

White Dreams, Another World:  
Exploring the Racial Beliefs of White Administrators in Multicultural Settings

by

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## ABSTRACT

Although racial minorities are heavily represented in student bodies throughout the United States, school administrators who work with minority children have been overwhelmingly White. Previous research by race scholars has demonstrated that systems of racial dominance in the larger society are often replicated in schools. However, the role of White school administrators in perpetuating or disrupting racism has not been documented.

This study examined the racial attitudes and resulting professional practices of White school administrators who worked in a unique environment. These administrators lived and practiced their profession in towns that lay just outside the borders of the Navajo Nation, a large Indian reservation in the Four Corners region of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Termed *border towns*, these communities were populated by a large majority of Native Americans, with a heavy representation of Hispanics. This placed White school administrators in the uncommon position of living and working in a place where they were a numeric minority, while simultaneously representing the majority culture in the United States. Twelve White border town administrators in four different communities agreed to participate in the interview study, conducted over a two-month period in 2010 and 2011. Using a semi-structured interview format, the researcher gathered data on participants' racial attitudes and analyzed responses to find common themes.

Common responses among the interviewees indicated that there were clear racial hierarchies within border town schools and that these hierarchies were

sometimes atypical of those found in mainstream American society. These racial hierarchies were characterized by a dichotomy of Native American students based on residence in town or on the reservation, as well as deferential treatment of White administrators by Native American constituents. The intersectionality of race and socioeconomic class was a key finding of the study, with implications for school administrators' professional actions. Racial attitudes also impacted White border town administrators' actions and sometimes reinforced institutionally racist practices. Finally, results of the study supported several established models of race relations and White identity formation.

To my Little Sam who gave me a reason to finish what I started and  
who unknowingly sacrificed so many hours of his childhood  
over the past two-and-a-half years.

To my Big Sam, a loving husband and father,  
who has been and will forever be the  
single biggest supporter of everything I do.

To my mom Mary Joe and late dad John  
who taught me all about hard work  
and the value of an education.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“The wide variation in performance among schools serving similar students suggests that these [achievement] gaps can be closed.

Race and poverty are not destiny.”

—The “McKinsey” Report (2009)

A major focus of recent national legislative efforts, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RtT), is narrowing the achievement gap in reading and mathematics among various racial groups and ensuring that all students can perform on grade level. With devastatingly low test results for Native Americans and Hispanics, it is clear that the current educational system is somehow short-changing minority children. Because education eventually has an impact on income levels and quality of life, the issue is crucial to the entire nation, not just the parents and students caught in a flawed system. The widening achievement gap is forcing current school administrators to ask tough questions about the quality of education being offered to the nation’s racial minorities.

As shown in Table 1, the gap between the percentage of fourth-grade students proficient in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is nearly 25% between White and Asian subpopulation and Native American and Hispanic subpopulations. Even more discouraging is that one half of Native American and Hispanic elementary students cannot even perform at the basic level of reading. Furthermore, reading results do not improve significantly as students progress through school, with only slight gains in the percentage of minority eighth-grade students attaining basic levels on NAEP, and the achievement gap between Native American and Hispanic eighth graders and

White and Asian eighth graders diminishing by a mere percentage point or two (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010).

Table 1

*Percentage of Students at Each Achievement Level in Reading on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by Grade and Race/Ethnicity*

	Fourth grade			Eighth grade		
	At or above basic	At or above proficient	At advanced	At or above basic	At or above proficient	At advanced
White	78	42	10	84	41	4
Black	48	16	2	57	14	<0.5
Hispanic	49	17	3	61	17	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	80	49	16	83	45	6
Am. Indian/ Alaska Native	50	20	4	62	21	2

*Note.* Data are not cumulative. Membership in subsequent categories is drawn from the basic category. Adapted from *Results From the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2010 (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/>)

Mathematics achievement data from NAEP shows similar trends, demonstrated in Table 2. White and Asian students gain proficiency in math over Native American and Hispanic children by approximately 30% more at the fourth grade and 27% more at the eighth grade. Fully one third of Native American students and one quarter of Hispanic students also fail to attain basic levels of mathematics achievement in fourth grade, with numbers in both groups falling precipitously by eighth grade, where just over half of these children manage to perform basic math skills. Overall, only one in every five Native American or

Hispanic children is proficient in mathematics, according to NAEP (NCES, 2010).

Table 2

*Percentage of Students at Each Achievement Level in Mathematics on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) by Grade and Race/Ethnicity*

	Fourth grade			Eighth grade		
	At or above basic	At or above proficient	At advanced	At or above basic	At or above proficient	At advanced
White	91	51	8	83	44	11
Black	64	16	1	50	12	1
Hispanic	71	22	1	57	17	2
Asian/Pacific Islander	92	60	17	85	54	20
Am. Indian/ Alaska Native	66	21	2	56	18	3

*Note.* Data are not cumulative. Membership in subsequent categories is drawn from the basic category. Adapted from *Results From the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2010 (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/>)

Wide disparities in educational outcomes may be reflective of racial trends in society. These disparities are aggravated by inequalities in the opportunities offered to students in the public schools (Kozol, 1991). Therefore, race is likely a factor in the quality of education offered to students in the United States. The resulting unequal outcomes among various racial subgroups are reflected in data on drop-out rates, presented in Table 3, and rates of educational attainment, illustrated in Table 4, both of which show disproportionately high drop-out rates

and low educational attainment rates for Black, Hispanic, and Native American students.

Table 3

*Event Drop-Out Rates (Percentage of 9th- to 12th-Graders Who Dropped Out) During 2006-2007, by Race/Ethnicity*

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Am. Indian/ Alaska Native
Nationwide	3.0	6.8	6.5	2.6	7.6
Arizona	6.3	7.9	8.5	4.1	13.2
New Mexico	3.9	6.7	6.4	3.1	8.1

*Note.* Adapted from *Results From the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2010 (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/>)

Table 4

*Educational Attainment of the Population Age 18-24 by Race/Ethnicity (2005)*

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Am. Indian/ Alaska Native
Less than diploma	14.7	23.9	34.8	10.3	29.1
Diploma or equivalent	32.9	38.3	35.7	25.8	38.7
Some college, no degree	35.3	29.3	22.6	38.4	25.1
Associates degree	5.8	3.5	3.3	5.7	3.1
Bachelor's degree	10.5	4.7	3.4	17.5	3.8
Graduate or professional degree	0.7	0.4	0.2	2.4	<0.1

*Note.* Adapted from *Educational Attainment and Earnings by Race/Ethnicity and Gender*, by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2009 (<http://www.higheredinfo.org/raceethnicity/>)



Are these divergent experiences unique to the nation's schools, or are they reflective of greater trends in society? Proponents of critical race theory (Brown et al., 2003; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Leonardo, 2004) propose that inequalities in education are the result of social, political, and economic structures of racial dominance and subordination within American society. Race issues in all of these domains, including education, are often the result of institutional racism, as opposed to individual acts of racism. Critical race theorists are careful to avoid making racism a personal problem, focusing instead on the collective issues that make it an everyday reality for minorities across the United States; they theorize that Whites are often unaware of the ways in which their actions reinforce or create situations of racial dominance.

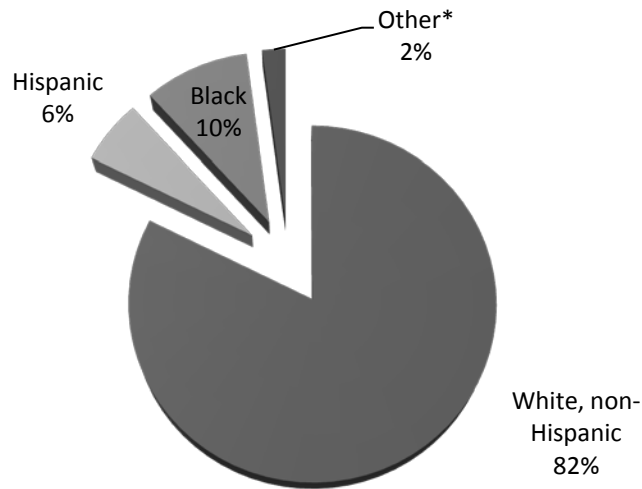
Arising from radical legal studies, Critical Race Theory explores a number of concepts relevant to the field of education:

- Racism is ordinary, not aberrational, which makes it difficult to address and fix. As such, color-blind conceptions of equality, demonstrated through rules that insist on equal treatment across the board, can remedy only the most blatant forms of discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).
- Racial dominance is reinforced by the constant definition of a dominant class or race and an *other*, or subordinate, set of peoples (Leonardo, 2004). This dichotomy is ever-present, and groups may move in and out of the dominant class, depending on circumstances.

- There is a set of privileges enjoyed by Whites in the United States (McIntosh, 1988) that is essentially invisible to those who can access it and are, therefore, among the privileged. This can be compared to the idea of a fish swimming in water, unaware of the water itself.
- The belief that racism is rarely perpetrated only through individual acts of hatred is a myth. Inequalities based on race are generally the product of institutional structures in law, education, economics, and society at large (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).
- Due to principles of interest convergence, advances in civil rights can generally be traced back to corresponding advances for the dominant race (Bell, 1980). As such, current reform movements may not be aggressive enough to address inequalities (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

These theories raise some important questions about education in communities that serve a majority of students of color. The overwhelming majority of school administrators working in U.S. schools are White (Figure 1), and this racial imbalance will remain for the foreseeable future, due to a shortage of qualified minority candidates for these positions (Howard, 1999; NCES, 2009). If White educators are generally unaware of the system of privilege and dominance from which they benefit, does this affect their ability to work effectively with minority students? Additionally, research on White identity formation indicates that, when Whites do finally gain an awareness of structures of dominance, they will travel through many stages, not all positive, before gaining a positive White identity and the ability to work autonomously with

others (Howard, 1999). The stage of identity formation at which a White teacher or administrator functions can have a clear impact on how they conduct themselves professionally and, in turn, on the quality of education they provide to minority students.



*Figure 1.* Percentage of school principals by race/ethnicity (2007–2008). *Other* includes Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native. Adapted from *Results From the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2009 (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/>)

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to describe the attitudes about race held by White school administrators serving school districts adjacent to the Navajo Nation and to explore how these beliefs impacted their professional actions.

## **Research Questions**

The researcher identified five study questions in order to explore the link between racial attitudes, White racial identity formation, and professional actions of school administrators:

1. How do White school administrators view race relations in their schools and districts?
2. What are the administrators' personally held beliefs about race and what experiences have they had that influence these beliefs?
3. How do the interviewees use these beliefs to inform their conduct as educational leaders?
4. How do White administrators in these settings feel to be part of a racial minority within their communities? In what ways has being White affected them?
5. Based on the administrators' responses to interview questions, can the researcher identify the stage of White identity formation, defined and discussed further in Chapter 2, at which they are operating, and does this appear to impact their practice?

## **Significance of the Study**

Although race continues to be a source of major inequalities within American society, and within the schools in particular, there are gaps in the research. Studies documenting the extent of inequalities are plentiful, and critical race studies that examine relationships between racially dominant and oppressed groups are on the rise. Additionally, the recent proliferation of studies in Critical

Race Theory give voice to traditionally silenced views of racial, ethnic, and gender minorities. A clear gap that needs to be filled, however, is that of attitudes and actions of individual Whites. While the dominant culture is often paraded in full view of critical theorists, and dominant discourse is dissected and examined in its minutest detail, the beliefs and experiences of the individuals who occupy that dominant collective are rarely, if ever, explored. In fact, for Whites, race is simply taboo, a topic not mentioned in polite discourse:

White people are raised to be confused about their own color. While they are taught to be aware of other people's color, polite White persons do not mention color in public—especially their own . . . Why are White people so uncomfortable about acknowledging color? Because from the time they are capable of recognizing color differences, around three or four years, they are bombarded with ambiguous messages about color. (Helms, 1992, p. 5)

The significance of this study is that it serves to illuminate the attitudes of a unique population of Whites—school administrators who live and work in communities where they serve primarily minority students and, even though they are members of the dominant culture in American society, are in the unique position of being Whites in a numerical minority. The results of this study can serve to reinforce or disprove various theories on racial dominance and hierarchies and contribute to the growing body of whiteness studies. It may also have implications for educational leadership practitioners by informing border town school districts' professional development practices for school

administrators or influencing educational leadership preparation programs at the universities that train these individuals.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The primary delimitation of the study was that it reflected only the experiences of White administrators working in border towns to the Navajo Nation. A possible alternative to this study would be one that explored the beliefs and experiences of White school administrators working on the reservation. However, reservation communities represent a monocultural experience—limited almost solely to interaction with Navajo students and parents—while border town communities have far more diverse demographics. An important area of inquiry for this study was the interaction of various racial and ethnic groups—primarily Native American (represented by a variety of tribes), Hispanic, and White—that would be encountered by White administrators in these schools.

As such, a clear limitation of the study is that the findings cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the experiences of White administrators working in monocultural environments. Additionally, the experiences of school administrators working in diverse rural environments, such as those studied, may not transfer to the experiences of school leaders in diverse urban environments.

Additionally, because point of view is an important concept within qualitative research, it is vital to acknowledge the positionality of the researcher. Positionality has the potential to affect the relationship of the interviewer with interviewees and, thus, the type of information shared, the filter through which data passes for examination, and the interpretation of the data for final analysis. In

this study, the researcher shared a common racial make-up with the interviewees, and was also a school administrator in a border town community; as such, the reader should recognize this shared background as both a source of authority and a limitation.

### **Definitions of Common Terms**

The following terms are defined below as they are used in the present research study. These definitions are grounded in the review of the literature, as seen in chapter 2. Following are definitions for the purposes of this research study:

- *Anglo*. During interviews, many participants in the study referred to themselves and others as *Anglo*, indicating that they view themselves or other individuals as White.
- *Border town*. Usage of the term *border town* refers to communities that fall outside, but close to, the borders of the Navajo Nation. These communities serve a large population of Native Americans and often serve as trading and business centers for people living on the reservation.
- *Culture*. In the context of this study, culture refers to the shared beliefs, customs, social behaviors, and values of particular groups defined by race or class.
- *Dominance*. This refers to the condition of having primary control, authority, or influence (Soukhanov, *Encarta's World English Dictionary*, 1999).

- *Ethnicity*. An ethnicity is commonly recognized as a group sharing common cultural characteristics. Within this study, participants in interviews often used the word interchangeably with race.
- *Institutional racism*. MacPherson (1999) defined institutional racism as “the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behavior which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people” (p. 8).
- *Intersectionality*. For the purposes of this study, intersectionality refers to the overlapping of two identities, such as Black and female, or Native American and single-parent.
- *Mainstream*. Mainstream describes the views or values of the dominant culture in the United States—in this case, White majority views.
- *Personal racism*. Personal racism refers to personally-held beliefs in the superiority of one race over another, or the acts perpetrated by a specific person as a result of these prejudices. Personal racism may also be referred to as *individual racism*.
- *Positionality*. Positionality is the context that shapes subjectivity. In other words, an individual’s forms of identity—racial identity, sexual orientation, professional path—impact their personal interpretation of events, conversations, and incidents.



- *Racialized*. Frankenberg defined racialized as “structured by relations of race” (p. 451). In other words, racialization is the placement of something into a racial context.
- *White*. For the purposes of this study, White refers to a racial categorization of those individuals with light-skinned coloring, generally of western European, non-Hispanic descent.
- *Whiteness*. As an interdisciplinary offshoot of Critical Race Theory, whiteness studies focus on the cultural, historical, and sociological aspects of people identified as White, as well as the social construction of whiteness as an ideology tied to social status (Wikipedia, 2010).

### **Organization of the Study**

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 contains an introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, definition of terms, delimitations and limitations of the study, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive review of the literature on racial identity and racism, Critical Race Theory, and issues of race in education. In addition, literature on Whites working in racially diverse settings and Whites writing on race was also reviewed. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology. Chapter 4 consists of analysis of the data and summary of the findings. Chapter 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations for policy, practice, and further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of the literature review is to ground research in a particular context. In order to understand the complex intersection of race and education, the reader is provided with a background in social theories of race and racism, the link between social dominance of Whites and the concept of whiteness, and the stages of formation of a White racial identity. Additionally, the researcher explored tenets of Critical Race Theory, as well as other views on race, and how these were illustrated in educational settings—debates over curriculum, school as a vehicle for reproduction for social inequality, and disproportionate inputs in the forms of quality teaching and physical resources in public schools. Also useful were reviews of literature on Whites working in multicultural settings and on Whites writing on race.

To conclude the literature review, the researcher provides an overview of Indian education and the trust duty of the United States government to provide an education to the nation's tribal members. As a people, the Navajos, who represent the majority of students served in border town schools, have a long history of economic, political, and social subordination at the hands of Whites. A basic knowledge of this history with regard to education is necessary to understand the context of the research.

#### **What is Race?**

After years of research, scientists have determined that there is no significant biological foundation to race beyond certain physical attributes; race

does not appear to play a part in differences in intelligence, morality, and personality. Race, then, is a construct that is a product of social thought and human relations. Known as the “social construction thesis,” this view posits that people racialize certain attributes in an attempt to create a societal hierarchy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Winant, 1994). Leonardo (2009) explained:

Race is an intimate part of how people represent/understand themselves and others. Racial ideology may distort their scientific understanding of social life, but it also functions for people in a daily way, and not always in a positive sense. It gives them a threshold for comfort as they choose their friends, decide where they want to live, and deliberate on who is or is not moral. (p. 38)

Some theorists believe that race is actually a legal and political construct, rather than a social one, that is designed to sort individuals and hide real economic relationships (Banton, 1980; Myrdal, 1962; Solomos & Back, 2000). This neo-Marxist view posits that racial constructions hide realities of class issues, such as economic exploitation, conflict over scarce resources, and differential access to power.

One of the consequences of differential racialization is that the dominant culture has, throughout history, characterized various minorities in different ways, according to the time and need (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). For example, war-time propaganda in the 1940s portrayed Japanese Americans as shifty; however, media increasingly labeled the same group as hard-working and productive as

trade between Japan and the United States grew into a major factor in the U.S. economy.

It is worth noting that, even though race is ubiquitous, it is never the single defining characteristic in an individual's identity. Threaded throughout are issues of gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and a myriad of other factors. For this reason, critical theorists are often at odds with one another as they struggle to determine the major force in societal structures, generally either favoring race (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Leonardo, 2009; Nyaggah & Gethaiga, 1995; Rousseau, 2006); class (Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Lutz & Iannaccone, 1995); or gender (Crenshaw, 1993; Farber & Sherry, 1993; hooks, 1981; Mohanty, 1988).

The middle ground, and the most reasonable stance, is an understanding that there is an intersectionality of factors that contribute to human actions or human perceptions of situations. This notion of multiple consciousness allows for a party to experience the world in different ways on different occasions, because of who they are (Crenshaw, 1993; Hall, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009). Intersectionality may also lead members of the same group to set different priorities. For example, the women's movement, which tends to be dominated by White women, may push for abortion rights or equal pay, whereas a Black woman in an urban environment is actually seeking accessible childcare or safe neighborhoods. The same Black woman may also not feel comfortable as a part of the Black rights movement, which tends to be male-dominated, because it pushes for better political representation rather than

material assets (Collins, 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; hooks, 1981; Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Discussions of race are complicated by a number of factors, most notably issues of ethnicity and multiple identities (Crenshaw, 1993; Datnow & Cooper, 1998). Debates around the racial definitions used as part of the United States census abound. As an example, in the 2000 census, the definition of an American Indian designated “persons having origins in any of the original people of North America,” excluding native Hawaiians and effectively rendering them Asian immigrants, despite their indigenous roots. Additionally, ethnicities have the possibility of encompassing race, as with Dominicans who might identify both with the Hispanic ethnicity and the Black race, or mestizos who might be considered Native American if they had been born north of the Rio Grande (Hill, 2004).

Why is race important? According to Parker (1995), the most important characteristics influencing decision-making are culture, class, and race.

Employing a clever analogy, she stated,

So, from the beginning who we are in terms of our culture, class, and race influences all that we do. Our professional and educational training impacts our decision making, but no matter how hard we try, sometimes some of our peanut butter is going to stay inside the sandwich and the jelly is going to come out of the sides because it acts as a filter for everything we do, say, and believe. (p. 236)

Her recommendations to minimize the influence of race and other factors on decision making included a recognition and acceptance of its impact and provision of safe places for students and professionals to talk about and explore their racial background and how it affects what they do. Perhaps most importantly, Parker addressed the elephant in the room: “Race is considered a taboo topic for discussion, especially in racially mixed settings” (p. 237). Without the opportunity to unpack the issues, racial tensions will never be resolved.

### **What is Racism?**

A natural outcome of the human tendency to define and sort by race is the attempt to establish a racial hegemony, played out through acts of racism. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) defined racism as “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (p. 131). Race scholars make painstaking efforts to identify different types of racism, as the layperson often views racism as an individual act, based on hate. Racism, however, can take many forms. Delgado & Stefancic (2001) identified several, including intentional racism, unintentional racism, unconscious racism, institutional racism, homophobia and sexism which have a racial bent, and White privilege. Brown et al. (2003) also advised that, given the many natures of racism, Whites and minorities may define racism differently, based on an individual view versus a group or institutional view.

