

Inside or Outside the Frame?

White Principals: Connections Between Racial Identity & Practice

Paul Michael Adler

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education  
in Teachers College, Columbia University

2024

© 2024  
Paul Michael Adler  
All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### **Inside or Outside the Frame?**

#### **White Principals: Connections Between Racial Identity & Practice**

By Paul Adler

Research suggests discrepancies between principals of color and White principals in their motivations and reflections on racism and how it shapes their philosophies, practice, and persistence in leading schools in historically underserved urban communities. Several scholars have discussed the pivotal role of early racial identity experiences in the beliefs and practices for Black and Latinx school leaders (Douglas, Wilson, and Nganga, 2014; Hernandez, Murakami, and Cerecer, 2014; Lomotey, 1989; Wilson, 2016). Scholars such as Gooden and O'Doherty (2015), Hines (2015), Theoharis and Haddix (2011), and Toure and Thompson-Dorsey (2018) have examined how White principals reflect on concepts of race in their work. These researchers call for further study, specifically on how White leaders' reflection on race manifests in their beliefs and day to day practices. This serves as the impetus for this dissertation, which is framed by two research questions:

1. Why do some White principals choose to lead schools that serve historically underserved communities? What, if any, reflections on early racial experiences are common among these leaders?
2. How do the motivations and reflections on early racial experiences of White principals who chose to lead in historically underserved communities inform their leadership philosophy and play out in their practices?

This study examines the role of racial literacy in the principal seat, specifically as White administrators attempt to enact leadership in low-income urban school settings that serve a

majority of students of color. Using a significant body of literature as well as results from a qualitative study, it describes the journey of four White New York city charter school principals as they reflect on early racial experiences and what brought them to the principal seat.

The study employs Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) theories around the White racial frame in leadership and Khalifa's (2018) culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) framework to code leadership behaviors observed on site. The post-visit debrief allows insights into how the principals saw their work and the degree to which they centered racial equity in their beliefs and practice. The paper then examines the impact of recollections on racial experiences and motivations on White leader beliefs and practices via a racial autobiography and subsequent interview. It classifies leaders' racial autobiography and interview data according to Helm's (1995) White racial identity model. The study concludes by theorizing how its findings can be used to better understand the intersection between principals' racial identity and practice.

This study is significant because it draws close connections between Helm's White racial identity model (1995) and Khalifa's (2018) theories on culturally responsive school leadership. This can support future research that seeks to connect racial mindsets to practice. The results of this work can also inform more rigorous hiring practices so that districts and networks unearth race neutral mindsets in candidates. Otherwise, it is likely that we will see a continuation of the colorblind approach that has held back so many promising young students of color

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	v
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background .....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	9
Limitations and Delimitations.....	10
Researcher’s Perspective .....	12
Significance of the Study.....	13
Organization of the Study.....	14
Definitions.....	15
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	18
Definitions of Race and related Concepts.....	19
Race and School Leadership.....	20
White Racial Identity Development.....	23
White Racial Identity Development and School Leadership.....	29
White Principals Leading with a Commitment to Equity.....	34
Summary.....	39
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .....	45
Setting.....	48

Participants.....	51
Data Collection and Instruments.....	53
Data Analysis.....	59
Trustworthiness.....	62
Summary.....	65
CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS.....	67
Research Question 1.....	71
Early Racial Experiences: Racial Isolation and First Significant Events.....	72
Ongoing Racial Development: Progression vs. Retreat.....	74
Motivations for Leadership.....	76
Research Question 2.....	82
White racial frame: Racial Stereotyping and the Focus on Control.....	82
White racial frame: Racial Images and Virtuous White Educators.....	85
White Racial Frame: Racial Images and Colorblind Curriculum.....	86
Inside and Outside the Frame: Leaders’ Direct Interactions with Students.....	89
CRSL: Critical Self Reflection in the Role.....	93
CRSL: Developing & Sustaining Culturally Responsive Teachers & Curricula.....	102
CRSL: Promoting Inclusive, Anti-Oppressive School Contexts.....	105
CRSL: Engaging Indigenous Community Context.....	109
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	113
Connection Between Racial Autobiographies & Interactions with Students.....	121
Role of Mentorship in Developing CRSL Competencies.....	123

Impact of Engaging with Indigenous Communities on Other Aspects of CRSL.....	126
The Role of the Charter Network in Leader’s CRSL Development.....	128
Leadership Behaviors and Grade Levels.....	131
Intersectionality and Leadership Behaviors.....	132
Connections Between Culturally Responsive Leadership and Student Outcomes.....	135
Recommendations and Implications.....	137
Significance.....	143
Conclusion.....	144

## DEDICATION

To my loving wife Jenya –

For your belief in me and the countless hours you sacrificed to support me

To my amazing children Juliette and Aaron –

For understanding this commitment and being patient with me

And to my parents, Larry and Eva

-For the sacrifices you made for my education



## PREFACE

My early life was guided by the firm, powerful, and weathered hands of my survivor grandparents. While most three-year old boys spent their Saturday mornings watching cartoons or playing outside, I was situated neatly on my grandfather's lap, my tiny hand inside of his, as he led me through the motions needed to write the Hebrew alphabet and words. I recall the strength of his grip on mine, pressing my fingers so hard into the pencil that my nails began to ache.

Education was the redeemer of my family and was revered above all other values. My great uncle Lazar spent his days after Auschwitz searching for family books in repositories in Budapest, Hungary. Emaciated and traumatized, it was the search for knowledge that sustained him and led him to a book that belonged to a family name that he recognized. He gifted the book to that family, and months later, the son of that family, who also survived Auschwitz, married my maternal grandmother. That book sits on the bookshelf beside me as I type this, enclosed in glass.

Education was also a redeemer for my mother as she arrived in this country at age eight, with her mother and one suitcase to her name. She did not speak the English language, was malnourished from months of travel, and had no family connections in the country. She was brought to this country as a political refugee through a Jewish aid agency. Her life changed when a courageous and caring teacher took the time and effort to literally sit next to her during every class period and teach her English so she could access the curriculum.

Given our history, my family revered those who imparted learning - rabbis, professors, teachers, and scholars. We treasured books and treated them like precious objects; we cared for them, stacked them neatly, kissed them when they dropped, and never, ever damaged them. We

had to “size the day” as my grandmother said in her broken English and could not waste time on trivial matters. The day was a success if we studied extensively.

It was from this culture that my earliest views of education were formed. I internalized the following messages, *(1) if you study hard, you can do anything and overcome anything, even horrific trauma, (2) many things can be taken away, but not what you have learned, and (3) the act of teaching is sacred and cannot be limited or restricted.*

It was these early experiences that led me continually back to teaching and education, despite my parents’ dreams of a more lucrative career. While starting a career working for the government, I was drawn to a volunteer tutoring program at a nearby church. There, I was assigned to work with an eleven-year-old boy who had recently immigrated from Nigeria. Despite his brilliance in math, he was given only basic worksheets from his local school. His teachers had simply assumed he could not handle more rigorous material. Once I brought in a pre-algebra book, his eyes lit up. Within three months, we finished the book and were moving onto algebra.

In my work with this young man, I saw both connections and chasms between his experience and those of my family. On the one hand, his story reminded me of that of my mother, who immigrated at the same age, and had very few resources to cope with her new world. Learning and a love for learning was what sustained her and gave her a sense of dignity and pride, despite limited means. Access to teachers and tutors who believed in her ability opened pathways for her. Education held that same incredible, mystical promise for this young man.

On the other hand, there was a chasm between our worlds. When my mother escaped persecution in Hungary, she found a world that no longer imposed inferior status because of her

religion and ethnicity. Yes, she was economically poor, but she was given the richness of chance and opportunity due to her privilege as a White girl. The same could not be promised for my student. Due to the caste system in our country and the color of his skin, it was more likely than not that his intelligence would be doubted, that he would be placed in low level classes, and that his trajectory would be decided for him.

That dichotomy, both the deep connection to and distance from the experiences of the students of color I served, was an important lens through which I saw my teaching work and later, my leadership practice. Yes, I absolutely believed in the mystical power of learning as resistance and even survival. Yes, my students' stories of tenacity, resourcefulness, and community reminded me of my mother's experience and inspired me to put everything I could into teaching mathematics and algebra. However, as I listened to the stories of my students in the first two years of my teaching career, I began to understand the role of Whiteness in my story.

Education alone was not enough for my students. They needed and deserved more. My students needed a teacher who was critical of the curriculum he was asked to implement, who was welcoming and inclusive of their identity, who was politically active alongside the local community, and who saw their strengths in places besides the classroom. As I attempted to teach in a socially just manner (Douglas, Wilson, and Nganga, 2013), I could not ignore the fact that my students' assets were not recognized nor rewarded by the larger racist system they found themselves in. This motivated me to move into school leadership.

As I prepared for principalship, I buried my family's story. Between my graduate and school-site leadership training, I was taught the importance of being the stoic, unflappable leader, and the constant for my adult team. The bureaucratic and administrative side of leadership was emphasized over the personal. I was expected to set goals, analyze data, manage a team, coach

teachers, and deliver impactful professional development. This training, combined with my private nature, kept my story buried.

My story resurfaced when I was fortunate enough to work as a principal-in-residence under two transformational leaders of color. The way in which they led for social justice – through engaging deeply with the community, honoring the strengths and backgrounds of students, bringing the culture of home into the school, pushing teachers and students to engage in social movements for people of color, and holding high expectations for students’ capabilities – served as a powerful example of what is possible when the right person serves in the principal seat. Students in each of these schools made dramatic academic gains, reported a greater sense of belonging, showed pride in their racial and ethnic identities, and were able to access more promising future educational options. Teachers in these schools stayed deeply loyal to the school, exhibited raised expectations for students, and formed coherent teams focused on student performance.

Above all, these leaders led via their personal narratives. One principal had grown up facing similar challenges to his students and had been raised with deep pride in his people and their history of struggle and sacrifice. His leadership was a way of transmitting this asset-based approach to his students. My other mentor principal had grown up being doubted and made to feel unintelligent as a multilingual learner. His leadership was a form of resistance against the deficit-based approach he saw being levied on Mexican American students.

These two leaders challenged and supported me in revisiting and reflecting on my motivation for school leadership in historically underserved neighborhoods. They felt that it would be even more important for me to share my story with the school community given my

identity as a White male. The parents and students I would be serving deserved to know, why is this White man here? In our community? What is he about? What are his motivations?

As I started my tenure as founding principal of a small charter high school in Brooklyn, New York, I decided that sharing my story would be crucial to the work. Indeed, it made a significant difference in my ability to connect with families. They saw how deeply ingrained education and learning were in my personal story. I could sense parents opening up to me and the school and they soon began to share their family histories. As I listened to their stories, I saw, yet again, both connections and chasms in our life experiences. Yes, many of the families I served came to this country with only a suitcase and the hope of a new life. Yes, many of them saw education as the key to realizing this new life. However, they had to fight for access to basic rights that my mother could take for granted – housing, healthcare, and most importantly, access to good schooling. They, unlike my mother, could not escape discrimination. They were still in a country with a caste system and racism that was baked into every corner of policy and practice.

The sharing of stories was an important entry point as I founded the high school. However, it was only the beginning of the journey towards understanding and honoring what families wanted. The parts of my background that were similar to the families I served made it easy for me to imbue our school with a love of learning, extremely high academic expectations, and relentless hard work. However, I had blind spots where our stories diverged. I did not initially push myself to provide the level of nurturing I needed to give my students and school. I used the excuse of other, more “important” work taking precedence. My leadership team and teachers had to remind me of the importance of proactive and nuanced discussions of race, class, poverty, and LGBT issues. I did not seek nearly enough opportunities for my students to actualize and see positive examples of resilience and strength in their community. Over time,

thanks to helpful challenges from my staff and parents, I began to reflect critically and increase my capacity in this area.

After seven years in the principal seat and having been fortunate enough to see our students succeed in several ways (all of students gained access to four-year colleges, most earned significant scholarships that allowed them to study without incurring debt, and many went on to promising careers), I was asked to coach charter school leaders who were attempting to do similar work.

Over the past five years coaching over forty principals, I see the mindset side of the work continue to be the determining factor in leader and school performance. There have been moments when I have stood outside of a building in stunned silence. I have observed principals who were not able to get through to a child who was only marginally pushing back on an expectation. I have witnessed leaders make excuses for teachers who were underperforming. I have seen principals exhibit deficit mindsets for children, celebrating academic outcomes that were only marginally better than awful. Most frequently, these moments happened outside of school buildings run by White leaders serving low-income students of color.

During this same time span, I have also left school buildings led by a small handful of White principals completely inspired. I have observed a community meeting completely run by positive and powerful student voices, a professional development session where the leader inspired and pushed teachers to expect more of students, a holiday event where staff showed deep understanding and care for families and their needs, and data reflection where teachers analyzed academic outcomes that were far above student performance at local feeder schools.

When I have reflected on why there has been such a stark gap within the performance of the cohort of White leaders I work with, I return, again and again, to their ability to examine their

stories, their racial identities, and their motivations for leadership. In most cases, the principals who have been able to exhibit socially just leadership (Douglas, Wilson, and Nganga, 2013) are those that have relentlessly examined their personal story through the lens of race and class.

My experience over the past twenty years as both a leader and as a coach of leaders has brought me to two central questions. Is a deep exploration of one's racial identity, early experiences, and motivations a requirement for White leaders to lead in socially just ways? If so, how exactly do these reflections translate to leadership mindsets and practice?

This dissertation is an attempt to answer some of these questions, with the hopes of better understanding leadership enacted by White principals. While there is robust research on the importance of principals of color for students of color, the profession has only marginally diversified over the past ten years, as White principals make up 78% of the field. As we do the necessary work of diversifying leadership pipelines, it remains crucial that the White principals who currently occupy the majority of leadership seats are equipped to rise against the status quo and provide transformative leadership to students who deserve it. They deserve nothing less.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past thirty years, educational policymakers and scholars have brought increased attention to differences in academic outcomes and opportunities by race. A report from the Executive Office of the President (2015), *Giving Every Child a Fair Shot*, shows that achievement and opportunity gaps along lines of class and race persist. The gap endures despite the efforts of No Child Left Behind and The Every Student Succeeds Act. Dolph (2017) cites the Council of the Great City Schools (2013) and states that “nationally, test scores and achievement gaps in mathematics and reading are even more pronounced in urban schools when compared to...other systems, such as suburban and rural” (p. 365).

Research on urban schools points to the significant role principals play in student achievement, and specifically in closing the opportunity gaps cited above. Martorell et al. (2010) examined successful schools serving low-income students of color and found that principal leadership was second only to classroom instruction in its impact on student achievement, with an implied impact of three points on a student’s standardized percentile in mathematics and reading. Leithwood and Jantzi (2010) examined a large district and found that principal leadership had a more significant impact on student engagement (correlation coefficient of .25 with strong statistical significance) than teacher leadership (no correlation). Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2012) found that effective principals could promote a two-month to seven-month gain in achievement in struggling Title I schools within a single year.

Lomotey depicts the route by which principal leadership flows to student outcomes. In a case study of African American principals, Lomotey (1989) states, “the leadership of the principal affects the behavior of the teachers which subsequently affects the achievement of students” (pp. 145-146). In a more recent study, Grissom (2019) finds that principals influence



factors such as quality of teaching staff and school climate, and therefore impact student achievement indirectly.

Key to this type of leadership impact on student achievement in Title I schools is the leader's mindset about social justice work. Douglas, Wilson, and Nganga (2013) state that social justice actions lead to positive outcomes for low-income students of color. Social justice actions include "developing political clarity, engaging in critical self-reflection, gaining cultural competencies, demonstrating critical care, and partnering with African American families" (p. 128). The authors state that these practices "will not only narrow the achievement gaps that disproportionately limit African American children, but they will also help constrict...educational equity gaps (128). Theoharis and Haddix (2011) speak directly to the importance of leaders openly discussing issues of race within a social justice frame, stating that "(effective) school leaders did not dismiss or run from these issues; instead, they recognize the powerful ways that race and racism shape and affect access to equity in schooling and can impede efforts toward closing the achievement gap" (p. 1347). The term "achievement gap" has been challenged by scholars such as Ladson-Billings (2006) and Quinn (2020), who find the term to be framed in deficit thinking, scolding Black students to keep pace with White students academically. Ladson-Billings (2006) has reframed the term to "opportunity gap", which is more indicative of the varying resources given to students based on their race and income.

Scholars have found that mindsets around social justice and racial awareness tend to be more advanced in African American school leaders than in White school leaders (Brooks and Jean-Marie, 2007; Lomotey, 1989). Lomotey (1989) found evidence for the idea that Black principals approach their roles differently than White principals. In looking at the relationship between African American principals and African American students, he explains how students

may perceive the leader. “The way a person relates to others and to circumstances that he or she encounters is shaped by the culture of that individual; African American people respond differently to situations than do people from other cultures in America” (p. 3). He concludes that racial congruence can be a net benefit to students of color. Brooks and Jean-Marie (2007) also discuss differences along leader racial lines, discovering that Black principals tended to see themselves as community leaders and advocates, attempting to shield their students from the harmful effects of racism and White supremacy culture.

White leaders, on the other hand, tended to think of schooling as meritocratic and that achievement gaps were to be attributed to lack of motivation, investment, and parent involvement. According to Brooks and Jean-Marie (2007), White leaders commonly explained that many students had, “too many things working against them that would ultimately undo their potential to succeed” (p. 763).

### **Statement of the Problem**

What might be a root cause for discrepancies in leadership between principals of color and White principals? Several scholars have discussed the pivotal role of reflections on early racial identity experiences in the beliefs and practices of leaders of color (Douglas, Wilson, and Nganga, 2014; Hernandez, Murakami, and Cerecer, 2014; Lomotey, 1989; Wilson, 2016). Scholars such as Gooden and O’Doherty (2015). Lomotey (1989) finds that African American principals’ commitment to educating Black children emanates from their recollection of exclusion and low expectations in their early years of schooling. Gooden (2005) highlights that this dedication is magnified when the leader is raised in the same community as their students and can empathize deeply with their experience. This is echoed by Wilson (2016), who finds that

a principal's notion of critical care is directly tied to her experience growing up in an African American community impacted by poverty and underserved by local schools. Douglas, Wilson, and Nganga (2014) take a strengths-based perspective and find that Black leaders often draw upon aspects of faith and family and see their profession as a calling. This has a deep impact on their level of commitment to African American children.

These findings are not limited to Black leaders. Hernandez, Murakami, and Cerecer (2014) find that Latina principals' practices are also connected to reflections on early racial experiences. These leaders' high expectations for Latinx students are connected to their experiences being doubted as young learners. Their leadership is a form of resistance against deficit mindsets they were subjected to in the larger inequitable system of schooling. These experiences helped these leaders to think and act differently on behalf of low-income students of color.

That there is a gap in childhood experience, schooling, and thus expressed beliefs between leaders of color and White leaders is not surprising, given the dominant role that racism has played in the United States education system. Beyond the total suppression of education during slavery, there has been the eugenics movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, meant to categorize students using IQ testing and creating the impetus behind "separate but equal" (Selden, 1999). There were additional laws and practices to support forced segregation, such as Native American boarding schools and Japanese internment camps. The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision did not signal a change in White supremacy in education, as Black-led schools across the south were hollowed out to privilege White principal and teaching jobs during desegregation (Horsford, 2009).

Here, White supremacy refers to the system of advantages given to White Americans in terms of job access as well as a view of education through a White lens. This includes the overvaluation of test scores, a focus on control of student behavior, and minimizing the importance of students' home culture in the classroom.

Later, during the era of accountability under NCLB and ESSA, schools were penalized (rather than supported) for poor performance. In sum, "both public policy and private institutional and communal [local district] actions have created inequalities based on race." (Freund, 2003, para. 1). Therefore, the early childhood experiences of Latinx principals encountering deficit mindsets, or of Black leaders who recall systemic racism in schooling, are not in any way an anomaly, but to be expected given the role of White supremacy in American education. Likewise, the lack of these deficit-based experiences for White educators is also to be expected. However, there is not yet an extensive body of work on the connection between reflections on early racial identity experiences and the beliefs and practices of White principals.

Research suggests discrepancies between leaders of color and White leaders in their motivations and reflections on racism and how it shapes their philosophies, practice, and persistence in leading schools in historically underserved urban communities. Scholars such as Feagin (2017) and Helms (1995) provide evidence that some White leaders may not even be able to identify early racial experiences even if they have witnessed them. These blind spots may be due to extreme racial homogeneity within Caucasian communities and privileged status vis a vis the education system. A study by Toure and Thompson-Dorsey (2018) finds that White leaders operating inside of a White racial frame (WRF) tend to take on these colorblind approaches, and in doing so, re-create racist systems and structures. Due to the nature of the study, the research

does not incorporate the leader's upbringing, reflections on early racial experiences, or motivations for serving in this context.

There is some literature that unearths how White principals move against colorblind tendencies and toward equity centered leadership. Theoharis and Haddix (2011) discuss the importance of White leaders engaging in racial identity development in order to lead equitable and excellent schools. They found that these leaders were able to discuss matters of race openly, challenge deficit mindset, and infuse race into data discussions. This led to improved academic outcomes and school climate. Unfortunately, due to the wide scope of the study, individual stories and narratives around early racial experiences are not included. Gooden and O'Doherty (2015) do examine White leaders' early identity formation via racial autobiographies in pre-service development programs. They find that aspiring principals in these training courses experience a challenge to their mindsets and emerge with professed commitment to do anti-racist work. The authors suggest additional research to determine whether these commitments are lived out:

While most students credited the experience of writing a racial autobiography as personally transformational, further study is needed to determine what impact, if any, this experience has on the leadership beliefs, decisions, and actions of graduates once they serve in formal school leadership roles (Gooden and O'Doherty, 2015, p. 250)

This excerpt forms the impetus for this study, namely, in what ways do reflections on early life experiences and motivations of White principals who chose to lead in historically underserved urban communities inform their leadership practice? The results from this study hopefully represent the additional work that Gooden and O'Doherty suggest. For if we expect

impact at the school site, in a way that improves outcomes for students, we must better understand how various mindsets translate to practice. Thus, a central part of this study will be site observations, where mindsets can be mapped to behaviors and vice versa.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand motivations and reflections on early life experiences of White principals who chose to lead in historically underserved urban communities and its impact on leadership philosophies and practice. The work seeks to unearth connections between racial identity work and the daily practices of White leaders in hyper segregated, urban settings. More generally, it aims to contribute to the extant literature on the intersection between race and school leadership.

In this study, I collected data via a multi-site case study of New York city charter schools that operate within a charter management organization (CMO). I selected this context because of the extreme segregation present in these schools as 90% of New York City charters serve greater than 90% students of color (Kucsera and Orfield 2019, 1). Additionally, these sites were ideal given the recent racial reckoning that has been occurring in larger CMOs in the city (Golann and Torres, 2020, Golann, 2015). For example, several of the major CMOs are currently centering diversity, equity, and inclusion in their principal development process as a response to criticism of their disciplinary and instructional practices with Black students (Achievement First, 2022; KIPP NYC, 2022; Success Academies, 2022; Uncommon Schools, 2022). Critiques of these CMOs included high suspension rates for Black boys and students with disabilities, the use of harsh consequences for minor misbehaviors, rote teaching techniques, and lack of responsiveness

to concerns of the local community. Given this climate and context, it was likely that White leaders there were frequently confronting issues of race, which was a focus of this study.

In examining the work of four White principals, I began with a site observation to analyze ways in which these leaders' practices represented either discriminatory and colorblind leadership or elements of culturally responsive leadership. Starting with the observation rather than the interview prevented any potential participation effects as the questions I asked hinted at the focus of the study and therefore could have influenced principal behaviors (Schreiber and Asner-Self, 2011).

I followed the visit with a debrief to hear more about how the leader interpreted their actions from the data collected. I then asked each participant to write a racial autobiography in a supportive context (see chapter 3 for details on this approach). I conducted three semi-structured interviews with each leader to gain additional context into their early childhood experiences, racial identity development, motivations, and how they believe these may have informed their educational beliefs and practices. The fourth and final interview served as a member check (Stake, 1995) on the observations from the site visit.

## **Research Questions**

To investigate connections between White identity and urban school leadership, I posed the following questions to guide my research:

1. Why do some White principals choose to lead schools that serve historically underserved communities? What, if any, reflections on early racial experiences are common among these leaders?

2. How do the motivations and reflections on early racial experiences of White principals who chose to lead in historically underserved communities inform their leadership philosophy and play out in their practices?

## **Theoretical Framework**

This dissertation directly addresses the question of White identity and its impact on leadership beliefs and practices. The study employed Helms' updated White racial identity development model (1995), which provides a continuum of how White individuals interact with concepts of race and begin to realize their own identity and privilege. This framework was ideal for examining each participant's racial autobiography and reflections on prior experiences with race, as the model depicts stages based on level of racial contact. It has been used to effectively analyze racial autobiographies in prior research (Gooden and O'Doherty, 2015). Bonilla-Silva's (2018) work is also used to understand how progressive White individuals learn to hide their racism, which was the case with some of my participants.

As the study connected these early experiences to school leadership practices, two framing theories around Whiteness in leadership were employed to analyze principal actions. Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) theories around the White racial frame in leadership provides a rubric of principal behaviors informed by colorblindness, White fragility, and racial stereotyping. This supported the coding of leader actions during the observational aspect of the study. On the other end of the spectrum, Khalifa's (2018) definition of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) gave clear examples of how leaders operate in ways that support the aspirations of minoritized children. The CRSL framework centers around critical reflection, fostering culturally responsive curricula and staff, and engaging deeply with the community. It



was used to classify principal behaviors during the observation that were responsive and supportive to minoritized students. The framework was also employed to examine bureaucratic leader actions to see how those did or did not further equitable outcomes for students such as inclusive classroom environments, spaces for student voice, and a culture of achievement for all.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This research centers around the experience and impact of White charter school principals serving in low-income communities of color in New York City. I decided to limit the study to this group because few studies explain how White leaders' recollections of early racialized experiences translate to leadership beliefs and practices within this context. Secondly, large charter management organizations (CMOs) in New York have recently begun reexamining their disciplinary and instructional practices in response to the national reckoning on race (Golann and Torres, 2020). Given the new focus on equity and inclusion, which can be seen in the leadership development sections of several websites (Achievement First, Uncommon, Success) and the demographics of these CMO schools (75% or more students receiving free and reduced lunch identifying as Black/Latino), it was likely that White leaders in this sector would be grappling with issues related to their racial identity.

The design of this research, a multi-site case study, resulted in a large volume of data, such as numerous interview records, hours of observational notes, and hundreds of documents. Therefore, time constraints limited the number of participants I was able to select for analysis. Due to the relatively focused sample size (four White leaders serving in low-income neighborhoods in New York City), it may be challenging to extrapolate the findings in this study

across a wider context, but the results can still be highly informative in settings that reflect the racial dynamics of New York.

There also are limitations in the data that speak to leadership beliefs and practices. The interview process relied on the accurate recollection and reflection of leaders, who may have been selective in their responses. Individual site visits may not have been representative of the type of leadership usually exhibited by the principal. For example, a leader may have had more direct interactions with students than was typical because of an absent staff member. A principal may have shown more positivity or joy than was typical because of a celebration or themed event that day.

My own standpoint as a White, Jewish, second-generation immigrant, and educational leader presented potential bias. Schreiber and Asner-Self (2011) describe researcher bias as “the selecting of data to support inferences or preconceptions and the subsequent selective data choices” (p. 275). Therefore, my data collection, especially during interviews, necessitated an interrogation of my position to ensure I was not hearing what I wanted to hear, but rather the authentic narrative of the leader.

There may be some questions as to why this study focuses on the school leadership of White principals. Although far from ideal, the vast majority of those occupying the seat of principal, including schools that primarily serve students of color, are currently White. During my twenty-three years of experience in education, I have observed more instances of problematic practices when school leaders are not racially congruent to their students. Therefore, this study aims to delve deep into the mindsets, thinking, and practice for each leader. In this way, we can better understand what is happening with such educators so that schools can become *more* discerning in leadership selection.

If the study can accurately depict examples of leader actions that are colorblind and savior-like in nature *and* connect these with leader backgrounds, then schools and districts gain two advantages in the hiring process. They can spot problematic mindsets in the actions they see in potential principal candidates and ask non-traditional questions that force candidates to reflect on their White identity and how it impacts their practice. Conversely, if this work can identify the prerequisites for a White principal to be culturally responsive, this may aid school districts in developing and selecting leaders.

### **Researcher's Perspective**

As a White male who once led a non-profit charter high school, my perspective likely impacted the degree of openness of my participants. Leaders in this study may have felt a sense of understanding based upon my background, which I am hopeful led to honest answers to interview questions. On the other hand, my role as an insider may have made me overly sympathetic to the challenges participants face or created blind spots in how I analyzed their practices. Therefore, I collaborated with a colleague in my cohort to serve as a check on my data analysis and findings.

