roles for education outside of their native culture. Although my autoethnography has more direct implications between the White and Black culture because of my unique story, I do

not believe the phenomenon of discomfort and disorder is isolated to only this paradigm. The long-term implications for investigating a larger sample and encouraging others to participate in their own autoethnographic journey would invite a complementary wealth of data to continue to reveal the complicated nature of educational spaces; not solely focused on those in traditional classroom roles, and perhaps even to help frame the unifying components of opportunity that stem from the challenges in every educational relationship.

**Where do we go from here?**

Although the prevalence of research into White Racial Identity has exploded in the recent generation, both in response to the prevalence of White teachers, but also the unmasking of the significance of White Privilege in education, it is the contention of my experience through this autoethnographic process that even if not a prescription demanded of anyone connected to White racial identity, at least the invitation should exist. I temper this invitation with the satisfaction of having begun the experience of understanding, awkwardly, but nonetheless attempting to divorce shame from the process instead like a mystery enjoying the value of truth and its capacity for restoration. I admit that this experience was no less frightening than it was uncomfortable, but challenge that the extreme consequence of leaving my skeletons unchecked is far worse than the potential of being able to release them and move into a new space of healing and productivity. If anyone truly wants to help teach another, the upheaval of comfort afforded by this autoethnographic process in any form may be frightening or seemingly inversely irrelevant to those not stricken with the awkwardness of my Grey identity, but I, having come to terms with the potential limitations, the crutch of my Greyness has befallen me. I modestly welcome the critique of my experience to equal measure of anyone else's for the sake of the profession and

the hope that should we allow ourselves a deep and honest examination that we as teachers will be far better equipped to teach others to do the same.

One of the implications of this study is the potential for replicatability. The challenge for such application is inherent in the uniqueness of every autoethnographic experience being unique to the individual. There are two take-aways from this immersion that have potential to support the development of other teachers, regardless of their level of identity development. The first is in the reliance on agreement for the unique attributes of their identity or personality. The desire for approval from a sociological construct within the classroom dynamic often exists as a wholesome interjection of the powerplay that inevitably interferes in the development of the teacher-student relationship. It may appear to be beneficial to thwart this power dynamic by subjugating the approval of the teacher's identity to the students, but this inevitably invites a group of young people who are also likely to be wrestling with their identities at some level, suddenly being responsible for affirming the identity of the teacher. It would be far more beneficial for the cohesion of the group dynamic for the teacher to assume a posture of facilitation with the group instead of feeling the need to derive emotional kindredness within the group. Such a boundary would help with the second application, which is an appropriate façade of self-confidence. Identity awareness is a prevalent component of teacher development in recent years, and has promoted examinations of the power dynamic present in the classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2006), especially under the umbrella of racial identity, which research has revealed to be confrontational to the learning environment (Paris & Alim, 2014). Unfortunately, many teachers wrestle with unresolved identity issues, none the least of which adhere to racial constructs (DiAngelo, 2018). The process for resolving these issues that are unresolved is better left to private spaces instead of the classroom as a catharsis. Even in the in-between spaces, I

spent more time applying energy to unresolved issues than focusing on the objective of the interaction. This immersion and subsequent analysis may serve as a cautionary tale for managing the desire for personal growth with no cost to the education of the students. Interactions with students, whether diverse or not, from an instructor's identity may serve as a litmus test for the teacher's growth and confidence in accepting who they are.

A further potential of this more positivist approach could yield an abstract identity model, and perhaps even a "grey" identity examination wherein like intersectional research, the liminal spaces of identity development not limited to racial identity are explored. In a society as diverse and integrated as ours is in the West especially, there is a potentially expansive array of qualitative explorations investigating the nature of identity outside of the strict confines of racial profiles or established cultural norms.

Like a Venn Diagram, a Grey Identity Development Model might present how the traditional representations of identity overlap in some places, but do not meet at all in others, to create the uniqueness of each individual's experience without confining it to a square with inflexible dimensions.

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