Perhaps the most crucial separation to be made is between the concept of racism as an individual act and the concept of institutional racism. While discrete racial acts by individuals or groups of people who are openly bigoted are

reprehensible and can result in clear acts of hate, they are relatively uncommon and their perpetrators are generally easy to identify. More insidious is the institutional racism that occurs through ordinary, everyday interactions, because it shapes society and keeps racial minorities firmly in their places. Because no single person or entity can be blamed for the set of circumstances, institutional racism can be described as *racism without racists* (Brown et al., 2003; Helms, 1992; Leonardo, 2004). Ultimately, to look for individual racism may come at the expense of uncovering unconscious racism.

### **Issues of Dominance**

In social experiments, Tajfel (1970) demonstrated that human beings tend to demonstrate negative in-group and out-group dynamics, even when there was an extremely limited basis for drawing distinctions between members of the groups. Dubbed the minimal group paradigm, Tajfel's work had two significant findings that explain prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviors:

1. People tend to draw distinctions between themselves as individuals and groups, even if the distinctions are essentially meaningless in a larger context; and
2. Having drawn these distinctions, people then ascribe values of superiority and inferiority to the various in-groups and out-groups they have created.

In other words, creating differential relationships and using them to develop hierarchies is a normal human action.

Race fits the minimal group paradigm and is often conceived of in a binary relationship: dominant and subordinate, Black and White, in-group and out-group (Hall, 1997; Park, 1939). The racial binary most commonly takes form in definition of a dominant group that is described as *White*. In its modern form, the concept of whiteness arises from the field of immigration law, in which minorities are generally defined as something *other than White* (Howard, 1999). So, whiteness becomes the standard to which all other races are compared.

A binary approach can also cover up realities of race. First, a preoccupation with Blacks as the prototypical minority group fails to account for differences in experiences of other groups. Where African American rights organizations may focus on issues of fair housing and economic equality, indigenous groups may have a stronger focus on land rights, preservation of language and culture, and sovereignty. Additionally, the binary also pits minority groups against one another, as they jockey for position within the dominant group; these dynamics may appear as social struggles, such as political campaigns that depict Mexican workers as taking Black jobs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In short, the binary view may be too simplistic to describe the racial landscape in the United States adequately. In actuality, while one group is gaining ground in the race battle, another is probably losing ground.

Howard (1999) identified three major processes that function together as dynamics of dominance, once the dominant group has been established:

- *The assumption of rightness*: In this situation, the dominant group takes its own views as truth, as opposed to a perspective. In the case of race, this is



often manifested by a White view that the group's beliefs and customs are the norm.

- *The luxury of ignorance:* The assumption of rightness is generally reinforced by the fact that dominant groups tend to know very little about marginalized groups, while, in reverse, minority groups do not have the luxury of avoiding engagement with the mainstream, since they must navigate the transitions between their own culture and the dominant culture on a daily basis.
- *The legacy of privilege:* Systems of dominance are characterized by the differential distribution of rewards to individuals as a function of their group membership, as opposed to the basis of their self-worth.

According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), another consequence of structures of dominance is that a hierarchical society tends to reproduce itself. This is often used as a way to explain why academic and social outcomes of people of color are lower than the outcomes of Whites, coming from an assumption that these individuals lack the social and cultural capital required for social mobility. Bourdieu termed this concept the theory of *cultural capital*. This view set minority status as a deficit (Donnor, 2006; Yosso, 2005).

Scholars must also recognize not only is there a dominant group, but also there is a dominant discourse advanced by this group. With regard to race, the current discourse pushes colorblindness. At first sight, the concept of overlooking race appears enlightened. However, this is a deeply politicized choice, even if held at an unconscious level, as it disregards any historical conditions that have

led to a system of disadvantages for minority groups (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Rousseau and Tate (2003) challenged this very colorblindness in their study of White math teachers, and Thompson (1998) summed up the precariousness of this position: “Politely pretending not to notice students’ color makes no sense unless being of different colors is somehow shameful” (p. 524). In this sense, colorblindness can be a form of microaggression, or inadvertently demeaning action.

### **Whiteness**

As the racial group that most frequently occupies the highest rungs of the dominance ladder, Whites enjoy a unique position. Frankenberg (1993) identified three linked dimensions of whiteness that are key to understanding its power:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege.

Second, it is a standpoint, a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, whiteness refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p. 447)

Interestingly, whiteness does not necessarily apply to a single race or ethnicity; in other words, *whiteness* and *White people* are not necessarily one and the same (Gillborn, 2005). Rather, various groups have moved into the White dominant group throughout history, including Jews, Italians, Irish, and some Asian groups. So, whiteness is based just as much on a set of expected behaviors as on physical characteristics (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Because *being White* involves adoption of a set of behaviors that are socially acceptable to members of the mainstream, individuals from minority groups have, at times, used White

features, either physical or behavioral, to *pass* into the White world and denounce their racial origin (Bell, 1995; Datnow & Cooper, 1998; Decuir-Gunby, 2006). This is generally done in order to gain access to better economic, social, and political security.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), many Whites have no concept of themselves as racial beings, which lends itself to the assumption of rightness described earlier:

Indeed, one aspect of whiteness, according to some, is its ability to seem perspectiveless, or transparent. Whites do not see themselves as having a race, but being, simply, people. They do not believe that they think and reason from a white viewpoint, but from a universally valid one—*the truth*—what everyone knows. (p. 80)

Brown et al. (2003) described the lack of a White racial identity with precision:

According to a well-known philosophical maxim, the last thing a fish notices is the water. Things that are unproblematic seem natural and tend to go unnoticed. Fish take the water they swim in for granted, just as European Americans take their race as a given, as normal. White Americans may face difficulties in life—problems having to do with money, religion, or family—but race is not one of them. White Americans can be sanguine about racial matters because their race has not been (until recently) visible to the society in which they live. They cannot see how this society produces advantages for them because these benefits seem so natural that they are taken for granted, experienced as wholly legitimate.

They literally do not see how race permeates America's institutions—the very rules of the game—and its distribution of opportunities and wealth.

(p. 34)

### **White Privilege**

Key to whiteness studies is the idea of White privilege, which can be described as “the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 78). An important concept within White privilege is how accumulation of privileges, particularly property ownership, can give advantages to the dominant group (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Throughout American history, property ownership has had a direct link to enhanced rights; for example, in early days of the United States, voting rights were granted only to White, male landowners. Conversely, accumulation of *inequalities* can also be a factor in the success, or lack of success, of certain minority groups (Brown et al., 2003). For example, when American society experiences an economic downturn, Whites are more likely to be able to fall back on some form of accumulated wealth and net worth, but many Blacks and other minorities do not own property or have savings, so the effect is worse for them. This can be seen around Indian reservations in the increased likelihood of indigenous peoples being exposed to predatory lending practices and having more difficulty obtaining loans (DeCoteau & Jorgensen, 2003). Another example of the accumulation of advantages or disadvantages was demonstrated through research that showed that, because many hires are made through informal connections, and because people tend to associate with those of

the same gender and race, Whites often unintentionally hoarded opportunities (Brown et al., 2003). Accumulation of privileges can be seen in admissions to universities, housing patterns, and social institutions.

In addition to being a vehicle by which property can be accumulated, whiteness is, in and of itself, a type of property that has value, entitling its bearers to certain rights (Bell, 1995; Decuir-Gunby, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Harris (1993) named four important property functions of whiteness:

- Rights of disposition, which can be described as the ability to confer whiteness on certain groups;
- Right to use and enjoyment;
- Reputation and status property; and
- Absolute right to exclude.

In other words, the value of whiteness, as a property, lies in the special rights and privileges that come with it, much like owning membership in a country club.

According to Gillborn (2003), what makes whiteness so powerful and dangerous is “that many (and possibly the majority) of White people have no awareness of whiteness as a construction, let alone their own role in sustaining and playing out the inequities at the heart of whiteness” (p. 55).

### **Formation of a White Racial Identity**

For Whites, formation of a racial identity is crucial to having meaningful insight into matters of race. It is, however, a process fraught with turmoil and personal anguish, because it means taking on an identity that is largely based on privilege and the oppression of others (Nieto, 1999).

Tatum (1994) identified three common models of whiteness: (1) the actively racist White supremacist (as with a member of the Aryan Nation); (2) *What whiteness?* or the failure to acknowledge salience of skin color in American society and, by extension, the existence of racism; and (3) *Guilty White*, which involves acknowledgement of the existence of a system of structural racism and the accompanying shame and embarrassment of being White. Because these were the three models of whiteness generally available to Whites, Tatum chastised race scholars, asking why any White person would want to explore issues of race. She proposed inclusion of a fourth model, that of White ally, which rests upon people's ability to construct a pro-active White identity. This model offers hope for antiracists and alleviates fears of social isolation.

Leonardo (2004) also took on the issue of White guilt:

When educators advise white students to avoid feelings of guilt, we are attempting to allay their fears of personal responsibility for slavery and its legacies, housing and job discrimination, and colonialism and other generalized crimes against racial minorities. Indeed, white guilt can be a paralyzing sentiment that helps neither whites nor people of color. White guilt blocks critical reflection because whites end up feeling individually blameworthy for racism. In fact, they become overconcerned with whether or not they 'look racist' and forsake the more central project of understanding the contours of structural racism . . . Many whites subvert a structural study of racism with personalistic concerns over how they are perceived as individuals. In a society that denies whites access to a

sociological and critical understanding of racism, this is not a surprising outcome. (p. 264)

Howard (1999) presented another model (Appendix A), which was more fully developed than that of Tatum (1994). He offered three possible White identity orientations—fundamentalist, integrationist, and transformationist—and translated their viewpoints across three domains: thinking, feeling, and acting. The position of a fundamentalist roughly corresponds to mainstream beliefs, with integrationist positions resembling views pushed by the multicultural education movement. Transformationist orientation corresponds to many of the tenets of Critical Race Theory, which is discussed in detail in the next section of the literature review.

Tatum (1994) stated that the development of a positive White racial identity differs from the formation of racial identities for people of color, because of the different social positions these individuals likely occupy in society. However, working past White guilt and understanding that a White identity involves more than being victimizers, just as identities of people of color extend beyond being victims, is crucial for a healthy outlook (Nieto, 1999). Helms (1990) identified the steps to formation of White identity:

Table 5

*Helms's White Racial Identity Development Model*

Stage	Characteristic
<i>Phase I: Abandonment of Racist Identity</i>	
<i>1. Contact stage</i>	<p>Pays little attention to significance of one's racial group membership</p> <p>Describes self as <i>just like everyone else</i> or "part of the human race"; does not describe oneself as White</p> <p>Has little awareness of how stereotypes of people of color have influenced their concepts of race</p> <p>Does not have a perception of oneself as prejudiced</p> <p>Is experiencing new awareness, perhaps distressing, of racial structure in one's life; probably has had an encounter with a minority of greater intensity than anticipated</p>
<i>2. Disintegration stage</i>	<p>Begins to see how much their life and the lives of people of color have been affected by racism in American society</p> <p>Experiences degree of cognitive dissonance surrounding concepts of meritocracy, color-blind society, and other long-held beliefs</p> <p>May react by denying validity of information presented, physical or psychological withdrawal from source, guilt, or desire to take action</p> <p>Recognizes not just overt racism, but the role that passivity plays in reinforcing racism</p> <p>Sees racist acts on an institutional level for first time</p>



Table 5 (continued)

Stage	Characteristic
3. <i>Reintegration stage</i>	<p>As relief for guilt that they are experiencing, may turn to explanations for racism that put burden of change onto minorities</p> <p>If unable to work past this stage, will engage willingly in acts of individual racism and permanently espouse philosophies that espouse deficit model in race relations</p>
<i>Phase II: Establishment of a Nonracist White Identity</i>	
4. <i>Pseudo-independent stage</i>	<p>Moves away from blame-the-victim explanations</p> <p>Develops a commitment to unlearn individual racism</p> <p>Moves toward creating a positive definition of whiteness</p> <p>May desire to associate with those of another race and to distance oneself from White peers</p> <p>Whiteness is a source of shame, rather than pride</p> <p>Desire for activism at this stage may manifest itself in paternalistic actions</p>
5. <i>Immersion/emersion stage</i>	<p>Attempts to develop a positive White self-identity</p> <p>Seeks role models for non-oppressive ways of being White</p> <p>Feelings of shame and guilt are replaced by feelings of pride and excitement</p> <p>Form of activism changes from paternalistic focus to a quest to change oneself and fellow Whites in a positive way</p>
6. <i>Autonomy stage</i>	<p>Has internalized one's race and integrated a positive White identity as part of self-definition</p> <p>Race no longer a threat to self-identity</p> <p>Actively seeks opportunities to learn from other cultural groups</p> <p>Recognizes other forms of oppression, such as ageism and sexism</p>

*Note.* Adapted from "Toward a Model of White Racial Identity," by J. E. Helms, *Black and White Racial Identity*, 1990, pp. 49–66.

## Tenets of Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a movement with its origins in the legal field; it seeks to understand how White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT arose from the earlier field of Critical Legal Studies in response to the perception that civil rights advances had stalled, and possibly even receded, and its scholars began to examine more closely the material realities of equality (housing, criminal justice, education) that exist beyond the legal rhetoric of the civil rights movement (Parker & Lynn, 2002). CRT made some ground-breaking moves in the 1970s, including a redefinition of racism not as the acts of individuals, but as the larger, systemic structures and processes that reinforce dominant/subordinate relationships in society. In the early 1990s, CRT found its way into the educational field, as resegregation of schools occurred due to White flight, universities abandoned affirmative action, urban minority schools lost funding through desegregation busing plans, and a growing achievement gap between races became apparent (Tushnet, 1996).

Taylor (2009) identified the tenets of CRT, many of which mark it as a relatively new theory on race, one that steps beyond traditional liberal views:

1. *Society's acceptance of racism as normal:* In this view, assumptions of White dominance are so ingrained in daily structure of law, politics, and education that they are almost impossible to detect. Hence, racism is ordinary, not an aberration, which makes it difficult to address and

alleviate (Brown et al., 2003; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Leonardo, 2009; Litowitz, 1997).

2. *Interest convergence or material determinism*: The concept of interest convergence in race states that the interests of minorities in gaining racial equity have been accommodated only when they have converged with the interests of powerful Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Donnor, 2006; Morris, 2001). The most famous example of a CRT scholar speaking to interest convergence was the essay on *Brown v. Board of Education* by renowned ex-Harvard Law School professor Derrick Bell (1980), in which he posited that *Brown* was decided in favor of desegregationists because civil rights issues were creating a blemish on the face of America at a time when the nation's standing in the international community was crucial. Because the United States and Soviet Union were vying for the support of many third-world and developing countries as part of the Cold War, and because these countries were often populated by people of the same racial make-up as the very people against whom civil rights violations were occurring, the American government had to strike down Jim Crow laws in order to position itself as the model of democracy in the international arena. Consequently, the U.S. Justice Department filed an amicus brief asserting that, because of foreign policy concerns, desegregation was in the national interest (Dudziak, 1988).

3. *Historical context*: CRT scholars take the position that all examinations of social institutions must be grounded within the historical context of race, lest problems (such as academic achievement gaps) can be rendered as new problems, “rather than the expected outcomes of intentional policies and practices” (Taylor, 2009, p. 7). In the example of education, this would mean an acknowledgement that non-White access to education has never been a *de facto*, legal, or social right and that the Constitution and courts have historically been, and continue to be, the gatekeeper of minority access to education (Banton, 1980; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Solomos & Back, 2000; Winant, 1994).
4. *The importance of narrative in the study of race*: Much of the work to date in CRT has utilized qualitative modes, though not exclusively, and its scholars tend to express a preference for narratives about the experiences of oppressed peoples over what could be perceived as the *objective* opinions of Whites. Critical race theorists push the idea that there is a unique voice of color (Delgado, 1993; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Farber & Sherry, 1993; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009) and that stories provide a vehicle for storytellers and listeners to view the world in different ways (Delgado, 1990; Leonardo, 2004; Litowitz, 1997). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) best summed up this idea: “Minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism” (p. 9).

CRT has two current camps of scholars. The real world school works for material improvement of housing, schooling, and economic opportunities, while discourse analysts focus on the system of ideas and categories by which society constructs and understands race and racism; this second group emphasizes issues of identity and intersectionality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Whatever their differences, CRT scholars agree, however, that the field moves beyond many other theoretical frameworks in its incorporation of a multitude of disciplines—law, education, philosophy, and the social sciences—into the research (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

### **Other Views on Race**

At the other end of the spectrum, racial realists take a very different stance, pushing the ideas that the civil rights movement was successful, that the economic divide between Whites and minority groups is greatly exaggerated, and that color-blind policies ensure equal treatment and negate the need for advancements such as affirmative action (Brown et al., 2003). Specifically taking on race-conscious policies, the realists posit that they actually stir up more racism, yet one more reason that they should be abandoned. Scholars in the realist camp also push theories that persistent racial inequalities are a result of minorities' failure to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the civil rights movement; in essence, the argument is that minority failure to advance is a direct result of individuals' laziness and intransigence (Renzetti, 2007). Racial realists also push for assimilation policies, claiming that racial identity politics encourage groups to adopt separatist views (Brown et al., 2003). Additionally, conservative

pundits further obscure racist leanings in the guise of American ideals, such as rewarding merit and engaging in fair play (Brown et al., 2003).

Occupying a liberal space, but a fairly middle ground, scholars and policymakers in favor of multiculturalism tout its value as a unifying force in society, welcoming all groups to the educational table and fostering tolerance. CRT critics of multiculturalism take the movement to task for its incrementalism, its assumption of a unity of difference without recognition of growing tensions surrounding race, and its assimilationist roots (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). At the same time however, CRT scholars, such as Dixson and Rousseau (2005) and Morris (2001) clarified that their criticism of the multicultural movement was merely a call to action, rather than a disapproval of its strong emphasis on inclusive schooling.

Separatism in education, and in other social institutions, is an idea not only embraced by White, right-wing conservatives, but also by many minority groups who feel that separatism is a viable alternative to integration, which, if done well, challenges the belief that quality education can only take place in the presence of White students and staff (Du Bois, 1897; Morris, 2001). Tushnet (1996) argued that the primary flaw in the argument for forced desegregation was that it placed a stigma on the idea of not associating with White kids and assumed that Black schools were inferior. Bell (1980) suggested that voluntary segregation with a focus on building exemplary Black schools would allow Black communities to draw on their cultural strengths.

Another crucial representation in the field of race studies belongs to those who would be critics of CRT itself. Perhaps the greatest criticism of CRT is its lack of practical application. Morris (2001) argued,

CRT discourse is occurring primarily within academic communities rather than among practitioners involved with the day-to-day education of African American students. Relegated to “safe” intellectual and academic environments, often missed are everyday “nonacademic” analyses of race and racism. (p. 131)

Other critics also caution that CRT’s future in education will depend on whether or not researchers keep it alive and connect it directly to life in the schools (Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Stovall, 2006). Another major critique of CRT is that there are very few psychological or social studies supporting the existence of a unified voice of color (Bell, 1995). Additionally, critics claim that an over-reliance on stories and other *soft* research, rather than objective measures and hard science, renders the research prone to inaccuracies and analyses based on atypical situations (Duncan, 2005; Farber & Sherry, 1993; Litowitz, 1997).

### **Implications of Race in Education**

With the enactment of the No Child Left Behind legislation, public schools have once again become a battleground for various political groups over the topic of race. The legislation takes a clear stance on elimination of the achievement gap, requiring schools to show grade-level performance not just for their total population, but for various race-defined subpopulations, as well.

However, Brown et al. (2003) cautioned against the conservative belief that closing the education gap alone will eliminate discrimination. The arguments against this view were that it discounts invalidity of admissions practices, particularly those based on tests; the discrimination minority students face when they do gain access to traditionally White elite institutions; and issues of class and academic achievement. Lutz and Iannaccone (1995) further warned against the *educational messiah complex* (p. 16), a term coined by J. W. Reitman, that describes the view that education can fix whatever is wrong in American society. This may be an attempt to try to place the fault of discrimination at the feet of public schools and use their failure to educate minority students as a ploy to push a conservative agenda of vouchers, which could potentially serve to further amass White privilege (Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Leonardo, 2009).

### **Meritocracy Versus System of Privileges**

A closely-held American belief is that the nation's education system functions as a meritocracy. Feinberg (1985) and Giroux and McLaren (1989) challenged this belief, taking it as a thinly-veiled attempt to demonstrate the superiority of White dominant discourse. Based largely on testing that has been demonstrated to be racially biased (Sacks, 1999), the concept of a merit-based system pits excellence and equity as mutually exclusive. With a strong push for a return to traditional forms of learning, in the form of standards-based education, minority students are often exposed to boxed programs that are teacher-proofed. In the opinion of Giroux and McLaren, the labeling of students as *at-risk* or needing remedial programs is part of the conservative quest for *excellence*, code



for legitimizing the interests and values of the rich and privileged. In essence, school is a battleground of cultural politics.

A popular critical theory of education is that it is a vehicle to reproduce the social hierarchy:

In the social conflict theory, the struggle of dominated groups to change the conditions that oppress them and the attempts of dominant groups to reproduce the conditions of their dominance are the key to understanding changes in the economy, in social relations, and in the culture. (Carnoy, 1989, p. 7)

To achieve this end, public schooling must serve the function of stripping minorities of their unique culture and voice and continually reestablish the superiority of Western values (Giroux, 1995; Giroux & McLaren, 1989). Leonardo (2009) explained the racial aspect of this process: “When it is constructed as the universal standard for rational thought and derogates worldviews of color in the process, European thought takes on a racial dimension” (p. 3).