My racial identity and role as an outsider to the school communities I studied may limit the degree to which some teachers, students, and parents shared openly during interactions. Schreiber and Asner-Self (2011) describe this as “reactivity” which is “the effect the researcher has on the situation, the setting, or the people involved” (p. 275). The authors depict this as “the white lab coat syndrome” where blood pressure rises during visits to the doctor (p. 275).

Finally, the amount of work I have done on my White racial awareness may have either heightened or limited my ability to recognize the stages in which various leaders were situated.

While I have done a significant amount of work on my White identity as both a person and a principal, I have much more to do and am prone to blind spots. For example, I did not initially consider how the COVID pandemic impacted our African American teachers and students in a manner that was significantly different from their White peers. I am still learning how the notion of intersectionality, especially for Black women I have coached, plays out in how they show up as leaders. Therefore, it was crucial for me to review the data from this study with a colleague to strengthen my analysis.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research is significant because it can lend support to schools and communities seeking leaders who are committed to leading in a culturally responsive manner. The results of this study can inform more rigorous and meaningful hiring practices as well inform the structure of interviews and which voices are present. As this work maps leaders' self-reported experiences around race to their practice, it may support hiring teams in spotting either problematic or healthy mindsets. Rather than relying on a hiring process that tests traditional skills in the administrative realm, schools can create questions and tasks that assess a candidate's current stage within their White identity and their ability to effectively work across lines of difference. The results of the observational part of the study could also help schools in designing leadership scenarios where White candidate responses show rather than tell how their practices are impacted by their Whiteness.

This work can also add to the extant literature on White leadership by adding an important connection between identity and leadership. Given that 78% of principals in the country are White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), it is crucial that these leaders

better understand how their mindsets around race connect to their mindsets and practice. Otherwise, it is likely that we will see a continuation of the race neutral and colorblind approach that has held back so many promising young students of color. Finally, this study may help draw closer connections between Helm's White racial identity model (1995) and Khalifa's (2018) theories on culturally responsive school leadership. This can support future research that seeks to connect racial mindsets to practice.

### **Organization of the Study**

The study examines the role of racial literacy in the principal seat, specifically as White administrators attempt to enact leadership in low-income urban school settings that serve a majority of students of color. Using a significant body of literature as well as results from a qualitative study, it describes the journey of White individuals as they reflect on early racial experiences and what brought them to the principal seat. The study uses Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) theories around the White racial frame in leadership and Khalifa's (2018) CRSL framework to code behaviors observed on site. The post-visit debriefs allowed insights into how the leaders saw their work and the degree to which they center racial equity in their beliefs and practice. The paper then examines the impact of recollections on racial experiences and motivations on White leader beliefs and practices via a racial autobiography and subsequent interview. It classifies leaders' racial autobiography and interview data according to Helm's (1995) White racial identity model. The study concludes by theorizing how its findings can be used to better understand the intersection between principals' racial identity and practice.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review that includes: (1) definitions of race and related concepts (2) research on race and school leadership, (3) foundational theories on White racial

identity development, (4) examinations of White racial identity and school leadership and (5) studies on White principals leading with a commitment to equity.

Chapter 3 presents a summary of the study's design, including the conceptual and methodological approach, description of the sample, data collection methods, and how data is analyzed via framing theories. It also describes the context for each case study, including demographics of the neighborhood in which each school is situated, demographics of leader, and school population.

Chapter 4 reports the study's findings. It analyzes outcomes that point to the connection (or lack of connection) between leaders' early motivations and racial experiences and practice. It then describes themes across the backgrounds of White leaders who exhibit CRSL behaviors and those who remain in the White racial frame.

The dissertation concludes with chapter 5, where the findings of the study are connected to past research, such as studies on racial identity and leadership. It presents implications for future work in the area, including how the findings can be used to better understand the development of White school leaders. Ideally, it will position districts and CMOs to foster heightened leader awareness and skill in serving young people of color.

## **Definitions**

*Black* – a descriptor of peoples in this country that are of African descent. This definition encompasses those who are born into American families who have resided in the country for generations as well as those who are new immigrants to this country. (As much of the research cited here uses the terms “African American” and “Black” interchangeably, I do so here as well).

*Culturally responsive school leadership* – “is characterized by a core set of unique leadership behaviors, namely: (a) being critically self-reflective; (b) developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula; (c) promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school contexts; and (d) engaging students’ indigenous (or local neighborhood) community context” (first named in Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis, 2016, pp. 1274-1275; expanded and clarified in Khalifa, 2018, p. 13)

*Race* – a concept of phenotype “invented to assign some groups to perpetual low status, while others were permitted access to privilege, power, and wealth; race has thus evolved as a worldview, a body of prejudgments that distorts our ideas about human differences and group behavior” (American Anthropological Association, 2022).

*Social justice leadership* – leading with political clarity, critical self-reflection, cultural competency, and partnering with families of color (Wilson, Douglas, and Nganga, 2013).

*Transformative leadership* – a commitment to educational equity exuding critical ideologies and compassionate dispositions, yet also maintaining their emphasis on high academic standards and expectations, culturally proficient instruction, and overall school quality (Douglas, Wilson, and Nganga, 2013).

*White* - a descriptor for peoples who are born to Caucasian parents

*White fragility* – the series of emotions and actions taken by White people when their own White worldview is confronted; often induces anger, defensiveness, and guilt (D’Angelo, 2018).

*White racial literacy* – reflecting on, understanding, and questioning one’s own cultural or White ways of knowing (Theoharis and Haddix, 2011).

*White racial frame* - “dominant frame is an overarching White worldview that encompasses a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images,

interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate” (Feagin, 2013, p. 3).

*Whiteness* - the notion of the privilege and right to property and power based on White race



## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

In this section, I discuss major themes in the research on race and educational leadership, White racial identity development, Whiteness in leadership, and White principals attempting to lead for racial equity. The chapter begins with key terms and a brief discussion of race and leadership. It continues with a description of foundational theories on White racial identity development. This serves two purposes. First, it gives a window into early formative racial experiences that contribute to either advancement or stagnation of White racial identity, which is pertinent to the purpose of the study. Second, these theories help frame the analysis of Whiteness in leadership and provide precise vocabulary for the discussion of how White identity manifests in the principal's seat.

The conversation of Whiteness in leadership begins broadly, discussing a variety of school contexts and leader stages of racial identity development. The discussion then focuses explicitly on White leaders who choose to work in schools that serve historically underserved urban populations. I assess the degree to which these studies examine personal histories and connect these to mindsets and actions in the role. The section concludes by looking at the key framing theories that will be used in the methodology of the study – namely Helm's (1995) White Racial Identity Model, Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) White racial frame in the practice of school leadership and Khalifa's (2018) culturally responsive leadership.

I employed several criteria in the selection of literature. Only peer review articles were included in this study. All foundational textbooks were referenced by authors in these journals. It was also important to ensure a diversity of voices in the review. Leveraging scholars of color enriched perspectives in the study and prevented the traditionally biased slant in research of leadership.

## **Definitions of Race and Related Concepts**

The scientific and neo-liberal schools of thought have frequently defined race according to phenotype as a means to explain differences in populations. Smedley and Smedley (2012) find that this definition is strategically employed by those in power, stating that race is a “cultural invention...fabricated out of physical differences [that] were a major tool by which the dominant whites constructed and maintained social barriers and economic inequalities” (p. 21). This paper moves away from the scientific definition of and towards one that depicts the sociological phenomenon whereby oppressed people are raced in a way that resembles a caste system – limiting opportunities, basic health and safety, and educational opportunity. The American Anthropological Association (1998) released a statement on race, in which it states that the concept of race “was invented to assign some groups to perpetual low status, while others were permitted access to privilege, power, and wealth” (p. 1). Using this definition in the school leadership context allows us to more clearly understand whether leaders are exhibiting true racial literacy. For surely, all leaders, no matter their background or experience can “see” the color of a person’s skin. However, to what degree can they “see” color as it intersects with power, dominance, opportunity, privilege, and culture?

For the purposes of this paper, “White” is used as a descriptor for peoples who are born to Caucasian parents and have benefitted from the systemic racism of the United States (Smedley and Smedley, 2012). This includes people who have emigrated to the United States, and who also benefit from the privileges of Whiteness. The word “Black” is meant to be inclusive of all peoples in this country that are of African descent. This means both those who are born into American families who have resided in the country for generations as well as those who are new immigrants to this country, such as those from African countries as well as from the West Indies.

As much of the research cited here uses the terms “African American” and “Black” interchangeably, I do so here as well.

Finally, Whiteness refers not just to skin color but to the notion of privilege and right to property and power. As Harris (1993) states, “whiteness has been characterized, not by an inherent unifying characteristic, but by the exclusion of others deemed to be ‘not white.’ The possessors of whiteness [are] granted the legal right to exclude others from the privileges inherent in whiteness” (pp. 1731–1737). It is especially relevant to discuss race as a sociological phenomenon in this study, given how it has been used by those in power to create stark differences in educational opportunity. Despite legal efforts to improve educational access for student of color (*Abbott v. Burke*, 2011; *Brown v Board of Education*, 1954; *Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. State of New York*, 2006; *Rose v. Council for Better Education*, 1989;), federal and local practices around funding and accountability measures have limited educational opportunities for low income African American and Hispanic families. Additionally, the classification of students based on race through use of terms such as “at risk” and “gap” is present in both national and local discourse (Wilson, Douglas, and Nganga, 2013). It will be instructive to see if White leaders in this study who did not directly experience this type of racism can name and work to dismantle such deeply ingrained inequities at the school site level. The following section discusses notions of race (using these definitions) in the field of educational leadership.

### **Race and School Leadership**

Horsford (2011) defines racial literacy in educational leadership as “the ability to understand what race is, why it is, and how it is used to reproduce inequality and oppression” (p.

95). Using this definition, research shows that to date, racial illiteracy and color blindness have dominated the practice of school leadership. From a policy level, it is striking that concepts of race are absent from the national standards for educational leaders. Davis, et al (2015) are concerned about this omission and its impact on perpetuating race neutral approaches. They find that colorblind leadership perpetuates historic opportunity and achievement gaps by race by obscuring inequitable practices present inside of the school. Lopez (2003) has similar concerns that leaving race out of the educational leadership discussion will prevent principals from confronting problems of equity. This blindness and silence have real effects on schools and the students they serve. Shields (2004) warns that racial silence will enable dominant actors and narratives to continue to define school policy. For example, educators in positions of power, such as department chairs, can continue to put up barriers for students of color to access rigorous courses. There is also a lost opportunity to benefit from the assets of cultural diversity and learning (Evans, 2007). Students may miss out on crucial experiences, such as collaboration with those from different backgrounds and a better cultural understanding of each other.

Beyond the policy level, principal preparation programs play a significant role maintaining colorblind approaches in educational leadership. Rusch and Horsford (2009) analyze the discomfort of the majority White faculty within graduate spaces in discussing matters of race. The authors posit that the consequences of this challenge are far more dire externally, stating that there is “mounting evidence that aspiring school heads who feel unprepared to talk about racial and cultural perspectives and differences, have limited ability to effectively lead in diverse social contexts and may even view diversity as a negative” (pg. 303).

In an earlier work, Shields et al (2002), find that even well-intentioned leaders struggle to name and discuss race in their school contexts. In studying leaders of color they find that,

“sometimes people who are the most marginalized have the most reluctance to raise the topic of prejudice, perhaps because they fear repercussions” and that for White leaders, “those who are in more privileged positions may also avoid tensions, either by being unaware of them or by believing there is little to be gained by bringing conflict to the attention of the school administrators” (p. 130). When race is brought up, the discussion tends to focus on the groups most impacted by racism, which May (1999) warns leads to “cultural reification and essentialism” (p. 16). Problems are localized to the population of color, and this obviates the need of White educators to own the work of racial healing.

The impacts of colorblind leadership approaches are described in vivid detail in a case study by Mabokela and Madsen (2005). In examining seven suburban school leaders, the authors find that the subset of four White leaders are not attuned to racial issues within their school. Their myopia prevents them from seeing the need for a more diverse teaching staff, reducing the suspension rates for African American students, addressing race-based conflicts between staff members, promoting culturally relevant teacher practices across all classrooms, holding high expectations for students of color, and challenging White parents’ fears of integration. Notably, the three African American leaders in the study exhibit color consciousness and leverage this awareness to challenge the status quo and improve opportunities and outcomes for historically underserved students.

These findings naturally beg the question of whether White principals can lead in a similar manner. While Horsford (2014) presents a compelling model for leaders to progress from racial literacy to racial reconciliation, it is worthwhile to first examine the specific work that White leaders need to engage in to lead for racial equity. The following section focuses on the

beginning of the story for White leaders and discusses research on the early formation of their racial identity.

### **White Racial Identity Development**

The study of White racial identity development intensified in the psychological field in the 1970s. To that point, most theorists had focused on classifying White identity according to the individual's level of direct racism towards oppressed peoples. Scholars such as Katz and Ivey (1977), Dennis (1981), and Karp (1981) turned the focus inward and examined the emotional implications of racism on the producers of racism – namely guilt, fear, and rage. Hardiman (1979) and Helms (1984) independently developed progressive identity models, which showed ways in which an individual might move through various stages of White identity. While both models culminated in a non-racist White identity, the Helms model had the backing of empirical evidence, while the Hardiman model did not.

Helms clarified and extended her classification of White identities within her model in 1990. Here, she introduces the idea of Whites moving towards a positive identity by accepting Whiteness, deconstructing White culture, and identifying oneself as a racial being that rejects the dominance of one people over another. She expands the model to six stages – contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, immersion/emersion and autonomy.

### Stages and Phases of White Racial Identity Development

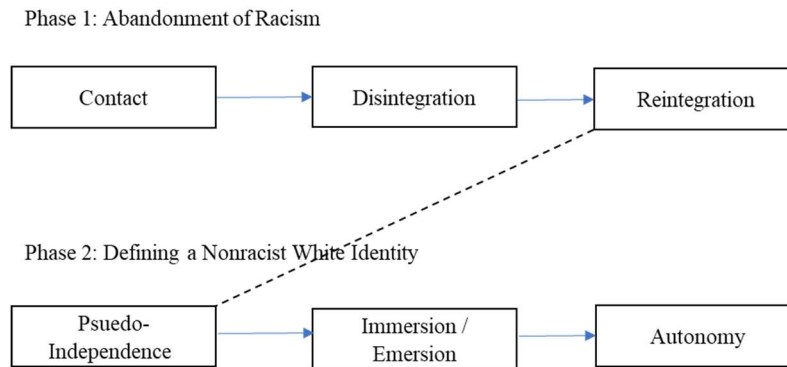


Figure 1: Helm's White Racial Identity Model. From Helms (1990, p. 56).

Early stages of development are characterized by colorblindness, race neutrality, and even race hostility. White children tend to inhabit these stages as most White parents in this country select segregated neighborhoods and do not grapple with racial identity. Helms (1990) does find that increased interactions in more diverse settings can lead White adolescents towards latter stages of their White racial identity. Middle stages involve a re-examination of issues of race and questioning of societal power dynamics. Individuals in these stages may still unknowingly act in racist ways, embodying White saviorism (attempting to rescue people of color) and White silence (ignoring issues of race), while reassessing their privilege. Later stages consist of an abandonment of racist beliefs and practices, and active work to undo racist mindsets and systems.

According to Helms (1990), moving from one stage to another depends on some degree of interaction across lines of difference. Those who remain in segregated settings are unlikely to move towards autonomy. Helms's (1995) updated White racial identity self-assessment can be used for individuals to measure current racial development and if desired, consider areas for growth. The model assumes that White people can free themselves from racism if they continue

to develop self-awareness and work to address their blind spots. This belief is challenged by the later work of Feagin (2010) and D'Angelo (2018), who explain that racism is both biologically and behaviorally ingrained in our consciousness. There is no ridding oneself of racism, but rather there is work to be done to acknowledge and counter racist beliefs.

Helms' framework emerged from multi-year research where she surveyed over four hundred White college students in the United States. Her racial identity inventory tool showed a reliability ranging from .55 (contact stage) to .82 (reintegration stage), which exceeded the median score for personality tests that assess more general psychological attributes. This means that the racial identity stages have sufficient reliability to warrant future use in research. To assess internal validity, Helms used both correlation and factor analysis. While correlations between stages and expressed attitude are weak, factor analysis shows that each stage maps significantly onto at least one outcome. Given the nature of the sample in this study, external validity is solid. All school leaders in this study identified as White and attended college as a requirement of their role.

Feagin (2010) employs a sociological lens to interrogate racial identity, examining how early experiences in a racist and segregated society encourage White people to perpetuate the status quo via a White racial frame. Feagin echoes Helms' notion that racial segregation prevents White racial development. In fact, Feagin theorizes that racial isolation is a key contributor to the White racial frame, which he describes as, "overarching white worldview that encompasses a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate" (p. 3). Feagin's research indicates that the White racial frame is taught both



directly and indirectly to children, from sanitized accounts of American history to biased media narratives of violent Black men, to structures inherent with Whiteness in early schooling.

Children learn to imitate the White racial frame by watching their parents, including how they interact with people of color, make statements concerning people of color, and navigate the largely White spaces in which they operate. The volume of repetition ingrains this frame so deeply into the minds of White children that neurological studies have been able to measure its impact in areas of the brain.

Feagin finds that the White racial frame is most closely associated with anti-Blackness, as studies of his White subjects indicate a preoccupation with racism towards African Americans. This ranges from direct stereotyping of Black people as violent or ignorant to more subtle messaging that indicate discomfort with the race. Feagin's social science methodology consists of broad interpretations of people and group interactions, at times backed by prior research and literature. While the approach is descriptive and easy to digest, it lacks the empirical backing of the Helms model.

Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) describe how racially progressive Whites operating inside of the White racial frame learn to hide their racism using linguistic devices to portray themselves as neutral or colorblind. He defines racial progressives as people who support affirmative action and intermarriage and name discrimination as a problem in the United States. Bonilla-Silva (2018) follows up this study with extensive interviews with college educated White women and finds that despite racially progressive attitudes, nearly all display some degree of colorblindness. In a study conducted by Harvard University, six-year-olds and young adults both scored similarly on an implicit bias test, but older children self-reported beliefs that sounded far less prejudiced (Baron and Banaji, 2013).

Feagin (2010) observes that the White racial frame can be seen in nonverbals of progressive Whites, such as avoiding physical and eye contact with people of color, changing their tone of voice, and making awkward physical movements. While Feagin does not present a model by which White people progress in their identity, his thick description of the frame allows us to see and name important biased behaviors that show up in a workplace setting, such as a school. There is potentially unintended impact to Feagin's work. White readers could interpret the White racial frame as an unavoidable force that prevents them from reaching higher levels of racial literacy. It gives the potential for excuse making rather than looking inward and making significant personal change.

D'Angelo (2018) expands on the work of Helms and Feagin by identifying a root cause of White people's inability to progress to healthier identities and break from the White racial frame. D'Angelo describes White fragility as a set of reactionary behaviors used when control and dominance is named or questioned. These behaviors serve to maintain the status quo in which White people continue to benefit from racist systems and structures. D'Angelo names and defines each tendency within White fragility in detail so that these behaviors may be better understood and corrected by Whites.

For the purposes of this research, I provide high level definitions for behaviors that fall under the umbrella of White fragility. Exceptionalism, based on the work of Frankenberg (1997), is the tendency for White people to cite individual success stories as evidence that structural racism no longer exists. Meritocracy is steeped in the work of Coates (2011) and is centered on the belief that success comes to those who simply work hard and are free from the impact of race on one's life prospects. Individualism is derived from Perry (1992) and occurs when White people claim to treat each person individually regardless of race, and do not see larger issues of

systemic racism. Racial innocence borrows from work of Thompson (2008) and Applebaum (2010) and occurs when White people avoid responsibility for the plagues of racism and claim that their personal or family history has not been intertwined with the history of oppression. Saviorism leans on the work of Akintunde (1999) and Trepagnier (2010) and is defined as the desire to rescue people of color from their inherently deficient status and assumes a deficit mindset about the strength, intelligence, and character of people of color. These behaviors are centered in the desire to stay on the “good” side of the good/bad racist binary and ignore larger societal factors. In fact, the desire to avoid the racist label is so strong that it discourages most White people from acknowledging and counteracting racism.

Like Feagin and Helms, D’Angelo finds that White fragility is imprinted early in a child’s life and enhanced via segregation in neighborhoods and schools. D’Angelo takes a wide sociological view on concepts of White identity, citing prior research and her own experiences as a racial awareness trainer. This allows her to provide richer detail than Feagin, providing anecdotes and quotes of racial interactions.

Earlier work by Thandeka (1999) provides a deeper and more nuanced view of why people tend to remain entrenched in the White racial frame. Grounding her work in psychological theories, Thandeka explains the concept of White shame, whereby an individual is conditioned early in life (usually by family or society) to take on racist behaviors even when it is at odds with their moral core. These emotionally loaded events are usually repressed due to the level of shame they bring the individual, especially those who proclaim to be non-racist. Interestingly, when these memories are recalled, the level of emotional charge is so high, that most White people choose to avoid discussing and hence, remain in their White cultural space.

In conclusion, the works of Helms (1995), Feagin (2010), D'Angelo (2018) and Thandeka (1999) show that the imprinting of an invisible White identity begins at birth and is continuously reinforced throughout childhood and adulthood. Factors such as racial isolation, White fragility, and White shame act to preserve this colorblind ideology.

### **White Racial Identity and School Leadership**

How do concepts of White racial identity present in school leadership? D'Angelo's concepts of individualism and Helms's contact stage can be found in Theoharis' article in "Whiteucation" (2019). Theoharis reviews two decades of his own empirical research to show how White leaders in all positions and across all types of schools tend to exhibit race disconsciousness. He reviews hundreds of prior interview scripts, observation notes, and documents on White school leadership from his time embedded in over thirty racially diverse, urban schools across the country. Theoharis codes the data according to instances when the leader names race, demonstrates race neutrality, and challenges racist systems and behaviors. His review finds that most leaders do not see their Whiteness nor name it as a factor in their work. Administrators describe themselves as neutral and focused on prioritizing good relationships with each person in the building. One principal explains, "I am committed to my school and my students. I'm all about the students. I have to be objective" while another leader states that "the beauty of being an administrator is that when conflict arises between families and school, I can be a neutral party" (p. 56).

Leaders in this study can be best understood via Helm's contact stage where they claim not to see race to "remain a member in good standing of the White group" (p. 57). Their attitudes

can also be characterized by D'Angelo's concept of individualism, as they profess to treat each person fairly, while ignoring the significant societal factors of racism.

In "Black School White School", Brooks (2012) describes more pernicious and palpable manifestations of White disconsciousness than the high-level study written by Theoharis. Brooks spends a full year embedded inside a large, diverse high school, where he studies differences in leadership by race. In observing over twenty school leaders from department chairs to assistant principals, he finds that White leaders on campus hold strong beliefs around meritocracy and ascribe challenges that Black students experience to problems at home. Interestingly, none of the leaders venture to visit African American homes nor express an interest to learn more about the culture of their students. Embodying deficit mindsets closely aligned with the White racial frame, assistant principals discriminate against Black students based on physical appearance, calling Black students "gangsta" for their choice of clothing and calling out Black students exclusively for posture. Leaders in this case study can best be characterized by Helm's reintegration stage, where individuals re-affirm their White superiority, while ascribing deficits to Blackness.

Brooks expresses pessimism for White school leaders, stating that, "unfortunately, few educators make [the] journey from ignorance to awareness" (p. 121). While Brooks' study powerfully and intimately illustrates the implications of White leaders remaining in low levels of racial awareness, the study of a single high school campus is not robust enough to be generalizable to other contexts.

The idea that White leaders who remain racially illiterate reinforce and reproduce inequitable systems within schools can be found across the literature. Evans (2007) examines how school leaders make sense of racial and demographic change. The three leaders in the study

exhibit race neutrality and colorblindness in ways that prevent improvements to Black student reading programs, perpetuate stereotyping of students of color, and allow teachers to opt out of culturally relevant training and practices. The principals essentially vacate their roles as responsible and equitable leaders and do not shy away from naming their racial ignorance and discomfort. One administrator states,

I think there may be a higher incidence of fatherless homes in the Black community than White community. Again, I can't support that. I think that Black students, especially males, need male role models. They need that mentoring more than Caucasian students do. I haven't personally experienced that relationship. I don't know that I could be a good mentor. I don't know if I can relate. Certainly, I have good relations with students but don't know if it is the same kind of relationship (p. 176).

Toure and Thompson-Dorsey (2018) explicitly look at how the White racial frame operates in leadership. In their case study of three White leaders in southwestern Pennsylvania, the researchers find that the principal's behaviors embody *all five aspects* of the White racial frame. The leaders' inability to challenge racial stereotypes perpetuates low expectations from staff towards students of color. The principals' colorblind racial narrative prevents them from diagnosing and then differentiating for the needs of Black students. Their acquiescence to discriminatory teacher actions prevents them from challenging harmful treatment of Black students.

While not as overtly hostile as leaders in the Brooks' (2012) study, these leaders' race neutrality results in the same implications for students: low expectations, lack of culturally relevant approaches, and teacher hostility towards minoritized students. This parallel mindset – belief in meritocracy and race neutrality while holding deficit mindsets for students of color – is

the subject of research by Milner (2010). He finds that educators who profess to be colorblind may be unconsciously exhibiting low expectations for historically marginalized students.

Hines (2016) finds evidence of White fragility among leaders even after being introduced to courses on cultural proficiency in leadership. While participants recognize the presence of White privilege, they downplay the significance of such hegemony. Some principals shy away from generalizing structural racism to societal groups (individualism), while others cite examples of students of color who are successful as evidence that racism is not pervasive (exceptionalism). Unlike Brooks, Hines shows hope for leaders to overcome their fragility through additional training, coaching and reflection.

Beyond limited literacy, racial incongruence itself may be a factor in White principals' inability to lead for equity when serving students of color. Gates et al (2016) find that principal turnover is lower when the race of the leader matches that of the majority student population. High principal turnover has been linked to low achievement in schools. Brooks and Jean-Marie (2007) find that White leaders are less likely to hire and retain teachers of color, who are important for creating a culturally responsive school environment. Davis et al (2016) find that "racial congruence appears to be related to a host of matters involving school leaders, such as principal turnover, advocacy, and school climate" (p. 562).

The role of trust has been examined within racial congruence. Several studies have shown a positive and significant relationship between trust in the school leader and academic achievement (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Fuller et al (2008) focus explicitly on how trust in the school leader is impacted by racial congruence. They find that teachers who share the same race as the principal find the leader more helpful and accessible. The level of trust between

parents and the school leader is even more impacted by race and the authors cite a study by Fields – Smith (2005), who demonstrate that African American family trust in schools dropped dramatically with integration and the influx of White principals.

Fuller et al (2008) find direct and compelling evidence on how student trust in the principal is impacted by race. They observe discrepancies in trust based on the demographic of a diverse student body. Campus after campus, the students who possess the highest level of respect and trust for the school leader are racially similar to the principal. Mabokela and Madsen (2005) found a similar phenomenon in their study of suburban schools, along with trust deficits based on gender. Rusch and Horsford (2009) attribute the absence of trust across racial lines to the country's history of White abandonment as people of color fought for basic freedoms. The authors recommend that White leaders publicly recognize their privilege and status, engage in conversations about race honestly and openly using established protocols, and take a listening stance to better understand the needs of people of color and the larger community. They found that these actions led to closer connections across lines of difference.

While the studies discussed here analyze how Whiteness in leadership manifests when racialized viewpoints remain unchallenged, they do not examine principals' reflections on racial experiences or motivations towards leading in diverse settings. This is crucial to examine as the ability to exhibit race consciousness is highly dependent on reflections and learnings from racialized events during childhood (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2014; Helms, 1990;). Additionally, leaders who do not enter the work with the motivation to actively undo racist systems and structures are bound to reproduce them (Khalifa, 2018). The following section discusses what happens when White principals make a direct and earnest commitment to their racial identity



development and to leading for equity. I explore whether these leaders can interrupt the reproduction of inequitable practices.

### **White Principals Leading with a Commitment to Equity**

Scholars distinguish between espoused commitment to equity and anti-racist behaviors in the role. Swanson and Welton (2019) find that advanced racial development and motivation to increase equity are not sufficient for two White principals to lead for equity in diverse district high schools. The locus of their struggle lies in interactions with racially unaware staff. One principal found himself repeatedly in reactionary situations, trying to advocate for students of color amongst a staff that resisted equity work. When asked why he did not implement more proactive work in this area, he stated it was “we’re just not there yet...I don’t think I have enough political capital” (p. 748). This recalls the Fuller et al study (2008), where leaders are conflicted between maintaining trust with their students and families while not alienating the faculty. Another principal in the study struggled in a similar manner, opting for comfort rather than challenge in his interactions with staff. When asked for the source of his struggle, he stated, “I felt I wasn’t as prepared, or I wasn’t as successful at leading those conversations as I should have been” (p. 748).

Gooden and O’Doherty (2014) examine the possibilities for White leaders when they *are* rigorously prepared for equity work in schools through deep reflection of their racialized selves. The authors study twelve aspiring principals as they engage in a leadership preparation program centered on racial reflection and consciousness. They analyze a single data source, an evolving racial autobiography, to examine the degree of racial reflection for each participant.