In order to take a critical look and determine issues of dominance and subordination, Gillborn (2005) identified three questions to ask about education policy:

1. Who or what is driving education policy?
2. Who wins and who loses as a result of education policy priorities?
3. What are the effects of the policy?

This represented a strong departure from traditional views of equity in education, which focus on equal input (as with access and funding issues), toward a broader view of hierarchical structures within society and the forces that seek to maintain those structures through education. It also highlighted the role that interest convergence plays in education. Rousseau (2006) highlighted the marginalization of minority education issues and accompanying issues of dominance, quoting a comment by a local politician in a study conducted on school consolidation efforts in Memphis: “You know when the funding mechanism is going to change—it’s when the education of White students in the suburbs begins to suffer” (p. 113).

### **Critical Race Theory in Education**

Solórzano & Yosso (2002) defined Critical Race Theory in education as “a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (p. 132). CRT has recently shined a light on nearly every aspect of schooling, including tracking, curriculum, discipline, school hierarchy, teacher preparation, and testing. Most importantly, however, it stepped in to fill a void, as there is currently a lack of practical vocabulary or a theoretical framework surrounding race in education (Taylor, 2009). CRT gave voice to previously silenced arguments about what may be wrong about mainstream beliefs in education, exposed negative stereotyping and racist practices in schools, and encouraged dialogue about how to define race and determine what it means in the training of teachers and in classroom practices (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Returning to a previous discussion on whiteness and its value as a form of property, Harris' (1993) four property functions of whiteness provided an excellent tool for a CRT analysis of trends in education through the lens of race:

Table 6

*The Four Property Functions of Whiteness in Relation to Education*

Property Function	Impact on Education
1. Rights of disposition	The sense that <i>whiteness</i> can be conferred on someone (or taken away) based on their conformity or nonconformity to White standards, in this case in the educational arena
2. Rights to use and enjoyment	Seen in both the accumulation of unearned privileges by White students and actual physical differences in what is provided in schools
3. Reputation and status property	Application of a stigma of <i>otherness</i> to anything related to minority culture, particularly with regard to curriculum
4. Absolute right to exclude	Initially done through separate but equal policies, but more recently through White flight, choice schemes, tracking, exclusionary practices (expulsions, etc.)

*Note.* Adapted from "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," by G. Ladson-Billings & W. F. Tate, *Critical Race Theory in Education: All God's Children Got a Song*, 1995, pp. 17–36.

Once again, the view of whiteness as the standard in education sets the stage for a deficit model of minority students. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) contended that cultural capital can be obtained in two ways: through family or formal schooling. They asserted that some communities are culturally wealthy

while others are poor, and held White, middle-class culture as the standard. Yosso (2005) challenged this position:

Indeed, one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in U.S. schools is deficit thinking. Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills, and (b) parents neither value nor support their children's education. (p. 173)

These beliefs are threaded throughout decisions made in the education of disadvantaged students and are reflected in the rigor of the curriculum, access to enrichment opportunities, staffing of quality teachers, teacher preparation curricula, and material resources provided to students of color.

In his groundbreaking work on Chicano education inequality, Solórzano (1995) framed four theoretical perspectives on race in education, based on different constructs and ranging from deficit models to social activist models. Solórzano's framework, demonstrated in Table 7, can easily be extrapolated to work with other minority groups, such as Blacks and Native Americans. Solórzano used his framework to offer four different theoretical explanations of the cumulative effects of inadequate educational preparation of Chicanos in public schools, with a brief explanation of the philosophy behind the perspective, followed by the logical policy solution to such views.

Table 7

*Theoretical Perspectives on Chicano School Failure*

Theoretical Perspectives	Attribution of Responsibility	Primary Policy Solutions
<p><i>Genetic Determinist</i> The Chicano fails because he/she is genetically inferior. Traces inequality to the Chicano genes.</p>	The Chicano genetic makeup is responsible.	No solution is possible because nothing can be done to change the Chicano genetic makeup.
<p><i>Cultural Determinist</i> The Chicano fails because his/her culture is viewed as deficient. Traces inequality to Chicano culture.</p>	The Chicano cultural values and related behaviors are responsible.	Acculturate Chicanos to the values and behaviors of the dominant group.
<p><i>School Determinist</i> The Chicano fails because of the unequal conditions at the schools they attend. Traces inequality to social institutions.</p>	The unequal conditions at the schools that Chicanos attend.	Change the unequal conditions at the schools that Chicano students attend to that of majority students.
<p><i>Societal Determinist</i> The Chicano fails because schools reinforce and reproduce societal inequalities. Traces inequality to the overall social system.</p>	The socioeconomic structure is ultimately responsible. Institutions, such as schools, serve primarily to reinforce the unequal social structure.	Change the socioeconomic system to one that is more equitable; then social institutions, such as schools, will reflect that equality.

*Note.* Adapted from “The Chicano Educational Experience: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives,” by D. G. Solórzano, *Class, Culture, and Race in American Schools*, 1995, p. 40.

**Access Issues for Minorities**

Curriculum can be viewed as a form of intellectual property, and race plays into this area as an argument about whose views should be taught and who controls access to knowledge (Howard, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

According to Ladson-Billings (1998), curriculum battles breed issues of distortions, omissions, and stereotypes: “Critical race theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (p. 29). Conservative arguments against emphasis on

uniqueness of cultures and individual identities focus on the need to acquire certain learning tools through adherence to a common set of standards (Altenbaugh, 1995; Brown et al., 2003), while liberal scholars believe this view pushes cultural assimilation at the expense of culture and language of origin (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Wexler 1995). Perhaps most importantly, however, state-sponsored curricula fail to encourage students of all racial backgrounds to take a critical look at historical and social practices that perpetuate White domination; in scrubbing textbooks of nearly any controversial racial subjects, curriculum committees and publishers produce a bland, color-blind discourse that actually disregards the oppressive experiences of people of color (Leonardo, 2004). Regardless of the view held, Giroux (1995) warned that school knowledge cannot be viewed as neutral. Rather, it is a form of political and cultural power.

Curriculum as intellectual property is also reflected in the degree of access to opportunities to learn granted to various groups (Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). These inequities are reflected in many ways, including tracking (Chapman, 2005; Feinberg, 1985; Gillborn, 2005; Taylor, 2009), limited access to Advanced Placement opportunities for minority students (Taylor, 2009); restricted curriculum for low-performing groups of students (Chapman, 2005; Gillborn, 2005; Solórzano, 1995); and material inequalities in schools, such as lack of science labs, crumbling physical plants, and a dearth of technologies for student use (Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Rousseau & Dixon, 2006). Inequalities in input eventually result in inequalities in outcomes,

demonstrated by depressed graduation rates and lack of access to higher education (Brown et al., 2003; Rousseau, 2006; Solórzano, 1995).

Minority students are also routinely exposed to a lower quality of teaching than are their White counterparts (Brown et al., 2003; Solórzano, 1995). In her study of the Memphis schools, Rousseau (2006) found that minority schools in corrective action were more likely to have inexperienced teachers and principals and teachers who were not licensed to teach their subjects, especially in mathematics. In essence, the city was maintaining a dual system of schools.

Figure 2 reinforces this study, showing the percentage of high school teachers in three major subject areas who did not possess a college major or standard certification in their subject area during the 2007–2008 school year, by racial concentration of their schools. Schools servicing a majority of Black or Hispanic students had a large number of teachers who did not meet federal definitions of a *highly-qualified teacher*, per NCLB, particularly in the key areas of mathematics and English. One in four teachers in majority-Black schools did not possess a college major or standard teaching certificate in math, declining to approximately one in six in Hispanic-majority schools. Whites, by contrast, were far less likely to be exposed to unqualified math teachers. Rates of exposure to unqualified teachers were slightly lower in the English subject area, but Blacks and Hispanics were still more than twice as likely as Whites to have a teacher who neither majored in nor was certified to teach English.

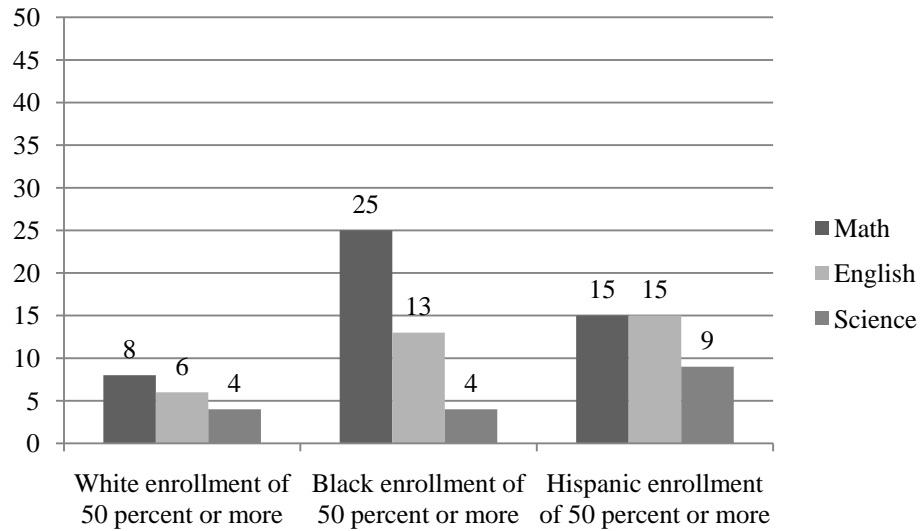
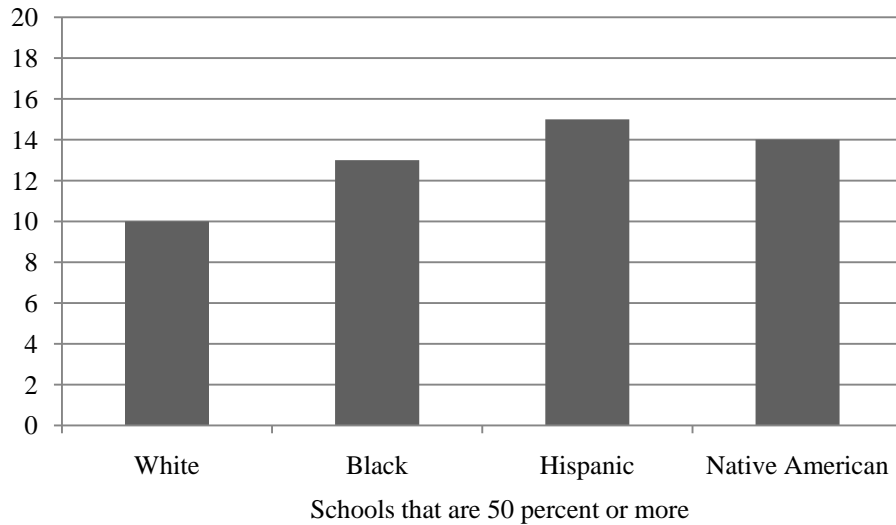


Figure 2. Percentage of high school teachers with neither a college major nor standard teaching certificate in their subject area. Adapted from *Results From the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2010 (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/>)

Figure 3 shows the percentage of novice teachers, those with less than three years of experience, during the 2007/2008 school year, by racial concentration of the schools. This graph demonstrates that students in schools that serve a majority of White students have a one in ten chance of being exposed to a novice teacher. The chances of having an inexperienced teacher increase for Blacks and Native Americans, peaking with Hispanics, who have nearly a one in six chance of learning from a novice teacher.

Compounding the problem, the majority of teachers working with minority students are Whites who grew up in predominantly White neighborhoods and were educated in predominantly White schools of teacher preparation; they have little knowledge or understanding of the backgrounds of their students (Howard, 1999).





*Figure 3. Percentage of teachers with less than 3 years of experience, by school racial concentration. Adapted from *Results From the 2007-2008 Schools and Staffing Survey*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2010 (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/>)*

Many scholars questioned whether many teacher education programs draw upon mainstream views to explain education inequity through cultural deficit models—the idea that children come from a culture that is lazy or does not value education (Gillborn, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Zuniga-Hill & Barnes, 1995). Steele (1997) explored the effect of racial stereotypes on academic achievement and found that they could negatively interfere with performance on short-term measures, such as tests, but that continued stereotype threat could lead to actual removal of certain domains (such as general academic achievement, or achievement in math and science) as a self-identity. Further analysis of the phenomenon indicated that minority students could actually act resiliently by devaluing the domain in which they felt little efficacy, explaining high levels of disengagement from school and eventual drop-

out rates. Possible solutions proposed by Zuniga-Hill and Barnes (1995) include development of minority role models, content integration that uses examples and data from a variety of culture groups, prejudice reduction programs, equity pedagogy, and development of an empowering school culture and social structure. They also recommended stronger credentialing requirements for teachers, especially in states with highly diverse populations.

### **Racial Identity Issues**

Although minority students may be bombarded with mainstream culture within the classroom, attending school with Whites, particularly in predominantly White elite institutions, may actually serve to reinforce racial identities for some students. In a study by Datnow and Cooper (1998), African American students at elite private schools in the Baltimore area described the formation of a new identity that fused academic achievement and strong racial identity, which was reinforced by peer pressure from other Black students at their schools. Most students stated they had friends of other races but they were closest with their Black friends, and they consistently referred to similar values and life experiences as the reasons for this.

In the same study, however, students also described a negative effect of attending school with a majority-White student body—the feeling of being caught between two cultures. These teens recounted difficulties being accepted by White peers in school and Black peers outside of school (Datnow & Cooper, 1998). Morris' (2001) study of Black teachers involved in St. Louis desegregation efforts yielded similar results, with participants raising concerns about inner-city students

being ostracized at predominantly White county schools, then returning to the city to be excluded from neighborhood activities.

### **Studies of Whites Working in Multicultural Settings**

Howard (1999) made the point that by 2020, social scientists predict that students of color will make up about 46% of the nation's student population; yet, the teachers with whom they work are likely to be White. Lutz and Iannaccone (1995) demonstrated that the underrepresentation of minorities in education extends to leadership levels; despite the changing demographic in schools, the demographics of school boards has largely not changed over recent decades—still predominantly White, male, incumbent (with an average of six years of experience), upper middle class, and 41–50 years of age. Despite this disparity, the viewpoints of Whites working in multicultural educational settings were rarely studied. Nieto (1999) commented:

I thought it was odd that White teachers, who are after all the teachers of most students of color in U.S. schools, should be largely missing from conversations concerning multicultural education. In fact, I always thought it was particularly crucial for White teachers to be involved because they needed to reflect on what it means to be teachers of African American, Latino, Asian, and American Indian students; they needed to consider what it means to be both White and multicultural and both White and anti-racist. (p. xiii)

But in order to engage Whites in conversation on educating students of color, one must first recognize the ethnicity of Whites—even though acknowledgement of race is often considered taboo for this group.

If stunted White racial identity causes unconscious perpetration of racism, then philosophical questions arise about the efficacy of White educators who work in multicultural settings. Because the racial composition of the teacher population working with minority students does not generally reflect the racial composition of the student body, this issue requires further exploration. The fundamental questions, then, are, Is there a paradox of a largely White teaching staff working with minority students? and Do their practices, consciously or not, contribute to the racial achievement gap? Giroux (1995) articulated this concern:

The concept of authority raises issues about the ethical and political basis of schooling: that is, it calls into serious question the role that school administrators and teachers play as intellectuals in both elaborating and implementing their particular views or rationality. (p. 136)

Unfortunately, only a handful of studies have yet tackled this issue.

One major study, conducted by Frankenberg (1993), explored the racial realities of White women's lives, in order to discover the ways in which the intersectionality of race with gender was a barrier to the advancement of the feminist movement. One of her major findings was that racism was often viewed as the problem of minorities when, in fact, it impacts Whites as well. She stated:

Among the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured

invisibility . . . To look at the social construction of whiteness, then, is to look head-on at a site of dominance. (And it may be more difficult for white people to say, “Whiteness has nothing to do with me—I’m not white” than to say, “Race has nothing to do with me—I’m not racist.”) To speak of whiteness is, I think, to assign *everyone* a place in the relations of racism. It is to emphasize that dealing with racism is not merely an option for white people—that, rather, racism shapes white people’s lives and identities in a way that is inseparable from other facets of daily life.

(p. 451)

In Frankenberg’s view, the normalization of whiteness was a key to understanding the way in which racism was rationalized, rather than upheld through coercion. For this reason, she felt that racism was largely a White issue that must be addressed by Whites, rather than minorities, since there is a power differential.

Despite interesting findings in a number of studies, there is a camp of critical race scholars who question the validity and value of whiteness studies. Hill (2004) quipped that studying whiteness was “an accidental field, if a field at all” (p. 16). Concerns included whether or not whiteness studies may, contrary to the authors’ intentions, reinforce the very hegemonic relationships they seek to uncover by allowing Whites to re-center education on their *culture* and identity (Gillborn, 2005).

Some CRT scholars (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Tatum, 1994) took on this line of reasoning, countering that Whites who conduct research on race are likely engaged in more than just an academic exercise—it is also a way for them

to strengthen their own commitments to antiracist action. Tatum (1994) described an independent study conducted by one of her White students on the phenomenological experience of being a White ally on a college campus and the daily implications of being an antiracist: “More of this research needs to be done so that the fourth model of whiteness, that of the white ally, becomes a more visible option for white students” (p. 286). This view positions studies on Whites in multicultural settings squarely in a practical realm of research, untangling one of the common critiques of CRT.

One of the potential areas of exploration in researching the beliefs of White educators in multicultural settings is examination of their views on equity. Dixson and Rousseau (2005) identified two prevailing visions of equality. The first, termed *expansive*, stresses equality as a result and seeks restitution for previously wronged groups; the ultimate goal is a change in institutional power. The second position, termed *restrictive*, treats equality as a process and is less outcome-oriented. There is a greater focus on equal inputs, and the goal is prevention of future problems, rather than redress of grievances. Rousseau and Tate (2003) used restrictive and expansive constructs in a study to determine White math teachers’ beliefs on the nature of equity in the classroom. The researchers found that the teachers did not connect the concept of equity to achievement of students of color in their classes, even though it was lower, on average. The teachers also largely held restrictive views, with a belief in treating students equally. This barrier kept them from reflecting deeply on their

instructional practices and on the differential effects of those practices on minority students.

### **Whites Writing on Race**

The belief that there is a unique minority voice blends into another related issue: that of positionality when writing on race and who speaks for whom. Howard (1999) defined social positionality as a situation of dominance and subordination that affects an individual's worldview. It can manifest itself in subjective dimensions, such as how a person views him or herself or is viewed by others, or objective dimensions, such as income, level of education, or job title. For Whites, social positionality tends to be taken for granted, without a clear understanding of historical issues surrounding oppression and dominance.

Furthermore, scholars were divided on the effectiveness of Whites who choose to write on race:

This issue of *standing* (who has the right to redress a grievance) usually comes into play when white scholars talk and write about racial encounters or other subjects outside their experience. Critical race theorists believe that, while white scholars should not be excluded from writing about such subjects, they are often better addressed by minorities. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 92)

In addition, Parker and Lynn (2002) called into question the validity of research conducted by Whites, stating that Whites studying Hispanic educational trends tended to place too much emphasis on Hispanic school failure, for example, without research to determine how these students experienced school. They also

raised issues of participant exploitation when White scholars researched Black experiences calling into question Whites' ability to understand minority perspectives during analysis of the data.

By contrast, Leonardo (2004) took a unique stance, stating that White authors may be necessary to the field of whiteness studies. After all, the content of whiteness studies has been available through writing by minority authors and researchers for decades, but the issue is this: "White audiences have had access to these traditions of criticism for over a century. As such, radical writings on the topic of white privilege are new to white audiences *who read mainly white authors*" (p. 266). From this point of view, then, White researchers have a unique role to play as advocates to move the field into mainstream scholarship (Howard, 1999). Leonardo (2009) further emphasized the importance of including Whites in racial studies:

In studies of race, the idea that whites do not know much about race is generally accepted . . . Whites do know a lot about race in both its everyday sense as a lived experience and its structural sense as a system of privilege. A critical reading of whiteness means that white ignorance must be problematized, not in order to expose whites as simply racist but to increase literacy about their full participation in race relations.

Constructing whites as knowledgeable about race has two advantages: one, it holds them self-accountable to race-based decisions and actions; two, it dismantles their innocence in exchange for a status as full participants in race relations. (p. 10)



One of the most unlikely supporters of this view was distinguished race scholar, W. E. B. Du Bois (1897), famed for his stance on separatism: “We believe that only earnest efforts on the part of the white people of this country will bring much needed reform in these matters” (p. 86). From the stance of Du Bois and many other race scholars, racism needs to be solved from a White standpoint, rather than from a minority position.

That White scholars in the field of Critical Race Theory must have a well-developed racial identity is clear. Derrick Bell (1995), often considered the father of the movement, remarked, “Those critical race theorists who are White are usually cognizant of and committed to the overthrow of their own racial privilege” (p. 40). Leonardo (2004) added to this point of view, cautioning,

Even when critical analysis takes white experience as its unit of analysis, this must be subjected to the rigors of the analytics of the oppressed. That is, there is a difference between analyzing whiteness with an imagined White audience against an imagined audience of color. (p. 265)

The barrier of White racial identity and fears of social isolation at the hands of both White and minority scholars have contributed to a situation where there is actually very little research literature on race, and even less on whiteness, produced by White scholars. Tatum (1994) quipped,

I try to provide written materials about white people who have been engaged in examining their own white identity and who have made a commitment to antiracist activity in their own lives. However, this

information is not easily located. One of the consequences of racism in our society is that those who oppose it are often marginalized. (p. 286)

The need for greater involvement of Whites in race research was clearly illustrated by the dearth of studies by and about this key group.