Gooden and O'Doherty (2014) find that most White participants do not recall racial events until their teenage years, a symptom of extreme racial isolation. This reinforces the challenges named by Helms (1995) and Feagin (2008) in overcoming deeply ingrained White racial mindsets. Leveraging racial autobiographies, a diverse cohort model, multiple readings, and Helms' (1995) White racial identity model, the participants experience awakenings around their identity. Interviews with subjects demonstrate a movement towards higher levels on Helms' model and expressed commitments to antiracism. One participant pledged meaningful action, stating, "I will be the voice for those who have none. I will be an advocate. I will continue on this journey of actively working against racism" (p. 56). Another student looked inward, explaining, "I have to know myself in order to put my own biases aside to invoke the empathy needed to break through racial barriers that exist in education" (p. 56). However, as noted previously, the authors recommend further examination of how this impacts leadership practice. Hence, the motivation for this study.

Gooden et al (2018) do revisit the connection between reflection and action. They study the implementation of equity practices of pre-service assistant principals as they progress through an anti-racist preparation program. This case study of ten practicing leaders has the advantage of studying both subjects' emerging racial awareness and how it impacts their leadership beliefs and actions. As in his past study, participants moved from colorblind and racial neutral mindsets towards awareness and Helm's (1995) autonomy stage. The subjects self-report how they implement antiracist practices, and in contrast to the Swanson and Welton (2019) piece, *do* confront adult mindsets via frank conversation and presentation of disaggregated student achievement and behavior data. They can skillfully preserve relationships with their teachers as they challenge beliefs by modeling equity mindsets, centering conversations in

student data and being direct yet supportive. One participant showed evidence of this difficult skill, stating, “[I was] showing them the data and what that looks like and having them think twice before [writing a referral]. I think that reduced the number of referrals I was getting in the office after that” (Gooden et al, 2018, p. 17). Another participant demonstrated the importance of taking a long-range view. She explained that when confronting problematic mindsets, “I wasn’t going to destroy a relationship because I knew I needed it for student achievement... increasing student achievement, in many ways, is dependent upon a strong relationship with her” (Gooden et al, 2018, p. 21).

The work in the Gooden et al study (2018) is limited by the lack of observations to triangulate subjects’ statements. Duneier (2011) defines the attitude behavior consistency problem in interview only studies where people’s verbal responses are often unrelated to their actions. It would be helpful to incorporate observation in this study as well as interviews with other stakeholders in the school to see if leader actions were truly becoming more equity oriented. Another issue in the research is that it focuses on the role of assistant principal, which often carries less pressure and responsibility than the role of principal.

Two studies show empirical evidence of White principals leading for equity in schools that serve primarily low-income students of color. Kappler-Hewitt and Reitzug (2017) examine the practices of a White, female turnaround principal who oversees dramatic improvement in student achievement and school culture within one year in a rural southeastern elementary campus. The case study begins by depicting the principal’s commitment to equity. One staff member explains, “I would say you would be really hard pressed to find someone that is as passionate about doing right by kids and making sure that they have equal opportunity for learning” (p. 503). The authors find that the leader skillfully navigates several dynamic tensions

in leading her staff towards equitable outcomes for students. The principal balances her mission driven behavior with individual connection to staff. The authors use interviews with teachers to illustrate this balance, with teachers stating that the leader is always pushing a sense of responsibility to do as much for students each day, while knowing each adult personally and ensuring they have what they need to succeed. The leader navigates a sense of high expectations and trust with staff, with teachers experiencing her as “firm, but fair” and “trust(ing) of you to do your job, but [wanting to always] know what your *follow up* is” (p. 506).

The principal in the Kappler-Hewitt and Reitzug study is also mindful of the need to disrupt complacency while providing a semblance of continuity. According to school staff, the principal immediately addressed low expectations in her first week on the job, challenging teachers who were satisfied with high failure rates for Black students but held off on larger conversations about school systems and structures that involved potentially disorienting change. By knowing when to press on each side of each dynamic tension, the leader effectively challenges deficit mindsets and disrupts harmful, complacent adult behaviors. While the study benefits from rich description, including interviews with twenty-four staff members, observations, and document reviews, the concept of race is not central to the work. One might infer that the leader has committed to racial identity work, but it cannot be proven by this study.

A study by Theoharis and Haddix (2011) centers race in the work *and* demonstrates empirical evidence on the effectiveness of racially conscious White leaders who lead for equity. In contrast to the participants in the Swanson and Welton and Gooden studies, these leaders *entered the work* seeking to improve equity in schools. Many of them worked in racially diverse settings from the start of their career and all had done significant work on their White racial identity. This included reading and reflecting about race, race-based discussions, and learning

from colleagues of color. This self-work allows them to explicitly name issues of equity, facilitate race-based discussion and lead their staff on culturally responsive professional development.

The participants in the Theoharis and Haddix study overcome barriers to parent trust due to racial incongruence that Fuller et al (2008) cite in their study and all of them build close connections to families of color. Theoharis and Haddix provide evidence of impact for this type of leadership, listing improved outcomes for each school, from reduced suspension rates to increased access to rigorous courses, to higher student achievement. The study is limited by its breadth as it only briefly mentions the formative racial experiences and self-work that each leader engaged in prior to their leadership roles. There is limited observational evidence of how exactly their leadership practices play out daily. Further work is needed to understand the direct connections between leaders' pre-service racial experiences and current practices, hence the focus of this study.

While research on White principals leading for equity shows a path forward to improving the quality of urban leadership, there is still room for deeper exploration in this area. Over the past ten years, some approaches have emerged to improving preparation and coaching of said leaders. Horsford's (2014) work on race and leadership is a promising model for ensuring the growth of leaders. The multi-step progression from racial literacy to racial reconciliation offers strategies for growth, from learning the history of racism and education in this country, to engaging in counter-storytelling to challenge deficit mindsets, to actively disrupting racist and inequitable practices. Gooden et al (2018) show how the practice of racial autobiographies can elicit shifts in mindsets of pre-service leaders. This, paired with comprehensive equity audits can show leaders ways they can be anti-racist in their work.

Another helpful framework is Khalifa's seminal work on culturally responsive school leadership (2018). In this study, Khalifa examines the practices of a high school principal in the Detroit area who leads for equity in a large and racially diverse campus. During the two-year ethnographic study, Khalifa embeds himself in the community in a manner that allows him to describe the lived experiences of students, staff, parents, and the leader himself. He finds that a culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) approach involves self-reflection on identity and positionality, investing in culturally relevant instruction, creating an inviting school atmosphere that affirms student culture, and partnering directly with the community. For each aspect of CRSL, Khalifa provides clear examples from the setting. Given that CRSL is descriptive of leader behaviors and inherently "action-based and even urgent" (Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis, 2016, p. 1278), it will be ideal for assessing the degree to which White leaders embody antiracist beliefs and practices. However, the capacity for White leaders to do this type of work largely depends on their self-work and motivations for leadership that is the focus of this study.

## **Summary**

The concept of race as a sociological means for control and oppression is inseparable from the school experience in this country. Systems such as segregation, tracking, access to academic and emotional support, discipline, and curriculum are all deeply shaped by the White racial frame. Therefore, a leaders' ability to see and name this aspect of racism is crucial to their ability to run equitable and affirming schools for children of color. Research shows that this skill is more present in leaders of color and work is needed to understand how White leaders can overcome their race neutrality to lead in antiracist ways. This work begins by understanding White racial identity.

White racial identity development has been researched extensively in the fields of psychology and sociology for decades. Scholars have shown how denial of White identity is not just harmful to people of color, but to the White populace as well. Research shows that the White racial frame is learned through deep imprinting early in life and without significant formative racial experiences across lines of difference, White people remain stuck in colorblind, race neutral, and oppressive mindsets. In this place, they are unable to see how racism operates systemically to harm people of color.

Conversely, the study of White racial identity in leadership is relatively new in the field of educational research. Early studies showed the impact of White principals remaining in lower levels of White racial identity, or in Feagin's (2010) White racial frame. These leaders are not able to lead for equity because they do not see nor attribute equity challenges to factors of race. As they lead in race neutral manners, they perpetuate inequitable practices such as tracking, over suspending, stereotyping, and holding low expectations for students of color.

Even when leaders progress towards higher levels of White racial identity, their ability to enact equity agendas is unclear. Leaders must overcome potential trust deficits due to racial incongruence, be skillful at challenging adult mindsets while preserving relationships, and make deep connections with students and families of color. Very few studies point to the specific motivations and reflections on early childhood experiences of White leaders who effectively serve historically marginalized communities; there are also gaps in the literature on what exactly these practices look like.

It is important to acknowledge that this study focuses squarely on race in studying principal leadership. Surely, there is the need for White leaders to acknowledge all the ways in which their students might be marginalized and excluded – based on gender, sexual orientation,

religion, ethnicity, economic class, and the intersection of these identities with race. However, race continues to be the dominant narrative present in American education and problematic perceptions of race continue to contribute to persistent opportunity gaps for students of color (Horsford, 2014). It is the hope of this study, that by focusing exclusively on race, we can better understand the mindsets and actions of leaders who effectively work across lines of difference. In doing so, it may open additional conversations for how leaders can approach other lines of difference, be it able bodied principals serving students with physical disabilities or heterosexual leaders serving students who identify as LGBTQ.

Themes from this review of literature are leveraged extensively in this dissertation.

Specifically:

- **White racial identity stages can be classified based on self-report: interviews, questionnaires, and reflective writing** (D'Angelo, 2018; Gooden et al 2018; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2016; Helms, 1990). This research will employ these tools to better understand each participant's current racial consciousness.
- **There is a direct connection between lower stages of White racial identity development and racist school practices** (Brooks, 2012; Hines, 2016; Theoharis, 2019; Toure and Thompson-Dorsey, 2018;). The study will examine these connections via site observations and provide specific examples of how practice is impacted by race neutrality and White fragility. The research will also examine how these behaviors are connected to early racial experiences and motivations for leadership.
- **Heightened racial consciousness does not necessarily translate to culturally responsive practices.** (Gooden and O'Doherty, 2016; Swanson and Welton, 2019)



On-site observations will be central to this research, to ensure that self-reported reflections on racial identity are matched by equity practices at the site. The study will use Khalifa's (2018) Culturally Responsive School Leadership framework to classify observed leader actions.

- **White leaders can lead for equity provided they have committed to working on their racial selves, are motivated to do antiracist work, can promote culturally responsive practices, and are able to navigate tensions between challenge and empathy for adults.** (Gooden et al, 2018; Khalifa, 2018; Reitzug & Kapler-Hewitt, 2017; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011) The researcher will look for examples of these practices and how they are connected to formative racial experiences and motivations for leadership.

Given these findings, this study employs Helms' updated (1995) model of White racial identity to assess each leader's racial identity development. As for how the racial identity development of each principal influences beliefs and practice, the research employs Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) White racial frame in the practice of school leadership and Khalifa's (2018) work on culturally responsive school leadership.

Helm's stages of White racial identity development have been used in past studies by Gooden and O'Doherty (2015) and Gooden et al (2018) to code racial autobiographies. The researchers operationalize these stages by reading autobiographies several times and noting themes that emerged that aligned with various stages. While the racial autobiography prompt does not specifically cite questions in Helms's survey, data from the writing can be connected to each stage. For example, a participant describing living in a segregated community connects directly to Helm's (1995) question, "I live or would live in a segregated (White) neighborhood"

(p. 63). This may indicate that the participant is holding a reintegration attitude. Another participant may describe trying to educate fellow White people on the ills of racism towards African Americans. That can be directly tied to Helms' (1995) question, "I have tried to help Whites understand Blacks" (p. 63). This may be an indication of exhibiting Pseudo-Independent behavior. Additionally, themes that emerged in racial autobiographies in the Gooden and O'Doherty (2015) study pointed to the impact of reflections on early childhood experiences and family influence, which are echoed by Helms (1995) as she describes factors that influence racial identity development.

The study attempts to connect participant attitudes according to Helms's (1995) stages to lived leadership practice in CRLS. The latter stages of Helm's model are aligned to heightened racial awareness (studying the history of the White race, doing anti-racist work, etc.). Given that an essential aspect of CRLS is critical self-reflection (Khalifa, 2018, 59), data from Helm's model should be relevant in examining leadership mindsets and practices. Khalifa (2018) even suggests the racial autobiography as an important (but not sufficient) step towards critical consciousness. Like Helms', Khalifa (2018) believes that racial consciousness can be developed when he argues for the importance of self-awareness. "The leader needed to have an awareness of self and his/her values, beliefs, and/or dispositions when it came to serving poor children of color...we suggest that this awareness can be developed" (p. 60).

On the other end of the spectrum, lower levels within Helm's stages that reflect contact and reintegration, can speak directly to Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) White racial frame model that are employed in this work. Helms (1995) describes attitudes in these stages that range from neutrality to racial superiority – "I personally do not notice what race a person is...I believe that... Western civilization is the mostly highly developed, sophisticated culture ever to

have existed on earth” (p. 63). These attitudes are reflected in data from the White racial frame study. Toure and Thompson-Dorsey (2018) find several examples where administrators are either directly discriminatory or acquiesce to inequitable systems or behavior and code these as “inclinations to discriminatory action” (p. 20). The researchers find that leaders in lower stages of racial development are unable to challenge racist teacher practices because they ascribe problematic behaviors to factors other than race. In other words, their colorblindness (which can be found in Helms’ reintegration stage), leads to inaction.

By leveraging the interaction between the three framing theories – Helms’ (1995) White racial identity and either Khalifa’s (2018) CRSL or Toure and Thompson-Dorsey’s (2018) White racial Frame, this study seeks to draw connections between leaders’ reflections on earlier racialized experiences, racial attitudes, and leadership mindsets and practice. This work also establishes connections between racial identity models and leadership theories that are beginning to emerge in the field.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

This section describes the methods used for the study, as it aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Why do some White principals choose to lead schools that serve historically underserved communities? What, if any, reflections on early racial experiences are common among these leaders?
2. Do reflections on previous racial experiences and motivations impact the way in which White principals lead? If so, how does this present in their lived beliefs and practices?

This work employs a multi-site case study technique, which is ideal for answering inquiries of “why” and “how” as reflected in the research questions above (Yin, 2018). The approach is ideal when the researcher has little agency over the events in the study, and the research is of a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The advantage of the case study is its ability to offer an in-depth description of the phenomenon along with multiple data sources to enrich and triangulate findings (Creswell, 2017). Leveraging multiple sites provides the opportunity to cross compare subjects and elicit trends but comes at the cost of significant resources and time.

I used Yin’s (2018) framework to design a sound case study as he suggests “follow(ing) a clear methodological path” (p. 3). The study began with my observations in the field in my role as a principal coach. Here, I noticed wide variance in White principals’ leadership beliefs and practices, despite common training experiences and similar school contexts. I then delved into the literature and research to generate questions of how and why that would address the wide variance in practice I was observing. As I designed the multi-site case study, I made sure to

“adhere to formal and explicit procedures” as recommended by Yin (2018, p. 3). This included clearly depicting the cases at hand, establishing sample selection protocols, and creating consistent data collection and analysis across all participants.

I recognized both the assets and drawbacks of the case study as recommended by Yin (2018). This included the advantages of case study in providing rich descriptions of a phenomenon, in this case the mindsets and behaviors of White leaders as they enacted leadership in low-income underserved communities. It also included the drawbacks, such as a limited sample size and potential observer bias. Finally, as directed by Yin (2018), I “set high expectations” (p. 4) by studying a complex problem, in this case why certain White leaders express leadership within the White racial frame whereas others embody culturally relevant practices.

The other advantage of this multi-site case study is that it is bounded in nature in terms of participants, setting, and timeline. There are four subjects, all leading charter schools in New York City, and the length of data collection was three months for all participants. This follows the advice of Huberman and Saldana (2018) who discuss the importance of bounded case studies where it is paramount to define who or what is *not* being studied. The authors also recommend multi-site case studies when possible because, they “offer the researcher an even deeper understanding of the processes and outcomes of cases, the chance to test (not just develop) hypotheses, and a good picture of locally grounded causation” (2018, p. 25). The results of this specific study do allow for the first two advantages listed above, but not necessarily the third. As seen in the findings later in the paper, connections, but not causation, are established between leaders’ racial backgrounds and their work in the field.

The study is grounded in an interpretivist epistemology, attempting to understand why White principals are brought to the work of leading in low-income urban communities and understanding how these beliefs manifest in the school setting. In this qualitative approach, “scholars...aim at discovering the meanings that motivate their actions rather than relying on universal laws external to the actors” (Della Porta and Keating, 2008, p. 24). Given the subjective nature of this lens, reality is created by human interaction (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991) and knowledge is created via human interpretation (Leppaaho et al, 2016). When this epistemology is used in a case study method, it allows the researcher to gain “in-depth understanding of local, emic meanings...[while] remaining open to alternative perspectives and tensions in the research setting” (Leppaaho et al, 2016, p. 161).

In this case, an interpretivist case study will enable “thick descriptions” (Boblin, et al, 2013, p. 18) of equity minded White principals attempting to lead in an anti-racist manner. It required me, as the researcher, to engage with the phenomenon over an extended period of time, in this case at least three months (Boblin, et al, 2013). Committing to this level of interaction allowed me to both understand the racial literacy of the leader as well as examine how it manifests in practice at a greatly detailed level.

The results of this study are intended to unearth connections between racial identity work and the daily practices of White leaders in historically underserved urban settings. While the findings may not be generalizable, they could offer some window into the motivations and pre-service learning experiences needed for White principals to lead in antiracist ways and disrupt the inequities so thoroughly baked into educational systems. They might also be used to better understand current principal practices and suggest additional learning and reflection that needs to take place to improve performance.

## Setting

New York City, despite being racially and ethnically diverse, has one of the most segregated school systems in the country (Kornblau, 2019). According to the New York City Council (2020), seventy-five percent of students of color attend schools with fewer than ten percent of white students. Charter schools in the city are even more segregated, with 73% serving greater than 98% students of color; 90% of these schools serve greater than 90% students of color (UCLA Civil Rights Project, 1). Despite these demographics, New York City charter schools are still overwhelmingly led by White leaders (EdTrust, 2016). Continued efforts are needed to increase principal-student racial congruence in schools as Davis et al (2016) found benefits for students attending schools with leaders who share their socioeconomic and racial background. Simultaneously, the hiring of White leaders needs to become more rigorous, so that students who attend schools headed by White principals benefit from more equity minded leadership, such as differentiating the academic program to support every student, leveraging deep listening to ensure all student identities are affirmed and values, and adjusting behavior practices so that there is a sense of inclusion and belonging in the school.

This study uses New York charter schools as a context given the increased focus on race and equity over the past three years within the largest five charter management organizations (CMOs) in the city (Achievement First, Democracy Prep, KIPP, Success Academies, and Uncommon). Charter schools in New York take on various forms - for-profit and nonprofit, open enrollment and selective screening, network based, and community based. For the purposes of this work, the largest five CMOs are all nonprofit, open enrollment, and network based. They were founded by White educational reformers and lawyers, with significant support from corporate donors. Their original purpose, as self-described by founders, was to address the

achievement gap in various neighborhoods in New York. These CMOs have leeway in selecting curriculum, hiring and firing teachers (they are non-unionized), and setting disciplinary policy. As of the writing of this dissertation, all the CMOs, with the exception of KIPP, were highly centralized in curriculum, criteria for teacher hiring, and discipline. The networks were approved by the state Board of Regents and must demonstrate strong academic results as promised by their original charter in order to be renewed every five years.

Since the murder of George Floyd and the national reckoning on race that ensued, former students, teachers, and families in these CMOs have shared their frustrations more openly on behavior practices. For example, an Instagram account entitled "The Uncommon Truth" was established in July 2020, and provides firsthand accounts of "mismanagement, racism, prejudice, and cultural bias at Uncommon Schools" (The Uncommon Truth, 2022). Several other Instagram sites have been created in backlash to the practices at these schools, including "Black n Brown at DP" (Democracy Prep) and "SA Survivors Anonymous" (Success Academies). Alumni of these schools describe feeling marginalized for their identity and cited a lack of any discussions around race and class.

Against this backdrop, many of the larger networks have changed their practices and are now embracing efforts to be more diverse, inclusive, and equitable. Golann and Torres (2020) found that "no-excuses schools themselves increasingly emphasize character and social justice" (p. 619). In reviewing the CMO websites, these organizations are clearly striving to move away from their original practices of "no excuses," "sweat the small stuff" and the "broken windows" approach that had connections to 1980s policing policy (Golann, 2015, p. 620).

The practice of "no excuses" was used to steer teachers away from factoring in external challenges into their expectations of students. For example, if a student did not do their



homework because they were caring for a sick family member, the child would still receive a consequence. The “sweat the small stuff” philosophy involved addressing minor misbehaviors as a means of preventing larger behavior challenges. At times, this played out in an obsession over student habits such as posture and making eye contact with whoever was speaking. The “broken windows” approach was borrowed from a policing approach in New York City in the 1990s and was similar to the notion of “sweat the small stuff.” Charter schools were to address the tiniest cracks in their schoolwide systems to avoid larger challenges related to control of student behaviors. For example, some schools would choreograph their hallway procedures so that every class-to-class transition was quiet, controlled, and orderly.

As of the writing of this dissertation, none of the four major CMOs kept these phrases on their websites (they had been part of their branding materials through 2015). Instead, we see Success Academy (2022) state, “we’re in this together” in reference to how they seek to partner with parents in a responsive manner (Success Academy, para 2). Achievement First (2022) has added “lead for racial equity” as one of their core values, and states that “we look at ourselves first. We reflect and talk about the role race plays in our work, experiences, and decisions. We strive to be constantly anti-racist in our words and actions” (“Our Values” section, para 3). KIPP NYC (2022) has a page devoted to its commitment to anti-racism, and states that it has created a network wide DEI team that is helping school leaders engage in conversations around power and privilege. Uncommon Schools (2022) also describes a DEI team on their website and explains how it has led to increased staff diversity and awareness of issues of equity.

Given these recent shifts, it was likely that White principals working at these CMOs would be engaged in racial identity work and would be examining current and past systems at their school sites. Indeed, in my conversations with former colleagues at one of these

organizations, there has been significant time spent on DEI training, where leaders are asked to reflect on their backgrounds, power, and privilege. I do not have evidence that this level of work is being committed to with the other three organizations.

It is illuminating to study a context that was born out of largely White, corporate powers and practices (Golann and Torres, 2020). The decision on the part of White principals to even lead in the CMO space suggests interesting motivations such as White saviorism and White guilt. Historically, CMOs in New York City have promoted their role in providing middle class values to low-income students of color (White, 2018) and former CMO leaders have noted that “instead of drawing from the wells of knowledge from Black and LatinX communities, [CMOs] were ‘digging for data’ in order to raise test scores” (p. 68). White leaders may be drawn to this context to “save” poor Black and Brown students rather than learn from, and value, the perspectives of the communities they are serving.

## **Participants**

To answer the research questions above, I selected four White principals who were leading at New York City CMO campuses that were engaging in equity work across their network as cited above. I selected principals who serve a population that is at least 90% students of color so that each site reflected the larger context of segregated charter schools in the city. This required the use of purposeful sampling, which Creswell (2017) argues “will intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination” (p, 148). I examined data from the New York State Education Department to ensure that these CMOs served at least 90% of minoritized students. I examined open source CMO training materials to confirm that the organization was incorporating equity in their

leadership development. Additionally, I reviewed job descriptions for principals from each school's website to ensure that a commitment to equity was present in the posting.

After this review of documents, I used a snowballing selection technique (Creswell, 2017) to identify potential participants. Leveraging my professional network within the city, I asked various charter school superintendents and central office staff whether some of their White principals were currently engaging with issues of equity. I asked these contacts to share an electronic flier with their White leaders. Vetting documents about each charter organization combined with snowballing gave me reasonable assurance that the participants in the study (a) identified as White, (b) led a school that served at least 90% students of color and (c) worked in a CMO context that was currently focused on issues of equity.

Once I narrowed my search based on the criteria above, I emailed participants to confirm their interest. The message included information on the general area of research, scope of the study, and time required per participant. As needed, I spoke to principals via phone to clarify any questions they may have had and reassured them of the anonymity of the study. Those who accepted were sent a consent form to ensure I had their approval prior to the study. I did not explicitly name the purpose of the study during leader selection to avoid a participant effect that could have biased their expressed viewpoints and actions (Schreiber and Asner-Self, 2011).

There is some debate in the literature on the appropriateness of small sample sizes in case study research. Scholars such as Yin (2018) and Lipsey (1990) leave it to the researcher to determine the sample size needed to satisfy the specific study. Others, such as Seawright and Gerring (2008), explain that a small sample size is justified so long as it represents an extreme or deviant case. However, Creswell (2017) argues that sample size should be determined by saturation, or when there are sufficient cases such that no significant new findings would be

yielded by adding subjects. Since the study sampled four White leaders who all work within mission driven New York City CMOs that are reflecting on issues of equity, the resultant data set was representative of several variants of a similar case. This includes differences by gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, and class. It was interesting to see how these markers played a role (if any) in how leaders perceived their racial identity and how these translated to mindsets and practice pertaining to racial equity.

### **Data Collection and Instruments**

I conducted a single school site observation at each campus to examine the dispositions and behaviors that each leader exhibits. Observational data was helpful in providing a more nuanced and detailed picture of the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2018). I performed site visits *prior* to the racial autobiography and interviews to avoid participant effects that are possible once leaders know more about the subject of the study (Schreiber and Asner-Self, 2011). Even conducting a racial autobiography prior to a visit may have signaled that I was examining the way principals' racial background and viewpoints impacted their practice. I sought to study leader behaviors free from any framing as to the purpose of the study.

During school visits, I took on the role of non-participant observer to limit potential bias (Becker, 1993) and to ensure I could focus completely on recording observations. To ensure that this was a naturalistic observation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006), I built rapport with each principal via Zoom prior to each visit, so that they could introduce me to staff and students in a positive light. This allowed me to gain credibility within the environment and manage impressions (Atkinson, 2015).

For the official site observation, I shadowed the leader for a full workday. This allowed me to see a variety of interactions, from management of staff, to meeting facilitation, to individual work with students, staff, and parents. While I scripted literal notes as accurately as possible during the observation, I paid particular attention to moments where the leader took actions that reflected culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa, 2018), or the White racial frame (Toure and Thompson-Dorsey, D., 2018). The data collected on site helps the reader understand the lived experience of each leader and deepen their understanding of how White leaders' actions are (or are not) influenced by early racial experiences. The observation also served as a check on the attitudes and behaviors leaders self-reported during subsequent interviews as well as an opportunity to categorize actions based on the framing theories summarized in the literature review.

I recorded all notes in a notebook, and included detailed contextual information, such as time of each observation, location, description of physical setting and individuals in the room. I used a note-taking tool (see appendix I) like one shown by Creswell (2017), with space for both descriptive notes and reflective notes. There were also places to code in the moment, indicating where leader behaviors reflected framing theories from the study. This practice is in line with Yin's (2018) suggestion that the researcher "can develop observational instruments as part of the case study protocol, to assess the occurrence of certain types of behaviors during certain periods" (p. 121). For example, how frequently did the principal demonstrate colorblind interactions versus culturally responsive interactions? Coding behaviors according to Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) White racial frame criteria and Khalifa's (2018) culturally responsive criteria allowed me to quantify which types of interactions were more prevalent in each leader's practice. See appendices H and I for all observation protocols and data collection tools.

I conducted a debrief with the leader immediately after the site observation so that leaders could recall various events from the observed school day. I asked questions pertaining to moments where the participant expressed leadership that embodied the framing theories from the study. The purpose of this initial debrief was to better understand what the leader was thinking in these moments, their rationale for the choices they made, and how their decisions connect to any larger leadership philosophies they possess (see appendix D for further detail).

To understand each leader's early racial experiences and motivations prior to the role, I asked each subject to write a brief racial autobiography. This reflection asked participants to identify one or more racial events they recalled from childhood to the present and how it made them reexamine their identity (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2014). The value of this prompt was in its ability to surface key features in an individual's racial identity formation. Given that it asked participants to reach back to potentially painful moments in the past, it was a difficult exercise for some leaders to complete. Moments of shame from initially repressed memories may have made participants deeply uneasy (Thandeka, 1999). To support participants in this exercise, I (a) explained the purpose of the task (b) restated that the exercise was anonymous (c) shared my own racial autobiography and (d) walked them through some strategies on how they could recall and process past racial events.

After I discussed the prompt with leaders, they received a password protected document form in which they could write their racial autobiography and return to it any time they wished to add or change the narrative. See appendices A and B for the exact wording of the protocol and prompt.

I conducted three semi-structured interviews with each participant. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to gather data targeted to research questions and made it possible to

compare responses across multiple subjects (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The first interview was forty-five minutes in length and asked leaders to expand on their written racial autobiographies. This allowed for an in-depth description of early childhood experiences. The second interview was forty-five minutes long and asked leaders to describe how their racial identity and motivation for leadership impacted their beliefs and practice. The results of this interview were compared to data from site observations as the researcher looked for examples of the leader's stated beliefs in practice.

Questions in these interviews were broad enough to allow each participant to expand on their early racial identity development and their lived experiences as White educators. Charmaz (2006) finds that more general interview questions increase the likelihood of participants delving deeper into their personal narrative. The third and final interview was forty-five minutes and served as a member check, which Creswell (2017) says is a "key validation step in research" (p. 182). The study used Stake's (1995) approach to the member check, including sharing the key data, analyses, and findings with the participants. Subjects were encouraged to question and critique the study to minimize bias or misinterpretation. All interviews were audio recorded, with participant permission. The protocols and questions for each interview, including the member check, can be found appendices C through G.

The central document for this research was the racial autobiography, which helped me understand each subject's early racialized experiences and what impact that may have on their current racial identity. Gooden and O'Doherty (2014) found that this type of artifact allowed them to see what type of internal racial conflict participants were still grappling with.

The study also examined documents to "corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin, 2018, p. 115). This included the leaders' resumes, to better understand their

current tenure and years committed to the profession. I reviewed each school's academic data, disaggregated by demographic such as ability status, gender, and race. This provided evidence of student learning, which Khalifa (2018) cites as one of the beneficial outcomes of CRSL. For the two secondary schools in this study, I pulled state test data from the New York City Department of Education (DOE) website, which allowed me to analyze each school's academic achievement relative to peer groups within the city. For the two elementary schools in the study, I requested, and was granted, data on students' reading levels, as measured by the STEP assessment. This gave me a window into the degree to which students were acquiring literacy skills as a result of attending each elementary school.

I collected disciplinary data from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) website. Specifically, I analyzed school suspension data as Khalifa (2018) finds it to be a core measure of exclusionary practices. Each participant emailed me an example of their written correspondence with families, in the form of a newsletter or memo, to examine the general approach and tone the leader used with the community. Finally, each teacher sent me a set of professional development materials that they used in their summer training with teachers. This allowed me to see ways in which the principal communicated (or did not communicate) concepts of race equity to staff.

The table on the following page shows the data collection instruments I employed to answer each research question.



<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Theoretical Frame</b>	<b>Relevant Topics</b>	<b>Data Collection Instrument(s)</b>
Why do some White principals choose to lead schools that serve historically underserved communities? What, if any, reflections on early racial experiences are common among these leaders?	Helms' (1995) White Racial Identity Model	Leadership as a Calling White Guilt White Saviorism White Fragility Contact Stage Disintegration Stage Reintegration Stage Immersion Stage Autonomy Stage	<u>Interviews:</u> Questions where leaders self-report their motivations for the work.  <u>Document Review:</u> Examination of racial autobiographies.
Do motivations for leadership and reflections on previous racial experiences impact the way in which White principals lead? If so, how does this present in their lived beliefs and practices?	Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) White Racial Frame in Schooling  Khalifa's (2018) Culturally Responsive School Leadership	Racial Stereotyping Racial Narratives Racial Images Racialized Emotions Inclinations to Discriminatory Action Culturally Responsive Critically Self-Reflective Inclusive School Context Engaging Indigenous Context	<u>Interviews:</u> Questions that ask each subject to reflect on connections between early childhood experiences and leadership beliefs and practices. Questions that ask each subject to reflect on motivations for school leadership and principal beliefs and practices.  <u>Observations:</u> Examine how the leader interacts with staff, students and parents and assess cultural responsiveness.  <u>Documents:</u> Disaggregated school data, professional development materials, memos to families

Table 1. Data Collection Instruments

I secured participant consent in recording all interviews but also took detailed notes in case there were technical difficulties. For site observations, I took handwritten notes, which were less intrusive and distracting than using a laptop or device. This approach also allowed me to record data as we moved about the school or stood in common spaces such as the hallway or cafeteria. Documents mentioned in the section above were collected via email and were organized by the leader. The artifacts I collected were to triangulate observational data. As recommended by Creswell (2017), I requested documents prior to the study, as these can be difficult to acquire without advanced notice. When I could not obtain them beforehand, I requested them during the observation. All notes from the field were stored on a password protected google document. Following, I describe the methods by which I analyzed the data collected.

## **Data Analysis**

Analysis of data took place through the lenses of the three framing theories of the study: Helm's White racial identity model (1995), Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) White racial frame in the practice of school leadership, and Khalifa's (2018) culturally responsive school leadership. The advantages of these theories are that they both align to the content of the study (White identity and school leadership) and have been used effectively in past research. The first theory has been used to code racial autobiographies and the latter two theories have been used in coding school site observations in prior work (Gooden and O'Doherty, 2014; Scribner, J., Weingand, D., and Sanzo, K., 2021; Toure and Thompson-Dorsey, 2018).

I reviewed each set of data from interviews, observations, and documents several times to categorize findings and code appropriately. I used a priori codes developed (Maxwell, 2005)

prior to the study so that I could classify leader statements and behaviors according to theories on Whiteness and Whiteness in leadership. For example, data from racial autobiographies and the first two interviews (see appendices E and F) were coded according to the six stages of Helm's (1995) White racial identity inventory. Observational data were tagged using codes from Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) White racial frame in the practice of school leadership, and Khalifa's (2018) culturally responsive school leadership. This observational data helped me determine the degree to which the leader was enacting color blind or color neutral leadership as opposed to culturally responsive leadership.

I then looked for possible associations between a leader's current stage within Helm's White racial identity inventory, their motivations for leadership, and their enacted leadership and the degree to which it was culturally responsive. I examined principal behaviors and narratives that did not necessarily fit into a priori codes, but that shed light on the research questions. I looked for themes in this data and created emic codes (Maxwell, 2005) to highlight emergent trends across subjects. This allowed me to be responsive to unexpected outcomes of the study. Please see appendix J for all coding systems.

To triangulate the data, I relied on both observational notes and documents. The time I spent on campus helped me assess the degree to which the leader's statements were reflected in their behaviors and actions. For example, if they expressed a focus on inclusionary practices during interviews, did I see them follow up on this in their classroom visits?

As noted above, I analyzed each school's academic and disciplinary data disaggregated by demographics such as ability status, gender, and race. This served as a check on the degree to which leader practices were culturally responsive versus a representation of the White racial frame. For example, I looked at academic achievement at the two secondary schools in the study

via the NYCDOE website. I analyzed how state test scores in mathematics and English compared to the school's comparative group, which is representative of a similar student population within the city. Schools that served low-income students or students with disabilities at a higher level than their peers could be categorized as having equitable outcomes, a hallmark of CRLS. For elementary school, I looked at the STEP assessment, and the degree to which current growth in reading would put students on or above grade level. Similar to secondary schools, rapid reading growth would be an indication of equitable results.

For disciplinary data, I examined the number of suspensions per school per year and the percentage of suspensions by demographic. In Khalifa's (2018) study of culturally responsive leadership, he names low suspension rates as "a handful per year" (10) at a relatively large regional high school in Texas. Therefore, schools with low suspension rates (2% or fewer for the year) indicated a more inclusive school environment reflecting culturally responsive leadership practices. Schools with high suspensions rates (above 2%) compared to their overall student population indicated inequitable outcomes associated with leadership in the White racial frame. I also examined the percentage of suspensions for demographic groups that have been historically overrepresented in discipline data. In this study, I looked at the suspension rates for Black male students and students with disabilities. Rates well above their current representation in the school demonstrated inequitable practices.

Examining written communication from the leader to families was another way to check on the "engaging indigenous context" aspect of CRLS. Below is a bulleted list that shows how I analyzed the communication for evidence of CRLS:

- number of languages offered in the correspondence, which allows access for *all* family members

- degree to which the leader invites parents to participate in the school community, which creates a sense of welcoming
- mention of social action and community activism that indicates leader's understanding of neighborhood and surrounding context
- degree to which voices of parents and students are featured, which shows a community centered approach

Communications that featured more than one of these aspects were coded as examples of culturally responsive leadership.

I analyzed professional development materials from each leader's summer teacher training. Here I looked for the number of instances where the leader used the language of equity - either in goal setting, culturally responsive teaching practices, or inspiring the staff to hold high expectations for students. Specifically, I counted the number of instances where words such as "culturally responsive", "high expectations", "warm/strict," "inclusive" were used to determine how much each leader was leveraging a CRSL approach. I also looked at quantitative data that leaders included in their PD materials to see if goals were set to disrupt the status quo, such as lowering suspension rate for black boys, or increasing reading growth for students with disabilities. These measures helped me assess the degree to which the leader "develops and sustains culturally responsive teachers" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 13).

### **Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness in this research, I examined issues around credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 2005). These

are the qualitative equivalent to the concepts of internal and external validation, reliability, and objectivity in quantitative research.

My own standpoint as a White, Jewish, second-generation immigrant, and educational leader presented potential bias. Schreiber and Asner -Self (2011) describe researcher bias as “the selecting of data to support inferences or preconceptions and the subsequent selective data choices” (p. 275). This may be especially true given my background in urban education and my strong views on what makes for effective leadership. Therefore, my data collection, especially during interviews, necessitated an interrogation of my position to ensure I was not hearing what I wanted to hear, but rather the authentic narrative of the leader.

As a White male who once led a non-profit charter high school, my perspective likely impacted the degree of openness of my participants. Leaders in this study may have felt a sense of understanding based upon my background, which I hope led to honest answers to interview questions. However, my role as an insider (former principal within a CMO and now coach of charter school leaders) required interrogation in the way I selected participants and collected and analyzed data. For example, I may have chosen participants that I feel represented variants within a single case, but instead represented homogeneity. I may have confused strong outcomes on standardized tests with true equity leadership.

During observations, I may have empathized with a leader trying to create a sense of order in a school without thinking about the implications for certain demographics within the school. I may have coded a certain leader behavior as CRSL that is only superficially responsive. For this reason, I worked with a colleague to critique participant selection criteria and coding. This colleague is a member of my graduate school cohort who has spent years examining the role of racial identity in leadership, specifically Latinx leaders in pursuit of equity for Latinx students.

He is also doing doctoral research and has been coding interviews and observational data for his own study.

My race and role as an outsider to several of the school communities I study may have limited the degree to which some teachers, students, and parents shared openly during site observations and conversations. Schreiber and Asner-Self (2011) describe this as “reactivity” which “the effect the researcher has on the situation, the setting, or the people involved” (p. 275). The authors depict this as “the ‘white lab coat syndrome’ where a patient’s blood pressure goes up when visiting a doctor” (p. 275). To counteract this, I managed impressions by gaining the trust of the gatekeeper (the principal) so that they could introduce me in a way that increased credibility (Atkinson, 2015). I also kept note taking and recording to a minimum at the start of each observation.

Finally, the amount of work I have done on my own White racial awareness may have either heightened or limited my ability to recognize the stages in which various leaders were situated. I asked peers in my graduate school cohort to confirm or challenge my classification of each participant.

To ensure dependability of interviews and observational data, I employed member checks. I also used triangulation (as discussed above) by seeking out another source of data within the observation and documents. For example, I examined each leader’s written communication to families that spoke to the practices of that leader. I also analyzed each principal’s professional development materials used in staff training. I used similar techniques to establish authenticity, which Creswell (2017) defines as the means of ensuring that there are a variety of voices represented in the data.

The issue of transferability is complex. Miles and Huberman (1994) discuss key criteria in determining the transferability of a study, listing aspects of setting, sample, and method. While the study is not designed to directly inform other contexts, my hope is that findings from this study might be employed to inform how equity minded districts and charter schools think about leader development. The degree to which this study can be transferred depends on the characteristics of said context. If the results are to be examined by other New York City charter schools driven by similar missions as those in this study, applicability could be high. However, should it be employed by districts with far different demographics and values, there might be little transferability. Additionally, the selection criteria of the sample in this research are narrow, and it may be difficult to find a sizable cohort of like-minded White leaders across other districts and charter schools to apply findings.

## **Summary**

This section described the methods I used to ensure that sound data could be collected and used to answer the two research questions. I used an interpretivist lens to better understand the phenomena of White leadership in urban schools that serve students of color. I selected New York City as the location given its extreme student segregation and the presence of White principals leading in historically underserved neighborhoods. I narrowed the focus to charter schools given recent reckoning with past practices and espoused commitment to be anti-racist. In these contexts, it was likely that White leaders would be examining their identity and its intersection with their leadership.

I used several criteria to select a sample of four, which was large enough to examine trends across contexts, but small enough to ensure rich descriptions of the phenomenon. The



snowballing method increased the likelihood that these leaders were indeed wrestling with issues of racial identity while leading in majority minority contexts.

I employed three data collection techniques – document review, interviews, and observations to ensure a full account of the leader’s experiences, beliefs, and practices. This also allowed me to take steps to confirm the data as authentic, credible, and dependable. Each instrument to be used either confirmed a finding from an earlier part of the study or contributed new data as I sought to answer the research questions. A priori and emic coding was used to categorize the data.

I am confident that the data and findings in this study are robust and reproducible. I hope that, where applicable, the results of this study can be helpful as other schools seek to raise the bar for the selection and development of White leaders.

## Chapter 4: Findings

The following section lays out data that pertains to the focus of the study. I summarize results from observations, interviews, and artifacts that speak to each research question. Before delving into results, it is important to describe the participants in the study in detail. Recall that all four subjects identify as White, lead a school that serves at least 90% students of color, and work in a charter management organization (CMO). Each CMO currently states they are focused on issues of equity. Despite these commonalities, there were demographic differences among participants that are worthy of note (table 1).

<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Social Class</b>	<b>Parents' Education</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Ethnicity (self-report)</b>	<b>Years in Principal Role</b>
Jenna	Suburban Midwest	F	Hetero	Middle Class	HS Diploma	Christian	White American	2
Robert	Suburban Northeast	M	Hetero	Working Class	HS Diploma	Christian	White American	5
James	Suburban Midwest	M	Gay	Middle Class	1 HS Diploma, 1 College Diploma	Catholic	White American	2
Melissa	Suburban Mid-Atl.	F	Hetero	Upper Middle Class	1 HS Diploma, 1 College	Jewish / Christian	White Jewish American	7

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Some of these demographic nuances were cited by participants during the exploration of their racial identities and influenced how they reflected on their current leadership practices.

As noted above, Jenna grew up in a medium sized midwestern town. Her parents were raised in the Midwest as well and trace their lineage to Eastern Europe. Both parents completed high school, and her mother completed some college courses, but did not graduate. They each

worked in the restaurant industry, and Jenna described her upbringing as working class but “comfortable.” Jenna described her mother as demonstrating tough love, expecting her to figure out the college and career process independently.

Jenna attended a regional high school with a diverse student body, but a mostly White staff. She described her friend group as mostly White but was also close with Asian and African American peers. During her senior year in college, Jenna engaged in an internship at Planned Parenthood and as an advocate at a prisoner advocacy program. She went into education because “the [intern] work I was doing would be unnecessary if people had a strong educational foundation.” Jenna started teaching through the Americorps program and was drawn to the fact that it could help cover the cost of her graduate degree. She stated that she was not originally set on a teaching career, but that it found her. She was then drawn to a large charter network because of its high level of organization, efficiency, and structure. Jenna taught at the high school level, served as the director of operations, and was then invited to apply for the principal role given her significant commitment to the organization and familiarity with the school. During the time of the observation, this was her second year as principal.

During my observation, Jenna appeared to be focused on ensuring the school functioned smoothly and efficiently. She followed a tight schedule of meetings, classroom observations, and supervising school systems such as arrival and lunch. Jenna continuously checked that the school was delivering on all operational logistics, from timely parent communication to classes starting on time, to staff being timely to their posts. Jenna appeared to be stoic and neutral in her interactions with staff, family, and students. Most students at Jenna’s school appeared to be focused on their classes and their friends and did not spend too much time engaging with staff.

Robert grew up in suburban New Jersey, and was raised, along with his brother, by a single mother. His mother worked long hours as a nurse, so it was up to Robert to help raise his brother. They were a working-class family but had the opportunity to move to a more affluent town and reside with his grandmother. This allowed him access to highly rated schools. Robert was a standout athlete and coaches played a significant role in his upbringing. Given his experience with sports coaches, Robert was drawn to coaching and teaching. He entered education through charter schools because they offered him more freedom with regards to certification and training. Robert taught for several years at a CMO and was recognized as an outstanding teacher. He was eventually asked to serve as a dean thanks to his strong relationships with students across the school. Robert was then eventually offered a position as principal in the same charter school he had taught in. He took a brief respite from leadership to return to the classroom, but then re-entered leadership two years ago to take on a middle school principal position. At the time of the site visit, he had been in this position for two years, and had served as a principal for seven years.

Robert appeared to be a highly relational leader. Before the school day started, he circulated the hallways, checking in with staff, from security guards, to nurses, to teachers, to deans. He knew each person's first name and a bit about their background and interests. He smiled warmly in almost every interaction and made several people smile and laugh. This continued in his interactions with students, where he knew each student's name and some part of their background or interest. Most of the student body were focused on their classes but did not show joy or engagement until there was some sort of unstructured time (lunch or recess). The other times students showed authentic joy was during meaningful one-on-one conversation with a respected teacher.

James grew up in a predominantly Catholic, working-class town near Pittsburgh. His father was a high school graduate who worked in the postal service. His mother was the first in her family to graduate from college and eventually worked in computer engineering. James described his upbringing as middle class and comfortable but noted that his parents lived beyond their means. His town was steeped in traditional, Catholic values. This culture did not resonate with James, who questioned the town's conservative beliefs that were at odds with his liberal views. This led to him feeling like an outsider, which was heightened as he grappled with his sexuality. James' closest friends were a White male and an African American female. James was first intrigued by education when he took a sociology course in college. This led him to explore ways he could make an impact in low-income areas, including teaching. He was drawn in by recruiters from Teach for America and joined the corps in the Bronx. He taught second grade for several years, before being asked to step into leadership as founder of a new elementary school. At the time of the observation, James was in his second year in the principal role.

Similar to Robert, James was also highly relational. He shared parts of this personal background with staff and used humor to connect with teachers. During arrival, he knew most parents' names and there was brief but warm small talk. James leveraged these relationships to inspire students and staff alike inside the classroom. During instructional walkthroughs, James' common phrases were "I know you can do better" and "you got this". Most students showed joy on their faces throughout the day, except for one lower performing classroom. Staff did not show as much joy, and some appeared to be tired.

Melissa grew up in suburban Maryland, in a town of middle-class professionals, most of whom had received higher education. Her mother was a teacher in Baltimore and her father owned a business. Her mother identifies as Jewish and her grandparents on this side were both

immigrants to the country. Melissa described going to a racially diverse school with a similarly diverse teaching staff, but stated her friend group was primarily White. She eventually went to a private high school due to social tensions at her public school.

Melissa engaged in a border studies program in college, which exposed her to brutal inequalities for immigrants seeking asylum in the United States. This inspired her to go into education, with a focus on serving Latinx immigrants in their early years. She served as an elementary school teacher for several years before becoming a principal in a charter network. At the time of the site visit, this was Melissa's seventh year in the principal role.

Melissa appeared to be joyful with students, staff and parents, but there were times where she gave off a sense of stress through extremely fast paced talking and some clipped statements. She seemed concerned that the vision for daily school routines was being followed, especially inside the classroom. When reading instruction was not meeting her vision, there was some visible frustration detectable on her face. Melissa appeared more relaxed during unstructured times such as lunch and recess. Most students appeared happy and excited to be at school. Some staff showed signs of anxiety and exhaustion, especially kindergarten and first grade teachers.

I now describe the results that speak to each research question.

**Research Question 1: Why do some White principals choose to lead schools that serve historically underserved communities? What, if any, early racial experiences are common among these leaders?**

I present data that align to this research question via leaders' racial autobiographies and their subsequent reflections on their writing. Findings are connected to Helms' (1995) theory on White racial identity development. I establish themes across the four participants as well as areas

where their stories diverge. I conclude by drawing connections between subjects' racial autobiographies and motivations for leadership.

### ***Early Racial Experiences: Racial Isolation and First Significant Events***

There were several trends across subjects' early racial experiences. All four, despite several demographic differences, cited racial isolation in their childhood. This presented as a lack of interaction across lines of racial difference along with a paucity of conversations about race. For some participants, this was unsurprising given the segregation patterns across the United States. However, even participants who lived in more integrated settings experienced racial isolation. Melissa stated:

I was very much the norm. We (white families) were the numerical majority, and we were the racial group that generally owned the businesses, and the politics of the local area was white. I guess, you could say it was also economic class, White and upper class. There was remarkable similarity in how participants described conversations of race in the household. Responses included, "we didn't explicitly talk about race" and "nothing beyond one incident" and "race was never a topic we discussed in our family." Three out of four participants stated that they did not even consider the concept of race in early childhood, besides an occasional school reading about a civil rights hero. Thus, all subjects were squarely in Helms' (1995) contact stage, described as a phase where White individuals have limited interaction with people of color and thus may exhibit colorblindness.

Another commonality across early life experiences were participants' first meaningful racial events. Three of four leaders experienced significant racialized moments in early adolescence and all four involved either one or both of their parents. Incidents ranged from a

parent covering up the existence of an African American relative, to labeling a childhood friend in racial terms, to making negative assumptions about Black professionals.

Three out of four participants described the discomfort they felt as they witnessed micro and macro aggressions. Subjects shared adjectives such as “upset”, “uncomfortable”, “sad”, and “guilty” to describe their emotions. They appeared especially troubled that these incidents originated from their parents, who they had held up as loving, well-meaning people. This cognitive dissonance is described in depth by Helms (1995) as part of the reintegration stage when White people become aware of racial discrimination and feel pulled between the notions of liberalism and equality and the reality of inequity. The depth of feeling expressed by participants in discussing these incidents speaks to Thandeka’s (1999) work on White guilt and shame. Unpacking these incidents can become so emotionally charged that participants might avoid discussing them. While the subjects in this study were able to discuss these moments, they showed visible stress via their speech and one wept openly.

A final congruence in these narratives is the dominant role that parents play in early conceptions of race. This is not surprising given the stories of first racial incidents described in the paragraph above. As Gooden and O’Doherty (2015) found, writing about race using this autobiographical prompt allows participants to see the influences of their families with fresh eyes. One leader in this study stated, “wow I really hadn’t thought about my mother in this way before. This is really difficult.”

Participants cited the negative influence of their family in shaping their early conceptions of race. This ranged from blatant racist language, such as use of the “n” word, to more subtle forms of racism such as avoiding new neighbors who were recent immigrants to the country. Interestingly enough, participants claimed that their families did not explicitly discuss race yet



were able to discuss incidents such as these in clear detail. In this way, most internalized notions of race via observation, which is central to Feagin's (2010) White racial frame theory. Feagin (2010) finds that this type of conditioning is stronger than explicit messaging and produces neurological changes in how Whites view African American people. While all subjects attempted to distance themselves from their parents' viewpoints of race, two leaders exhibited behaviors at the school site that mirrored their families' beliefs. I shall discuss this in more detail in response to the second research question.

### ***Ongoing Racial Development: Progression vs. Retreat***

Commonalities in racial identity stages dissipated after early racialized incidents. Jenna and Robert soon retreated to the contact stage after their early racialized incidents. Jenna, in discussing her first teaching job in a classroom with mostly African American high school students, stated:

When I first started teaching, I was a naïve little puppy. It (race) was not the most prevalent thing on my mind. It wasn't something that came up regularly. I don't think it became so prevalent to me until I had some sort of leadership role.

Robert indicated that he did not think much about race for large portions of his professional life, even when teaching in diverse settings. The absence of thoughts towards race is a hallmark of the Helms' (1995) contact stage where "the person benefits from institutional and cultural racism without necessarily being aware that he or she is doing so" (p. 57). It is surprising that both leaders remained in the contact stage despite an increasingly diverse environment, as Helms' (1995) suggests that interactions across lines of difference usually lead to progression.

James and Melissa progressed to further stages of White racial identity development earlier in their lives, albeit in different ways. Melissa engaged in a transformative college experience at the U.S. - Mexico border which exposed her to harsh racial realities and alerted her to both White privilege as well as systemic racial inequities. Here, she began to question the social order she had grown accustomed to:

I was often [given access through the border] simply because I was White. I watched many others [at the border] be questioned for minutes, sometimes hours. Those people never had White skin. Several people [of color] in my program were taken into secondary questioning multiple times during their semester. Going through this blatant experience of unquestioned access -being given a free pass EVERY SINGLE DAY, that I didn't earn in any way, while watching people of color be questioned...was a visual and material representation of the invisible access that I am given every day in my life.

This awakening is aptly captured by Helms' (1995) pseudo-independent stage where a White person begins to redefine their identity in a positive manner and acknowledges the significant toll that both interpersonal and systemic racism have on people of color. It is this experience that motivated her to eventually enter the educational profession and work with historically underserved Latinx students.

James also progressed in White racial identity development but did so in a more gradual manner. He continually questioned the social order in his surrounding environment, from why he had been denied a relationship with African American family members to why his classmates made insensitive racial comments, to why his churchgoing friends contradicted their religious beliefs when it came to matters of race. In fact, he named cognitive dissonance explicitly in his reflection on the racial autobiography.

I remember going to (church) youth group and it's like we preach these things - you say you want a world in which everyone has equal opportunity - but you're upset that someone received food stamps. In those moments it was a cognitive dissonance. I was like this is odd and doesn't make sense to me.

This represented a shift into Helms' (1995) pseudo-independent stage, where he was no longer comfortable with racist conceptions, ideas, and White supremacy culture. James noticed the contradictions between espoused and lived beliefs in his community. He soon began to address his White peers, speaking out inside and outside his high school classrooms in response to ignorant comments. This made him a target of classmates, yet he still pushed back:

I remember the kid (in history class) when I made a point. He would whisper the "n" word in my ear to see if I would get mad. I remember talking to the teacher and being like, 'yo, this is the shit that's happening in this classroom, and no one wants to say anything or do anything.'

These repeated actions represent a move to Helms (1995) immersion stage, where White people begin openly challenging their White peers' mindsets. When asked to reflect on where his tendency to speak out at an early age came from, James stated that he was unsure. He recalled that he was not emulating family members, mentors, or friends. Later, when asked about his identity, he described feeling like an outsider in his hometown, perhaps given his status as a gay, liberal man growing up in a conservative Catholic town. This intersectionality is discussed further in the discussion section.

### ***Motivations for Leadership***

Figure 2 and table 3, below, show the White racial identity progression that is summarized in the section above for all four participants in the study. In figure 2, the numbers on the y-axis represent the five stages of Helms' (1995) White racial identity model, where 1 represents the initial contact stage and 6 represents the autonomous stage. There are four bars per participant, indicating their racial identity stage at early childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and the current day. Racial identity tiers for early childhood through young adulthood were determined from each subject's racial autobiography combined with their debrief of the racial autobiography.

As seen in table 3, I used key descriptors from Helms' (1995) text to classify participants' stages. For example, leaders who discussed limited interaction with other races in early childhood were coded as inhabiting stage 1, the contact stage. Subjects who reported experiencing deep conflict between racist family members and liberal ideas of democracy and liberty were coded to stage 2, or disintegration. Participants who began to unpack their racial identity and White privilege were classified in stage 4, or independent. Two of the four participants showed aspects of antiracism, and were coded to stage 5, or immersion. Finally, one participant, James, demonstrated actions associated with a fully antiracist identity, as characterized by stage 6, or autonomy.

As seen in Figure 2, leaders' progression through stages differed. Jenna remained in the contact stage until she progressed to leadership, when she depicted an "awakening" during the time of the George Floyd murder and the national reckoning on race. She described how she entered difficult discussions with those from different racial backgrounds, read more about White privilege, and questioned her status at work and in the larger world. This brought her to the third stage, independence. Others took a more linear path. For example, James experienced a

series of smaller learnings and development from childhood through young adulthood. His friend group was diverse throughout, and he learned from their personal experiences. He constantly questioned the world order and found contradictions in the country's exposed values compared to reality.

The circled bars indicate each subject's stage as they entered school leadership and are informative of their motivations for entering the role.