### **A Brief Overview of Indian Education in the United States**

After nearly two centuries of United States government policy aimed at fully assimilating Native Americans by any means possible, policymakers and educators find themselves at a crossroads. The education system, one of the primary tools of assimilation through the 19th and 20th centuries, has failed to produce American Indian students who can compete with their White counterparts, but neither are the majority of these students proficient carriers of their heritage culture or language. The result is two living generations of people without any culture to speak of—mainstream or native. How can educators, tribal leaders, and American legislators rectify this situation? Which system of education is more appropriate—mainstream or culture-based? What legal obligations do federal, state, and tribal governments have to fix the situation?

### **The Trust Duty**

The United States government has a unique relationship with tribes, known as a *trust duty*. As an example, the Indian Tribal Justice Support Act of 1993 states, "(1) There is a government-to-government relationship between the United States and each Indian tribe; [and] (2) the United States has a trust responsibility to each tribal government that includes the protection of the sovereignty of each tribal government" (25 U.S.C. Secs. 3601-3631). The primary

source of this government responsibility is the hundreds of treaties that were negotiated between the U.S. government and various Indian tribes between 1785 and 1871. According to the Supreme Court, the promises made by the U.S. Government in exchange for land—promises of protection, food, clothing, shelter, and education—create a unique relationship between the treaty tribes and the federal government, "moral obligations of the highest responsibility and trust" (*Seminole Nation v. United States*, 1942). In many of these treaties, the U.S. government has yet to keep its word.

According to Cross (1999), in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the United States promised to provide a suitable education to numerous tribes. In fact 110 Indian treaties name education as one of the resources that would be provided to tribal members. Yet, over two centuries later, Native American students disproportionately drop out of school (Table 3, chapter 1), are overrepresented in special education programs (Gritzmacher & Gritzmacher, 2010; Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002), have an average age in upper grade levels that is one year or more off the median age for their grade levels (Nel, 1994), and have a higher rate of suicide, low self-esteem, and drug and alcohol abuse than their peers (Shaughnessy, Doshi, & Jones, 2004). Native American students also have the lowest achievement scores of any ethnic minority (Tables 1 and 2, chapter 1); attend schools with high numbers of under-qualified and inexperienced teachers (Pavel, Curtin, & Whitener, 1998); and experience a lack of curricular and extracurricular activities compared to their suburban, non-minority counterparts (Klein, 2009).

Historically, the U.S. government has gone through several education initiatives for Indian students, none of which provided the suitable education that was once promised. From religious missionary schools as the primary vehicle of western education, the U.S. government went through a wholesale policy change, building off-reservation boarding schools and industrial schools, whose mission, according to Army Captain Richard Henry Pratt, was to “kill the Indian so as to save the man within” (in Cross, 1999, para. 7). One of the major goals of the boarding school movement, then, was to destroy traditional Indian education. At the same time, many educators and policymakers held Native American students to low academic standards, using *research* and personal observations to classify native students as clearly inferior to White students. At the same time that they separated tribal children from their traditional forms of education, American educators failed to provide them with the same standard of education that was being afforded White students.

When it became clear to government officials that the boarding schools were not providing an effective education, the Bureau of Indian Affairs created a mix of Indian day schools, mission schools, public schools, and bureau-run boarding schools. According to Cross (1999), this project failed for three reasons:

1. The federal government never intended to fully fund the initiative.
2. Educators of Native students never worked with Indian students and their families in order to provide an education that was relevant to their real-life circumstances.

3. Production of highly educated Native peoples was never truly the goal of federal Indian education policies.

Today, this is the formula that still exists on and around reservations across the United States. The current focus is to improve the mix that already exists. But is that enough?

### **Legislative Support**

Several key pieces of legislation provide additional support to Indian education. Title VII of No Child Left Behind Act (2001) states,

It is the policy of the United States to fulfill the Federal Government's unique and continuing trust relationship with and responsibility to the Indian people for the education of Indian children. The Federal Government will continue to work . . . toward the goal of ensuring that programs that serve Indian children are of the highest quality and provide for not only the basic elementary and secondary educational needs, but also the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of these children. (§7101)

Through Title VII, funds are provided to schools and districts with high percentages of Native children.

The Indian Education Act (2003) is a crucial piece of federal legislation that aims to provide equitable educational opportunities to Native students, maintain Native languages through school-based programs, and increase tribal control of education systems. This fits well with Cross's (1999) concept of a three-legged stool of Indian education, which involves the cooperation of state,

federal, and tribal governments in appropriately running the schools that serve these students.

### **Sorting It Out: What the Government Owes to Tribes**

Because of the trust duty that is, as yet, unmet, the U.S. government really does owe it to the various treaty tribes to step up their support of education. Even with extra assistance provided through additional funding programs such as Title VII and Johnson O'Malley, schools in Indian Country are severely underfunded. Equalization formulas at the state level have often meant that funds such as Impact Aid are diverted to schools in urban areas, despite the high cost of transporting students in rural areas and providing services in remote regions. (*Zuni Public Schools and Gallup McKinley County School District v. US Department of Education*, 2007). Cross (1999) recognized the need for greater funding in Indian education: "Whether the federal government can recreate this 'second leg' of American Indian education will depend once again on Congress' willingness to appropriate the needed funds to provide Indian education consistent with its treaty and trust duty responsibilities" (para. 107).

Beyond obtaining greater funding, another key issue for Indian education is forcing tribal governments to take a stronger hand in education. There are many barriers to accomplishing this lofty goal, the greatest of which is each tribe's capacity to take on these issues. Turning schools over to tribal governments before they are fully capable of managing this enterprise could cause great harm to students and to the concept of tribal self-determination in education. Additionally, tribes such as the Navajo, in the Four Corners region, have many

jurisdictional issues. With school districts in three states and configurations including public schools, grant schools, mission schools, and Bureau of Indian Education boarding schools, taking control of their destiny will require decades of political finessing; already, the newly-formed Department of Diné Education has assumed nominal oversight of grant schools on the reservation.

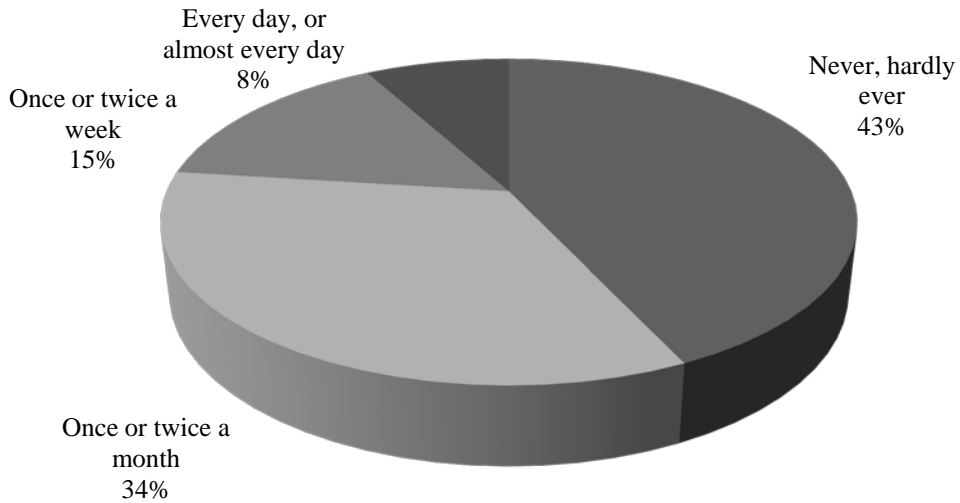
Another issue to be resolved in Indian education, closely related to tribal control of schools, is that of self-determination and parent involvement. Cross (1999) stated, “The basic problem with the JOM program, as with the BIA lead Indian educational programs, was that Indian parents and communities were systematically excluded from any participation in the education of their own children” (para. 81). Even today, the legacy of boarding schools and White determination of what is *best* for Native children has led to a dearth of parent voices in the governance of Indian schools. As governments seek to increase this voice, they will discover a tremendous dichotomy in Native communities—those who want a top-notch western education for their children and those who want to create schools as a vehicle for preservation of Native culture and language. The two should be able to co-exist, but the larger issue is that neither model is routinely implemented to a high degree of excellence in Indian country.

For those communities that wish to heavily push bilingual education, they will be wise to expect a fight from English-only proponents within their individual states. Ferrin (1998) attempted to argue that the Native American Languages Act (NALA) not only protects bilingual education, but also actually mandates it in schools serving Native populations. Sadly, he is incorrect. The

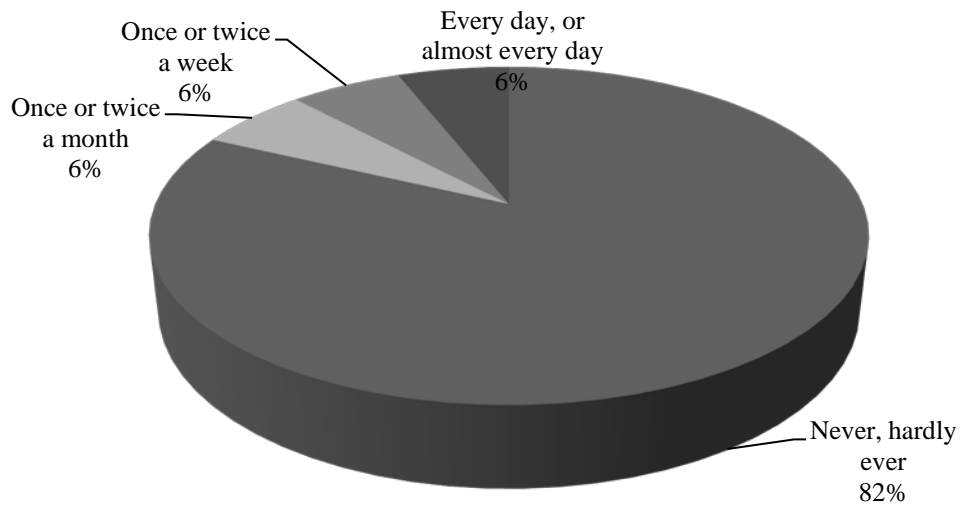
language of the law states only that Native American groups have the right to “use the Native American Languages as a medium of instruction in all schools *funded by the Secretary of the Interior*” (emphasis added; Zirkel, 2000, para. 1). The reality is that this offers no protection to state-funded public schools teaching bilingual or immersion programs. Littlejohn (2000) is correct in his analysis that NALA does not take away state and local control to determine the curricula of schools—most importantly that it does not render English-only laws illegal. It is crucial that advocates for Native language programs in the schools revisit this act and write it with stronger wording that allows for tribal and community decisions to teach a bilingual or immersion model.

Legal wrangling aside, the reality of Native American students’ experiences is that very few of them are routinely exposed to their language, culture, and history within a school setting. This phenomenon is clearly demonstrated in Figures 4 and 5 (Mead, Grigg, Moran, & Kuang, 2010).





*Figure 4.* Percentage of eighth-grade American Indian students who reported how often their teachers talk in class about history, traditions, cultures of American Indian people, 2009. Adapted from *The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools*, by Mead, W. Grigg, R. Moran, and M. Kuang, 2010, p. 19.



*Figure 5.* Percentage of eighth-grade American Indian students who reported how often people in their schools talk to each other in their American Indian language, 2009. Adapted from *The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools*, by Mead, W. Grigg, R. Moran, and M. Kuang, 2010, p. 20.

## **The Future of Indian Education**

In Indian education, there are no easy answers. Even within communities, belief about what *should* be provided is not consistent. However, achievement data and anecdotal evidence paint a dismal picture of what is currently provided to students on and near reservations. It is more than clear that government obligations have yet to be met, but there is little agreement on how best to accomplish this. Key issues to be resolved in the decades to come include adequate funding to close the achievement gap, attention to issues of culture and language, Indian self-determination in education, and fulfillment of the United States government's trust duty to provide education to Native Americans.

### **Summary**

In summary, the literature on race indicates that race is a social construct that provides a structure for relationships of dominance and subordination, as well as for people to make key decisions about their daily lives. Race, however, should be viewed as only one aspect of an individual's identity; intersections of gender and class are also significant. As race is used to define dominant/subordinate relationships, this binary most commonly takes the form of White and *other*. Whiteness is a construct that, while based on skin tone, actually represents a set of advantages, a particular viewpoint, and a generally unnamed set of cultural practices. Racial groups may move in and out of this White category, depending on historical and economic forces.

Critical Race Theory, the primary theoretical structure within race studies today, emphasizes several tenets of race relations in the United States. First is the

view that racism is a part of everyday life; institutionally racist practices, as a result, may be largely invisible. Second, minority groups have historically advanced when their promotion is directly linked to the benefit of Whites. Third, issues of race should be couched in a historical perspective. Finally, narrative is an important component to studying race.

Within Critical Race Theory, scholars are divided on the practicality of whiteness studies, and they also disagree on the role of White scholars who write on race. While some scholars feel that minorities have a presumed competence when speaking out about race, there is a growing movement to include Whites as allies within the field. Little work, however, has been done by White scholars.

In education, race becomes relevant as schools can inadvertently reproduce structures of racial dominance in American society. This is most commonly seen in rhetoric about the meritocracy of schools, debates over minority access to quality education, and issues of racial identity within the educational process. In Indian country, these racial issues are compounded by an unfulfilled trust duty by the United States government. Specific issues for Native American students include a large achievement gap on standardized tests and issues of self-determination and cultural revitalization.

In all, the literature points to a need for further study on the experiences of White educators working in multicultural settings. The research outlines clear theories on race relations, structures of dominance in American society, and the impact of race on educational systems that warrant additional exploration from a different viewpoint. The unique multicultural environment on the fringes of the

Navajo Nation in the Four Corners area of New Mexico and Arizona provides an unusual opportunity to learn about the race-based experiences of Whites who live in communities in which they are minorities.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

A marked achievement gap exists between White students and students of color throughout the United States. Two of the lowest performing groups, Native Americans and Hispanics, are heavily represented in school districts adjacent to the Navajo Nation in the states of New Mexico and Arizona (Table 8). Described as border town school districts because of their location in relation to the Navajo Nation, these districts serve primarily minority students, yet their administrative staffs are primarily White (Table 9).

Table 8

*Student Demographics of Arizona and New Mexico Border Town School Districts*

	Total students	% White	% Hisp.	% Native	% Other
<i>New Mexico Districts</i>					
Gallup McKinley County Schools	14,036	6.3	13.2	79.1	1.4
Grants Cibola County Schools	3,769	17.2	42.4	39.1	1.3
Central Consolidated Schools	7,440	9.9	2.6	87.2	0.3
Farmington Municipal Schools	10,381	41.0	27.5	29.7	1.8
<i>Arizona Districts</i>					
Holbrook Unified School District	2,015	24	12	61	3
Winslow Unified School District	2,713	29.1	27.2	38.0	5.7
Flagstaff Unified School District	11,389	54.3	20.3	21.4	4.0
Page Unified School District	3,269	18.0	NC	76.3	5.7

*Note.* Data obtained from the New Mexico and Arizona School Districts.

Table 9

*Racial Demographics of Principals and Vice Principals in Border Town School Districts*

	# Elem. Schools	# Sec. Schools	% White	% Hisp.	% Native	% Other
<i>New Mexico Districts</i>						
Gallup McKinley County Schools	19	16	68.9	8.9	22.2	0
Grants Cibola County Schools	7	3	36.4	63.6	0	0
Central Consolidated Schools	9	6	54.5	9.1	27.3	9.1
Farmington Municipal Schools	10	7	84.6	11.5	3.8	0
<i>Arizona Districts</i>						
Holbrook Unified School District	3	2	100	0	0	0
Winslow Unified School District	3	2	100	0	0	0
Flagstaff Unified School District	10	5	78.6	21.4	0	0
Page Unified School District	2	2	60	20	20	0

*Note.* Data obtained from the New Mexico and Arizona school districts.

Table 9 demonstrates the wide variety of racial demographics of school principals in border town districts throughout New Mexico and Arizona. While three districts—Gallup McKinley County Schools, Central Consolidated Schools, and Page Unified School District—had a principal corps that was at least 20% Native American, the other six districts had little or no Native American representation within their school-site administrative staffs. Grants Cibola County Schools in New Mexico showed a high percentage of Hispanic principals, at

nearly 64%; Flagstaff and Page also had a moderate Hispanic representation with approximately one in five principals identified as Hispanic. Two Arizona districts, Holbrook and Winslow, had a principal group that was only White. Despite several districts' hiring of minority principals at a rate higher than national averages (Figure 1), it was notable that only a single district in the potential sample placed White principals in a numeric minority within their group of colleagues. Comparison between student demographics in Table 8 and principal demographics in Table 9 shows the racial disproportions between the two groups.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to describe the beliefs about race held by White school administrators who work in border town school districts to the Navajo Nation and to explore how these beliefs impact their professional actions.

The researcher sought answers to several questions:

1. How do White school administrators view race relations in their schools and districts?
2. What are the administrators' personally held beliefs about race, and what experiences have they had that influence these beliefs?
3. How do the interviewees use these beliefs to inform their conduct as educational leaders?
4. How do White administrators in these settings feel to be part of a racial minority within their communities? In what ways has being White affected them?

5. Based on the administrators' responses to interview questions, can the researcher identify the stage of White identity formation at which they are operating, and does this appear to impact their practice?

### **Research Design**

A qualitative research design, specifically an interview study, was used to gather data relevant to the research questions. Interviews that took place in four school districts that serve a majority of students of color were conducted and analyzed. Interview subjects were selected from among candidates based on their racial identification as *White*. The researcher conducted interviews with twelve school principals and central office administrators from a pool of potential participants who responded to a letter requesting their participation (Appendix B). While the specific school districts that employ these administrators are not revealed for purposes of confidentiality, the demographics of all New Mexico and Arizona border town districts are shown in Table 8.

The aim of the research was theory contribution, which Rubin and Rubin (2005) described as “pick[ing] a specific problem that is examined”—in this case, race relations in education from the perspective of Whites—“and from that study pull[ing] out themes that have some broader significance” (p. 7). The goal of this project was to use the narrower cases of White administrators working in border town school districts to paint a description of race relations in multicultural schools and to determine possible ways that the beliefs and experiences of White administrators advantage or disadvantage them in this specific setting.



The researcher conducted interviews in a semi-structured manner, which simultaneously allowed for exploration of a specific topic or a narrow field defined by the researcher and the opportunity for respondents to “define the world in unique ways” (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). The researcher prepared a set of guiding questions for the interview (Appendix C) and supplemented these with questions designed to follow up, probe, extend, fill in detail, identify actors, learn about inner events, or make indications explicit, as appropriate (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Weiss, 1994). Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed in full.

### **Positionality**

As with any qualitative study, the issues of subjectivity, personal interest, and values had the potential to affect the relationship of the interviewer with interviewees and, thus, the type of information shared, the filter through which data passed for examination, and the interpretation of the data for final analysis. Hermes (1998) described the experience of attempting to use CRT as a framework to determine what members of the Ojibwe Tribe wanted for education and coming to the realization that this was an inappropriate construct for the study, based on the interview responses; stepping outside of the personal ownership of this theory was a notable challenge. Potentially, the narrative interpretations of researchers can silence the identities of minority subjects being interviewed (Parker & Lynn, 2002). In a different take on positionality, Morris (2001) recognized the possibility of race, social, or political views of the researcher affecting the investigation process and took it head-on:

Researchers bring their own epistemological perspectives—ways of knowing—into the framing of researchable questions, data collection and analysis, and interpretations and conclusion. Rather than minimize this influence, I use my racial identity as an interactional quality to glean theoretical perspectives. (p. 133)

In this study, the positionality of the researcher was that of a White female who, like the interview subjects, worked in a border town school district as a school administrator. Having grown up in a predominantly White neighborhood, having attended predominantly White schools, and having been prepared professionally in a predominantly White post-secondary institution, the researcher shared a common history with many of her interviewees. This shared background also lent itself to a common vocabulary to be shared between the researcher and participants, a greater depth of understanding on the part of the researcher, and an ease in determining follow-up and probe questions.

### **Sample**

Because the purpose of the study was to explore the beliefs and experiences of White administrators who worked with minority students, the researcher used a convenience sample (Merriam, 1998). A unique group was sought, namely those administrators who (a) worked in border town school districts adjacent to the Navajo Nation, (b) identified themselves as *White*, and (c) represented a variety of experiences (elementary, secondary, and central office) within that narrower group.

After obtaining permission from the districts' superintendents to speak with administrators under their supervision, the researcher conducted interviews in four of the eight border town school districts identified in Tables 8 and 9. Because several of the districts offered only small samples, the researcher chose not to identify participating school districts in order to preserve the confidentiality of the interviewees. However, for purposes of comparison of responses, the researcher conducted interviews in two districts in New Mexico and two districts in Arizona. Additionally, two districts selected were considered small, with enrollments of less than 4,000 students, and two districts were considered large, with enrollments of more than 4,000 students.

From within the larger sample of all administrators in these school districts, the researcher was able to identify those who may identify themselves as White based on the reports of the superintendents. Before conducting interviews, the researcher confirmed that each participant self-identified as White.