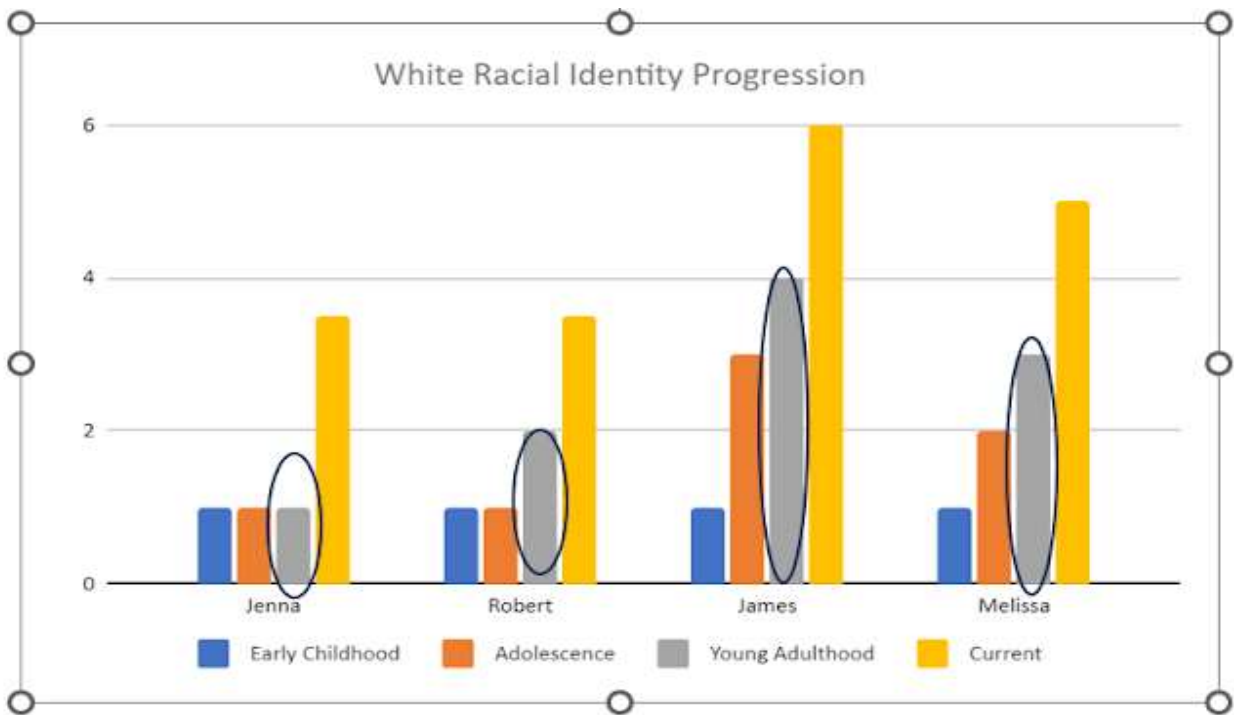


Figure 2. Participant's White Racial Identity Progression

	Contact (racial isolation)	Disintegration (conflict between ideals and reality)	Reintegration (retreat to White racist views)	Pseudo- Independence (early recognition of Whiteness)	Immersion (positive White identity)	Autonomy (nonracist/antiracist identity)
Jenna	“Most of my friends were white.” “We had no conversations about race besides that one incident.”	“I remember feeling confused about why (my parents) were asking about race. I felt discomfort on the ride home.”	No evidence	“I’ve read a lot more and had more discussions I realize now I need to talk about my racial identity more.”	No evidence	
Robert	“I grew up in a predominately White suburb” “Race was never a topic we discussed.”	“As I got older, I imagined how difficult the (jokes about race) were for my friends.”	No evidence		No evidence	
James	“I grew up in a predominately White, Catholic town.” “I didn’t have race conversations with my family until college.	“In those moments (of family racism), it was like when do I say something and when do I not?” “In those moments (of Christian values vs. being racist), it was cognitive dissonance.”	No evidence	“Even though I had learned and read about systemic racism in college, seeing the way the entire system... dehumanizes anyone who is not white.”	There’s part of racial identity you go through and it’s usually around receiving feedback around micro aggressions and I definitely think I was defensive for a long period of time. That’s why I’m like I’m constantly striving to be (antiracist).	I realize it's a journey not a destination. I don't just (take action) once. It has to be daily and part of my routine if I'm truly (going to be antiracist).
Melissa	“Most of my friends were white.” “We didn’t talk about race a lot.”	“I felt (about the incident) – ‘damn, that sucks, she was taking care of our grandma and my father didn’t even think she was a real nurse.”	No evidence	“This experience exposed me to the privileges involved...and that I got a pass every day at the border while my peers of color did not.”	“Engaging in uncomfortable conversations about race is a way I can leverage the comfort I was given to work towards progress for humanity.”	

Table 3. Sample Coding of WRI Stages Based on Interview Data

These specific stages were identified during each participant's second interview. I asked each subject to reflect on their racial identity development as they entered the principal role. Notes from these debriefs were coded to Helm's stages as described above. Jenna was forthcoming in noting that she did not consider race, even when she was teaching students who came from far different backgrounds than her own. This colorblindness is a hallmark of stage one, contact. Robert noted that he was wrestling with how his network approached discipline, but retreated to his White world view, a key element of the second stage, disintegration. James was very much focused on dismantling systems of oppression in schools as he entered leadership, thus his classification in the fourth stage, emersion. Melissa described questioning the racist systems inherent in her past schools, but still had several important blind spots that prevented her from noticing how she maintained the status quo.

Jenna and Robert shared similar stories of how they found themselves leading schools serving students with far different backgrounds than their own. Both entered the profession by happenstance and stayed in the field far longer than they imagined. Robert stated,

It (teaching in the city) wasn't what I wanted to do. Honestly, I was never a social justice warrior. I wanted to coach and envisioned it in a cushy suburb. But the opportunities were there in the charter school world.

Jenna stated that "I got this (teaching job) through a [volunteer organization]. I didn't intend to stay in education. I was going to do that and see if I could get my master's in public health."

These leaders' rationale for moving from teaching to leadership in their schools was similarly colorblind, with only cursory references to race and no references to the racial inequities inherent in the New York City school system. Jenna, in describing her path toward leadership, explained that she happened to be teaching in a school with Black and Brown

students, and would have made the same progression to principal had she been working in a school with all White students. Robert stated that his rise to the principal seat was because he had made a home at a charter middle school. Jenna and Robert's race-neutral motivations connect closely to the contact and disintegration stages they inhabited when they first entered leadership. Later, I discuss both (a) how their colorblind entrance to leadership impacted their practice and (b) the ways in which their leadership experience affected their racial identity progression.

James and Melissa entered school leadership with deep social justice motivations. Melissa directly connected her powerful college internship experience (described above) to her desire to lead a school that served Black and Brown students.

I am committed to leveraging this unquestioned access and unearned feeling of normalcy to fight for justice and access for Black and Brown people. I have a deep desire to create a school where all students feel a sense of belonging.

James cited his earlier cognitive dissonance as a reason for being a community-based leader for social justice. He saw his entrance into leadership as a way to advocate for students and fight injustices so that his actions aligned to his espoused beliefs:

I want to go back to those earlier moments of the cognitive dissonance...I say if I believe your life has value, if I say I want you to have a life of choice, and I know there's injustice happening and I'm not doing anything about it, I'm not living the truth I tell you every day. That's a big important thing for me.

These motivations represent a direct connection to Helm's (1995) later stages of pseudo-independence and immersion, where leaders can articulate racial injustices clearly *and* name specific actions they can take to work against systems of oppression. Later, I discuss how these motivations impacted their practice in the role.



**Research Question 2: Do motivations for leadership and reflection on previous racial experiences impact the way in which White principals lead? If so, how does this present in their lived beliefs and practices?**

I present data that align to this research question via site observations, documents obtained during the visits, and leaders' reflections on these visits. Findings are connected to either Feagin's (2010) White racial frame or Khalifa's (2018) culturally responsive school leadership. As opposed to the previous section, data aligned to this question was quite variable by subject. I briefly summarize common themes across participants, and then go in depth on how each leader's racial experiences connect to their current practice.

***White Racial Frame: Racial Stereotyping and the Focus on Control***

All four leaders spent at least some of their leadership time maintaining control and consistency in the student experience. At one extreme, Robert was present for every instance that eighth-grade students transitioned to and from classrooms, lunchtime, and dismissal. In total, he spent almost an hour of an eight-hour day monitoring students walking silently in line. During his reflection, when Robert was asked what stood out from the day, he cited eighth grade dismissal as a focus because it had been a challenge to that point in the year. When asked why eighth graders had to walk in a silent, controlled manner, Robert explained:

We had a really rough year last year with our eighth graders and wanted to create a new culture for our school. I feel like our eighth-grade team (of teachers) keeps falling back and reverting to 'it's ok, it's not bad. Kids aren't cursing at each other; kids aren't pushing each other.'

When asked to reflect on this practice, Robert did not articulate the problematic nature of a White adult male overseeing a straight and silent line of mostly African American adolescents. Nor was he able to draw a comparison to the culture of prison, law enforcement, or slavery. Robert also described a three strikes policy regarding eligibility for after school enrichment. When asked about the language of three strikes, he did not connect it to the legal system made famous for its disproportionately extreme sentences for Black men in California.

The professional development materials obtained after the visit also spoke to a focus on control. One slide featured a quote by a parent that described a desire for discipline, uniforms, and high expectations. The PowerPoint cited a need to go “back to basics” and focus on “academic systems” and “behavior systems”. There were also links to videos from a charter network that featured highly scripted and routinized classroom management techniques.

These control-based leadership practices connect closely to a central tenet in Toure and Thompson-Dorsey’s (2018) rich description of the White racial frame in the context of schooling. They describe one tenet of the WRF as “racial stereotyping” (p. 20), where leaders assume that African American children need structure, order, and discipline to thrive. Robert’s actions also connect to their theory of inclination to discriminatory action, as students are asked to behave in a way that is not age appropriate and would not be enacted in a more affluent and Whiter context.

Other leaders looked for control in more nuanced ways. Melissa focused on a point system for student participation in reading rather than deeper practices of literacy instruction. Jenna gave feedback on instruction that focused on countdown timers, getting student attention, and ensuring all students were on task. James circulated classrooms to check that breakfasts were silent and focused.

The two secondary school leaders, Robert and Jenna, cited a chaotic and disorderly school environment from the prior year as the impetus behind their focus on stringent classroom management. The two elementary participants, Melissa and James, explained their focus on consistency in the context of academic equity. Melissa explained that a uniform approach to literacy was necessary to ensure that students would be well prepared for phonics no matter their classroom or teacher. James discussed the importance of all students having access to rigorous learning materials. He also cited socio-emotional needs, stating that a predictable classroom environment supported students' sense of belonging.

The two secondary leaders shared discomfort over their school's policies. Robert wrestled with his school's disciplinary practices:

I don't know, I'm back and forth with it. I don't know if this is my bias. I do know that some of the (schools) that our kids come from, levels are so low and we need more. Does that mean we can't have art and does that mean we can't have a five-minute transition and we have to have a one-minute structured transition? We can't have any disruptions in class? I don't know, I go back and forth with it.

Here, Robert struggles with the fact that students change classes in complete silence and walk in neat rows and lines. He also wrestles with the need for classes to be completely orderly at all times.

Jenna discussed her discomfort with suspensions:

I don't like suspending people. It feels invasive, I wouldn't want it happening. [Long pause]. But it's something that has to be done to make sure the community is safe. Something we're really focused on this year over last year has been on accountability with students and staff.

This discomfort recalls the participants' earlier unease in the disintegration phase as they saw parents engaging in racist macro and micro aggressions. Here, Robert and Jenna appear to be stuck between wanting to create a safe and supportive environment and racist and exclusionary practices. Despite their discomfort, neither leader was able to name ways in which they were working to undo systems of control, nor consider alternative methods of achieving safe and supportive environments. As Khalifa (2018) states, "oppressive structures and practices in schools will remain in place unless (a) the status quo is challenged and (b) educators and leaders know *how* to properly push against oppression" (p. 7).

### ***White Racial Frame: Racial Images and Virtuous White Educators***

One trend that emerged from the site visits was the tendency for leaders to praise White educators and their ideas, even when these conflicted with affirming and culturally responsive practices. At one extreme, Robert praised several White female teachers who used a harsh tone to correct student behaviors. He even lauded a teacher who not only used a hostile tone with eighth graders, but also cut off and dismissed her African American co-teacher publicly. When asked to reflect on the moment, Robert explained that this type of directness was what students needed in that moment.

Two other participants showed favoritism towards staff who agreed with their viewpoints. Jenna praised their operations staff for communication to families that was aligned to their personal style and tone. In both cases, these correspondences were logistical in nature, bereft of inspiration or invitations for parent collaboration. In another case, Melissa affirmed a staff member for agreeing with her stance on professional development, stating, "yes I love this PD, it's exactly what's in my head." The training materials in this situation were focused on a

consistent, controlled way to implement phonics instruction, bereft of considering student backgrounds.

At one point during the site observation, Jenna mentioned that when she had to be out of the building, she put her White, female assistant principal in charge of the school instead of her African American, male assistant principal. When asked why she preferred this administrator, she stated, “she (White woman) asks me a lot of questions (about what to do) and he (African American man) goes rogue. She is more receptive.” This statement indicates a higher degree of comfort with deference to her leadership rather than someone who might challenge her viewpoints.

These tendencies, even from leaders who entered the principal role in progressive phases of White racial identity, closely mirror elements of Helms (1995) pseudo-independent stage:

Though the person may seek greater interaction with Blacks, much of this interaction involves helping Blacks to change themselves so that they function more like Whites on White criteria for success and acceptability rather than recognizing that such criteria might be inappropriate or too narrowly defined (p. 61).

The practical expression of Helm’s theory can be found in Toure and Thompson-Dorsey’s (2018) theory on racial images, where school leaders find White ways of educating children to be virtuous and worthy of emulation.

Only one of the four participants in the study reflected on how his approach to leading adults needed to change based on a fixed mindset steeped in favoring Whiteness. This awareness, and his moves to be more culturally responsive with adults, will be discussed in a further section.

### ***White Racial Frame: Racial Images and Colorblind Curriculum***

Participants were at varying stages of trying to promote a culturally responsive curriculum, but few were able to articulate their vision clearly, and most fell into color neutral approaches. Jenna observed a history lesson on the slave trade, where the teacher gave a traditional presentation using a map and historical documents. When asked for her thoughts on how to improve the lesson, she stated “I don’t know, maybe connect it to current events, but I don’t know.” She did not go into detail about how the content could have been connected to students’ family histories nor the legacy of the slave trade as it presented in their current context of New York City. Robert observed a lesson on bias and stereotyping and provided feedback to the teacher on making visuals clearer for students. When asked for his reflection on the instruction, he stated that it was a great lesson, but did not provide feedback on how it could have been connected to students’ every day experience navigating New York City’s racist systems. James stated that he saw cultural relevance during the site visit when observing guided reading. However, he only spoke in generalities about text piquing student interests based on an exploration of the five senses. He did not mention literature that honored students' cultural backgrounds or contained characters relatable to students who recently immigrated to the country. Jenna defined anti-racist teaching in a very general manner, in a way that did not incorporate race, “I do believe that strong teaching is anti-racist teaching; being prepared every day; knowing your lesson; knowing what you’re going to do at every point; this shows a real love for kids and that is anti-racist teaching.”

It is important to note that the two elementary school leaders did feature evidence of one aspect of culturally responsive instruction in their hallways. Here I refer to Ladson-Billings’ (2020) definition of culturally responsive pedagogy where she notes that one tenet is providing students funds of cultural knowledge that allows them to celebrate and affirm their culture.

James' school displayed carefully crafted posters which showcased students' country of origin along with their families' histories. Melissa's school used bulletin boards to showcase family and community events along with photos and descriptions in Spanish. These examples speak to this element of culturally responsive instruction.

Professional development materials collected from all four leaders were similarly race neutral. Despite covering a range of pedagogical areas, none tied their purpose to larger questions of equity or racial justice. Both sets of elementary school training materials were focused on shared reading practices that were highly scripted and controlled. This recalls the previous section on control, but the instructional practices espoused in these sessions were also bereft of cultural context. Neither showed thoughtful text selection that would be representative of students' home culture. Nor did the activities in the reading program encourage deeper thinking.

It is difficult to connect participants' conceptions of culturally responsive curriculum to their racial identity development. It is possible, however, to conjecture why leaders might be limited in this area. Given the early findings on a tendency towards control, these principals may be hesitant to provide the creative thinking space for teachers to create meaningful connections to their students and their home culture. Their lenses on instructional feedback may also be conditioned towards consistency and control. Indeed, most leaders focused their feedback on how urgently students started their work or what percent of students were on task during the lesson.

There may also be pressure from their networks to produce test scores and metrics that indicate the school's success. Three out of four principals used some form of dashboard in their office to chart progress towards academic goals. This can be a helpful practice for leaders to

inspire a team towards high expectations. However, it may also encourage teaching towards an assessment using scripted curricula that are not yet culturally responsive. I directly observed this type of curricula in my classroom walkthroughs with leaders, especially in reading and math classrooms. For example, all classrooms in one school focused on the same letter sounds, using the same rote practice and teacher directions. In another school, math instruction had very specific prompts of how teachers were to introduce word problems. All word problems were the same across a given grade level.

The tendency towards colorblindness in curricular matters, even when familiar with the terminology of culturally relevant and anti-racist teaching, indicates a colorblind frame summarized by Toure and Thompson-Dorsey (2018). They note that leaders who tend towards the use of “racial images” (p. 20) overlook the specific needs of children of color and assume that a color neutral approach works for all students.

### ***Inside and Outside the Frame: Leaders’ Direct Interactions with Students***

Perhaps the closest connection between current leader practice and reflections on early racialized experiences was found in direct interactions with students. Although each participant exhibited quite distinct approaches with students, each recalled elements of their racial autobiography. Melissa was hesitant to directly engage two Latinx students during arrival to school who were clearly upset and did not return her greeting. Her body language and verbal statements were cautious and tentative as she attempted to communicate with them. Yet seconds later, a Latino dean successfully took a direct approach, crouching down to their level, high fiving them, and giving explicit directions that both students responded to. When asked to reflect on the moment, Melissa shared that one of the students had been displaying attention seeking



tantrums recently and did not want to upset her, especially in front of an audience. The leader also wanted to show the students she cared and were not “in trouble.” It is important to note that the leader later successfully engaged other children who were struggling to participate in class. However, those later moments involved students who she described as “shy” or “reluctant”, not oppositional in terms of behavior.

The tendency towards avoidance with some students connects to her earlier experience with White guilt. She explained that during her volunteer work in college, she had been beset by this emotion as she saw people of color victimized and treated inhumanely:

I was still experiencing a lot of White guilt around that...time. That was when it came to like a bursting point. Towards the end, someone said, ‘you’re White, get over it.’ So, most of the time I was overwhelmed with guilt. I’m sure there was White saviorism in this (as well) and I’ll throw myself into this.

There is also a through line to her upbringing. The participant recalls her mother’s career as a White educator teaching in the inner city. In an intense emotional moment, she states,

This is almost more sensitive than talking about your own issues of race. Yeah, I don’t know why I’m having trouble. Um, yeah, I think she definitely had White saviorism. Um, she talks about having worked in a tough school, like things, and (helping the kids).

The participant did not go deeper on this subject, but it became clear that White guilt and saviorism was a theme in her household from an early age, only to then be felt again in her college internship. Recall that saviorism is defined as the desire to rescue people of color from their inherently inferior status and assumes a deficit mindset about the strength, intelligence, and character of people of color (Akintunde, 1999; Trepagnier, 2010). White guilt refers to the shame

people feel based on their personal treatment and larger society's treatment of people of color. While Melissa shared ways in which she was working on this tendency, and cited examples of how she had grown, her direct interactions with students showed signs (caution, fear) that White guilt remained a part of her practice. This connects to Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) definition of the White racial frame in a school setting, where racial stereotypes produce fear of certain students of color who may have greater needs.

Jenna exhibited a tougher approach with struggling students but had difficulty showing empathy in her interactions. In multiple instances, the leader used a firm but neutral tone to correct students for minor infractions such as uniform issues and tardiness to class. During more serious disciplinary moments, the principal avoided direct engagement and support of students. When a Latinx student said that he had been looking for the leader all day because he was upset about being sent out of class, she stated, "I'm not the best person for that" and referred him to a behavior specialist. In an emotionally charged moment at the end of the day, an African American female student sought out the leader after a teacher insinuated the student cheated on a high stakes essay. The student shouted, "the teacher said I'm dumb! She said she knows this doesn't come from my brain!" The principal responded, "what do you want me to do about this?" The girl then became inconsolable and called her grandmother.

A few minutes later, the student spoke to two safety officers, both African American women. The women got on her level, used hushed tones and soon one safety officer said, "speak to her (the principal) like you spoke to us." The student tried to engage the principal one more time, but again the leader deferred to the teacher. The student then stormed out of the building.

While there is certainly history and context with both major incidents above, it was clear that Jenna lacked the tools to connect with students in distress and advocate for them. Drawing a

through line from her racial autobiography, the leader later reflected that her tough and distant approach came from her mother.

Like when I was trying to do my FAFSA...she (the leader's mother) said, 'I am not dealing with that so if you want to get it done, get it done.' She wasn't coddling. When you were sick, 'you better make it to the bathroom, I'm not cleaning it up.' She didn't want to deal with it. So that is a mentality I've taken for a lot of things.

Jenna goes on to explain how her mother's approach factored into her own teaching. However, she does not explain how her racial identity might interact with this tough and distant approach when working with students who do not share her racial background. This recalls Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) definition of racial narratives as a colorblind approach where aspects of racial identity are ignored. This phenomenon leads to a disconnect between White leaders and students of color, especially African American students.

Robert exhibited more warmth and less avoidance with students than the other two participants and connected his practice back to childhood as well. From morning arrival to classroom observations to dismissal, the leader consistently made positive connections with students. At arrival, phrases included, "J let's go!", "M I know you think you're tough", "what's up - you got some good energy in math class (yesterday)!", "where's the Jamaican lunch, we made a deal!" and "no more lateness, ok?" During these interactions, he leaned into and made eye contact with each student, and nearly all students responded with nods, smiles, and positive responses. During a transition in the hallway, he asked a student how his sport was going, and the young man proudly proclaimed that he was a captain. The leader responded, "I better see some captain behavior in the classroom." This approach embodies the warm-demander balance as summarized by Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016), where educators signal love and care via

high expectations and empathy. It is important to note, however, that at times the leader did circumvent teachers and school policies in supporting students. He praised several tardy students without addressing their lateness and allowed students to eat breakfast in his office despite teachers' attempts to get them into class.

When asked where his approach with students came from, the participant cited the importance of coaches in his childhood experience, stating,

My mom was a single mom and raised four kids and I never knew my father... and had some really important coaches in my life, and were parental figures there to support you and help you. One of my coaches said, 'there's some (kids) you have to kick in the butt to motivate and there's some you have to wrap your arms around.'

His sports coaches modeled how to work with children who needed more guidance and support, and he transferred this toolkit to his current role. Despite feeling the pains of both poverty and absence of a father, he avoided comparisons to the students he served. When asked about how his childhood experience might give him a lens into his students, he stated that "those are two totally different experiences." However, he did acknowledge his experience may have given him more empathy or understanding when students and families experienced hardships.

James consistently demonstrated a "warm demander" approach that was not connected to his upbringing, but rather his later racial identity journey. I will discuss this case in the following section as I unpack culturally responsive leadership practices.

### ***CRSL: Critical Self Reflection in the Role as a Result of Racial Identity Development***

There was a clear relationship between participants' stages of racial identity development and their ability to be critically self-reflective in the role. Recall that Khalifa (2018) defines

critical self-reflection as both considering one’s personal biases in the role as well as continually examining and working against systemic racist practices inherent in the school. In this study, leaders who were coded into the contact or disintegration stage showed less evidence of exhibiting critical self-reflection during the site visit and debrief of the day. Leaders who were classified in the pseudo-independent and immersion stages showed multiple examples of personal reflection and challenging inequitable systems in their schools. Table 3 shows the relationship between the number of times each participant used the words “race, White, Black, Brown” in their racial autobiography discussion and instances of critical self-reflection during the site visit.

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>White Racial Identity Stage (as of study)</b>	<b>Number of Times Using Racial Language in Autobiography and Debrief</b>	<b>Number of Instances of Critical Self-Reflection during Site Visit</b>
Jenna	Oscillating Between Disintegration and Pseudo-Independent	71	3
Robert	Oscillating Between Contact and Pseudo-Independent	37	3
James	Oscillating Between Immersion and Autonomy	96	9
Melissa	Oscillating Between Pseudo-Independent and Immersion	95	9

Table 4. Connection Between Naming Race and Critical Self-Reflection

Here, we see the connection between comfort in naming race as a key theme in upbringing and the ability to be critically self-reflective in their professional role.

Robert, who struggled to name race during his interview on the racial autobiography, also had difficulty identifying how his own background intersected with his leadership. When asked how his observed interactions with students and staff intersected with his identity, he mostly avoided using racial terms and instead used colorblind language. He repeatedly used the phrase “these are just kids” as if to ensure he was viewing them in no relation to their racial identity and context. In terms of staff interactions, he was able to notice some differences in how his staff interacted with students with regards to racial identity. However, he did not recognize trends where White teachers spoke more harshly and referred more students out of their classroom.

Even when confronted with systemic inequities in his school, he avoided examining these issues. As mentioned previously, he did not see a problem with the language of three strikes for after school eligibility. After observing numerous behavior send-outs during the day, I asked him for the average number of disciplinary referrals per day as well as any goals for this number. He replied that he was not sure about current numbers and that the school only had a goal to cut suspensions by 50% in 2022-2023, from *two hundred and eighty-five* the previous year to *one hundred and ninety* this year (still an average of over one suspension per day!). Robert did not name how problematic this large a number was.

Jenna named race far more frequently in her racial autobiography and debrief. She explained that the racial reckoning in 2020 was a turning point for her:

I think it’s definitely impacted my leadership because I’m thinking about it and how the perception of me as a White leader and thinking about how the students we’re working with and the staff we’re working with. It’s that point it sinks in and you start to understand how our country has been built on these systems that are rooted in white supremacy. That didn’t really sink in until the summer of 2020.

When asked whether her heightened consciousness of racial identity had translated to leadership actions, she shared several examples. These included being more mindful of which adults are in the room when a student is in distress, allowing for more divergent work styles on staff, and relaxing expectations in the hallways so that students could socialize between class periods. Jenna was still grappling with her identity as of this study, and even shared doubts of whether she was the right person for the role:

I'm just thinking should there be a leader in the school that's Black or Brown instead of me or should I go try to be a leader in a school that's predominantly White are questions I ask myself. But I've been here for 8 years, I'm committed to this school, and I'm committed to this mission. While I do grapple with it, I've come to the conclusion that I am (the person for the role). That's kind of like the part...I describe I am White female. I have to own it. I can't change that I'm White.

This internal struggle showed up in several areas of the site visit. She was less visible than other leaders during school arrival, opting to station herself inside the building to check uniforms rather than outside. When asked about this choice, Jenna explained that some students arrive at school in distress and it was preferable for the social worker, an African American male, to be outside to check in with students. At the end of the day, as described above, she struggled to support a student in distress, while two Black female safety officers spoke to the child and addressed her concerns warmly and effectively.

It is unclear if her emotional distance from students was due to her discomfort as a White leader or was more personality driven. In her final debrief, she described herself as less empathetic than most and noted that she had received feedback that she needed to improve this area. There may be an interaction between these two factors, where her lack of empathy

combined with her self-doubt due to race prevent her from being a fully present culturally responsive leader.

Jenna is currently fulfilling at least part of Khalifa's definition of critical self-reflection in examining her personal privilege and Whiteness. However, her current pseudo-independent stage is not allowing her to move beyond feelings of inadequacy and she defers to staff of color when dealing with complex student situations. She is not yet able to meet the second aspect of critical self-reflection in examining racist systems in her school. While she has done away with some problematic practices like zero tolerance policies and silent hallways, the observation indicated a constant flow of classroom referrals throughout the day. When asked about her goals for daily referrals, she responded in a similar manner to Robert, stating that she was not sure. Similar to Robert, an analysis of data from the Office of Civil Rights showed a high suspension rate. In discussing student struggles with drug use (the leading cause of suspensions to date), I asked what type of support the school was offering. Jenna shared that the school brought in local police officers to discuss the consequences of being caught with illegal drugs. For a community that had been historically ravaged by the criminalization of Black youths for minor drug use, this approach seemed problematic. In this way, her actions embodied both Toure and Thompson-Dorsey's (2018) racial images (stereotyping Black youths as needing a law-and-order approach) and inclinations to discriminatory action in inserting law enforcement into an adolescent health issue.

Melissa used race terminology ninety-six times in her racial autobiography and site debrief and entered the role between the pseudo-independent and immersion stages. There were numerous examples of critical self-reflection during her site visit and debrief. On a personal level, she noted how her tendency towards White guilt was something she monitored and had to



actively work against it to move towards culturally responsive leader actions. She cited a White mentor from an earlier social action program who advised her to get over her feelings and simply enact the work of allyship. This came into play when she examined the constitution of her leadership team. During the site visit debrief, she stated,

I was in a mostly Latinx school with a mostly white leadership and mostly black and Latinx teachers. And it's not right. And I mostly didn't think it was my fault the people who applied were White. Initially, I thought about it as I'm not really racist because the people before them weren't White (and they moved on) and I didn't fire them. But you have to be actively seeking talent and have convos where those folks understand you believe in them, and then you can excavate internalized racism they have or reassure them of any concerns, so they are eligible when a position comes open.

Here, she shows a shift from defensiveness (“didn’t think it was my fault”) to action (“you have to be actively seeking talent”) that produces a more representative leadership team.