Table 10 shows selected characteristics of the individuals sampled, but for the purposes of confidentiality, further information is not shared. All participants were assigned pseudonyms for ease of discussion of the findings. *Origin* refers to the milieu in which the individuals grew up; *local* indicates those people who grew up in or near border towns to the Navajo Nation; whereas *transplant* indicates individuals who moved to the area later in life, generally for professional reasons.

Table 10

*Selected Characteristics of Interview Sample*

Pseudonym	Professional position	Gender	Age range	Origin	District size
Debbie	Elementary principal	Female	40-50	Local	Small
Elaine	Elementary principal	Female	30-40	Transplant	Small
Rob	Elementary principal	Male	30-40	Transplant	Large
Lawrence	Secondary principal	Male	50-60	Local	Large
Max	Secondary principal	Male	30-40	Local	Large
Luke	Secondary principal	Male	40-50	Transplant	Small
Jennifer	Secondary principal	Female	30-40	Transplant	Small
Jason	Secondary principal	Male	40-50	Local	Large
Bruce	District administrator	Male	40-50	Transplant	Small
Paul	District administrator	Male	50-60	Local	Small
Ingrid	District administrator	Female	60+	Transplant	Large
Catherine	District administrator	Female	50-60	Transplant	Large

**Data and Sources of Data**

Data concerning the demographics of the participants' schools and districts were gleaned from reports available online from the New Mexico Public

Education Department and the Arizona Department of Education. Data on White administrators' perceptions of race and its realities in their districts were gained from semi-structured interviews from the 12 selected participants. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was based on pre-determined questions shown in Appendix C. Follow-up questions were based on initial responses provided by the interviewees and were tailored to the unique experiences and perspectives of each participant.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Border town school districts were identified based on location in relation to the Navajo Nation and student demographics. Prospective participants for interviews were identified first through identification by their superintendents; then their self-reported racial identification was confirmed by the researcher. All potential candidates were sent a letter explaining the purpose of the study, as well as a copy of the interview questions. From among those interested participants who responded, the researcher chose individuals who would lend diversity to the sample in terms of professional position, age group, gender, and place of origin.

Once participants were selected, the researcher made contact by phone to set up interview times, and interviews were conducted at the participants' work sites. All interviews took place during the months of December 2010 and January 2011. The researcher based interviews on a guide to ensure that all participants were asked about the same issues and experiences. However, in accordance with the tenets of semi-structured interviewing provided by Rubin and Rubin (2005), interviewees were asked follow-up and probe questions to elicit responses that

spoke more directly to the proposed research questions. Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Digital sound files of interviews were destroyed upon approval of the researcher's completed dissertation; while written transcriptions of the interviews will be maintained for three years after the date of transcription, and then will be destroyed.

### **Data Analysis**

Once interviews were transcribed, the researcher used content analysis techniques to code them and search for common themes. Coding is an important task within the analysis of qualitative interview studies. Richards (2005) identified three types of coding, all of which were incorporated in the data analysis of this study. The first, descriptive coding, provides information about the attributes of the case and is often described in simple terms, such as the person's gender or the school's size. Determination about the relevance of certain data was made during the descriptive coding process. Topic coding is described by Richards as "putting the data 'where they belong'" (p. 92). The researcher sought common themes across the interviews and arranged them into a meaningful analysis by relating them to the different study questions, then by identifying a sub-theme under each of these questions. The third type of coding, analytical, considers the meanings of responses in context and creating categories that express new ideas about the data. This included consideration of ideological assumptions in the responses, as well as idiosyncrasies in the narrative or conversational structure, such as contradictions, omissions, and turning points. It

also required analysis of body language or tone of voice that, at times, lent significance to a certain statement or narrative.

### **Trustworthiness**

Given the sensitivity of conversations on race, the researcher made a commitment to abide by the following guidelines for interviewing set forth by Weiss (1994):

1. The interviewer and the respondent will work together to produce information useful to the research project.
2. The interviewer will define the areas for exploration and will monitor the quality of the material. The respondent will provide observations, external and internal, accepting the interviewer's guidance regarding topics and the kind of report that is needed.
3. The interviewer will not ask questions out of idle curiosity. On the other hand, the interviewer will be a privileged inquirer in the sense that the interviewer may ask for information the respondent would not make generally available, maybe would not tell anyone else at all.
4. The interviewer will respect the respondent's integrity. This means that the interviewer will not question the respondent's appraisals, choices, motives, right to observations, or personal worth.
5. The interviewer will ensure, both during the interview and afterward, that the respondent will not be damaged or disadvantaged because of the respondent's participation in the interview. In particular, the

interviewer will treat the respondent's participation and communications as confidential information. (p. 65)

### **Summary**

Qualitative methods, in the form of semi-structured interviews, were used to gather information from 12 White administrators in border town school districts adjacent to the Navajo Nation. Information sought focused on the racial attitudes and experiences of administrators and how these impacted their professional practices. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. The analysis allowed for the development of the conclusions and generalizations reported in the two subsequent chapters.



## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND RESEARCH

This chapter contains a description of the major themes and findings that came from the data collected and analyzed. The sources of data were responses to open-ended interview questions by 12 White school administrators who served in border towns adjacent to the Navajo Reservation.

#### **Research Questions**

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How do White school administrators view race relations in their schools and districts?
2. What are the administrators' personally held beliefs about race and what experiences have they had that influence these beliefs?
3. How do the interviewees use these beliefs to inform their conduct as educational leaders?
4. How do White administrators in these settings feel to be part of a racial minority within their communities? In what ways has being White affected them?
5. Based on the administrators' responses to interview questions, can the researcher identify the stage of White identity formation, defined and discussed further in chapter 2, at which they are operating, and does this appear to impact their practice?

A total of 12 administrators from elementary, secondary, and central office assignments participated in interviews aimed at gathering the data necessary to

answer these research questions. In the following discussion, interviewees are referred to by pseudonyms for ease of discussion; identities of participants and the districts that allowed participation are not identified in order to preserve confidentiality.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question was, How do White school administrators view race relations in their schools and districts? Specifically, interview prompts related to this question were designed to ferret out information on hierarchies of power and influence, seek information on reasons for these structures, and determine whether there were any patterns unique to border towns to the Navajo Nation. Results indicated that there were, indeed, structures of dominance and subordination within these towns and districts; and their organization, while similar among border towns, differed in some important ways from systems of dominance in mainstream American society.

#### **In-Groups, Out-Groups, and Unique Hierarchies**

Without doubt, the majority of respondents identified Whites as the dominant racial group within border towns, despite their numerical minority. Of the twelve administrators interviewed, nine made specific references to White dominance, either through allusion to hiring practices that favored White educators, curriculum and assessment issues that emphasized practices that disadvantaged minority students, or through direct statements about White dominance. Bruce, a central office administrator, commented,

The racial hierarchy, in my perception, is still probably White, but Hispanic is very, very close in that hierarchy, too. Native American, even though there are a great deal of Native Americans who have residences here, . . . they're not active or involved politically, or they don't make a voice in the community.

Like Bruce, other interviewees established a clear dichotomy between the in-group, which included Whites and Hispanics, and the out-group, which was composed almost solely of Native Americans. Debbie, an elementary school principal, stated the link between Whites and Hispanics clearly, "[Hispanics] tend to value education a little bit more than the Native American families, . . . but I really kind of think that they have more in common with Anglo families." Max, a secondary principal from another locale, reinforced this idea: "You know, I think that Whites and Hispanics are pretty much the same in our town." Jason also directly referenced a power differential between Hispanic students and Native American students when discussing racial tensions at his school, "We have a small group of Mexican girls who use their heritage as a threat to some others, but then at the same time, the Navajos aren't usually using that peer-to-peer stuff." This inclusion of Hispanic students and families as part of the dominant group ran contrary to the trend in many major American cities at the time of the study, but seemed to be predicated on defining Native Americans as *other*, or sufficiently different from mainstream society so that Hispanics, comparatively, were not viewed as foreign or threatening to White dominance.

The place of Native Americans, primarily the Navajo, within this hierarchy brought up conflicting viewpoints. While some administrators, such as Paul, Bruce, and Catherine, viewed the Native population as occupying a clearly subordinate role within the border town hierarchy, other administrators made statements to the contrary. Max recognized the financial power that Navajo consumers held over his border town:

In town, as we should, they cater to Native Americans a lot, but they're also the bread and butter of the town. They don't come into town and shop and [town] dries up and goes away with all the wind in the spring.

Other interviewees recognized the power that Navajo constituents held, by sheer dint of their numerical majority, but they were hardly as positive in their outlook as Max. Jason quipped, "So I think in this area where we [Whites] are the majority people in the United States, but the minority here, and we treat the majority here as a minority, it's backwards; and I think it is a negative."

Ingrid also highlighted some interesting tensions *within* racial groups, first by sharing a story about her district's work with a Native American parent group advocating for sweeping changes to the Navajo language and culture courses in their schools, in which she described this group as a "vocal minority," particularly after their numbers waned to just a single advocate. Later, she described the dynamics that arise within the Native American population when Navajo teachers return to work on the reservation and in border towns:

I've seen it happen where if they're Native American and they become educated and they come back, sometimes they're not accepted. They

become like the *apple*, you know. . . . It depends on the group that they're working with and whether they become accepted.

Buttressing her story of the *apple*, a common reference to Native Americans who are viewed as red on the outside and White on the inside, Paul and Lawrence related stories of Navajo parents specifically requesting their child not be placed in Native teachers' classrooms, specifying that they prefer a White teacher. This race-on-race tension was aptly described by Lawrence, who commented, "I think a lot of the Native Americans are more critical of themselves, of each other, than they are of Native Americans to Anglos." Catherine agreed, sharing stories of her experiences as a law enforcement officer in the area, stating that police brutality was generally Hispanic on Hispanic or Native on Native; with regard to teachers, she stated that White teachers tended to hold White students to a higher standard, and Native teachers cut little slack for Native students. Her belief was that "you've got to realize that sometimes the racism is against your own race."

Despite the tensions among various racial groups, and even within specific populations, the majority of interview participants described race relations within their schools and communities as peaceful and tolerant. Ten of the twelve administrators interviewed characterized relations in their schools and communities as tolerant, understanding, or open-minded. One administrator, Debbie, even went so far as to mourn this assimilation of races as a major loss for her Native American students because she equated it with a loss of culture and a weakening of their unique identity.

## **The *Rezzy*/Town Dichotomy**

One of the key dichotomies that arose throughout the administrators' discussions of hierarchical structures in border towns was that of reservation students and in-town students. This binary further broke down the Native American population, with in-town students viewed as more modern, more assimilated, and more capable than their reservation counterparts. Just over half of the study participants made direct references to this dichotomy.

Debbie referred to a situation at her local junior high school, where students from an all-Native American elementary school on the reservation first mingled with the much more diverse in-town elementary population, which included White, Hispanic, Native American, African American, Asian American, and biracial students: "Once they hit seventh grade, they come into town, and you'll see those kids; they separate themselves from the in-town kids." Catherine shared stories about Native students mocking Navajo accents on the playground and about students refusing to accept much-needed clothing from an assistance program because the jackets and shoes handed out to students were similar enough that other children could identify them as receiving tribal assistance.

Going beyond the idea of mere isolation, Bruce stated that this situation actually caused tension within his community:

I do hear . . . that there is currently a lot of friction between rez kids and town kids who are Native American. And, just knowing kids who grow up on the reservation and knowing kids who grew up here, and they're both Native, many times there are differences in the way they respond and the

way they react. I think somebody would be naïve to think that you can just lump these kids all together.

Students also seemed to be cognizant of this labeling of students from the reservation. Jason shared an alarming story about students at his secondary school:

We have kids that will not ride the bus that live in town, or even that live out of town, because they do not want to be seen as a *rezzy*. They want to be known as an in-town Navajo, not a reservation Navajo. . . . As we talk chronic tardies and stuff, [I say] “I have a bus that will pick you up within 50 yards of your home,” and they will not ride the bus. They flat out say, “Because I do not want to be seen as a *rezzy*.”

In this way, border town school administrators saw Native American students begin to sort themselves out within groups that could more readily accommodate White expectations and standards and those who could not, simply based on where they lived.

### **Deferential Treatment**

As these border town administrators sought ways to describe the race dynamics they experienced every day and offer rational explanations, they frequently referenced two race-based behaviors. The first was a sense of entitlement that they observed among White and Hispanic children in their schools. The second was a trend of deferential treatment that they experienced when interacting with a majority of Native American parents and community

members. While one alternative view was presented by Jason, the majority of interviewees connected these two behaviors with specific racial groups.

Both Jason and Luke, in particular, took issue with the sense of entitlement that they saw in their middle-class students, who also largely happened to be White. Luke took a more cautious viewpoint, comparing the challenges of working in a specific suburban community in his state, which was largely White and wealthy, to his own border town experience, simply stating, “It might even be more challenging for an administrator or teacher when you’re dealing with kids that maybe feel entitled.” Jason, on the other hand, specifically targeted White students as lazier and more demanding than their minority counterparts:

Some of them are of the Anglo population; that it’s “you owe my child the education. They don’t have to work for it.” And the kids have that attitude: they’re owed a diploma. So, to me, they didn’t care about the test, they played on the test. The bare minimum, and they’re happy with life. You know, mommy and daddy’s money are going to support them the rest of their lives, anyway.

Paul also briefly referenced a sense of entitlement, but couched it in contrast to the deference he received from his Native American parents at an earlier work site:

The longer I stayed, the easier it became, the more influential I was. By the time I left that school, the people were so deferential to the way I described things. Like, if there was a conflict between boys and girls or a



teacher and a child, and I had a conference with the parent and I clearly labeled the way I saw things—who was at fault with this and what shouldn't have been said—I mean, parent after parent after parent, my reputation was such that, boy, that's the way it is. And you don't get that kind of deferential treatment—I have never received that, anyway—in a predominantly Anglo community.

Other interviewees, including Max, Elaine, Bruce, Lawrence, and Jessica, described this experience, but Rob got to the root of the problem by identifying two possible explanations:

I think it's been a combination of race and position. I think, sometimes, with some individuals, it's the race that's talking—not me, not my experience, not my position—and as an administrator in the building, it's sometimes perceived that this is the White guy, and he's saying these things, and he must know what he's talking about, so he's going to do the right thing for me. Other times, I've seen that it's my position, not what color I am or anything; it's that I'm in a position of authority, and people will listen to that because they think I know what I'm talking about. . . .

I've seen both. I've seen, sometimes because of race and sometimes because of position, people will acquiesce and say, “Okay, we'll go with what you're saying.”

Paul plainly pointed out this divide between the border town school administrators and the families they served, speaking about his own experience and the importance of “being very aware of your role, and your role is one of the

more highly educated people in a border town community and the great gift—that deferential piece that Native Americans gave to me.” This disparity between the education level of school administrators and the education level of border town inhabitants set up a natural hierarchy when dealing with matters of schooling.

However, not all interview participants agreed that the education differential was merely a matter of race; there was an intersection of race and class that also came to bear in these situations. Bruce referred to what he saw as an unconscious racist practice among administrators in border communities:

The observation that I make, . . . is that you tend to deal more carefully with the parents and students that you know will advocate for themselves, and I believe that that’s something that’s very easy to get lulled into when you’re in an administrative position, dealing with discipline, dealing with hard decisions with people—that you tend to push, and if people don’t advocate for themselves, the wheel that squeaks the loudest gets the grease. And I believe that that becomes, unknowingly, a racial issue.

When questioned whether he meant that Navajo parents were less likely to question an administrative decision than White or Hispanic parents, Bruce further theorized:

You know, I think it’s easy to couch it as a poverty issue—poverty parents tend not to advocate for themselves. Then, if you differentiate that and look among race, the Navajo people tend to be more, I hate to use the word *passive*, but they just tend to not be as aggressive in their defense.

Where Bruce had trouble separating deference as an issue of class or race, Jason saw it solely as a function of class and education. He recounted incidents of having administrative decisions questioned by Native American parents and chalked it up to the higher education levels of these parents:

Maybe it's because it's the first generation [of Navajo parents] that's this highly educated and they feel so much more above their own people that they're expecting more. And those are the ones that we have the trouble with, that "my child wouldn't, won't, hasn't," no matter what your evidence. Where the others, I hate to say it, with the low socioeconomic Native Americans, it's almost as if, "Okay, my kid did it. Now what?"

To some degree, the discussion of whether or not the deferential treatment was a result of race or class and education level was rendered nearly moot, because as Jessica pointed out, the majority of parents served in border town communities were largely Native American and Hispanic and were rarely college-educated, if they even obtained a high school diploma. Thus, the power in border-town school districts was generally in the hands of administrators who shared neither a racial nor a socioeconomic background with their students' families. Catherine, a border town superintendent, shared her experience in negotiating salaries and benefits for work, which highlighted the economic gulf between school district constituents and management:

I think this is key: when you're a border town superintendent, you're dealing with poor communities, and the fact that you make anything that

you make, or what teachers make, or what principals make, you're making too much money, because they don't have that.

One other important factor in the deferential treatment of White border town school administrators was referenced by only three interviewees. Rob, an elementary principal, talked about the parent-teacher conferences taking place in his school on the day of his interview:

I look at people walking through the door, and they're scared to death of walking into the building, and I think a lot of it relates back to how they were treated as a student. . . . They carry a lot of baggage along with them, and I think they're afraid to come into school, whether they know they're going to get good news or bad news. I think that school is an uncomfortable situation for them.

Clearly, in Rob's view, administrators could not ignore the history of oppression that minority students experienced in schools, as it almost certainly colored parents' perceptions of the schools that their children attended.

### **Accumulating Disadvantages**

Regardless of their different views on the racial milieu in which their students operated, all twelve participants in the study mentioned an accumulation of disadvantages as a major obstacle to offering high-quality education to their minority children.

**Lack of opportunities.** Lawrence, Debbie, Elaine, Ingrid, Jessica, and Jason all quoted lack of opportunities as a significant barrier, most frequently referring to rural isolation, small-town infrastructures, and low economic

development as hindrances to offering progressive educational programs to their children. Luke cautioned that this may be a racial issue unique to Native American students by distinguishing between urban poverty and the conditions experienced by children on and near the Navajo reservation.

**Lack of resources.** Lack of resources was quoted by just a few participants, with one even complaining quite the opposite—that he had so much money flowing into his school, he was not certain how to spend it. What was evident, however, with regard to resources, was a hint of frustration at not having the flexibility to use state and federal monies where schools most needed them. Jessica described the resourcefulness required of border town principals:

I think being a border town administrator is a really good experience. It opens up your eyes. It's a hard job, dealing with less resources and how to solve harder problems. . . . The bigger schools . . . have problems also. But in a border town, and a small town like this, we don't have a lot of resources, so we have to be very, very creative.

Lawrence and Catherine both also expressed concerns about their state's funding formulas, which allowed distribution of federal funds earmarked for students residing on non-taxable land (such as Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, or Navajo Nation properties) throughout the state, despite the lack of a local tax base in their communities.

**Teacher quality.** A major disadvantage identified by all but two participants in the study was the ability to attract and retain top-notch teachers. Ingrid quipped, "Another [disadvantage] is the quality of the teachers that we're

able to draw here, because of the area and where we live, and also, their ability or their wanting to stay and be contributors to this community.” Paul, whose entire career had been in the area, supported Ingrid’s view, “I’ve always felt that border towns and the reservation attract the best and the worst in the education profession.” Once those teachers were in the door, according to border town administrators, there was a school culture, fueled by bureaucracy, that allowed these individuals to remain in place or, at the very worst, to lose their jobs in one locale only to obtain employment at another border town or reservation school.

**Teacher turnover.** Closely related to concerns about teacher quality was unease expressed by Debbie, Max, Jessica, Catherine, and Paul at hiring large numbers of inexperienced teachers, due to high turnover rates. Several interviewees described professional development for novice teachers as one of the biggest components of their jobs, expressing frustration, because they knew that they were likely to lose these young, energetic individuals when they tired of small-town life and rural isolation. Catherine and Debbie also shared stories of new teachers from *back East* experiencing culture shock when they arrived to teach, or simply leaving because the environment was such a challenge to them.

**Administrator quality.** Interestingly, three of the participants also questioned the quality of administrators running their border town schools. When asked if a good principal in a border town was more capable than a good principal in suburban Phoenix, Bruce countered, “Absolutely not. . . . I don’t believe that good principals, to tell you the truth, stay here [for] a duration.” Perhaps not as

quick to dismiss all school administrators in border communities, Jason still criticized a segment of his colleagues:

I will be blunt on this. If you were happy in this district just to go with the flow and not rock the boat, long as you have a pulse, you're a wonderful administrator. But if you are trying to make changes, putting your foot down because you see something better for your students or your school, then you become under the microscope; you're under scrutiny. Definitely, there'd be administrators in this district that would not make it if there was accountability of being at your school, curriculum knowledge, just your basic leadership principles. There's some [that] wouldn't be able to make it anywhere else.

**Cumulative effects.** Concerns about lack of opportunities, inflexibility of monetary resources, low quality of teaching staff, and unaccountable leadership, taken individually, may not have raised red flags, but given the prevalence of all of these conditions throughout border town school districts, there was a cumulative effect on students that was reinforced by home concerns arising from poverty issues, such as hunger, homelessness, abuse, and illiteracy. Those interviewed painted a picture of districts struggling against institutional problems, resulting in interactions delivering a lower quality of education for students in border towns.

### **Border Town Schools as White Places**

Along with their views on the racial order both within their towns, as well as within mainstream American society, came the sense that border town schools

were largely a White institution that may not have served the needs of minority students appropriately. Debbie framed this discussion by describing her Native American children as needing the skills to “be successful in both worlds.” This dual nature of the minority child’s experience was rarely addressed in border town schools, according to those interviewed. They described an environment where White students were treated as elite students and athletes, which was reinforced by testing practices and curricular choices. The ultimate outcome was the schools’ irrelevance to the minority students’ lives and a subsequent disengagement from the process of schooling.

Catherine, whose own son was biracial, best illustrated the whiteness of border town schools by sharing the blunt conversation she had with her son after he graduated from a border town high school:

When he was at [Border Town] High, we would look in the yearbook; it was so White. The soccer team, there wasn’t a dark face on it. In fact, when my son went to [college], for school, the first time they had a fire drill in the dorm, he said, “Mom, I felt like I was rooming with the [Border Town] High soccer team. There wasn’t any dark skin there but me.”

Max described the test-driven culture of schools in his community and, in an attempt to explain the growing achievement gap between Whites and minorities, made light of the situation:

Well, everyone is getting better, but the Native Americans aren’t adapting as quickly as the Caucasian students are. And so, they’re getting *more* gains than Native American or the Hispanic or the whatever. You know,



they know how to work in that system already. . . So, yeah, they're making okay gains, but are they making as much as the White kids? Nah, they're not, because White kids have been taking tests like that forever. Since they were in the womb (laughs) . . .

Though Max was facetious in his description of the situation, he pinpointed an overarching concern of many of his colleagues—that certain institutional practices in their border town schools, such testing, may have, inadvertently, disadvantaged their Native American or Hispanic students.

In another eye-opening account of how schools represented access to the White world for Native American children, Ingrid described her experience of interviewing and being hired to teach at a majority-Navajo school in the area:

Matter of fact, the first thing the Navajo principal that hired me, when he interviewed me, told me point blank—and this seemed a racist statement to me—but he said, “We want you as an English teacher because we want our students to speak correct, White, middle-class English.” And that was the reason that he wanted to hire me, knowing what state I was from and the type of English that I had spoken and had been raised with.

But while the schools clearly represented the White component of minority children's dual experience, they were not doing a strong job of developing the other side—the Native or Hispanic side—of children's identities. Elaine discussed the narrowing of the curriculum as a result of No Child Left Behind and test pressures and commented:

There is, of course, the need to get all kids prepared, but some of the curriculum, to me, could get done by doing, like, Native American authors. And there's just no one stopping and taking the time to figure that out.

She described a top-down approach from the national, state, and local level that had gradually eroded teacher flexibility since the days when she taught in a predominantly Hispanic community, before the passage of NCLB. In her eyes, this increased narrowing of the curriculum was at the cost of relevance to students, a sentiment echoed by Catherine and Lawrence.

Ingrid agreed, pointing to this as a root cause of minority students' disengagement at the high school level. When asked to describe unconsciously racist practices in the classrooms that she observed as a central office administrator, she was quick to respond:

A teacher may be teaching and there'll be students who are raising their hand, and I can think of a specific school in our district where they'll be raising their hand, and they'll be the White students, okay? And the Native Americans, I don't know if the teachers have given up on them, but they'll have their head down on their desk . . . or they've totally lost interest, and the teacher's expectation is like, "Well, I'm not going to push them anymore." Or even desire to make it interesting or try to help them at their level or find out if they even understand.

In that same vein, both Luke and Bruce questioned whether or not school was relevant to their students and advocated for a complete overhaul of educational systems serving minority children.

While interviewees disagreed on the exact cause of the problem, there was a common understanding that some institutional practices had resulted in a lack of engagement among minority students. Paul described a culture of compliance in area schools: “I see classrooms in border communities and on reservations very compliant. Either the kids do it, or they’re forced to do it, or they don’t want to do it, or they’re hesitant about doing it.” Ingrid advocated for what she described as *contextualized learning*, the idea that teachers connect classroom learning with students’ lives and interests, “I think that’s important, especially there, or they’ll just tune out.” Catherine expressed concern that Native American students at the border town high school, where they attended with White and Hispanic students, were actually underperforming when compared to students at reservation schools, where the population was almost one hundred percent Navajo.

### **Native American Leaders**

If schools in border towns were manifestations of whiteness, they were almost certainly reflections of the beliefs and experiences of the White administrators who inhabited them. Why then, were there not more Native American leaders in these schools? Questions in this vein brought out defensive reactions in several interviewees, particularly those in districts where one hundred percent, or nearly one hundred percent, of administrators were White.

The first response was that there was a limited pool of qualified Native American applicants for school administration positions. When probed on this broad category of *qualified*, many interviewees were able to make the connection that few opportunities existed within their communities to advance education to a point where one could earn credentials to be a school administrator. While not all participants saw this as a racial disadvantage, several were savvy enough to understand that their White upbringing allowed them greater financial resources, increased mobility which allowed them to move to other communities to obtain an education, more stable home lives where education was a centerpiece of their childhood and where they were not responsible for bringing income to the family at an early age, and stronger educational backgrounds from attending better quality schools.

Despite initial resistance to the idea that Native American leaders might be necessary for Native American schools, a large segment of the pool interviewed recognized this as a need for area schools. Debbie proudly described a grow-your-own program in her district that reimbursed employees of the schools for pursuing teaching and administrative licensures. Elaine discussed her efforts to bring in more Native American and Hispanic employees on her staff. Jason, however, best summed up the conflict and ambivalence that the majority of White administrators experienced on this issue:

I believe in the best person for the job. I've seen some Native Americans get the job because they're Native American, and I don't think it's fair to the students because I've seen some schools that slide. I've seen some

very effective Native American administrators, but they were the right person for the job. So, I've always just been an advocate for the right person to meet the needs of that situation. I don't care what race they are; and if we're doing it just because of race, then we're letting down the students. But then, at the same time, an effective Native American is going to be a great role model for their students and have a better opportunity to reach those students.

While this may have appeared to be an enlightened view on minority administrators, Bruce highlighted an interesting difference between White administrators and Native American administrators. While a White principal could be judged solely on ability and performance, a minority candidate would always have a label and an accompanying set of assumptions, based on race, with which to contend. In an interesting exchange about his school district, which did not have a Native American school administrator, he laid his beliefs about the district culture on the line:

Bruce: I believe that, if the school district hires a Native American in a leadership position, that person would have to be able to demonstrate a significant track record of reliability (laughs), through references, to really lock in on a position.

Kim: Do you think it's because of past experiences with people being unreliable?

Bruce: (sighs) I think there are subtle messages that are delivered from this school district. I'm guessing from what I know of other

school districts, I believe there are also subtle messages sent out of who they are interested in for positions.

Returning to earlier discussions of internal group politics, Catherine shared stories about former colleagues in administration who were Native Americans, who were eventually forced out of their positions by their own communities: “It’s almost like they liked having the White administrator in place because they eat their own.” After the resignation of one principal at a border town elementary school, the Native American teachers on the staff approached Catherine and told her to hire a White, male candidate from outside the state: “And so, twelve of them came—all Native American staff members from that school—and they said, ‘Please don’t hire a Native American because we run them off. Our community is too rough on them.’”

Native American educational leaders, then, may have faced more obstacles to obtaining and holding down jobs in school administration for a variety of reasons. Their race, repeatedly, was a disadvantage at both the hands of White managers who held the power to hire them, as well as at the hands of people of their own race.

## **Research Question 2**

The second research question was, What are the administrators’ personally held beliefs about race, and what experiences have they had that influence these beliefs? The researcher sought clarification of the participants’ views on race, but did not seek to couch them within beliefs about structures of dominance and

subordination. In this sense, the researcher examined interviewees' responses for broader attitudes about race.

### **Intersections of Race and Class**

In all twelve interviews, White administrators made reference to issues of poverty that their students experienced on a daily basis in border towns.

Respondents alluded to lack of financial resources for material goods, hunger, homelessness and transiency, violence and verbal abuse in students' homes, high rates of suicide and low self-esteem, issues of substance abuse, and low levels of education among parents. Because these issues were ubiquitous, many of the interviewees either felt that class and race could not necessarily be separated for their students, or they felt that socioeconomic class had a bigger impact on students' school experiences than race. Rob elaborated on this connection between race and class:

I think it's hard to separate the two, but most of the time, I think they go hand-in-hand. I mean, because of the population, if you're taking things into consideration, the socioeconomics of things will usually take precedent; you'll look at that first just because you've got to figure out how people operate. You've got to figure how you run your house, how I run my house, how they run their house, and a lot of socioeconomics dictates how that is done. But then, I think you could lump race in with that, because they definitely go hand-in-hand.

As a result of this intersectionality, it was often difficult for the researcher to separate whether responses of the interviewees were referring specifically to racial issues, solely to economic and social issues, or a combination of the two.

### **Color Blindness**

Another area of focus for all twelve administrators interviewed was the issue of color blindness. While eight administrators fully denied taking color blind actions, the remaining four affirmed that they took a color-blind approach to working with students, but at the same time gave examples that actually contradicted their assertions of color-blindness.

The eight interviewees who denied color-blind policies and actions openly acknowledged the importance of taking a student's background into account when working with them. This was the area of discussion where the intersectionality of race and poverty issues was perhaps most key. While they found color-blind actions to be fairly routine, these eight individuals were also able to specifically identify times when they felt race and socioeconomic issues needed to be taken into account. Max, for example, talked about the difficulty of enforcing uniform dress policies when students on the reservation or in temporary in-town housing might not have access to laundry facilities, or might be walking through deep mud to gain access the school bus stop; he also acknowledged that many minority students possessed only one or two pairs of pants. Likewise Debbie talked about the importance of knowing about individual students' home lives when handling discipline in her elementary school. She cautioned that children might be ready to lash out because of tensions at home over unemployment, fighting in the home,



and teen parents struggling to raise children. Although the link to race was not clearly illustrated in each of these examples, the administrators were well aware of the increased incidence of these issues among their minority children.

Of the four administrators who initially claimed to be color-blind, they issued broad euphemisms such as Jessica's statement, "There really seems to be a color-blind aspect here," or Luke's claim, "I'm very people-centered, and humans are humans, and it's just not an issue for me, you know." Jessica, within minutes of making her assertion, went on to recount a crisis experience of dealing with a suicide pact among students in her district, and her realization of the need to be culturally sensitive and bring in Native American counselors to work with the Native American students. Luke, similarly, ended his interview by declaring that state and federal policymakers needed to understand that Native students have centuries of "history, of political forces, of biological forces, social forces that have caused where a lot of these kids are." He went on to advocate specific resources to help students overcome these barriers to education.

In spite of color-blind rhetoric in some interviews, all participants demonstrated some degree of sensitivity to issues of race and poverty. Jessica, a transplant to her border town, described changing as an administrator as she got to know the students and their needs: "When I deal with students and I deal with parents, originally, I'd be more stern or whatever. . . . I feel now that everything I've seen has made me more compassionate, more willing to find solutions to problems." This ability to recognize situations that call for cultural sensitivity may be one of the keys to success in these administrators' careers.

## Differing Values

Closely related to an admission that color-blindness is often unfair was the realization that their values as White administrators often differed from the values of the students they were educating. Elaine wisely cautioned against paternalism when dealing with people of color:

I try to look at the big picture, look at what the cultural background is, the history with the family, and bring that in. It takes a long time for people to realize that I'm not coming in to rule over. That's how they see it sometimes—that we're coming in to change it and make everything White, and we're not. The challenge is to get other people to see me as somebody who's not prejudiced, not biased, and to really think about my actions so it doesn't come across that way.

Paul described this phenomenon among White educators as *missionary zeal*, and reminded his colleagues, “The values that we have in the Anglo culture aren't always valued in the same weight within the Native American community, and that needs to be recognized and appreciated.”

While the majority of interviewees recognized the difference in value systems between the dominant group and Native Americans, there was also some unresolved tension within the dialogue. For example, Luke proudly declared,

We prepare them for life. We do give them a Western education, so to speak, and a lot of our kids come off of the reservation for this . . . so they can go anywhere in the world and succeed.

When Jason described a similar trend in his district, with Natives choosing to attend an in-town school that emphasized a standards-based education rather than a nearby Bureau of Indian Education school with a culturally based curriculum, he went so far as to agree that this was directly linked to a desire by students to associate more with mainstream culture, at the expense of their racial and cultural identity. Jason stated, as a supporting example, “We’re seeing more Navajos take German and Spanish, instead of Navajo.”

The meaning of this finding was open to debate, as some race scholars could point to it as further evidence of White dominance and institutional racism; whereas, others could feel, like Luke and Jason, that border town schools offered one choice among many for minority students. However, the significance was clear as differing value systems were discussed by seven of the interviewees.

### **Individual Racism**

Although the participants in the research study were largely open in discussing their views and enlightened compared to many White education professionals, they sometimes made statements that exposed unconsciously racist ideals. While the purpose of the study was primarily to examine institutional racism, these comments belied these individuals’ seeming lack of prejudice and were notable for their similarity. Their importance lay in the patterns that emerged and possible implications for institutional practices, as the people who made the statements were also those creating and enforcing policy for border town school districts.

One trend in comments was in the perpetuation of racial stereotypes. For example, Max characterized math as a subject that “it seemed like White kids should know it better” than their minority counterparts. Similarly, Debbie, Bruce, Elaine, Lawrence, and Jessica all portrayed Native American students and parents as apathetic or described them as placing a lower value on education than Whites and Hispanics. Bruce’s statement to this effect was similar to those of his colleagues:

Probably the biggest challenge is, because we’re a high poverty area, that we’re struggling with the fact that high poverty—and I’m going to use *mind set, mentality, low motivation, helplessness, unwilling to improve yourself*—can permeate other kids and pull other kids down.

Another common reference by interviewees was to *free stuff* or *handouts* that Native American students purportedly received. Max complained that, as a child growing up in a border town district, he felt it was unfair that Native students were provided with school supplies while he was not. Jason made a similar claim: “We have those kids that don’t have anything and, hate to say it, they don’t want anything, either. They see their parents living without and being supported; they feel they can do just as well.” Both Elaine and Luke made comparable comments, supporting a negative stereotypical view of Navajo culture as a welfare culture that breeds complacency.

The second important trend in racist comments was centered on the highly charged topic of teaching Navajo language and culture in the border town schools. Debbie opened the discussion of loss of cultural identity and the importance of

preservation and revitalization. However, when asked if schools can or should play a role in this cause, she commented, “I don’t know that it’s so much mine to address,” then later suggested, “Maybe they should take control of their own schools—teach their culture in *their* schools.” Max supported this view, asserting that he felt his White elementary-school son should have course offerings beyond Navajo, such as art or music. Rob described efforts to teach Navajo language and culture in the schools as the “biggest disconnect” between his own upbringing, which emphasized maintenance of culture by students’ families, and his experiences in the area. He summed up the view of four of his colleagues who were interviewed:

I see a culture that’s trying to be revived or kept on life support through a mechanism of the public school system, which I don’t see as our mechanism to do that. We should not be the savior of their language and culture. *They* need to do that on their own and come up with a process, but they’re trying to use this umbilical cord back to the schools to keep it alive, and I just don’t see that as a functional, viable way to maintain their culture.

Interviewees also shared stories about handling personal racism of the teachers, parents, and students in their schools. Max told a story about a cheerleading coach who asserted that cheerleading was “unfair to Native Americans because they don’t know how to do the things that a cheerleader would normally do.” When he questioned the coach, the bizarre answer was that Native American students didn’t know how to clap. Catherine told a story about

her first encounter with a church leader from her border town community; when he visited her in the superintendent's office, he told her that he had heard she was "an Indian lover" and asked her, "Are you just going to kowtow to those Indians?"

Luke spoke out about the importance of disrupting racist talk, rather than allowing individuals to assume that it was accepted when administrators remained silent: "We've had some stern conversations where I say, 'Fine, then. Find another school.' You're not going to get to that point with these kids; I will protect them and the integrity of our school." Lawrence also talked about confronting teachers' preconceived notions about student abilities:

A lot of my teachers—and I've had to break them of this idea—they lived on the excuse that, "Hey, our kids can't. They're low coming in, they're never going to succeed." It made them feel better. . . . We don't need that mentality. We need to get off the crutch and really think that all our kids can succeed. We've just got to work harder to make sure we get them the tools so that they can.

Ultimately, confronting institutional racism may also require border town administrators to confront personal racism, both within their own subconscious and within their communities.

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question was, How do the interviewees use these beliefs [about race] to inform their conduct as educational leaders? The root of this

investigation was how White border administrators' attitudes on race impacted their professional actions.

### **Developing Relationships**

The most common theme across all topics and threaded throughout all twelve interviews was that of developing relationships and knowing students as individuals. Central to that discussion was the identification of empathy as a crucial attribute for successful border town administrators. Ingrid described it as a need to “put yourself in the place of the people, the parent . . . I’d say, ‘In this situation, what would I be thinking?’” Four other interviewees also specifically named empathy in their discussions, while another seven expanded on the importance of *knowing the area* or *getting to know the people*.

From that understanding, administrators had the opportunity to develop relationships with their students and families. Paul stated simply, “Your effectiveness as a leader, somewhere in that hierarchy, is either damaged or enhanced by your ability to build relationships, and if you don’t have a relationship, you can’t talk about the tough things.” Luke placed it in a context of school programs: “We try to get to know our kids, so I think that’s the biggest thing—our school culture, the programs that we put in place to really reach out and extend our hand to our kids.”

### **Dealing With the Culture of Poverty**

According to all administrators who participated in the study, a big part of knowing the area and meeting students’ needs was understanding and dealing with the culture of poverty. Paul emphasized the urgency of dealing with the issue

and its pervasiveness in the area: “Poverty has the tendency to bring out the worst of humanity, and border towns are riddled with poverty,” while Lawrence described parents as being in survival mode. The issues that arose daily, according to Debbie, included teen parenting, single parenting, and drug and alcohol abuse. Jessica shared an especially heart-wrenching situation at her secondary school:

Then you have kids down here that have nothing, that come in and load up their plates with food in the cafeteria, and the cafeteria workers just let them go, even though you’re not supposed to, because they know, hey, those are probably the only two meals those kids are going to get that day.

Because these school districts hired a high number of inexperienced teachers who were transplants to their communities, one of the challenges of dealing with a culture of poverty was helping novice teachers from White, middle-class backgrounds relate to minority, impoverished students. Debbie quipped, “They don’t understand the culture of poverty that we’re in. That’s the biggest issue that we have in this area, and they are not able to relate to the Native Americans.” Paul advised that

getting your teachers out of this thing we call school, into a child’s real world—and a child’s real world is very different, you know, than a teacher’s real world. So, I’ve thought it important to emphasize: get out of here and see where your boys and girls are coming from. Begin to understand the dynamics that you’re dealing with on a daily basis.

As a specific example, Paul shared the frustrations of new teachers attempting to get students to return homework. According to him, children in



border towns and reservation areas often stay temporarily with various members of their extended families and are picked up later by working parents. When they leave homework and school books behind, it can sometimes be weeks before they see the relative and are able to retrieve the materials. Alternately, Jessica pointed out that many parents were not home to assist children with homework, as they worked the night shift; and she also noted that many parents did not have enough education to assist their children with homework beyond the elementary level.

Interviewees described efforts to mitigate the effects of poverty in school, including increased sensitivity in decision-making, channeling of additional resources into programs, such as homework labs, joint efforts with social service agencies, and professional development designed to assist teachers in understanding high poverty issues.

### **Freedom or Lack of Accountability?**

Many interviewees also discussed the freedom that they enjoyed in performing their jobs in schools that serviced high-minority populations. Elaine talked about teaching controversial subject matter to a largely Hispanic population, knowing that she would probably not have been allowed to teach the same content at a previous position in an all-White school. Rob put it more directly, “Here, in my situation, I have had a tremendous amount of freedom and flexibility, where I don’t feel that, maybe if I went somewhere else, I would have that much.”

What was seen as freedom to act how they saw best by some administrators was viewed as lack of accountability by others. In discussing his

school's large increase in test scores and eventual recognition as a top school in the state, Paul described efforts to move from teachers' and administrators' desires to be self-sufficient to an all-hands-on-deck kind of approach that emphasized collective responsibility. Ingrid contrasted her experiences in border towns, where teachers have not traditionally been held to curricular pacing guides, to her early career in a mid-Western state, where standardized curriculum was a norm. Luke, also a transplant, railed against teachers' desires to be their own learning and instructional agents, terming their loose curricula as *organizational archipelagos*—a chain of closely-related islands with curriculum and beliefs. Beyond the issue of inexperienced teachers, he characterized this lack of accountability as one of his biggest challenges to delivering a quality education to his students.

### **Reliance on Data**

Where freedom and lack of accountability were viewed as flip sides of the same coin by interviewees, a reliance on data was almost universally identified as a necessity in making fair and equitable decisions. Lawrence summed up this trend: "I look to data more than culture," when making decisions. Administrators effortlessly detailed trends in the testing data for their schools' various subpopulations and offered access to reports during dialogue with the interviewer. They enthusiastically outlined their schools' initiatives to address gap areas for minority students through targeted interventions, such as homogeneously grouped reading programs, career and technical programs, mentoring classes, increased mental health counseling, after-school programs, and homework labs.