During the site visit, Melissa also exhibited actions that indicated reexamination of the equity of systemic practices. She continually pushed her staff to consider the school’s priority of collaborating with families, from monthly events at the school, to ways the school could creatively communicate with various parents and guardians. When asked where her emphasis on family connections came from, she noted that during the pandemic, parents shared their feeling of isolation and disconnect. Melissa also explained that many families were not vaccinated and could not enter the building to meet. Rather than assign a deficit mindset to this, she explained that for new immigrants, navigating the health system is incredibly difficult, and brings up issues of trust and safety. Her visibility during the height of the pandemic in the community allowed her to gain this nuanced perspective. This connects directly to Khalifa’s (2018) ideas of the role

community-based epistemology plays in leader awareness, where he names that critical self-reflection can evolve when there is fluid, open, and ongoing communication between the neighborhood and the leader.

Melissa also used community-based knowledge to inform her school-based practices. Her behavior system steered away from compliance and more towards belonging. She cited families' experiencing fleeing gang violence in Central America and noted that students were searching for a sense of belonging, community, and rituals that gangs often provide. She wanted her school to provide this in a positive and safe manner, from weekly celebrations to student recognitions to homeroom cheers to notes to families. This inclusive culture was also informed by her reflections on racialized experiences, as she wanted her school to be a place that worked against systems that target and push out immigrants of color from entering this country.

Melissa also used data-based reflections to examine her school's behavior policies, another key tenet in Khalifa's definition of CRSL. She closely monitored student send outs, and proudly stated that her school had the lowest suspension rate in her network since becoming principal while achieving three times the reading proficiency of the local district school. Data collected after the visit supported this claim, with fewer than ten suspensions for the entire prior school year. Her team did preventative work on student referrals, asking the teacher to text leadership when it appeared that a student's behavior might be spiking. The administration was called to the classroom, assessed the situation, and coached the teacher on how to better work with the child to prevent removal.

It is important to note that blind spots remained, even for a leader who was quite progressed in her racial identity development. The observation showed differences in how staff of color interacted with students during unstructured time compared with White staff. However,

when asked for her noticings of how staff interactions with students varied by racial identity, she was not able to name the variation. Melissa was not able to name the control-oriented way the school implemented reading instruction, which limited space for culturally responsive teaching practices. She was also unable to identify the hesitant manner in which she addressed high need students. Root causes of these limitations will be explored further in the discussion section.

Similar to Melissa, James entered the role on the higher end of the racial identity spectrum and used identity-based language frequently throughout the site visit and debrief. Recall this graphic displaying each participant’s stage when entering the role (figure 3, gray bars).

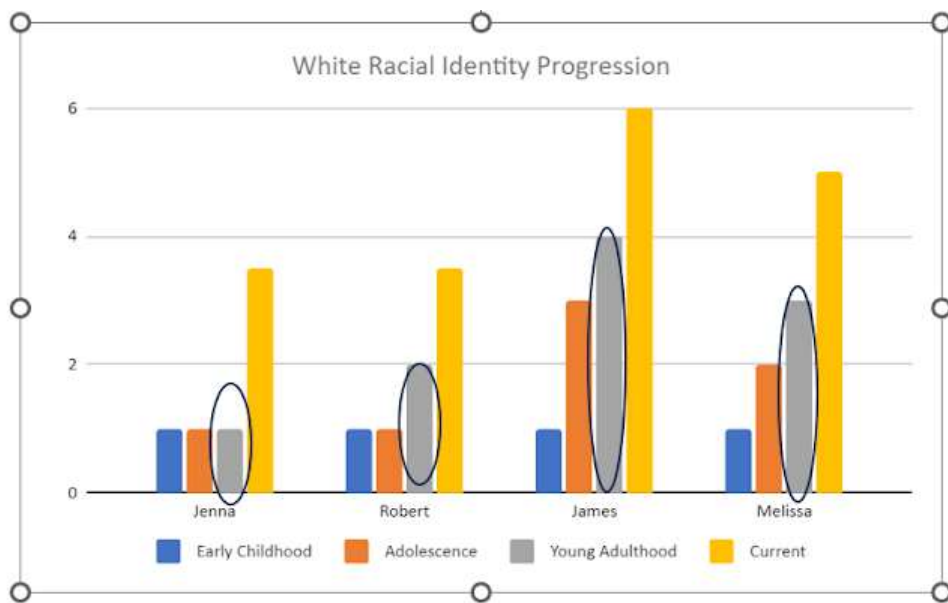


Figure 3. Participant White Racial Identity Progression

James’ critical self-reflection was evident in how saw his role in family interactions. During morning arrival, he knew each parent’s name and warmly greeted them as they dropped their children off. When parents had questions or concerns, he was able to address them quickly using his knowledge of each student and their circumstances. When I later asked him to reflect on arrival, he stated,

I mean historically systemic racism is a huge part of our schools as institutions and there are still barriers to access and equitable resources. If families are navigating a school system, they have not got the support needed at other schools... how can I continue to model and give grace and partner with...positivity?

Later in the site visit, the principal made phone calls to parents after resolving disciplinary issues. Each time he spoke to parents, he began by checking in with them and then clearly and respectfully explained their children's situation. He ended each call by asking, "does this sound good?" and "do you have any questions or concerns?" In one instance, a mother asked to speak to her child so she could reinforce the principal's message. There were numerous other examples of his desire to establish close connections with parents, from texting a mother in distress to address her concerns, to offering unique ways to get parents into the building and seeking out parents at dismissal to share updates. When asked how his racial identity played into this mindset, he shared:

I do think my identity comes into play, with all across lines of difference there are gonna be barriers to connection and trust. And if I'm here to build connection and trust and partnership, which is the mission of the school, I need to continue to show what is possible and I need to continue to model, ok how can we approach this situation with that same thinking so that families feel as though this is an actual partnership and not so much, a school that's once again just telling me what to do.

While he does not explicitly name race here, he acknowledges his line of difference with most parents and identifies trust as a key element needed in his work with families. This harkens back to Fuller's (2018) work, where he observes some White leaders establishing deep connections

with families of color as a means of overcoming barriers to parent trust. The leader also clearly understands the history of alienation in the local community when it comes to schooling.

James' critical reflection on both his personal leadership practices *and* his schoolwide systems was seen in the data collected following the school visit which spoke to an inclusive culture. During the date of the visit in October, the school had suspended only one student and student attendance exceeded 96%.

### ***CRSL: Developing and Sustaining Culturally Responsive Teachers and Curricula***

As noted above, few participants fostered a culturally responsive curriculum. Some were not able to clearly define what it meant for lessons to be culturally responsive. Others were able to define the term, but cited examples of instruction that were generally engaging, rather than specifically connected to students' home culture. The most salient evidence of responsive instruction was found in the elementary schools, where bulletin boards and student work from past lessons honored students' heritage, language, and ethnicity. However, none of the leaders cited community or parent input into the instructional model they were implementing. Rather, much of the curriculum and instruction was generated from their charter networks.

There was evidence of leaders fostering culturally responsive practices in their teachers, especially high academic expectations. Melissa used a data-informed systematic approach to maintaining high academic standards in the school. Throughout the site visit, she continually referenced student reading levels and interim assessment scores to push teacher expectations. During an instructional meeting, she encouraged a teacher coach to use student data to center how she worked with each teacher. The principal pushed the coach on her expectations. "The teacher may be improving, but student results are not." Later, she cited student data when

creating a whole school initiative for professional development on reading. Melissa was aware of every classrooms' progress towards reading mastery, down to the percentage point. Basing her decisions on ambitious goals for students pushed her staff to think similarly and not settle for what appeared to be successful teaching practice.

When asked why she pushed high standards via data, the leader said that students must be able to read to access any learning. She analyzed data to ensure that all teachers were aligned to the school priority of literacy growth. She also explained that in the current climate of teacher shortages, effective practitioners must be “made” not necessarily hired. The leader did not connect her high expectations to any culturally responsive tenets such as resisting deficit narratives or fighting against systemic racism. Nor did she name any aspects of her identity or reflections on racial experiences in this justification for high academic standards.

Interestingly enough, despite Melissa's obsessions with reading data, results remained low. As of the date of the site observation, the percentage of students at or above grade level in reading was lower in each success grade. Between 30-40% of kindergarten and first grade students were on grade level whereas only 15% of second and third grade students were on grade level. This may explain the pressure Melissa was putting on the reading program during the site visit.

James was less systematic and more relational when it came to raising teacher expectations for students at his school. Instead of relying on data alone, he circulated to classrooms several times during the day to coach staff on increasing the rigor of instruction. His classroom interventions ranged from affirming staff who pushed student thinking, to whispering to a teacher to ensure students were referencing the text, to directly modeling decoding skills in a way that elicited more student thought. After each of these interventions, teachers adjusted their

practice in a way that challenged and engaged more students. Despite less of a data focus, STEP results collected during the site visit showed students meeting their growth goals. James had posted each classroom's STEP growth since the beginning of the year and only one out of four classrooms had not made their growth goals.

This leader also found moments to directly mentor teachers on their level of expectations for students and families. During the site visit, a teacher approached the principal to ask if it was permissible to assign extra practice at home to a student who was struggling with literacy. Instead of simply answering, he asked, "tell me, why are you questioning this?" The teacher responded that she was worried that the parent would be too overwhelmed, and that the assignment would be too much. He then had her name the downside to not giving the extra work. James ended by stating, "no it's not too much! We have to keep the bar high." When asked where his lofty expectations came from, the leader recalled his teachers pushing him to high standards throughout his education. When it came to serving this specific population, he cited an African American mentor who inspired him to hold high expectations for his students.

This leader later shared a more glaring example of addressing a teacher's deficit, racist mindset.

For example, one of my white staff...she came up to me and told me a child stabbed her with a marker. I asked, 'what do you mean?' And she said, 'he did this motion with a marker.' And I was like, 'ok he didn't stab you.' She visibly got upset, she's like 'how are you telling what I am experiencing? I am telling you my truth. This is my experience.' I said, 'ok let's talk about the definition of stabbed. You can be stabbed with a pencil. But you can't be stabbed with a marker. Is your skin pierced?' And we had a conversation about how you as a White woman are using language that's charged on a

demographic that is already perceived as aggressive. You then use this word to describe what a kid did to you? What do you think the impact is? So, we had a larger convo. It did not go well. It was very hard for her. Eventually she saw what I was saying...it took two hours.

The principal's approach here embodied multiple facets of Khalifa's (2018) definition of developing culturally responsive teachers. He used direct accountability ("he didn't stab you"), mentorship ("we had a conversation about how you as a White woman are using language") and coaching ("what do you think the impact is?") to develop the teacher. He also resisted the urge to give up on the teacher, staying in the conversation for two hours. This is the type of work needed to move teacher mindsets.

### ***CRSL: Promoting Inclusive, Anti-Oppressive School Contexts***

In this section, it is important to return to the concept that culturally responsive leaders have unique power in either promoting or interrupting exclusionary and deficit-based practices in the school and classroom (Khalifa, 2018). All schools had centralized ways for responding to escalated student behaviors. Recall in the section above, Robert and Jenna had no stated goals regarding student referrals out of class. Jenna came across multiple students in the hallways and classroom who asked for advocacy regarding teacher referrals but declined in every case. Robert did attempt to prevent teacher referrals by intervening directly with students before they were sent to a reflection room. However, in his interview, he was not able to connect this to a culturally responsive approach nor could he provide specific examples of mentoring teachers towards a more inclusive mindset. The lack of inclusive practices was seen in both observational and quantitative data. During site visits to both Robert and Jenna's schools, there were more than



twenty referrals during the school day. Recall that Robert's school was seeking to *average* one suspension or less per school day and Jenna's school had similarly high suspension numbers.

James and Melissa both named the desire to interrupt a culture of exclusion but went about it in far different ways. Melissa employed a systematic approach, designing a referral process that required the teacher to receive coaching in the moment when dealing with escalated behaviors. During the site observation, there were two instances when teachers called administrators to support behavior incidents. In both cases, the leader first approached and whispered with the teacher, *not the student*, to ascertain what strategies had been used to that point. The leader then coached the teacher in real time on how to deescalate the student. In both cases, the intervention was successful. Not only was a referral prevented, but the teacher learned a new skill in the moment. There was evidence of fidelity to this approach, both in the consistency with which administrators intervened with teachers rather than students (I observed four similar interactions) and the way teachers responded to the intervention. All teachers took feedback willingly, as evidenced by nodding their head and smiling and immediately attempted to work with the student using a new approach. When asked why she adopted this system, Melissa stated,

I don't believe in just a compliance-based system... that's never gonna invest them in the community or their relationship with their teacher. So, we really pull from restorative practices, collaborative problem solving. I feel like there's a relationship that has to happen in there for it to be effective. If outside classroom folks are the only ones implementing things, it's just gonna undermine the relationship between the student and teacher which is the most important relationship.

Here, the leader was able to connect her approach to discipline to a sense of community and relationships but did not explicitly name the historical experience of exclusion faced by students from Hispanic backgrounds. Later in the debrief, she did name the importance of a sense of belonging for students coming from gang cultures in Central America. This was the impetus behind her vision for an inclusive school culture. Observational and quantitative data confirmed that Melissa's vision was resulting in less exclusion from class. During the site visit, I only observed one student out of class for an extended period of time, and there had only been one suspension to date.

James took a more hands on and relational approach to interrupting exclusionary practices. When teachers alerted him about a student's behavior, he demonstrated how to respond to the child so as to avoid an out of class referral. This speaks directly to Khalifa's (2018) notion that developing culturally responsive practices in teachers sometimes requires the leader to explicitly model inclusionary practices for staff. Khalifa states, "culturally responsive school leaders provide mentorship and modeling of...inclusionary... practices. This happens in daily interactions with students" (p. 124). At times, James urged the teacher to imitate his approach and at other times he solved the situation himself. When James urged teachers to implement his approach, there was evidence that the teacher was gaining skill in dealing with students' frustration. However, when he directly solved the situation, it was unclear whether the teacher had indeed acquired a new skill in supporting frustrated students.

James was the only leader who rejected a consistent classroom management system. When asked to describe the school's approach to discipline, he stated,

My staff don't like this, but I don't have a behavior system. Love and logic is our behavior management system and I think our kids are, our culture is pretty strong. I do

believe everything is situational which is why I don't give... this is the behavior for OSS (out of school suspension), this is the behavior for in-school suspension. Every situation is so different. So how do I try to give the teacher the toolkit of how to mediate a conflict...and it logically makes sense for what happened. If you are confused, you can use me as a thought partner or leadership member. So, I do think there needs to be a complicated and nuanced approach. I think there isn't anything prescribed and that's sometimes hard for folks coming from color chart school or a very prescriptive school, but they get used to it.

Numerous data points spoke to the effectiveness of these methods. Suspension rates were very low, with only one out-of-school suspension issued in the first three months of the school year. In general, teachers were able to call on the principal and deans for support in addressing behavior with minimal referrals out of the classroom.

There were two less skilled teachers who did ask for students to be removed, but the principal informed them that he would quickly mediate the situation and return students to class. He followed through on his word and both students returned. More importantly, students were coached on strategies to manage their stress and frustration so that they could adapt the next time they faced a challenge. This approach recalls that of the principal in Khalifa's (2018) research who at times eschewed hard and fast policies to the chagrin of his staff. In both cases, these leaders are trying to disrupt punitive and exclusionary practices by introducing nuance and relationships into school discipline.

The other two elements of inclusive school contexts, indigenous spaces and staff representation, were only moderately visible in this study. All four leaders hired racially diverse staff (average of between 50-60% people of color), but the percent of educators from the local

community was unclear. Most schools had safety officers and nurses from the neighborhood. During the study, Jenna pushed her operations leader to hire a local resident and saw that as an asset to the school. James brought in family members to support a struggling first grade classroom. However, there was no evidence of community-based staffing in Robert or Melissa's schools.

Indigenous spaces were largely absent across most schools. The exception was in James's school, where each student's identity was represented via posters on the wall and the student of the week was featured prominently with a picture of the student and their family. However, it was unclear how frequently these wall hangings were updated or reflected ongoing representation of the community in curriculum.

### ***CRSL: Engaging Indigenous Community Context***

In his description of CRSL, Khalifa (2018) concludes by arguing that it is essential for leaders to (a) understand the community they are serving by venturing outside of the school to engage with the local context and (b) advocate that community in multiple ways. Each leader was directly asked about the way in which they engage with their neighborhood. Robert and Jenna stated that they did not directly engage with the surrounding community. Melissa did not initially recall an instance of working directly with the community, but later recollected that she had become involved with a local food bank during COVID. As she reflected on this experience, she noted how this experience benefited her own psyche during COVID and that it helped her understand families' sense of isolation. It is important to note that this leader does live near the school and demonstrated some understanding of the local dynamics. However, there was no

evidence that she took a learner's stance or advocated for the community regularly. She stated that her decision to live in the neighborhood was mostly due to social reasons.

Artifacts collected after the site visit also spoke to these three leaders' lack of full engagement with the surrounding communities. Robert shared a letter to families about after-school eligibility. The tone in the opening sentences is warm, but the focus of the letter is on policies related to behavior. The letter cautions families that if a student is on "school probation" or suspended, they are no longer eligible for activities such as athletics and theater. There is no mention of school-family partnership, nor does the letter invite families to the building to discuss their child's eligibility.

Jenna's newsletter home was similarly procedural, with references to locker and cell phone policies, but no mention of direct partnership. Melissa's letter to families was the most engaging, with an appeal to families to read with their children over the summer. The school offered families the chance to receive a "book gift" to encourage this type of reading. The message was translated into Spanish so that all families could access the message. This showed some understanding of the indigenous community. However, the tone of the communication was school centered rather than incorporating community voice. The books were selected by the school and did not reflect the home cultures present in the neighborhood. Nor did the letter offer to support families who may have had difficulty getting to the school building.

James mentioned the importance of the school and community connection repeatedly during his final interview. When asked where this orientation came from, he stated, I think it's not seeing the work of school as separate. It's important to me that there's a community aspect in doing the work and I want to know the issues of the community. I am a registered voter - what are some of the things we're voting on as a community?

There needs to be an attachment (to community) because schools have always been an institution that has been a mobilizing force.

Here, the principal recognizes the political power of the school and sees its ability to work with local partners to improve issues in the surrounding community. He then detailed the ways in which he advocated for his families outside of school, from protests at the local precinct to working with parents on a food drive to working with the city to reduce traffic near the school. When asked why he advocates so staunchly for the local community, he recalled his frustration with the hypocrisy he saw in his upbringing,

For my kids, I wanted them to know there are grownups in the building that care about them. I think I show it outside the building. I want to go back to those earlier moments of cognitive dissonance (from my upbringing). You can't tell people you care about them but then don't want government assistance for them. If I say I believe your life has value, if I say I want you to have a life of choice, and I know there's injustice happening and I'm not doing anything about it, I'm not living the truth I tell you every day. To me it's a great disservice and also a lie. That's a big important thing for me.

This excerpt shows evidence of how his immersion stage at an early age (high school years) enabled him to recognize the hypocrisy of White people in the disintegration stage who attempted to defend a liberty and justice agenda. This awareness allowed him to fully recognize and commit to culturally responsive actions, which meant aligning his care inside the building to a sense of justice outside the building on behalf of his students.

Artifacts collected from the school support the picture gained at the school site and during interviews. The school's newsletter featured pictures of parents volunteering at the school and publicized community events that the staff was involved with. Internal survey data showed

that over 90% of families were satisfied with their experience with the school and its leader. It is important to note that survey data is not necessarily a reliable indication of school health. Given the internal nature of the survey, it was difficult to compare it to results at other schools operating in similar contexts. A 90% satisfaction rate might sound impressive, but what if peer schools average 95%? The way in which the survey was conducted may also bring results into question. Were respondents mostly those who already felt connected to the school or did the sample represent a broader segment of the population?

This section depicted each participant's racial identity journey, from early formative experiences to initial interactions working in environments far different than their racially isolated upbringing. Leader's motivations for leadership were described and connected to their White racial identity as they entered the role. The results of the study were then shared in detail, specifically ways each leader embodied either the White racial frame or culturally responsive leadership or both. Following, I will elucidate themes that emerged from the study that connect to past research and may be useful threads of scholarship going forward. I will conclude by providing potential implications of the study for implementation in the field of school leadership.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was twofold:

- (1) to better understand why some White principals choose to lead in schools that serve historically underserved minority communities.
- (2) to determine whether motivations for leadership and reflections on early racial experiences play out in principals' philosophies and practice, and if so, how.

The findings above show that motivation for leadership in underserved communities was not uniform across participants but broke along lines related to White racial identity stages. The two participants in earlier stages of Helm's (1995) racial progression entered the leadership seat through happenstance and both identified that they would have been equally satisfied if they were to lead a majority White school in wealthier neighborhoods. The two participants in the later stages of Helm's (1995) model named motivations for leadership that suggested intentionality and viewing leadership in low-income areas as a calling. Melissa identified a formative experience working at the United States border with Mexico and how it fueled her desire to create a sense of belonging at the school. James was drawn to the assets and features of the neighborhood and saw leadership as a way to partner closely with the community.

Both early racial experiences and motivations could be seen in leaders' philosophies and lived practices. Participants who entered the role in earlier stages of White racial identity with colorblind motivations tended to exhibit beliefs and actions that mirrored the White racial frame. For example, Robert entered the role in the disintegration phase, characterized by discomfort between espoused beliefs of liberty and justice and the reality of inequitable systems in society. This played out during the observation, when he was clearly uncomfortable with some of the systems in his school (silent class to class transitions, harsh disciplinary codes), but rationalized



them as necessary for a safe and orderly school. He was not able to name such systems as oppressive and therefore did not act to interrupt them. Additionally, Jenna entered the principal role in the contact phase, characterized by colorblindness. This played out in her role as she failed to see systems that were exclusionary and racially inequitable.

It should be noted that leader behaviors varied based on the type of interaction in the school building. For example, Robert exhibited several aspects of colorblind leadership with teachers, but also demonstrated a type of culturally responsive leadership as a warm demander with students. Interestingly, this also connected to his early childhood experiences. These findings point to the fact that leadership mirrors one’s current racial identity stage, which are inherently complex. Stages such as pseudo-independence immersion are nuanced and have aspects that are connected to *both* the White racial frame *and* culturally responsive competencies. Therefore, it is unsurprising that leadership practices were similarly varied.

The participants who entered the role with motivations for racial justice at higher ends of White racial identity did embody aspects of culturally responsive school leadership. For example, recall that Melissa entered the role at the independent stage.

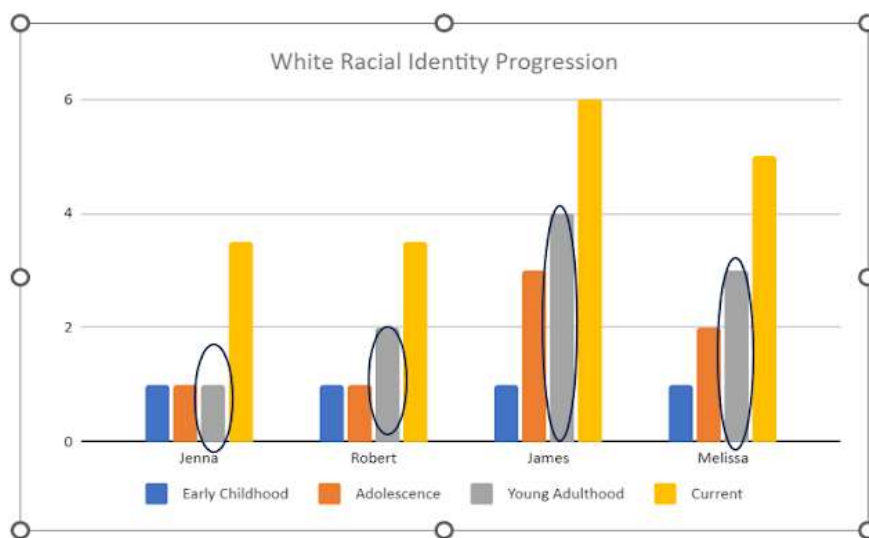


Figure 4. Participant White Racial Identity Progression

She then moved to the immersion stage as she embraced feedback from staff and surveys and received guidance from an anti-racist White mentor. This stage could be observed during the interviews, where she constantly interrogated her position as a White principal serving mostly Latinx students. This demonstrated the critical reflection aspect of CRSL, and she embodied this in further interviews when she explained how she interrogated the school's disciplinary systems. This interrogation helped her lead the school away from exclusionary disciplinary practices towards inclusionary practices where teachers received coaching on how to manage challenging behaviors.

During the site visit, Melissa also effectively challenged teachers who held low expectations. She continuously re-centered conversations with teachers around reading goals and did not accept excuses for teachers who tried to explain away low performance. In reflection, Melissa stated that giving students access to literacy was key to her vision.

James also entered the role at a later stage of White racial identity and embodied aspects of both the immersion and autonomy phases. He displayed several aspects of CRSL during the site observation. This included direct mentorship of staff, most notably when he helped a teacher see how her reaction to a misbehavior was steeped in racial stereotypes. James also demonstrated the strongest skills in Khalifa's (2018) notion of engaging indigenous community context. During interviews, he was able to provide numerous examples of how he worked to learn the neighborhood, advocate for local causes, leverage school resources to support family needs, and collaborate with local organizations to support the school's educational vision.

James' deep connections with the neighborhood were triangulated during the site observation and he cited knowledge of the community when speaking with parents and staff. For

example, he was able to explain specific challenges a parent might have in attending an in-person meeting given recent events in the neighborhood to his main office staff.

Even leaders who entered the role at higher stages of White racial identity demonstrated gaps in CRSL practices. Neither James nor Melissa had a clear vision for developing a culturally responsive curriculum that activated students' indigenous context. And participants in this group, although more culturally responsive, still behaved in some ways that represented the White racial frame. For example, Melissa demonstrated manifestations of racial stereotyping in her hesitant approach with higher need Latinx students. She focused intensively on control when it came to instructional practices, opting for consistent scripted practices. James mirrored this approach to instruction, with a focus on consistency over deeper engagement. It is not surprising to see these variations in these leader practices. Their behaviors map closely to their current racial identity stage, which, despite being advanced, still contain elements of previous stages (Helms, 1995).

The results of this study connect to several themes seen in past research on White racial identity and school leadership. This study finds that motivations for entering leadership play a key role in whether or not a principal will embody culturally responsive practices. This recalls Khalifa's (2018) CRSL research as he states that those without the impetus to actively undo racist systems and structures are bound to reproduce them. He repeatedly discusses the danger of principal neutrality in disrupting systems of oppression such as over referrals of Black male students to special education, exclusion of minority students from classrooms based on misunderstanding of behavior and maintaining White privilege in access to advanced classes.

The motivation theme is also echoed in Theoharis and Haddix's (2011) study where they discovered that White leaders who *are* able to lead for equity and excellence *all* entered the work seeking to dismantle oppressive systems. The authors also note that these leaders had done

significant work on their racial identity, including reading, introspection, and conversations across lines of difference. This resembles the self-work that James and Melissa exhibited in this work. Recall that Melissa had completed racial autobiographies previously, engaged with a White anti-racist mentor, and received feedback on the degree to which her leadership was equitable. James had been openly challenged by Black mentors, received feedback on how he came across as a White manager, and attended several training sessions on the intersection of race and leadership.

Similar to the Theoharis and Haddix (2011) research, this study was able to connect principals' desire for equity with equitable student outcomes. James' school had the highest reading growth and one of lowest suspension rates for students of color in his network. The site observation showed a positive, aspirational school environment. Across classrooms, students were praised for their hard work and achievement. This was often spurred by James, who made comments to students *and* teachers such as, "I see you!" and "you go!" and "yes! you got it!" These statements often led to teachers praising students even more and further engaged their classes. On average, three of every four classrooms were highly engaged as evidenced by the number of students smiling, leaning forward to respond to questions, and quickly responding to teacher directions. On the day of the visit, a student's photograph and story were being placed on the wall for "student of the week." As she passed the poster, the principal said, "oh my gosh, is that you [student name]?" She grinned broadly and said yes and that she was going to inform her mother. Even challenging moments were resolved in a positive, warm manner. There were three student conflicts observed during the day. Each of them was mediated in a manner that allowed both sides to state their feelings and needs. The meditations resulted in student high fives or hugs with an agreement of how they would show empathy to each other going forward.

Melissa's school also had low suspension rates, but reading results were among the lowest in the network. It is worth noting that this gap in reading outcomes is a current focus for the leader, and she is dedicated to closing it. The school environment was not quite as energetic or positive as James' school but did show signs of inclusivity and caring. Morning arrival was very welcoming to families. Parents were invited to enter the school yard to drop off their children and were warmly greeted by four bilingual educators. Joyful music played loudly in Spanish and one teacher danced as he welcomed students inside. Inside the building, school leaders and teachers immediately noticed when a student was upset and took time out of their day to address children's concerns. There was an especially poignant moment when a second grader was being moved to another classroom and wept when she realized she would no longer see her teacher as frequently. The school leader allowed both the teacher and student to take time out of the day to process this together. In general, students were not quite as engaged in their classrooms. They appeared to be on task and focused, but most classrooms did not show palpable evidence of joy and excitement. Nor did Melissa intervene to increase the sense of joy and belonging as James did.