On the one hand, reliance on data allowed principals to individualize educational programs, ostensibly removing any considerations of race. However, as Max pointed out, in his tongue-in-cheek jest, White students have been taking tests “since they were in the womb”; that testing and use of data may actually lead to de facto tracking of students by race. If tests were culturally inappropriate, or if they resulted in assumptions about students’ capabilities without being normed to a specific group or region, they could be used as a tool to reinforce racist practices. When asked about institutional practices in their districts that they considered to be racist, both Ingrid and Jason pointed out this stratification of students into *high* and *low* groups as a process that tended to end with children still being placed in racially homogeneous groups and resources either being concentrated on or withheld from certain children.

### **Educating the Whole Child**

A more holistic approach, promoted by several administrators interviewed, may actually have served to paint a more positive picture of minority students and avoid accidental labeling or tracking of students. In line with their advice to know the area or know the families, this practice of educating the whole child took into consideration not only testing data and teacher observations, but information on a child’s home life, cultural needs, and socioeconomic factors, as well. Debbie explained a new goal-setting and monitoring system for children at her school, where teams of teachers looked at three aspects of a child’s development—personal, social, and academic—in order to build an intervention plan for

students. Luke adopted a similar philosophy in working with high school students to attain diplomas:

Number one, we want you to be healthy emotionally, socially, and physically. We have a whole-child approach here. I talk to parents, and we have a whole lot of issues. They're trying to get these kids graduated, but they're an alcoholic, or they've got an emotional [issue] . . . You go to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and this isn't going to work. It doesn't matter if they've got a diploma if we don't settle these issues here.

This process allowed for use of data for accurate determination of school services, while remaining culturally sensitive.

#### **Research Question 4**

The unusual racial demographics of border town communities made for a unique experience for White school administrators. While they enjoyed a position as members of the dominant group in U.S. society, their daily reality was one of being in a numerical minority. Many Whites in the United States never have a prolonged experience of operating as a minority. The fourth research question, then, was, How do White administrators in these settings feel to be part of a racial minority within their communities? In what ways has being White affected them? Several key questions arose within this area of research: Was their dominance ever challenged? Did they ever feel like the *other*, or part of an out-group? Why did they choose to work in this environment?

## **The Advantages**

While many Whites would feel out of place working in an environment where their dominance was not a given, the administrators in the study reported that they saw the experience as a learning opportunity. Ingrid shared her love of trying new experiences: “I love the different cultures—learning about them, the customs, the language, the different types of food. . . . Learning about any culture has always fascinated me [because] the town that I was raised in was pretty much White.” Elaine, who worked in Guam, the Laguna Pueblo, and several Hispanic-majority towns, took a similar view, stating that she liked “getting the kids’ perspectives on life and the families’ perspectives on life and how they are different from mine. . . . It really has opened my eyes to a bigger world than just what I grew up in.”

Because of the difficulty border towns had in recruiting teachers and administrators, many interviewees were lured to their districts by the prospects of a job, then ended up enjoying the area and staying. Paul recognized that the administrative jobs in his school district in Colorado were occupied by individuals unlikely to leave within his desired time frame, so he took a teaching job at a reservation school, knowing that job opportunities would be more likely to arise there; within four years, he was the principal of a school. Catherine talked about the ways that job opportunities almost magically seemed to present themselves to her, gaining her experience in both education and law enforcement, and giving her positions of increasing importance when school boards were unable to find other qualified candidates. She also had the added benefit of earning two master’s

degrees that were fully funded by local agencies seeking to increase the number of professionals able to deal with unique problems in the area.

Once they were hired, several White administrators described the exhilaration of working in underserved communities and feeling needed. Paul commented:

I've always felt needed—that working in an Anglo community, I knew that when I stopped being the principal of that school, or I stopped being the teacher in that school, they would get somebody in to take my place who had equal or better ability and things would go on just fine. Working on the reservation and in a border town area, I became very aware that what I did and what I brought was very unique. Yes, I can be replaced at any time; however, what I was bringing to the job, day to day, was pretty special. . . . I truly felt that way—that this was the right time, the right place, and I was needed right now.

Lawrence echoed the sentiment, “I think in [our border town], we can do the most good, because our kids won't succeed without us. . . . Our kids need the best people possible in the classrooms and running their schools in order to be successful.”

### **Reverse Racism**

Although the study participants were largely positive about their experiences in border towns, ten raised issues of reverse racism. They shared stories about being accused of racism when performing their jobs, and they described this phenomenon as a source of personal and professional frustration.

Elaine recounted the painful story of having a grievance filed against her by a minority staff member when she addressed the individual's tardiness in completing essential work. Although she felt supported by her central office administration during the investigation, she resorted to addressing all mandates to the entire staff and insisted that she would not address the grieving staff member alone ever again. Debbie told a story about taking a class at a local college, hoping to expand her knowledge about Native culture. According to her, the Native American instructor remarked on the first day that he would not give A grades to White students; afterwards, she was adamant that this was the reason she received a lower grade.

Five administrators specifically referred to members of various racial groups "throwing the race card." Rob perceived that this was most likely to happen when parents or students were faced with a stressful situation and felt powerless to solve it. Catherine described this phenomenon as "a way for people just not to accept things for what they are." Lawrence took a harsher view, stating,

We have a hard time in this community about people using race as a crutch. If I failed their child or their child gets expelled, the first thing they pull out is race, just because they don't want to put the responsibility where responsibility lies.

Jason and Catherine expressed similar views, pointing out examples of situations where White administrators became community scapegoats when they had to enforce unpopular policies.

Another source of angst for several interviewees were Navajo-preference employment laws in place on the Navajo Nation, which has a sovereign government. For Jessica, the fear that she could be removed from a position and be replaced by someone Native was a key factor in choosing to work in a border town, rather than on the reservation. Jason and Max both told stories about Navajo preference impacting second jobs that they once held and defined the law as *reverse racism* or *catering to certain races*. Ingrid, who once worked at a school on reservation, took a more thoughtful perspective:

I can remember, when I was hired, I was surprised that I had to sign a paper that there would be Navajo preference, that I was agreeing that I was, in fact, a minority, and if anyone else were more qualified that was Navajo, or equally qualified, that they would receive preference. I guess that's really the first time that that really sunk in to me, because I had never experienced that before. I also had never experienced being a minority in a working situation.

Eventually, the open comments of a new superintendent in that district about the plan to enforce Navajo preference led to Ingrid's decision to leave the reservation and seek employment in a border town.

### **Intersections of Small Town Politics and Race**

Another challenge for White administrators in the study was navigating small town politics, which were often racially charged. Jason described his border town district as *stagnant*, and he compared the system to several other border towns, where he thought administrators could be more successful. By contrast,



Lawrence rated his own border town as more accepting of Native Americans than other border towns. From his perspective, tribal politics on the reservation were so difficult for Navajo educational leaders, that his district had seen an influx of talented Native American principals who were seeking a respite from Navajo infighting at reservation schools.

As Bruce dispensed advice for White administrators who are transplants to these small towns, he cautioned:

Think before you speak. If you're not from a small town, talk to somebody who is familiar with some of the dynamics of small towns. Assume that everybody is related. Assume that you can trust nobody for your deepest, most confidential issues. And spend a lot of time listening and observing before you act on decisions.

Catherine recommended relying on classified staff, such as secretaries, because they were usually from the communities in which they worked. She discussed the ways in which one of her secretaries helped her negotiate with chapter houses, which are local seats of Navajo government, and helped her understand the cultural expectations of the area.

For Catherine, however, small town politics eventually took a nasty turn when her knowledge of the newspaper editor's domestic violence incidents gave him reason to target her as the superintendent of schools and launch a campaign of negative press for her over the course of five years. As a former law enforcement officer, she also had run-ins with a woman who was eventually elected to a school board; when the school board member targeted her for

termination, Catherine felt that her racist accusations were simply a cover-up for a personal vendetta. Her experiences illustrated the interconnected nature of personal encounters in a small town and race politics.

### **A Challenging Job**

One aspect of being a border town administrator that was raised throughout the interviews was the sheer challenge of the job. Jason and Lawrence talked about the difficulties in meeting state-mandated testing goals in reading and math; because their Native American and Hispanic students often came to school behind in academic performance, they felt that their role as instructional leaders was more difficult than that of their suburban counterparts. Lawrence, a middle school principal, proudly spoke about his staff's ability to close the gap of students who entered his school reading, on average, three grade levels lower than their current grade, but who left school reading on grade level:

I don't see many other teachers, regardless of where you're pulling them from, that would do a comparable thing. I think they're dealing doing more with less and they're dealing with a tougher population than you would find almost anywhere else in the state.

Other administrators pointed to the additional challenges of working within a culture of poverty, having less monetary resources, and living in communities that lacked infrastructures such as paved roads, running water, and electricity.

Because of this environment, Bruce expressed concern that working in a border town had stigmatized him when he operated in power circles on the state level:

The other problem is, because you come from a border community, there is a stigma attached to you, and because you're in a border community, you don't have the opportunity to . . . do the networking necessary many times to connect with other jobs.

To some interviewees, however, these challenges prepared them to work in any environment. In her own research, Catherine asked a colleague whether he experienced a stigma when seeking jobs elsewhere in the state. According to her, he stated, "No, I think they saw it like, if I would fight that hard for that [minority] district, I would also fight that hard for them." Jessica, a transplant to her border town, commented, "I think that, if you can deal with the challenges that we face up here—the socioeconomics, the culture, the hardships that you see—you could work anywhere. I know that because I had a real eye-opener coming here."

The challenge of being a White border town administrator may, on one hand, have been a great opportunity for personal and professional growth. On the other hand, it was a source of stress and frustration. Ingrid recalled her decision, early in her teaching career, not to teach on or near a reservation because of racial tensions during the 1970s, as well as concerns for the quality of education her son would receive. Elaine, after her interview, when the recorder was no longer running, confided in the researcher that she and her husband were considering looking for jobs somewhere else, since she was now pregnant and had similar concerns about quality of education for her own child.

## **Research Question 5**

The final research question was, Based on the administrators' responses to interview questions, can the researcher identify the stage of White identity formation at which they are operating, and does this appear to impact their practice? For the purposes of analysis, the research compared interviewees' comments with descriptors of various stages in Helms's (1990) White Racial Identity Development Model. Detailed descriptions can be viewed in Table 5, in chapter 2 of the study.

### **Fluidity of White Identity Formation**

When comparing the participants' responses to Helms's (1990) Model of White Racial Identity Formation, the researcher was cognizant that individuals could operate on several stages simultaneously, depending on the issue at hand. In several cases, the normally high-functioning participants in the study operated within Phase I of the model, primarily when they perseverated on issues of reverse racism or adopted views that the responsibility for changing racist practices, such as exclusion of Navajo language and culture courses from border town schools, should lie with the minority groups.

All participants, however, operated almost solely within the last three stages of Helms's model, indicating a low level of personal racism and the ability to recognize and combat institutionally racist practices. The mere act of participating in interviews on a subject considered by much of mainstream society to be taboo for Whites was, in itself, an expression of their comfort in their own

roles and identities as White school administrators in border towns, an environment where they were actually in a numeric minority.

### **Indicators of Operation at the Pseudo-Independent Stage**

Within Phase II, the fourth stage of the model, known as *pseudo-independent*, is characterized by paternalism. The four who explained they felt needed or valued within their roles as border town administrators did not make comments that devalued alternative perspectives of the people of color that they served. However, five other participants did make statements about the value of Western education over ethnically based curricula and methods or espoused views that Native families were less likely to value education than White or Hispanic families.

The primary professional impact of operation at this stage was support of particular curricula that emphasized adherence to state or national standards, to the exclusion of cultural activities and coursework. The reader should note, however, that several individuals operating at higher stages also advocated use of standards, but felt that they could be integrated with cultural knowledge in order to better engage minority students in their education.

Another impact of assumptions about the value of education within Navajo culture was lower expectations for Native American students. The clearest example of this was Max's comments that, when he taught math, he focused on the Native American students, because it seemed like Whites should be better at it. Lawrence identified these low expectations as a challenge to be addressed within his own teaching staff.

One final impact of operation at the pseudo-independent stage was an expression by some interviewees of shame in what they saw as a sense of entitlement in their White students, with some indicating a preference to work with Native American students as a result. Within a school setting, attitudes of this type could lead to neglect of White students or outright expressions of dislike, resulting in unfair practices and forms of reverse racism.

### **Indicators of Operation at the Immersion/Emersion Stage**

The fifth stage of Helms's (1990) model is characterized by the attempts to develop a non-oppressive identity. Four interviewees, Elaine, Max, Paul, and Bruce, spoke of their disgust or frustration with educators who came to border towns to *save the Indian*. Their awareness of this paternalism indicated a higher level of White identity development.

Professional actions representing this stage included support of grow-your-own educational programs that recruited locals into college programs to become teachers or administrators, work to develop professional development plans that emphasized cultural sensitivity among instructional staffs, and personal efforts to better understand the cultural milieu. Interviewees' responses indicated an appreciation of the challenges of working in a diverse environment, and they expressed exhilaration and a feeling of accomplishment at being able to work with a tough population.

### **Indicators of Operation at the Autonomy Stage**

In the highest stage of Helms's (1990) model, Whites do not see race as a threat to self-identity, and they actively seek contact with other minorities. All but

three administrators in the study described a desire to learn about other cultures and work in a diverse environment. Their decisions to work in border towns were often purposeful. Luke commented, “Working with the Navajo has been an enriching experience, because I had never in my life, prior to coming out here, interacted with a Native American.”

All interviewees were only minimally uncomfortable with being a racial minority in their communities, and one, Catherine, actually shared her sense of displacement when returning to visit family back in their majority-White town: “When I go and visit my parents, I’m like, ‘Where are all the dark people?’” Rob talked about the importance of having a strong identity when working in a border town:

I think it helps if you know who you are, as a person. If you know who you are, and you’re not lost and in the process of some big spiritual search, . . . you’re going to be all right. But if you don’t know who you are, and you don’t know what your job is, and you don’t know where you want to go, you’re always going to be lost.

Professional practices at this stage of White identity formation included abandonment of color-blind decision-making processes, adoption of whole-child development programs, and active disruption of racist practices on both a personal and institutional level.

### **Comparisons**

Final analysis of the differences in responses by the characteristics of the participants (Table 10) and of the districts in which they worked (Tables 8 and 9)

demonstrated very few differences. There were no apparent differences in responses according to interviewees' professional positions as elementary principals, secondary principals, or district administrators, nor were there differences based on gender, age range, or district size.

There were also no major differences among racial attitudes of the six participants from New Mexico and the six participants from Arizona. Administrators from New Mexico, however, were more likely to express frustrations over funding issues in their schools, with four of the six making specific references to this issue, while only two Arizona administrators referred to funding issues. One Arizona administrator even spoke of an overabundance of funding for his school.

Arizona administrators, on the other hand, were the only ones to allude to the political power of Mormons within the border town communities. One of the Arizona-based participants, Bruce, commented, "When I came here, I felt very distinctly that there was a theological hierarchy." One other colleague from the same district made a pointed comment about Mormons during his interview.

A comparison of the racial attitudes of transplants to border towns, versus those of locals, or participants who had been born or raised within border town communities, did reveal some differences. In all, seven of the interviewees identified themselves as transplants, while five were locals. Every response coded in the interview transcripts as being opposed to inclusion of ethnic elements in the curriculum, such as a greater infusion of Navajo language and culture, with one exception, was made by those identifying themselves as locals. Locals were also



more likely to perpetuate stereotypes about Navajo students receiving free handouts or Native families undervaluing education, with four out of five making these types of remarks. Transplants, on the other hand, were more likely to make remarks about the importance of respecting others' values or identify a desire to learn about other cultures as a reason to accept employment or remain on the job in a border town; six of the seven transplants made comments of this nature, while only two of the five locals made specific reference to learning about other cultures.

The final area of comparison that yielded a significant result was analyzing the responses of participants by the racial demographics of their district (Table 8) and of their principal group (Table 9). The participating district with the highest percentage of minority children also happened to have the highest percentage of minority principals of the districts studied. The three interviewees from this district were less likely to make personally racist statements, and all three identified paternalism as a problematic practice for White educators. All three also rejected color blind actions, referring to their inherent unfairness. Out of the other three districts represented in the study, no other set of three administrators had this level of agreement on any issue raised during dialogue.

Significant differences, then, existed according to individuals' origins—transplant or local—and by the percentage of minority students and principals represented in the district. Minor differences also occurred between New Mexico and Arizona administrators. Otherwise, there were no discernible patterns by professional position, gender, age, or district size.

## Summary

Using data collected from twelve White school administrators in border towns adjacent to the Navajo Reservation, the researcher found that these leaders could identify clear hierarchies within their communities that advantaged Whites and Hispanics, while placing Native Americans in a subordinate role. These hierarchies were further complicated by tensions within the Native American group, most commonly through placement of higher value on residence in town, as opposed to residence on the reservation. The hierarchies in these communities were reinforced by deferential treatment of Whites in power, the accumulation of disadvantages for minority students, and the establishment of schools as a White institution.

Personal beliefs of the White administrators emphasized an intersectionality of race and socioeconomic class, which rendered color-blind decision-making inherently unfair. Participants recognized how their whiteness led to differences in views from many of their constituents, and they overcame these differences by developing personal relationships with children and families, learning to work in a culture of poverty, exercising freedom in their jobs, and relying on data while attending to whole child development practices.

The White racial identity formation of all participants in the study was high, with all operating within Phase II of Helms's (1990) Model of White Racial Identity Formation. The stage of operation for each individual had clear implications for their practices as White administrators working with majority Native American and Hispanic populations in their border town schools.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, the nation's educators have experienced an increase in pressure to close the achievement gap between Whites and minority students. For Hispanics and Native Americans, this achievement gap severely impacts post-high school outcomes, including educational attainment and family income. The achievement gap, then, is one indicator of racial inequalities within American society, but it also represents the reproduction of social inequalities through a flawed school system.

Even though racial minorities are heavily represented in student bodies throughout the United States, the teachers and administrators who work with minority children are overwhelmingly White. This phenomenon warrants examination in relation to the achievement gap to determine whether racial attitudes of White school administrators impact their professional practices and, by extension, academic achievement of students of color.

#### **Summary of Study**

This study examined the racial attitudes and resulting professional practices of White administrators who work in a unique environment. These administrators lived and practiced their profession in towns that lay just outside the borders of the Navajo Nation, a large Indian reservation in the Four Corners region of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. Termed border towns, these communities are composed of a large majority of Native Americans, with a heavy representation of Hispanics. This placed White school administrators in the

uncommon position of living and working in a place where they were a numeric minority, while simultaneously representing the majority culture in the United States. Twelve White border town administrators in four different communities agreed to participate in the interview study.

### **Summary of Findings for Research Question 1**

The first research question asked, *How do White school administrators view race relations in their schools and districts?* Overall, findings were similar across the various border towns represented within the study. Participants identified Whites and Hispanics as a clearly dominant group. Within the Native American population, White administrators described a dichotomy between reservation and in-town youth, with *reservation* viewed as a less desirable quality. Administrators also described deferential treatment, although they disagreed on whether this was a function of race or education. Adding to the perceptions of a racial hierarchy was the belief that their schools experienced greater barriers to provision of a quality education than schools in wealthier, Whiter communities; barriers included lack of opportunities, lack of resources, teacher quality issues, and lack of accountability among administrations. Schools in border towns were also described as guardians of traditional practices in curriculum and assessment that heaped additional disadvantages on their minority students and that either purposely or inadvertently shut out Native American administrative candidates.

### **Summary of Findings for Research Question 2**

The second research question asked, *What are the administrators' personally held beliefs about race, and what experiences have they had that*

*influence these beliefs?* A focus on personal attitudes on race of White border town administrators demonstrated several findings. First, the intersectionality of race and low socioeconomic status was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Second, this intersection meant that color-blind actions and policies were perceived as unfair or insensitive in certain situations, and all interviewees were able to recount stories of weighing these circumstances in their administrative decisions. Next, a recognition of differing values among the dominant White culture and Native American culture did not necessarily result in White administrators yielding to local needs within their schools. Finally, unconsciously racist statements by several participants yielded hidden beliefs that reinforced stereotypes of Native culture and uncovered opposition to efforts to use border town schools as a place for cultural revitalization.

### **Summary of Findings for Research Question 3**

The third research question asked, *How do the interviewees use these beliefs to inform their conduct as educational leaders?* As the researcher considered ways in which administrator attitudes about race impacted their professional practice, several trends emerged. First, White school administrators discussed the importance of developing relationships with students and their families and understanding the ways that poverty impacted children in their schools. White border town administrators also described exercising greater freedom in conducting their jobs, although they disagreed on whether or not this was a positive aspect of border town school culture. All interviewees also relied heavily on use of data to remove race considerations from educational decision-

making. Some administrators, however, questioned whether this practice may not actually reinforce institutional racism and advocated for a whole child approach to intervention.

#### **Summary of Findings for Research Question 4**

The fourth research question, a two-part question, asked, *How do White administrators in these settings feel to be part of a racial minority within their communities? In what ways has being White affected them?* The unique experience of being White but living as a racial minority within a community offered border town administrators chances for personal enrichment, as well as a greater likelihood of promotion. However, White administrators expressed frustration with experiences of reverse racism, issues of small town politics often grounded in race, and increased difficulty of the jobs they performed.

#### **Summary of Findings for Research Question 5**

The fifth research question asked, *Based on the administrators' responses to interview questions, can the researcher identify the stage of White identity formation at which they are operating, and does this appear to impact their practice?* The White racial identity formation of all participants in the study was high, with all operating within Phase II of Helms's (1990) Model of White Racial Identity Formation. The stage of operation for each individual had clear implications for their practices as White administrators working with majority Native American and Hispanic populations in their border town schools.

## Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the attitudes and practices of White school administrators in border town districts. These conclusions support several current theories in research on race.

### **A Unique Hierarchy**

The first significant conclusion is that border towns do have a racial hierarchy that influences how members of various racial groups behave and interact. Although they occupy a minority position in terms of numbers, Whites are still a dominant group in these communities; however, in border towns, Hispanics are often viewed as synonymous with Whites. This pairing is contradictory to the situation in many other areas of the United States, where various Hispanic and Latino ethnicities are considered to be part of an out-group, or subordinate population. The border town view of Hispanics as White supports Howard's (1999) and Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) beliefs that a binary identification system of White and *other* exists in the United States and that the definition of whiteness may vary according to social need. The endowment of whiteness upon this group is predicated on the view of Native American populations in the area as sufficiently alien to mainstream culture as to warrant Hispanic inclusion in the dominant group, since their views and cultural practices closely mirror those of Whites.

This hierarchy is reinforced by the deferential treatment of White school administrators. Several factors contribute to this circumstance. First, the

systematic disadvantaging of Native Americans through socioeconomic and educational practices has a cumulative effect on their place within the hierarchy. This leads to differentials in education, income, and power. Additionally, Native school leaders may experience greater difficulty obtaining jobs in administration and remaining in those jobs, due to both Whites' stereotyping of their competence and unrealistic expectations from within their own Native communities. When Native American administrative candidates encounter such barriers to accessing the power structures with the hierarchy, the hierarchy is reinforced.

These findings contribute to research and theories pointing to a system of White privilege in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McIntosh, 1989). This system involves an accumulation of advantages for White administrators in border towns, including middle-class upbringing, better access to educational resources to attain necessary degrees, favor in professional hiring and evaluation processes, and systematic acquiescence to their will. An important finding with regard to theories on White privilege was that the individuals who participated in this study were able to articulate ways in which their own race had given them advantages, and they could identify ways in which their views differed from the views of the families they served. Thus, Whites who work and live in environments where they are a numeric minority have a greater understanding of White privilege and, subsequently, a stronger positive White identity, which according to researchers, is not the norm in White culture.



Those studied also described incidents of Native American students further stratifying themselves by *rez* and in-town status. Those students who lived on the reservation were perceived to be less educated and less metropolitan than those living in town, and students would go to great lengths to obtain status as an in-town Native. This resembles the concept of *passing*, in which people of color purposely adopt White mannerisms and espouse a negative view of their own race in order to better gain access to the benefits of White society (Bell, 1995; Datnow & Cooper, 1998; Decuir-Gumby, 2006). This abandonment of a Navajo identity was a form of assimilation that also reinforced the existing racial hierarchy.

### **Intersectionality**

The second significant finding is that there is a clear intersectionality between race and socioeconomic class in border town communities. This conclusion is an important piece to understanding the puzzle of racial hierarchy in border towns. Additionally, intersectionality is important because it impacts how White administrators take professional actions. While participants in the study were at times reluctant to discuss race openly, they made repeated references to socioeconomic class and the culture of poverty. They were comfortable making decisions based on student need when children were contending with poverty issues, but several of those interviewed denied making decisions based on race. This may be viewed as a coping mechanism for White administrators, who are traditionally encouraged to be color blind (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Rousseau & Tate, 2003). However, because race and class are so closely linked in these communities, to deal with one is to deal with the other, resulting in fairer practices

in the school environment. Also, the stronger assertion by interviewees that class is the dominant factor in their schools and towns may support Giroux and McLaren's (1989) insistence that class trumps race.

### **Racial Attitudes Impact Professional Practice**

Leonardo (2009) supported the social construction theory of race, which argues that race is a means to give structure to human society. Parker (1995) posited that the importance of race is that it influences who we are and, subsequently, the decisions we make in our daily lives, such as where to live, how to behave in public, and with whom to associate. The findings of this study support these related views, as racial attitudes led to specific patterns of behavior among the White administrators interviewed.

One primary behavior of the interviewees was an attempt to mitigate the influence of racial attitudes of themselves and others on treatment of students through use of data to make decisions. Interestingly, because much of the data were gleaned through standardized testing, which often demonstrates a racial bias, this practice may unknowingly reinforce structures of institutional racism (Sacks, 1999). This practice was sometimes tempered by administrators' use of whole child development practices within their schools, which allowed for better individualization and lessened the reliance on data. Two other common ways of dealing with race issues were development of greater empathy and, closely related to that, pursuing ways to develop greater cultural competence. These actions complemented administrators' focus on developing relationships with students and families, which they overwhelmingly felt assisted them in making correct

educational decisions on behalf of children. Another interesting finding was that a sense of injustice with regard to the conditions of border town schools and a feeling that they could make an impact in these communities led most of these administrators to make the decision to live and work in these border towns on a long-term basis.

### **Border Town Schools are White Places**

Despite their openness on views of race, the administrators in the study were largely reproducing the conditions in which they themselves were educated. Several of those interviewed specifically referred to offering a Western education, and some cited this as the reason that many of their parents enrolled Native children in their schools. Discussion of incorporating Navajo language and culture within the curricula yielded divided results, with some administrators declaring that it was families' responsibility to transmit culture and others pointing to lack of an ethnic base in schools as a reason for Native students' high levels of disengagement.

Some of the more overt indicators of these attitudes included comments about Navajo families failing to see the value of education and remarks on welfare culture. A number of participants also criticized their staffs and colleagues for holding low expectations for minority children. These types of remarks indicate that Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) theory of cultural capital is alive and well in border town schools, although there are a number of White administrators actively working to disrupt this discourse. Where deficit thinking exists, schools unwittingly reproduce societal hierarchies (Yosso, 2005).

## **Links to Critical Race Theory**

This research links closely enough with the tenets of Critical Race Theory to be considered a contributing piece to the field. It does, however, take several important departures from commonly held beliefs in CRT.

One of the linchpins of CRT is the idea that racism is accepted as normal in American society. When racism occurs at an institutional level, it is often invisible to all but those who are seeking it. This study supports this tenet through its conclusion that practices of institutional racism abound in border town schools, despite the sophistication of racial attitudes among the White administrators who inhabit them. In some cases, such as their anger in funding inequalities or adoption of culturally sensitive practices and policies, the individuals in the study were aware of and actively engaged against institutionally racist conventions. However, participants were also, at times, unconscious contributors to the very system that they sought to beat. This was best represented through their strong support of standardized, Western curriculum and sometimes erroneous use of data.

Although it was not a major finding, several of the administrators studied referenced the need to ground treatment of Native Americans within a historical context. In their eyes, this chronicle of events was important to understanding where the culture was today in relation to others. This is one of the commonly held beliefs of CRT scholars.

Another principle of CRT is that narrative is an important source of information in research on race. In this study, the narrative was provided through

interviews of White border town school administrators and offered a wealth of information on the racial conditions within their schools and communities. This is one more way in which this study is closely linked to CRT.

Many CRT scholars, however, argue that there is a unique voice of color (Bell, 1995) and that there is a presumed competence of minorities in speaking on issues of race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Some researchers question whether Whites have a role in studying race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Parker & Lynn, 2002), but there is a growing movement to include White scholars in the field of study (DuBois, 1897; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Leonardo, 2004, 2009; Tatum, 1994). Although this research was completed by a White scholar, it fits Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) definition of CRT in education: "a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom" (p. 132). As such, it is the author's belief that this study contributes to the body of CRT research.

### **Comparison to Existing Models of Race Relations**

During review of the literature, several key models of race relations were explained. This study clearly supports the theories espoused in three specific models.

#### **Dynamics of Dominance**

According to Howard (1999), there are three key dynamics of dominance that allow a group of people to subjugate others: assumption of rightness, luxury

of ignorance, and legacy of privilege. Even among the White administrators in this study, who had a highly-developed identity and set of ideals, two of these three dynamics were present.

With regard to the assumption of rightness, the very nature of schooling offered within border towns was questioned by only two interviewees. It was simply an unspoken assumption that school was to be offered in the ways that it always has been for these administrators. Additionally, several of those interviewed asserted the superiority of a Western curriculum and discounted use of ethnically based curricula.

All participants also recognized the legacy of privilege that had enabled them to attain powerful positions within their schools. The interviewees could articulate how various advantages had assisted them in their lives and careers, and conversely, could describe the accumulating disadvantages experienced by their minority students that were keeping them from being as successful as they could be.

The research did not find any links to the luxury of ignorance, primarily because the group studied was immersed in another culture on a daily basis and was a small minority within their communities. To operate within their schools, the White border town administrators had to learn about the lives of those around them, so ignorance was not a luxury.

### **Property Functions of Whiteness**

Harris (1993) identified four property functions of whiteness (see chapter 2, section titled “White Privilege”) in which the research relates to

education. The property functions are (a) rights of disposition, (b) right to use and enjoyment, (c) reputation and status property, and (d) the absolute right to exclude. All four of these functions can be discerned throughout the findings.

The rights of disposition refer to conferring White status upon certain groups to satisfy the dominant group's needs. In this study, this function was clearly illustrated through inclusion of Hispanics in the White dominant group within border town communities. To a lesser degree, it was also heard through stories about Navajo students' abandonment of their Native identity through attempts to pass or to distance themselves from a reservation identity.

The right to use and enjoyment, in schools, is best exemplified by the actual physical differences of what is provided in schools. The lack of resources and opportunities for children in border town schools was frequently referenced by participants in the study, particularly with regard to teacher quality, and the administrators felt that this was a major barrier to provision of a top-notch education to their minority students.

Reputation and status property involve the attachment of a stigma to those qualities or views defined as *other*. This was seen in the cases of Native American students passing, discussed above, as well as through the assignation of ethnically based curricula to a lower level of importance than standardized, Western curricula.

The final property function, the absolute right to exclude, can be seen in schools through choice schemes, separate but equal policies, and tracking. While this function was not as apparent in the narratives as the other three, it was present

to a small degree in discussion of use of data for decision-making. The presumed outcome of this process was grouping of students according to ability, on the basis of standardized test scores. This practice would be a form of tracking that would yield the possibility of reinforcing race-based hierarchies.

### **White Identity Formation**

The use of Helms's (1990) Model of Positive White Identity Formation is discussed in greater detail in chapter 4. The researcher discovered that specific comments and behaviors could be directly linked to operation at each of the six stages that Helms identified. The individuals studied fell primarily within the last three stages of Helms's model, which represents a development of a positive White identity, although they occasionally operated within the first three stages, or Phase I, which involves abandonment of racist identity.

The research indicated that even single individuals studied could operate within several stages simultaneously, depending on the aspect of race relations that they were discussing, which fits Helms's (1990) definition of the model as fluid and non-linear.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

Based on the literature review and the findings of the study, the following recommendations for policy and practice are presented:

1. Creation and strengthening of professional development and professional preparation programs that emphasize cultural competence. This should be a regular component of new teacher orientation and teacher/administrator mentoring programs in border



town school districts. These programs should have a heavy component of understanding one's own racial identity, as well as multicultural awareness.

2. Development of grow-your-own postsecondary programs in education and educational leadership. Interviewees consistently referred to a shallow pool of candidates from which to select teachers and administrators, a problem that was compounded by high turnover rates. Stabilizing the school work force in these communities can be achieved through training locals and assisting them in earning credentials as educational assistants, teachers, and administrators. Because of the poverty and difficulty in accessing college-level programs in many of these communities, districts that pursue this option will need to offer tuition assistance to candidates and develop partnerships with postsecondary institutions that address specific needs of program participants and border town and reservation districts.
3. Development of culturally relevant curricula and programs of study. This recommendation is two-pronged. First, districts serving large numbers of Native American and Hispanic students should examine the current standards-based curriculum to determine ways to thread ethnic knowledge throughout; use of culturally appropriate materials and methods is not synonymous with lower expectations or abandonment of standards. Second, border town school districts should explore the possibility of building culturally-based programs such as

Navajo language and culture coursework, Hispanic studies programs, and immersion schools that can service the segment of the population that desires such an education. Although these programs would not be appropriate or wanted by the entire school population, they would serve to fill a void that exists within the structure of these school districts.

4. Examination of state and federal funding systems. The comments of administrators in this study indicate that closing the achievement gap will take additional resources that can mitigate the effects of poverty on minority students in border town areas. At this point, equalized funding formulas do not allow for allocation of such resources to impoverished schools, and redistribution of federal title funds and Impact Aid monies exacerbates the situation.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the literature review and the findings of the study, the following recommendations for further research are presented:

1. A comparative study of the experiences of White administrators in border towns to reservations and on reservations. While a border town represents a multicultural experience for a White administrator, the reservation represents a monocultural experience. In both cases, the White administrator is in a numeric minority.
2. A comparative study of the experiences of White and Native American leaders in either border town school districts or reservation school

districts. Data in this study indicate that Native leaders likely encounter additional barriers to being hired and, once on the job, experience extra pressures and unrealistic expectations.

3. Comparison of the jobs of school administrators working in high-poverty, high-minority schools, versus the jobs of school administrators working in affluent schools. Additionally, a similar study could compare the experiences of educators working in minority urban settings to those working in minority rural settings. Key questions include: How do the job duties differ between settings? Are the pressures and expectations different between settings? How do differences in the settings impact the ways administrators carry out their duties?
4. An analysis of funding trends in New Mexico and Arizona. Responses of the study participants demonstrate an overall concern that rural, high poverty, and high minority school districts are underfunded in both states. Such an analysis would focus on how many cents on the dollar make it into direct instructional costs for students. Key questions are: Is there a difference in classroom and administrative spending between school districts, and is there a discernible pattern, based on racial and socioeconomic demographics? What is the difference in direct classroom spending between rural and urban school districts? Based on these findings, are changes in state funding formulas warranted?

5. A cost analysis of what type of funding resources would be required to close the achievement gap in high-poverty, high-minority school districts. What is the monetary cost of provision of extra services, such as transportation programs, early childhood initiatives, childcare programs, tutoring services, and other additional assistance that would help close the achievement gap between Native and Hispanic populations and Whites?
6. A survey of Native American students and parents with regard to their views on the value of education and their expectations for school systems. In order to determine whether or not Native American students are being served appropriately, researchers must first learn about the community expectations. For example, do parents on the Navajo Nation prefer a standardized, Western curriculum for their children, or do they want the choice to send their children to culturally based schools that emphasize revitalization of language and culture? The fundamental question in this type of study is whether or not reservation and border town schools meet family and community expectations.
7. Reasons for abandonment of Native identity among Navajo youth. The dichotomy between reservation and in-town youth was a significant finding which warrants further investigation. What are the factors that impact students' choices to either adhere to or abandon their Native

identities, and how do these decisions influence their educational and life decisions?

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APPENDIX A

TABLE OF WHITE IDENTITY ORIENTATIONS

MODALITIES OF GROWTH		WHITE IDENTITY ORIENTATIONS		
		FUNDAMENTALIST	INTEGRATIONIST	TRANSFORMATIONIST
THINKING	Construction of Truth	Literal and fixed Single-dimensional truth Western-centric	Acknowledge diverse perspectives Interest in broader truths Continued defense of Western superiority	Legitimacy of diverse perspectives Truth as dynamic/changing Actively seeking divergent truths
	Construction of Whiteness	Supremacist/White is right Ignorance/avoidance Confusion	Beginning awareness Some self-interrogation Dissonance	Self-reflective critique Deep interrogation of Whiteness Affirming authentic/positive/ nonracist identity
	Construction of Dominance	Legitimize/perpetuate dominance Rationalize Deny/ignore	Victim's perspective Personal rather than institutional critique of dominance	Acknowledge complicity Holistic critique of oppression Comprehensive analysis of dominance
FEELING	Level of Self-Awareness	Perspective is right-the only one/Self-esteem linked to supremacy Threatened by differences	My perspective is one of many Self-esteem linked to helping others "Wannabe" phenomenon	My perspective is changing Self-esteem linked to growth/change Enhanced by connection to other groups
	Emotional Response to Differences	Fear/hostility/avoidance Judgment Colorblindness	Interest Beginning awareness Cultural voyeurism/curiosity	Appreciation/respect Enthusiasm/joy Honesty
	Emotional Response to Discussions of Racism	Anger Denial Defensiveness/avoidance	Shame/guilt/confusion Missionary zeal Externalized as someone else's problem	Acknowledgement/empathy Enlightened aversion to oppression Responsibility without guilt
ACTING	Approach to Cross-Cultural Interactions	Distance/isolation Hostility Reinforcing White superiority	Narrowly circumscribed/tentative Patronizing Emphasizing commonalities	Active seeking Deeply personal/rewarding Transforming/healing
	Approach to Teaching about Differences	Monocultural Treat all students "the same" Actively Eurocentric	Special program for special folks Learning about other cultures Tacitly Eurocentric	Social action/authentic engagement Learning from other cultures Challenging the Eurocentric perspective
	Approach to Leadership/Management	Autocratic/directive Assimilationist Perpetuates White dominance	Compliance oriented Invite others into "our" house Tacit support of White dominance	Advocacy Collaboration/co-responsibility Challenging/dismantling White dominance

Note. Adapted from *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers*, by G. R. Howard, 1999, p. 100.



APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW LETTER

Date:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Dee Spencer in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Division of Educational Administration and Supervision, at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to describe the beliefs about race held by White school administrators in school districts adjacent to the Navajo Nation (“border town” schools) and to explore how these beliefs impact their professional practices.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve an in-depth interview of approximately one to one and a half hours in length. The purposes of this form are to provide you with information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research and to record the consent of those who agree to be involved in the study. If you choose to participate, you have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. You must be 18 or older to participate in this study.

I would like to audiotape this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be taped. You also can change your mind after the interview starts; just let me know. Upon acceptance of my research for publication as a dissertation, all audio files will be deleted. Three years after the end of the study the transcripts will be destroyed.

I do not foresee any risks to you. To protect against any risk I will ensure that recordings and transcripts of your interview are held in files at my home with no access to anyone other than myself. Additionally, your responses will be anonymous. In any publication or public statement based on the study, all names, schools, or other potentially identifying information will be omitted and personal identifiers will be limited to “elementary principal,” “secondary principal,” or “central office administrator.”

Although there may be no direct benefits to you for participating in the study, people often find participating in an interview to be beneficial insofar as it gives them a chance to talk about things that matter to them. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

I will make my findings known through writing my dissertation. I will also share the findings with interview participants upon request.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact Dr. Spencer at (480) 759-4633 (dspencer@asu.edu) or myself at (505) 870-5145 (kjorr@gmcs.k12.nm.us). If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

Sincerely,



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Kim Orr  
ASU Graduate Student

APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS


1. Please describe the demographics of your school and your community.
2. Tell me a little bit about your career in education and how you came to be an administrator in this community.
3. What do you like most about working in a racially diverse community?
4. What are some of the challenges of working in a racially and culturally diverse community?
5. Do you believe there is a racial hierarchy within your school system, or within your community? Do they differ?
6. In what ways do you feel your race has been an advantage or asset to you as a school administrator?
7. Can you tell me about a time when you were acutely aware of your status as a racial minority in your community? In what ways has your race put you at a disadvantage in your job?
8. When you work with students, do you feel that you take a colorblind approach, or have there been times when you felt that the race of a student was relevant to the decision you made? Please elaborate.
9. Have you ever witnessed, or experienced, overt acts of racism in your job? Can you tell me about one?
10. Do you believe your students are afforded the same quality of education, or exposure to educational opportunities, as middle class white students? Why or why not?
11. Have you ever experienced pressure to teach either to a mainstream curriculum, at the expense of culturally relevant curricula, or pressure to attend more to cultural concerns, at the expense of mainstream curriculum? Tell me about it.
12. What factors do you believe contribute to the growing achievement gap between racial minorities and Whites? What do you think should be done to address these issues?
13. What advice would you give to a White administrator new to a border town school district? What are some of the valuable lessons you have learned or experiences that have changed your viewpoint?

APPENDIX D  
IRB APPROVAL



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

**To:** Dee Spencer  
ED

**From:**  Mark Ross, Chair  
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 12/06/2010

**Committee Action:** Exemption Granted

**IRB Action Date:** 12/06/2010

**IRB Protocol #:** 1011005773

**Study Title:** White Dreams, another World: Exploring the Racial Beliefs of White Administrators in Multicultural Si

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

## Biographical Sketch

Kimberly Orr grew up in Billings, Montana, and is a graduate of Billings Senior High School. She earned a bachelor's degree in music performance and music education at Northwestern University, where she graduated with honors. She also earned a Master of Music in Performance from Northwestern, before moving to Gallup, New Mexico, to begin her teaching career. As a middle school and junior high band director for the Gallup McKinley County Schools, Kim's bands earned numerous regional and state honors. After earning a master's degree in educational leadership from Western New Mexico University, she worked as an assistant principal and principal for the Gallup McKinley County Schools at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels. Kim has formerly held adjunct teaching positions with both Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois, and Western New Mexico University's Gallup Graduate Studies Center and is an active adjudicator for music festivals in the Four Corners area of New Mexico and Arizona. In 2009, she joined the second doctoral cohort of Arizona State University's Native American Educational Leadership program and anticipates earning an Ed.D. in Supervision and Administration in May 2011. Kim and her husband, Sammy, who is also a school principal, are parents to three children, Spencer, 19, Christina, 18, and Sammy, 5.