Like the work of Davis et al (2016), Fields-Smith (2005), Fuller et al (2008), Gates et al (2016), Mabokela and Madsen (2005), and Rusch and Horsford (2009), this study showed that trust was a major (spoken and unspoken) factor in White principal's ability to lead schools with students who did not share their racial backgrounds. At one extreme, Jenna was observed struggling to connect with students who sought her support and other staff had to intervene to resolve conflicts and meet student needs. The statement by an African American security guard to a student in distress, "tell her it in the same way you told us", was evidence of the unspoken trust gap between this leader and her African American students. On the other extreme, parents

at Melissa's school voluntarily shared sensitive mental and physical health information with the leader during arrival. She attributed some of that trust to her ability to speak their language, as well as the numerous times she had intervened when a student was in crisis. Recall that James explicitly stated the importance of building trust when working across lines of difference with parents:

I do think my identity comes into play, with all across lines of difference there are gonna be barriers to connection and trust. And if I'm here to build connection and trust and partnership, which is the mission of the school, I need to continue to show what is possible and I need to continue to model, ok how can we approach this situation with that same thinking so that families feel as though this is an actual partnership and not so much, a school that's once again just telling me what to do.

His approach embodies Rusch and Horsford's (2009) recommendation that leaders take a listening stance to better ascertain the community's needs.

The participants' experience in writing racial autobiographies closely mirrored some of the findings of the Gooden and O'Doherty (2014) study. As noted previously, all leaders cited some form of racial isolation in their past. Three of the four leaders showed some kind of discomfort in examining their racial past. Some of the tension was evident, as Melissa named her discomfort and was visibly moved when discussing a parent's problematic views. The other two participants, Jenna and James showed more subtle difficulties, mirroring Feagin's (2010) research on the White racial frame, where White people show unease through non-verbal cues, changes in tone of voice, and avoidance of eye contact. Robert tended to look down when asked direct questions about racial identity in his past. He also used repetitive filler language, such as "I

don't know" and "I'm not sure." Jenna hesitated when discussing race and her tone of voice changed considerably from confident and clear to uncertain and hesitant.

There are several possible reasons for this type of behavior. An explanation for Robert's disposition during these interviews could be related to Thandeka's (1999) notion of shame. In his racial autobiography, Robert recollected times when his family used derogatory language such as the n-word and instances when his friends made insensitive racist jokes. Reflection questions about Robert's racial identity may have triggered a sense of shame and made it difficult for him to find words to describe his upbringing. Another possible explanation for this discomfort could be fear of being labeled racist. Recall Bonilla-Silva's (2018) research revealed that some White people try to use copacetic language as a means to avoid appearing racist. In this study, Jenna had expressed this fear at another point in her interview, when she stated that did not always feel comfortable talking about race in professional settings out of concern of how she would be perceived. She often cited examples of when she asked an African American peer or supervisor to lead race-based discussions.

Beyond mirroring and confirming findings from past research as noted above, this study introduces novel connections between theories on racial identity and school leadership practices. The findings here show that White racial identity (WRI) stages can be measured via the Helm's model in a way that helps us better understand principals' mindsets and behaviors. Furthermore, each leader's WRI stage can be directly and indirectly connected to White racial frame practices as identified in the literature (Toure and Thompson-Dorsey, 2018) and CRLS practices as identified in research (Khalifa, 2018).

The precise behaviors that leaders exhibited earlier in their lives within White racial identity stages could be seen later in leadership. For example, recall that Melissa provided

evidence of White guilt in her young adulthood in her racial autobiography. Some of her leader's actions observed during the site visit mirrored this behavior. Recall that Robert discussed not noticing color in his childhood and then demonstrated color blind leadership at the school site. On the other extreme, James confronted issues of race continuously in his childhood, pushing back against narratives from his mostly White peers. At the school site, he was seen making similar moves by resisting deficit mindsets of students of color. These links between theories and their presentation within leadership behaviors at the school site have important implications that can contribute to the field of research on race and leadership. Those findings are summarized below.

### **Connection Between Racial Autobiographies and Direct Interactions with Students**

There is strong evidence from site visits that leaders' direct interactions with students across lines of racial difference mirrored aspects of their racial autobiographies. For example, Jenna was observed to be firm and at times even dismissive of student needs. When asked about her approach, she cited her description of her mother in her racial autobiography as showing "tough love" because she wanted "you to do it yourself." Robert took a relational and supportive approach with students, and directly cited the role of coaches in his life growing up as in a single parent, low-income household. James embodied the "warm demander" approach (Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis, 2016, p. 1295) and connected this back to his social justice mindset developed in his teenage years. Melissa generally took a warm and supportive tone with most students but appeared cautious and distant with higher need students. This mirrored the White guilt that she witnessed on the part of her mother and then experienced during a formative experience at the US/Mexico border.



When we layer on each participant's stage of racial identity awareness to this phenomenon, we see problematic consequences of mirroring early defining experiences. Jenna's tough approach at the high school level may represent a threat to students who have had limited and negative interactions with White adults. However, given her current stage of Pseudo-Independence, where "she may still behave in ways that unwittingly perpetuate [Black inferiority]" (Helms, 1990, p. 57), it is unlikely that she sees how her approach is breaking trust with students. Fuller et al (2008) discuss the trust gap between principals and students who do not share similar demographic backgrounds; Rusch and Horsford (2009) attribute the absence of trust across racial lines to the country's history of White abandonment as people of color fought for basic freedoms. It is therefore unsurprising that this leader struggled to support students throughout the day, with several students walking away frustrated and unheard. Additional racial reflection is needed for this leader to be able to notice this phenomenon and adjust accordingly.

Robert took a more positive and supportive stance with his students, but like Jenna, did not connect this to race when prompted. This limited his ability to provide support in ways that were specifically suited to his student population. For example, he did not intervene when White teachers used a harsh or sarcastic tone with students. His colorblind stage of racial development prevented him from seeing and interrupting these problematic racial dynamics.

Even Melissa, at a further level of White racial identity, was not able to identify her hesitation with high needs students. She explained that she did not want to "set them off" and that "she wants them to know that I care and notice and give comfort." Yet another staff member, who shared the racial background of both students, was able to successfully engage directly with each student to check in with them and ensure they were ready for the day. When

asked if she noticed differences between how she engaged with the two students compared to the other staff member, she felt her approach was similar. Melissa was able to reflect deeply on other aspects of her racial identity and leadership, such as how she had failed and later succeeded in developing healthy teacher mindsets as well as reexamining problematic school wide systems. However, there was something about student interactions that she was not able to recognize. Further study is needed to understand why this was the case. This leader could benefit from feedback on their approach with students paired with personal reflection on their tendencies.

Only James fully recognized how his racial identity influenced his student interactions. He described the importance of reflecting on his approach and tone as a White man and trying to strike a balance of holding high expectations while not demeaning children. He was mindful that excoriation could lead to shaming and traumatizing moments for his students, especially across lines of racial difference. Parents served as his “north star” for holding high expectations with warmth and support. He explained that he sought to hold the same expectation that a parent would want should they be present in the interaction. Finally, he described the importance of modeling student interactions for his staff, especially his White staff who struggle to find a warm, strict balance. This last point recalls Khalifa’s depiction of effective CRSL leadership, where the principal sets the tone for the climate in the school by modeling student interactions. It would be instructive for the other three participants in this study to consider the importance of this modeling and how the absence of critical reflection in student interactions could be limiting for the school.

### **Role of Mentorship in Developing CRSL Competencies**

There is strong evidence in this study that mentorship assists in the development of CRLS behaviors. The two leaders who demonstrated a multitude of CRSL competencies during the site visit were asked how they developed these skills, and both named the central role of mentors. James noted two areas of CRSL that he developed because of guidance from three older, more experienced, Black female teachers who he befriended. During his first two years of teaching, he struggled to connect with students from backgrounds different from his own. He noted how one of his colleagues challenged him:

She was basically like, ‘as a white male, you are teaching a class of twenty-six and there’s clearly a child who needs support and you don’t have a relationship with this child. What are you doing to bridge this gap?’ I was not reaching kids on where they were at. I think race must have come into play. I very much in my two years teaching was under the mindset of you come to school and you do work because that’s how I was taught. And it wasn’t so much of what do you need me to do to help you be successful? How do I create a space and belonging for you?

He later identified how his racial upbringing had been a limiting factor to this point.

It was not something I understood or something that was there. And I do know my own values and upbringing informed that it was personal responsibility and duty and working hard which is typically associated with white normative culture. It was until I changed how I viewed and how I changed my approach and relationship building and it started to be a shift.

This direct challenge from a colleague was successful because it came within a non-supervisory relationship, which allowed for trust and vulnerability. The fact that James had direct access to this veteran teacher was also transformative as he could observe and *see* the culturally responsive

teaching moves grounded in love and inclusion for all students. He later identified that while he could not mimic the exact approach of this mentor given his identity as a White male, he was able to create similar spaces for his students which were far more responsive to their needs and interests.

James cites another example of mentorship, this time as he entered the leader role. He discussed how a leader of his charter network (and a formal principal) inspired him to hold high academic standards for students and showed him how to make these lofty expectations come to life on a day-to-day basis. This then informed how he looked at instruction, student work, and data.

Melissa also described the deep impact of mentorship on her approach to racial identity work in the role. However, in her case, it was two White colleagues who were instrumental in her growth. Early in her career, she was part of a White affinity group. During one of these meetings, as Melissa explained what was holding her back from discussing topics of race, a White ally told her “get over it! It’s not about you, it's about doing the work!” This became a mantra for Melissa as she entered leadership. Anytime she started to take feedback about her identity personally, she reminded herself of the ally’s adage. She credited this with her ability to be critically self-reflective, a key aspect of CRSL.

Melissa also sought out direct mentorship from an older, White principal as she entered leadership and was able to directly observe the ways in which he was critically self-reflective.

The other one nonwhite [principals] said that he was the exemplary White ally leader and I could see that even before they said it. But them saying it affirmed it to me. He had such a resilience towards criticism. It wasn’t that he was never criticized for having racist policies or things...it was that he responded to them with heart and without taking it

personal and a critical pragmatic lens on how to fix it. And without seeing it it's hard to believe it's possible.

This last statement “without seeing it it's hard to believe it's possible” appears to capture the transformative nature of mentorship across these two participants. Direct observation of culturally responsive behaviors can rapidly and effectively improve principal practice, as long as there are open and earnest approaches to learning.

Melissa also discussed the importance of her mentor in regard to parent advocacy. He directly modeled how to advocate for a parent by coming to a meeting at *her* school and speaking on behalf of a mother's interests (he had a prior connection to the family via an older sibling). The participant was in awe of how the principal balanced support for the mother while helping her see the need for certain school policies. Melissa explained that this modeling served as an anchor for parent interactions going forward.

### **Impact of Engaging with Indigenous Communities on Other Aspects of CRSL**

Evidence from the outlier in this study (James) shows the outsized impact that engaging with the surrounding indigenous community has on other aspects of culturally responsive school leadership. James demonstrated the strongest commitment to interacting with the surrounding neighborhood. This went beyond living in the neighborhood, as James did. Rather, this involved (a) taking a keen interest in the history of the community (b) spending time outside of school hours (evenings, weekends) to attend local events (c) fighting for families' rights via protests and political pressure (d) opening the school up to community-based events and (e) partnering with local organizations on behalf of families. These actions facilitated his abilities in the other three aspects of his culturally responsive leadership.

Feedback from the community allowed him to be critically reflective on how parents viewed the school and his principal role. His open-door policy for families at the start of the school day came from his awareness of the neighborhood's history, where parents were kept out of the school building. When calling home to parents in response to student disciplinary incidents, he was careful to be objective and clear and use a warm and supportive tone. He also asked for parent input on the student's consequence. When asked about this approach, he cited the history in the neighborhood where schools would only inform parents of the punishment without consequence and expected parents to trust their decision making with little transparency.

This leader's knowledge of the community also helped him create an inclusive environment for students. The hallways of the school were lined with pictures, graphics, and posters of student's home cultures. This was informed by his knowledge of the languages, cultures, and countries of origin from various ethnic groups in the neighborhood. Additionally, he leveraged his community partnerships to procure space in a local basketball gym that the neighborhood was renowned for. Each time students walked into the gym, they saw pictures of legendary basketball players who came from the same community. Additionally, the leader invited parents into classrooms to support students who needed more care and attention.

Finally, his knowledge of the community supported him in mentoring his teachers. When some of his teachers balked at giving extra work at home, he was able to raise their expectations higher by providing specific examples of how extended family members support students at home. This came from direct experience during home visits. Or, when a staff member complained about family involvement, he was able to cite examples of how he connected with extended family members by going outside the school building. These proof points were essential in developing asset-based mindsets with staff.

This finding recalls Bryant's (1998) study of two African American principals in urban elementary schools in which she researched principals' abilities to incorporate parent voice into the educational process. One was more effective because he was able to better listen and connect with the local community. It also recalls Gooden's (2005) study of an African American principal serving at a large Midwest urban high school, where the leader's upbringing in the community helped him better understand and support students on issues they were facing. However, what is novel here is how the leader can identify how one aspect of CRSL leads to strengths in other CRLS competencies. For example, Jenna leveraged her bilingualism to engage with the indigenous context and find out more about families' troubling experiences with health care. This allowed her to create a more inclusive school environment, where bilingual nurses could provide additional support such as asthma treatment and referrals to clinics that served undocumented immigrants. James used his deep engagement with parents to develop culturally responsive practices with a teacher. He was able to cite a parent's high academic expectations as he pushed a teacher to reach out to the mother and provide additional daily homework.

### **The Role of the Charter Network in Leader's CRSL Development**

All four participants led schools belonging to large charter networks that had been established roughly twenty years ago. There was evidence from this study that the nature and behaviors of these CMOs impacted the ways in which leaders developed (or did not develop) CRSL mindsets and behaviors.

Robert and Jenna belonged to networks that stressed centralized, consistent practices when it came to hiring, curriculum, instructional vision, and discipline approach. While both leaders stated that they appreciated the clarity inherent in this model, they each struggled in how

to push back against problematic and racist practices. For example, Robert was troubled by the lack of support for Arabic speaking students. He advocated strongly with a network supervisor for services for these students but was not given a definitive answer. He then nobly volunteered to enroll all Arabic students in the network at his school, but again, was given a limited response. This lack of autonomy may have discouraged him from other areas of advocacy.

Jenna was clearly troubled by her school's suspension practices but was not sure what could be done if they were to follow the network's priority of a "return to clarity." This theme was about returning to clear schoolwide expectations and consequences. For example, leaders in this network were given the green light to use more serious consequences for drug use, verbal and physical altercations, disruptive, and disrespectful behavior.

There were also network-wide systems and policies in these leaders' schools that had become so ingrained in the ethos that it was hard for them to see the racism inherent in these practices. These were practices that each participant inherited when they assumed the role and given their previous roles as teachers in the same networks, it was difficult for them to identify the problematic nature of these policies. These included punitive send-out rooms, silent class to class transitions in lines, and scripted and formulaic approaches to classroom management and instruction. The heavy imprint of the network, combined with each leader's relatively early stage of White racial identity development made for uninterrupted racist systems. It is impossible to know whether these same leaders would have progressed to higher levels of White racial identity development in a less centralized and controlled system, but the other cases in this study illustrate what may occur when a network is less hegemonic and more open to improving DEI capacity.



The other two participants in this study, James and Melissa, were part of networks that took a laissez faire approach to individual schools and leaders. The CMO's belief was in finding skillful, committed leaders, and giving them the freedom to lead. This gave James and Melissa the autonomy to create a vision for their schools that was responsive to specific community needs. Recall that Melissa stressed inclusion and safety for an immigrant population that had fled gang violence in central America. This included honoring students' home language via bilingual staffing, rejecting exclusionary disciplinary approaches, and connecting with families at the school at least once per month. James centered his school's vision around a sense of community that blurred lines between school and the neighborhood. He welcomed in parent volunteers, partnered with community organizations, and made advocacy a key part of the model. He also rejected exclusionary disciplinary practices in favor of a "love and logic model" for behavior.

Beyond the freedom to reimagine school in a way that served each specific community, James and Melissa received support on their DEI capacity. These leaders received annual survey feedback administered by their charter networks on leadership in areas of DEI. This included data on how they interacted with staff from diverse backgrounds and ways in which they dismantled racist systems. This was instrumental in Melissa's development. She noted that the data from this survey spurred her to think differently about the composition of her leadership team. This resulted in her integrating the team to be more representative of the student population. Data also informed how she coached White leaders in her school towards a more culturally responsive approach. James received feedback on his strident tone and approach with women of color that pushed him to reflect on his White male identity, especially as a supervisor. Entering his second year of leadership, he modified his approach and asked for regular feedback on how he was perceived.

While the other two participants received feedback from their CMO network, the data was more general and did not target DEI metrics in the same manner. When asked what type of feedback they gleaned from the survey, their responses were unrelated to race and included data such as directness, instructional expertise, presence with students, etc. This limited the degree to which regular data informed their ability to be culturally responsive.

### **Leadership Behaviors and Grade Levels**

It is interesting to note that the two participants who inhabited higher levels of White racial identity and who embodied CRSL practices were leaders of elementary schools. One could speculate that leaders called to working with younger students might embody a nurturing mindset, which is an element in the warm strict equation inherent in CRSL. Indeed, Wilson's (2016) research on critical care does feature a case study on elementary school leadership. However, there is not yet research that connects leadership of specific grade levels to culturally responsive practices. And the small sample size in this study prevents making any strong conclusions.

On the other hand, it could be surmised that White middle and high school leaders might be more likely to fall into racial narratives, a key part of the White racial frames. As they work with students who are more adult-like in both thought and appearance, these principals might reflexively interpret behaviors as defiant or dangerous. There was no specific evidence of this in examining leader behaviors, however as stated above, many of their schoolwide systems did assume these characteristics of their students. Again, due to the small sample size of the study, it is difficult to extrapolate.

There was an interesting phenomenon where the two elementary schools used a more scripted and standardized curriculum. This can be attributed to grade level. For example, all students entering kindergarten in these schools needed similar literacy and math skills. However, the influence of these charter networks cannot be underestimated. The level of hyper control ties back to the CMO's original charter, where they promise results above their peer school group and require these for renewal. These organizations find a curriculum that "works" in that it leads to strong math and literacy data, and then replicate it.

### **Intersectionality and Leadership Behaviors**

All four leaders had aspects of identity intersectionality that impacted how they enacted their role, but there was no evidence that this led to more or less developed CRSL practices. Jenna identified as a first-generation college student and this marker played a factor in what drew her to a college preparatory school and what is keeping her in the role. She named that she found resonance in supporting first generation students to college access and that her life experience equips her to support students on numerous hidden skills related to college acceptance. However, Jenna was not able to identify ways this intersectionality related to the unique pathway her students were forging as first-generation students of color. She did not explain ways she sought to understand their journeys nor how their racial identity may have presented unique opportunities and challenges that she did not experience as a White student. When White school leaders chose not to include race in situations such as these, they fall into what D'Angelo (2018) describes as a detour where White fragility is avoided. It is a means of claiming a sort of oppression that obviates them from the difficult work of owning up to privilege and blind spots

needed to dismantle systems of oppression. In this specific case, this was a missed opportunity for Jenna to critically reflect and question her school's college preparatory systems.

Melissa took a similar detour and cited her immigrant grandparents as giving her a window into the experience of her students. She explained the feeling of loss her grandparents experienced when they could no longer use their home language to connect with people and navigate systems in the United States. This was partly what motivated her to become bilingual. It also was the impetus to hiring bilingual staff and creating signage to develop a sense of connection. However, Melissa did not name how her students' experience differed from that of her grandparents, who were able to benefit from their White identity to gain privilege in areas such as home ownership, education, and job markets. This was a missed opportunity for critical self-reflection. It prevented her from naming and addressing the unique barriers Latinx families face when they arrive in the United States. These insights could help her develop an even more welcoming school environment, from varying times for open houses, to venturing out into the community to meet families' needs.

Recall that Robert came from a low-income, single parent household. The role of athletic coaches and mentors from the community played a key role in his upbringing and he names this as influencing his supportive approach with students. This was evident in the site observation, where he knew every student's name and area of interest and was able to affirm their motivation for school. He effectively modulated between checking in and advocating for students (providing snacks, space for students to share concerns, etc.) and holding the line when expectations weren't being met. He even used sports specific language to motivate many of his students. While this approach clearly benefited students and gave them a sense of belonging on campus, it was unclear how this informed CRLS practices. He clearly stated that his upbringing in a low-

income, single parent household was not necessarily relatable to his students. Here he grasped the nuance of race in a way Jenna did not. However, he may be missing opportunities to explore authentic connections with students by learning more about the ways in which their lives are different from his and how systemic racism in the city contributes to their outlook.

James was least certain of how his intersectionality impacted his practice. He identifies as a gay man and hypothesizes that early life feelings as an outsider contributed to his desire for an inclusive environment where all students feel a sense of belonging. He also hypothesized that his sexual orientation may have made him more sensitive to a sense of social justice.

It is unclear why participants' intersectionality played a role in their day-to-day leadership while not necessarily impacting their capacity for CRLS behaviors. It appears that some principals either (a) underplayed their unique stories for fear of false equivalencies or (b) overplayed their upbringings and glossed over important differences between their backgrounds and those of their students. In either case, they represent missed opportunities to better understand their student populations and craft school experiences that best serve these students.

When leaders *do* reflect on their intersectionality, there is potential to enrich and strengthen their ability to examine systems within their school. For example, had James delved deeper to recognize the ways in which his gay identity subjected him to a feeling of exclusion in his hometown, he may have been able to gain a lens into which families and students felt welcomed or excluded in his school. He could have taken a learner's stance to this inquiry, as his status as a White male prevents him from understanding nuances in the African American and Latinx community. Reflecting on his intersectionality may have helped him craft effective questions for parents and families.

Similarly, Robert could have considered his upbringing in a single parent, low-income home as learned more about his students. What connections could he have made with some of his students? What might he never have understood about their experience, but gained insight into? How could these conversations help him craft a more inclusive environment?

For Jenna and Melissa, who *did* reflect on their intersectionality, they needed to balance this with a healthy respect for the oppression they could never understand. This would have helped them further conversations related to race and access to opportunity.

### **Connections Between Culturally Responsive Leadership and Student Outcomes**

Data collected during and after the site visit spoke to some connections between leader mindsets and equitable student outcomes. The table below shows how participants' current level of White racial identity connects to measures of student achievement and school climate.

Participant	Current Level of WRI	Academic Achievement	Attendance	Suspension Rate
Jenna	Independent	Graduation rate on par with peer group.  Regents' completion rate below per group  Postsecondary enrollment below peer group  (schools.nyc.gov)	Attendance below peer group  (schools.nyc.gov)	30% of students suspended at least one day (NYSED, 2021-2022)
Robert	Independent	Achievement on ELA state test on par with peer group  Achievement on math state test below peer group  (schools.nyc.gov)	Attendance below peer group  (schools.nyc.gov)	32% of students suspended at least one day (NYSED, 2021-2022)
James	Emersion /Autonomous	75% of students meeting reading goals  (self-reported STEP assessment)	Attendance above peer group  (schools.nyc.gov)	One suspension as of October, 2022 (self-reported)  Data unavailable for 2021-2022
Melissa	Emersion	30% of students meeting reading goals  (self-reported STEP assessment)	Attendance above peer group  (schools.nyc.gov)	One suspension as of October, 2022 (self-reported)  Data unavailable for 2021-2022

Table 5. Student Outcomes by Leader and School

It is difficult to draw direct links between leader mindsets and student outcomes. However, it is notable that leaders at enhanced racial identity stages are associated with stronger data on inclusive practices (suspension rates) and student engagement (attendance). This is to be expected from James and Melissa, who named their explicit desire to disrupt exclusionary practices at their schools. Conversely, Robert and Jenna were not able to name ways they were working against these practices and their suspension rates were higher and attendance percentages lower. Only James' school produced academic data that outperformed peer groups. It is difficult to ascertain why this is the case as culturally responsive mindsets and actions have not yet been proven to be correlated to higher academic measures.

## **Recommendations and Implications**

The following recommendations, based on evidence from this study, may be effective in fostering CRLS mindsets and behaviors for White principals who serve low-income students of color. While each of these suggestions may have a discrete impact, they are intended to be taken collectively as each one builds off the other, at times sequentially.

Findings from this study make it clear that CRLS behaviors can only be adopted in a limited, surface manner if White leaders have not done extensive work on their racial identity development. Recall that Robert and Jenna resided in the independence stage of Helms's (1995) model and were able to push back only minimally against racist practices because they were not able to see and identify these problematic areas. This connects to Khalifa's (2018) idea that critical reflection is integral to CRSL because it "allows leaders to see how oppression and marginalization is happening, now—and to catch it as it newly positions itself in organizations" (p. 82). Therefore, principal preparation programs and leader coaching should start with White racial identity development. This can include, but should not be limited to, several iterations of racial autobiographies, extensive readings on White racial identity development, affinity groups, and reflection journals.

Blitz and Kohl (2012) found that White affinity groups developed leader's perspectives on race and allowed them to notice previously unseen power dynamics at work. Gooden and O'Doherty (2018) noted that robust racial reflection on the part of school leaders can produce evolved mindsets and a commitment to antiracism. Theoharis and Haddix (2008) learned that a prerequisite for White principals' leading for equity was a commitment to racial justice. This study connects the findings from these two studies - that when White leaders commit to



developing their racial identity *and* when they commit to working towards social justice, White leaders *can* lead in culturally responsive ways.

Findings from this study suggest that leaders' White racial identity development can be accelerated by two factors. One is the accessibility to culturally responsive mentors and role models. Effective mentors are colleagues and not supervisors, which allows for vulnerability and trust. These advisors have done considerable work on several aspects of CRSL, most notably critical self-reflection and engagement of indigenous communities. The types of learning that can occur across this powerful relationship are direct feedback and modeling. Direct feedback allows the nascent principal to understand how their leadership practices "lands" with stakeholders as either responsive or neutral/harmful. This can then foster introspection and growth. Modeling allows the receiver to literally see, hear, and feel how a leader enacts CRSL behaviors. This can be especially powerful when the mentor shares identity markers such as race and gender so that the learner can relate to that person's racial identity journey. They can also identify with the skill needed to work across lines of difference. Finally, it should be said that the job of developing more culturally sensitive and responsive White leaders should not fall on professionals of color as this can lead to tokenism and an unfair burden put on one population.

Another factor that can accelerate growth is connecting with and learning from the indigenous community. Evidence from the study shows that when leaders take the time to commit to community engagement, their learning translates to improvement in other areas of CRSL. Leaders can follow the lead of James in this study, who took several meaningful steps in his journey. Principals new to an area can first study the history of the community, understanding its origins and how the current context developed over time. They can benefit from building

relationships with community members to hear stories that speak to the power and resilience as well as challenges of the neighborhood.

It is crucial that leaders step outside of their school building regularly and walk the streets to keep up to date with community issues and to be responsive to needs. Leaders should seek out gathering centers such as churches, YMCAs, YWCAs, libraries, and sports venues. This can benefit families who face obstacles to engaging at the school building level. Finally, the leader, after learning what issues face the neighborhood, should engage in activism and support of local causes. This demonstrates their commitment to all aspects of a child's development beyond academics. Recall the statement by James,

If I say I believe your life has value, if I say I want you to have a life of choice, and I know there's injustice happening and I'm not doing anything about it, I'm not living the truth I tell you every day. That's a big important thing for me.

Data from this study shows that regular and genuine interaction with the community informs critical reflection as the leader is pushed to think about how the school is serving *that specific community*. It enables the principal to better define the notion of inclusive spaces as they gain knowledge of home cultures, specifically the oral traditions, foods, music, and expectations of families. Community engagement also has the potential to inform culturally relevant instruction so that daily lessons speak to student motivations and interests and can be informed by family histories. Unfortunately, the study was not able to show this connection as even the most responsive leader was not able to identify clear ways the school's instruction was culturally responsive.

A reader of this study (especially an aspiring principal) might ask, *how will I find the time to engage in all of this - to reflect on my racial journey, spend time observing mentors, engaging*

*with the local community?* On top of this, consider the investment needed to fully embrace other CRSL practices inside the building such as mentoring teachers and challenging deficit mindsets. Recall that it took James two hours to discuss a single incident with a teacher who had accused a student of “stabbing” her with a marker.

It should be noted that one argument that this paper puts forward is that much of this work should be done *prior* to entering the role. As noted in the Helm’s graphs in the finding section, only one principal entered the role above the independent White racial identity stage. Unsurprisingly, he was the subject who demonstrated the highest number of CRSL mindsets and practices. Teachers aspiring to be leaders should (a) look for preparation programs that focus racial equity and identity development at its core (b) spend significant time reading and interacting with text that develops their identity (c) learn the community deeply through visits to local organizations, meetings with community partners and religious leaders, and visiting the places that families frequent. This prework will allow principals to ingrain CRSL practices in a way they have already practiced so that it feels organic and germane to their work.

In terms of the day-to-day work of school leadership, scholars as far back as Lomotey (1993) describe the balance needed between the administrative side of the role and the ethno-humanist side of the role. In his seminal work, Lomotey (1993) describes how effective leaders move fluidly between both approaches to achieve goals for their school. While the terminology of CRSL had not yet been fully developed yet, Lomotey’s notion of the “ethno-humanist” approach concerns similar matters, such as showing belief and commitment for African American students, exhibiting deep empathy and care for said students, and for developing positive mindsets within teaching staff. Here, Lomotey describes how an ethno-humanist approach furthers administrative school goals, such as when principals equip teachers with

positive mindsets, leading to higher academic expectations and outcomes. Or when these principles develop a nurturing school environment so that African American students can focus more deeply on their learning.

In the same way, current principals can further administrative goals via CRSL practices. The time investment on the front end saves time later in the school year. For example, when James took the time to mentor and challenge his White teacher who accused a student of violence, he not only prevented a teacher/parent rift, but he also made it far less likely that the same teacher will view future incidents using the same lens. This is likely to prevent over referrals of students due to behavior, and ensure more students feel comfortable in the class.

This study shows that districts and charter networks have a key role to play in the type of leadership they produce. Educational organizations that are tightly controlled at the top, via set curriculum, discipline policies, and instructional methodology limit the degree to which leaders can be responsive to their specific communities. Additionally, systems that are overly focused on control tend to reinforce the White racial frame and deficit mindsets for children of color. This includes silent transitions in lines, compliance-based classroom management systems, over referrals of Black boys, and regimented curriculum that is pegged to state standards, but not reflective of student lives. Even leaders such as Melissa and James, who see these practices as problematic, may not modify aspects of their school for fear of critique and/or low performance evaluations. It should be noted that principals who accept leadership roles in this organization are more likely to be aligned with these practices from the outset, which mutes dissent as well. It is worth noting that one leader belonged to a network that *did* set goals around suspension numbers. However, the goals were set so low - to reduce annual suspension to 190 - that it would not indicate a more inclusive environment. This represents a specific goal, but one that would

result in an average of an out of school suspension per day. There were no associated action steps or approaches included in this objective.

On the other hand, networks can encourage culturally responsive leadership. It starts by hiring principals who enter the work motivated for social justice and committed to their White racial identity development. This can be done by assessing racial identity early in the hiring process, by asking questions from Helms' (1995) inventory. If we were to examine the results from this specific study, school networks could consider two possibilities. One route is to simply screen out candidates who are not yet demonstrating an advanced racial identity mindset. This would prevent colorblind leadership that perpetuates the status quo. The other is to ensure that there is specific support for leaders who are not yet in the later stages of emersion and autonomy.

These networks can allow schools to be loosely coupled, thereby giving leaders the freedom to make their schools community responsive. However, the loose coupling should come with oversight to monitor progress towards equity goals. Leaders who are already social justice minded are more likely to make connections to the community, but still need to be encouraged to do so, as revealed in this study. Recall that only one of the two critically conscious leaders made this central to their leadership. Networks should pair newer leaders with mentors who are colleagues and can demonstrate living CRSL on a day-to-day basis. The mentor should be proximate enough so that the leader can observe their actions in person on a regular basis. Finally, networks should provide leaders with regular feedback on their CRLS practices. Surveys can be given to staff, families, and students and ask questions such as, "to what degree does this leader dismantle racist systems in the school?" and "how welcome do parents feel when entering the school?"

This study did not provide an example of a leader within a network using a culturally responsive curriculum. Rather, even the most responsive leaders were still using a somewhat colorblind curriculum. Networks should use an equity audit on their instructional plans and include voices of the community in the audit. This has the potential to push homogeneous instruction towards a more culturally responsive curricular framework.

### **Significance**

This work is significant because it can lend support to schools and communities seeking leaders who will bring about transformative change. The results of this study can inform more rigorous and meaningful hiring practices as well as inform the structure of interviews and which voices are present. If this work can map leaders' self-reported experiences around race to practice, it may support hiring teams in spotting either problematic or healthy mindsets. Rather than relying on a hiring process that tests traditional skills in the administrative realm, schools can create questions and tasks that assess a candidate's current stage within their White identity and their ability to effectively work in low-income communities of color. The results of the observational part of the study could also help schools in designing leadership scenarios where White candidate responses show rather than tell how their practices are impacted by their Whiteness.

The findings here can also support the development of White educators already serving in the principal seat. Leaders can and should commit to their own racial identity journey, so they become more adept at recognizing their own biases as well as systemic inequities in their building. Leaders can and should seek out mentors who can model culturally responsive techniques and function as a sounding board as they face inevitable resistance from staff.

Leaders can and should spend time in the local community, so that they have a better understanding of what it means to be culturally relevant *in that context*. Leaders can and should learn what families care about, the curriculum it is looking for, and how it wants their children treated.

This work also adds to the extant literature on White leadership by adding an important connection between identity and leadership. Elements from racial autobiographies can be coded to racial identity stages and can be connected to leadership behaviors. Simply put, principals reflections on their racial past can help us understand the way in which they lead. Given that 78% of principals in the country are White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020c), it is crucial that these leaders better understand how their mindsets around race connect to their mindsets and practice. Otherwise, we will see a continuation of the race neutral and colorblind approach that has held back so many promising young students of color.

## **Conclusion**

This study sought to understand how and why some White principals are able to progress to a point of racial literacy that enables them to serve effectively in low-income communities of color while others are not. The stakes are high. As Khalifa points out,

if school leaders remain neutral - claiming that they did not personally initiate the system, or that they have policies or intentions that are not oppressive and that promote inclusion—then the oppressive structures and practices will almost certainly be reproduced in the schools.

Given the events of the past few years - the racial awakening of a portion of the White population post George Floyd and a pandemic that forced schools to rethink dated instructional

practices - there are no more excuses for White educators serving across lines of difference. Nor are there excuses for charter networks and districts to *not* develop culturally responsive leadership in the principal seat. Especially since we have proof points in research (mostly thanks to Douglass, Khalifa, Gooden, Theoharis, O'Doherty et al) and now evidence from this study that shows responsive leadership is possible, under the right conditions, with the right leaders. Central offices can and should start by prioritizing candidates that share the backgrounds of their students and have shown to be effective in leading for equity. When White leaders *do* apply for principal seats that serve students who do not share their backgrounds, the bar needs to be extremely high. Students of color in low-income neighborhoods cannot afford more race neutral leadership or else the troubling statistics and opportunity gaps that led to this study will perpetuate.



## References

- Abbott v. Burke, 119 N.J. 287, 384-85, 575 A.2d 359 (1990).
- Achievement First. (2022). *Our values: Who we are and who we must be*. Retrieved January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022 from <https://www.achievementfirst.org/how-we-work/our-values/>
- Adams, K. S., & Christenson, S. L. (2000). Trust and the family– school relationship: Examination of parent–teacher differences in elementary and secondary grades. *Journal of School Psychology, 38*(5), 477–497.
- Akintunde, O. (1999). White racism, White supremacy, White privilege, and the social construction of race: Moving from modernist to post-modernist multiculturalism. *Multicultural Education, 7*(2), 2-8.
- American Anthropological Association. (1998). *American Anthropological Association statement on “race.”* Arlington, VA: Author. Retrieved January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022 from <http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racepp.htm>.
- Applebaum, Barbara. *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010.
- Atkinson, P. A. (2015). *For ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Baron, A. and Banaji, M. (2013). The development of implicit attitudes: Evidence of race evaluations from ages 6 and 10 and adulthood. *Psychological Science, 17*, 52–53.
- Becker, H. S. (1993). Problems of inference and proof in participant observation. *American Sociological Review, 23*, 652–660.
- Bernard, H.R. (2000). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Blitz, L, and Kohl, B. (2012). Addressing racism in the organization: The role of White racial affinity groups in creating change. *Administration in Social Work*. DOI: 10.1080/03643107.2011.624261.
- Boblin, S., Ireland, S., Kirkpatrick, H. & Robertson, K. (2013). Using stake's qualitative case Study approach to explore implementation of evidence-based practice. *Qualitative Health Research*, 23(9) 1267–1275.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2018) *Racism Without Racists Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. 4th edition. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. & Forman, T. (2000). "I am not a racist but...": Mapping White college students' racial ideology in the USA. *Discourse & Society*, 11(1), 50-85.
- Branch, G. F., Hanushek, E., & Rivkin, S. (2012). *Estimating the effect of leaders on public sector productivity: The case of school principals*. National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved August 1, 2021 from <http://eric.ed.gov/?q=%22Branch+Gregory+F.%22&id=ED529199>.
- Brooks, J. (2012). *Black school white school: Racism and educational (mis) leadership*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Brooks, J. S., & Jean-Marie, G. (2007). Black leadership, White leadership: Race and race relations in an urban high school. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 45(6), 756–768.
- Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
- Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership*, 60(6), 40–44.

- Capper, C. (2019). *Organizational theory for equity and diversity: Leading integrated, socially just education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Campaign for Fiscal Equity v State of New York, 100 NY2d 893, 925 (2003).
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Coates, R. (2011). *Covert Racism: Theories, Institutions, and Experiences*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV.
- Council of the Great City Schools. (2013). *Beating the odds*. Retrieved August 1, 2021 from <http://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/4/BTO2014.pdf>.
- Creswell, J.W., Poth, C.N. (2017) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.
- D'Angelo, R. (2018). *White fragility*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Davis, B., Lippa, A., Lehr, M., Gooden, M., & Dinh, T. (2016). Conceptualizing Principal-Student Racial Congruence (2016). *Journal of School Leadership*, 26 (7), 554-579.
- Davis, B., Gooden, M., & Micheaux, D. (2015). Color-blind leadership: A critical race theory analysis of the ISLLC and ELCC standards. *Educational Administration Quarterly* 51(3) 335–371.
- Della Porta, D., & Keating, M. (2008). *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences: A pluralist perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dennis, R.M. (1981). Socialization and racism: The White experience. In B.P. Bowser and R.G. Hunt (Eds.) *Impacts of racism on White Americans*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dolph, D. (2017). Challenges and opportunities for school improvement: Recommendations for urban school principals. *Education and Urban Society*, 49(4), 363–387.

- Douglas, T, Wilson, C, and Nganga, C. (2013). Starting with African American success: A strength-based approach to transformative educational leadership. In L.L. Tillman and J.J. Scheurich (Eds.) *The Handbook of Research on Educational Leadership for Equity and Diversity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Duneier, M. (2011). How not to lie with ethnography. *Sociological Methodology*, 41(1), 1-11.
- Evans, A. (2007). School leaders and their sensemaking about race and demographic change. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(2), 159-188.
- Feagin, J. (2010). *The White racial frame*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fields-Smith, C. (2005). African American parents before and after Brown. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 20(2), 129–135.
- Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2006). *Observation and interviewing. How to design and evaluate research in education* (6 ed., pp. 448-481). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Frankenberg, R. (1997). Local Whiteness, localizing Whiteness in Displacing Whiteness. In R. Frankenberg (Ed.) *Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Freund, D. (2003). *Ask the experts: What our experts say. What is the difference between race and ethnicity?* Retrieved February 20, 2022 from [http://www.pbs.org/race/000\\_About/002\\_04-experts-03-02.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-experts-03-02.htm).
- Fuller, E., Richards, M., & Cohen, R. (2008). Conflict or congruence? The intersection of faculty, parent, and student trust in the principal. *Journal of School Public Relations*, 29(2), 1-73.
- Gates, S.M., Ringel, J.S., & Santibanez, L. (2003). *Who is leading our schools? An overview of school administrators and their careers*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

- Goddard, R. D., Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, W. K. (2001). A multilevel examination of the distribution and effects of teacher trust in students and parents in urban elementary schools. *The Elementary School Journal*, 102(1), 3–17.
- Golann, J. (2015). The paradox of success at a no-excuses school. *Sociology of Education*, 88(2) 103–119.
- Golann, J. & Torres, C. (2020). Do no-excuses disciplinary practices promote success? *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 42(4), 633.
- Gooden, M. (2005). The role of an African American Principal in an urban information technology high school. *Educational Administration Quarterly*. 41(4), 630-650.
- Gooden, M., Davis, B., Spikes, D., Hall, D., & Lee, L. (2018). Leaders changing how they act by changing how they think: Applying principles of an anti-racist principal preparation program. *Teachers College Record*, 120, 1-27.
- Gooden, M. & Khalifa, M. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 86 (4), pp. 1272– 1311.
- Gooden, M. & O’Doherty, A. (2014). Do you see what I see? Fostering aspiring leaders’ racial awareness. *Urban Education*. 50(2), 225-255.
- Hardiman, R. (1979). *White identity development theory*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Harris, C.I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8), 1707–1791.
- Helms, J. E. (1995). An update of Helms’s white and people of color racial identity models. In J.G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casa, L.S. Suzuki, & C.M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling* (pp. 181-198). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Helms, J.E. (1990). *Black and White racial identity: Theory, research, and practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

- Helms, J.E. (1984). Toward a theoretical explanation of the effects of race on counseling: A Black and White model. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 12(4), 153-165.
- Hernandez, F., Murakami, E. and Cerecer, P. (2014). A Latina principal leading for social justice. *Journal of School Leadership*, 24(7), 568-598.
- Hines III, M. (2016). The embeddedness of White fragility within White pre-service principals' reflections on White privilege. *Critical Questions in Education*, 7(2), 130-145.
- Horsford, S.D. (2014). When race enters the room: Improving leadership and learning through racial literacy. *Theory Into Practice*, 53:123–130, 2014.
- Horsford, S. D. (2011a). *Learning in a burning house: Educational inequality, ideology, and (dis)integration*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Horsford, S. (2009). Black superintendents on educating Black students in separate and unequal contexts. *Urban Rev*, 42, 58–79.
- Horsford, S.D. (2007). Vestiges of desegregation: Black superintendent reflections on the complex legacy of Brown v. Board of Education. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, A68(4).
- Kappler-Hewitt, K., & Reitzug, U. (2017). The click-clack of her heels and the jingle of her keys: Exploring the tensions in the leadership of a successful turnaround principal. *Journal of School Leadership*, 27, 491-520.
- Karp, J.B. (1981). The emotional impact and a model for changing racist attitudes. In B.P. Bowser and R.G. Hunt (Eds.), *Impacts of racism on White Americans* (pp. 87-96). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Katz, J.H., & Ivey, A.E. (1977). White awareness: The frontier of racism awareness training. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 55(8), 485 - 488.

- Khalifa, M.A. (2018). *Culturally responsive school leadership*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Khalifa, M. A. (2011). Teacher expectations and principal behavior: Responding to teacher acquiescence. *The Urban Review*, 43(5), 702-727.
- KIPP NYC (2022). *An update on our commitment to anti-racism*. Retrieved January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022 from <https://kipppnyc.org/opendoors/update-anti-racism/>.
- Kornblau, G. (2019). Separate but still unequal: Challenging school segregation in New York City. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 46(3), 641-682.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2020), Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, *American Educational Research Journal*, 3, accessed January 2020.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006), From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12.
- Leppäaho, T., Plakoyiannaki, E. & Dimitratos, P. (2016). The case study in family business: An analysis of current research practices and recommendations. *Family Business Review*, 29(2), 159 – 173.
- Leithwood, K. & Jantzi, D. (2000) Principal and teacher leadership effects: A replication. *School Leadership & Management*, 20(4), 415-434.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2005). Quality and Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research in Counseling Psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 250-260.
- Lipsey, M. W. (1990). *Design sensitivity: Statistical power for experimental research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lomotey, K. (1993). African-American principals: Bureaucrat/Administrators and ethno-humanists. *Urban Education*, 27 (4), 395-412.

- Lomotey, K. (1989). *African-American principals: School leadership and success*. New York: Greenwood.
- López, G. R. (2003). The (racially neutral) politics of education: A critical race theory perspective. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39, 68-94.
- Mabokela, R. and Madsen, J. (2005). Color-blind' and 'color-conscious' leadership: A case study of desegregated suburban schools in the USA. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 8(3), 187-206.
- Martorell, F., Heaton, P., Gates, S. M., & Hamilton, L. S. (2010, February). *Preliminary findings from the new leaders for new schools evaluation*. Retrieved August 1, 2021 from [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/working\\_papers/2010/RAND\\_WR739.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/working_papers/2010/RAND_WR739.pdf).
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- May, S. (1999). Critical multiculturalism and cultural difference: Avoiding essentialism. In S. May (Ed.), *Critical multiculturalism: Rethinking multicultural and anti-racist education* (pp. 11–41). London: Falmer.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Milner, H.R. (2010). *Start where you are but don't stay there: Understanding diversity, opportunity gaps, and teaching in today's classrooms*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2020c). Characteristics of public school principals. Retrieved December 10, 2021, from: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cls.aspl](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cls.aspl).
- New York City Council (n.d.). *School Diversity in NYC*. (2019). Retrieved January 10, 2022



from <https://council.nyc.gov/data/school-diversity-in-nyc>.

*New York State's Extreme School Segregation* (2014). The Civil Rights Project. Retrieved on

March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021, from <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12/>.

Orlikowski, W. J., & Baroudi, J. J. (1991). Studying information technology in organizations:

Research approaches and assumptions. *Information Systems Research*, 2(1), 1-28.

Perry, P. (2002). *Shades of White*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Quinn, D. M., & Desruisseaux, T.-M. (2022). Replicating and Extending Effects of

“Achievement Gap” Discourse. *Educational Researcher*, 51(7), 496-499.

Rose v. Council for Better Education, 790 S.W.2d 186, 60 Ed. Law Rep. 1289 (1989).

Rusch, E. A., & Horsford, S. D. (2009). Changing hearts and minds: The quest for open talk

about race in educational leadership. *International Journal of Educational Management*,

23, 302–313.

*School Diversity in NYC* (2019). New York City Council. Retrieved March 18, 2021, from

<https://council.nyc.gov/data/school-diversity-in-nyc/>.

Schreiber, J., Asner-Self, K. (2011). *Educational Research: interrelationship of questions,*

*sampling, design, and analysis*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Scribner, J., Weingand, D., & Sanzo, K. (2021). Fostering cultural responsiveness in an urban

high school: A case study. *NASSP Bulletin*, 105(3), 153–172.

Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case selection techniques in case study research A menu of

qualitative and quantitative options. *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(2): 294-308.

Selden, S. (1999). *Inheriting shame: The story of Eugenics in America*. New York: Teachers

College Press.

Shields, C. M. (2004). Dialogic leadership for social justice: Overcoming pathologies of silence.

- Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40, 109-132.
- Shields, C., Larocque, L. and Oberg, S. (2002), A dialogue about race and ethnicity in education: struggling to understand issues in cross-cultural leadership, *Journal of School Leadership*, 12(2), 116-37.
- Smedley, A. & Smedley (D.). *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Swanson, J., & Welton, A. (2019). When good intentions only go so far: White principals leading discussions about race. *Urban Education*, 54(5), 732-759.
- Success Academy. (2022). *What sets us apart: We're in this together*. Retrieved January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022 from <https://www.successacademies.org/>.
- Thandeka (1999). *Learning to be White*. New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Group, Inc.
- The Civil Rights Project (2014). *New York State's Extreme School Segregation*. Retrieved July 20, 2021 from <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/news/press-releases/2021-press-releases/report-shows-school-segregation-in-new-york-remains-worst-in-nation>.
- The Education Trust. (2017). *See our truth*. Retrieved August 2, 2021 <https://newyork.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/See-Our-Truth.pdf>.
- The Executive Office of the President. (2015, July). *Giving every child a fair shot*. Retrieved July 20, 2021 from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/270746401/White-House-Giving-Every-Child-a-Fair-Shot#scribd>.
- The Uncommon Truth [@\_the uncommon truth]. (2020, July). *A space to share your experiences*

- of mismanagement, racism, prejudice, and cultural bias at Uncommon Schools.*
- [Instagram account]. Retrieved January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022, from [https://www.instagram.com/\\_theuncommontruth/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/_theuncommontruth/?hl=en).
- Theoharis, G. (2019). White privilege and educational leadership. In Brooks, J. & Theoharis, G. (Eds.), *Whiteucation: Privilege, power, and prejudice in school and society* (pp. 52-61). New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Books.
- Theoharis, G., & Haddix, M. (2011). Undermining racism and a Whiteness ideology. *Urban Education*, 46(6), 1332-1351. doi:10.1177/0042085911416012.
- Thompson, A. (2008). Resisting the ‘Lone Hero’ Stance. In M. Pollack (Ed.) *Everyday Anti-Racism: Getting Real about Race in School*. New York: The New Press.
- Toure, J. & Thompson-Dorsey, D. (2018). Stereotypes, images, and inclination to discriminatory action: The White racial frame in the practice of school leadership. *Teachers College Record*, 120 (020308), 1-38.
- Trepagnier, B (2016). *Silent Racism: How Well-Meaning White People Perpetuate the Racial Divide*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Tschannen-Moran, M. (2001). Collaboration and the need for trust. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 39(4), 308–331.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, W. K. (2000). A multidisciplinary analysis of the nature, meaning, and measurement of trust. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(4), 547–593.
- Uncommon Schools (2022). *Diversity, equity, and inclusion at Uncommon Schools*. Retrieved January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022, from <https://uncommonschoools.org/diversity>.
- Wilson, C. (2016) Enacting critical care and transformative leadership in schools highly impacted by poverty: an African-American principal’s counter narrative, *International*

*Journal of Leadership in Education*, 19(5), 557-577.

Yin, Robert K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

White, T. (2014). *Culture, power, & pedagogy(s) in market-driven times: Embedded case-studies of instructional approaches across four charter schools in Harlem, NY*. (Publication No. 0054D12188) [Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University].

Wilson, C. (2016) Enacting critical care and transformative leadership in schools highly impacted by poverty: an African-American principal's counter narrative, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 19(5), 557-577

Appendix A Racial Autobiography Protocol for Principals

**Interviewer:** Paul Adler, Ed.M, Principal Investigator

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Submission: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of Submission: \_\_\_\_\_

Location Stored: \_\_\_\_\_

Post Autobiography Comments:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Script (on google survey site):**

*You were invited to participate in a research study on White leadership in urban schools because you are a White principal who has chosen to work in a NYC charter school that serves primarily low-income students of color. I, Paul Adler, doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University's Urban Education Leaders Program will serve as Principal Researcher for this work. When necessary, interpreters and/or research assistants will provide support for this inquiry.*

*This study aims to gather your perceptions, attitudes, and actions as it relates to leading a school with a population that is different from the one you grew up in.*

*Before I begin, I want to ensure that you have had an opportunity to review and sign the informed consent form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that:*

- (1) all information will be held confidential*
- (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and*
- (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm.*

*In addition, to facilitate analysis, I would like to store your racial autobiography in a password protected folder on my hard drive. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the files which will be eventually destroyed at the conclusion of the study. This racial autobiography should take no longer than 60 minutes. Do I have your consent to collect this assignment via google today?*

## Appendix B

### Racial Autobiography Prompt (on Google Survey site)

A racial autobiography is a form of reflective journaling that asks you to think back on a pivotal moment or moments in your life that forced you to ask questions about your racial identity or the racial identity of someone else as it pertains to your own identity.

Please write your racial autobiography in the box below.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol for Principals

**Interviewer:** Paul Adler, Ed.M., Principal Investigator

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Number: 1                      2                      3

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Documents Obtained: \_\_\_\_\_

Post Interview Comments:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Script:**

*You were invited to participate in a research study on White leadership in urban schools because you are a White principal who has chosen to work in a NYC charter school that serves primarily low-income students of color. I, Paul Adler, doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University's Urban Education Leaders Program will serve as Principal Researcher for this work. When necessary, interpreters and/or research assistants will provide support for this inquiry.*

*This study aims to gather your perceptions, attitudes, and actions as it relates to leading a school with a population that is different from the one you grew up in.*

*Before I begin, I want to ensure that you have had an opportunity to review and sign the informed consent form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that:*

- (1) all information will be held confidential*
- (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and*

*(3) we do not intend to inflict any harm.*

*In addition, to facilitate note taking, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. This interview is planned to last no longer than 90 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover, and I will do my best to manage our conversation to ensure we get to all of them. Do I have your consent to record our interview on audio?*



## Appendix D

### Post Site Visit Debrief

1. To what degree did the date of visit represent a typical day in your leadership of the school?
2. Please share any moments in the day that stood out to you and why.
3. For x moment, how would you define the challenge/opportunity? What were you thinking when this moment occurred? Why did you take this action? Did your thinking or action in this moment connect to any larger beliefs you have about schooling, education, or leadership? If so, how?

## Appendix E

### Interview 1 for Principals

1. Tell me about the experience of writing your racial autobiography. Did you learn anything new about yourself?
2. Please share the racial, ethnic, and income demographics of where you were raised and the level/frequency of contact with those of different racial backgrounds.
3. Describe the racial attitudes present in your immediate family (parents, siblings, etc.).
4. Describe the racial attitudes present in your friend groups between age 0-21.
5. At what age did you begin to come into regular contact with those from different racial backgrounds? What do you recall about that experience?
6. How would you describe your current racial identity?
7. [Participant dependent]. You described X event. Why did you write about this? How did this impact your racial awareness?

## Appendix F

### Interview 2 for Principals

1. What, if any, parts of your identity influenced your decision to teach in this context?
2. What, if anything, from your childhood experiences influenced your decision to teach in this context?
3. Why did you choose to lead in a school that primarily serves students who do not share your background?
4. What, if any, parts of your identity influenced your decision to lead in this context?
5. What, if anything, from your childhood experiences influenced your decision to lead in this context?
6. Please describe your core leadership beliefs and practices.
7. How does your rationale for leading in this context impact your leadership beliefs?  
Leadership practices?
8. How do your early racial experiences impact your leadership beliefs? Leadership practices?
9. Tell me about your professional plans for the next 3 years, 5, years, 10 years?

## Appendix G

### Interview 3 for Principals

[Researcher will share all data and findings related to the participant and then ask the following]

1. To what degree do these findings accurately portray our interview, the site visits, and the documents you shared with me?
2. What, if any, parts of these findings are inaccurate? What needs to be correct before being included in the study?
3. After viewing this data, are there any reflections you would like to share?
4. Is there any additional information that would be helpful for me to include in this study?

Appendix H

Observation Protocol for Principals

**Observer:** Paul Adler, Ed.M., Principal Investigator

Observee: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer Number: 1                      2                      3

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Documents Obtained: \_\_\_\_\_

Post Observation Comments:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Script:**

*You were invited to participate in a research study on White leadership in urban schools because you are a White principal who has chosen to work in a NYC charter school that serves primarily low-income students of color. I, Paul Adler, doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University's Urban Education Leaders Program will serve as Principal Researcher for this work.*

*This study aims to gather your perceptions, attitudes, and actions as it relates to leading a school with a population that is different from the one you grew up in.*

*Before I begin, I want to ensure that you have had an opportunity to review and sign the informed consent form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that:*

- (1) all information will be held confidential*
- (2) your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and*
- (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm.*

*This observation is planned to last no longer than 8 hours. During this time, I will quietly shadow you. Should you need to have privacy for any interactions, or take a break, please let me know and I will pause the observation.*

Appendix I

Observation Data Collection Tool

Observation Activity: Description of Physical Setting: Observation Time: Individuals Present:			
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes	Coding Scheme 1 (C = consistent w/interview; I = inconsistent)	Coding Scheme 2 (CRSL = CRSL behavior; WF = White Fragility behavior)

Appendix J  
Coding Schemes

<b>Type of Data Collected</b>	<b>A Priori Coding Scheme Used</b>	<b>Coding Strategy</b>
Interview 1 Notes	Stages of Helms' White Racial Identity Model (1990) C=contact; D=disintegration; R=reintegration; P=pseudo-independence; I=immersion; A=autonomy	Color code each stage and use highlighter to categorize each quote with letter of stage above the quote
Interview 2 Notes	Culturally Responsive Leadership Behaviors Named (Khalifa, 2018) CS = critically self-reflective; CR= developing culturally responsive teachers/curricula; CI = promoting inclusive school context; CC=engaging students' community contexts OR White racial frame Coding RS = racial stereotypes; RN = racial narrative; RI = racial images; RE = racialized emotions; IDA = inclinations to discriminatory actions	Match each part of the script to letter codes using brackets and initials of codes in margin.
Observation Data	Culturally Responsive Leadership Behaviors Named (Khalifa, 2018) CS = critically self-reflective; CR= developing culturally responsive teachers/curricula; CI = promoting inclusive school context; CC=engaging students' community contexts OR White racial frame Coding RS = racial stereotypes; RN = racial narrative; RI = racial images; RE = racialized emotions; IDA = inclinations to discriminatory actions	First use the basic coding scheme above during/after observation (see tool in appendix F); then use more granular coding next day.
Documents	Culturally Responsive Leadership Behaviors Named (Khalifa, 2018)	Highlight lines of text that match each code;



	<p>CS = critically self-reflective; CR= developing culturally responsive teachers/curricula;  CI = promoting inclusive school context; CC=engaging students' community contexts  OR  White racial frame Coding  RS = racial stereotypes; RN = racial narrative; RI = racial images; RE = racialized emotions; IDA = inclinations to discriminatory actions</p>	<p>then indicate code in the margin.</p>
--	--	--