A Qualitative Investigation of the Interpersonal Changes White Psychology Trainees Experience During their Race-Based Learning and Development

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A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE INTERPERSONAL CHANGES WHITE PSYCHOLOGY TRAINEES EXPERIENCE DURING THEIR RACE-BASED LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

by

Molly K. Beagle

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology Western Michigan University December 2017

Doctoral Committee:

Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D., Chair
Joseph R. Morris, Ph.D.
Patricia L. Reeves, Ph.D.
A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE INTERPERSONAL CHANGES WHITE PSYCHOLOGY TRAINEES EXPERIENCE DURING THEIR RACE-BASED LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Molly K. Beagle, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2017

The current study expands upon prior research that has explored how white psychology and counseling graduate trainees are impacted by their learning about racism. Prior to this study being conducted, research primarily addressed the psychological impact of learning about racism for white trainees. There was minimal acknowledgment and exploration of how learning about racism impacted the interpersonal aspects of trainees’ lives, such as their relationships and larger social networks. The current study addresses this gap within previous research, with it being the first to have an intentional, exclusive focus on the interpersonal impact of learning about racism. The primary purpose of the current study is to explore the changes that white counseling psychology doctoral trainees experience in their relationships and larger social networks as their awareness and understanding of racism increases.

In order to explore the interpersonal changes experienced by trainees, the current study utilizes a phenomenological method of qualitative inquiry. Participants of the study included 10 white counseling psychology doctoral trainees, who each engaged in two phone interviews. The analysis of participant data resulted in the identification of five themes, with each theme representing an interpersonal change commonly experienced by participants as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. The five identified themes include: relationship tension and conflict, development and strengthening of relationships, relationship disconnection, relationship dissolution, and transitioning to new roles. Interconnection was found among the
themes, as they had an influence on each other.

Collectively, this study’s findings offer insight into how learning about racism impacts white counseling psychology trainees on an interpersonal level. The findings suggest that the development of greater awareness and understanding of racism may lead trainees to assume new roles in their relationships, with the assumption of new roles involving trainees shifting how they interact with others. The roles of educator, protector, and outsider were three roles the findings suggested that trainees may assume. Trainees’ learning about racism may also lead to shifts in the levels of intimacy and connection they experience in relationships. Finally, learning about racism may lead trainees to make changes to the structure of their social networks, where they begin to place greater emphasis on building relationships with fellow professionals, with people of color, and with individuals who share their perspectives on racism.

The findings of the current study have particular relevance for counseling psychology trainees, as well as counseling psychologists who are providers of multicultural education. Increasing trainees’ awareness of the potential interpersonal changes that may occur upon learning about racism, may help trainees better prepare for the challenges they may face when attempting to integrate their new perspectives on racism into their personal and professional lives. Trainees who are better prepared for potential challenges may be better able to develop strong, persistent anti-racist identities. Ultimately, through helping counseling psychology trainees to develop strong anti-racist identities that persist when faced with challenge, the perpetuation of racism within the field of psychology may be reduced.
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CHAPTER I

MY EXPERIENCE

The purpose of my qualitative study was to explore the interpersonal changes experienced by white counseling psychology doctoral trainees as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. As part of my role as a qualitative researcher, I spent considerable time throughout my study reflecting on the interpersonal changes I experienced myself as I learned about racism. This reflection helped me to accomplish the important qualitative task of acknowledging and setting aside my own experiences in order to fully attend to the meanings my participants made of their experiences of interpersonal change.

To demonstrate in writing my acknowledgement and setting aside of my experiences, I utilize the current chapter to provide a detailed account of the interpersonal changes I experienced as my awareness and understanding of racism increased. My main purpose for sharing my experiences is to help readers understand why I entered my study with particular assumptions about the phenomenon I examined, which was the experience of interpersonal change related to learning about racism. My secondary purpose for sharing my experiences is to help readers understand the inspiration and passion behind my study.

Prior to sharing my experiences, I will provide background information about myself. I identify as a white, agnostic, heterosexual female in her early 30s. Throughout my entire childhood and adolescence, I lived in a middle-class suburb of Lansing, Michigan. This area was highly conservative, and had a majority-white population. Reflective of the area in which I lived, I was raised in a middle-class family that I would describe as being moderately conservative. The majority of family members on my father’s side were Catholic, and on my mother’s side, the
majority were protestant. Although I never had a solid religious affiliation throughout my childhood and adolescence, the religions I was exposed to had a noteworthy influence on me.

My initial attitudes and perspectives on racism were shaped by the general messages I received from family, as well as by specific incidents that occurred during my childhood and adolescence. With regard to messages I received, my family placed strong emphasis on the “golden rule.” I was urged to treat all individuals in the way I wanted to be treated, regardless of individuals’ race or other demographic variables. Several of my family members aligned with the “I don’t see color” perspective, and through this alignment, would essentially minimize the importance of one’s race. In addition to the “golden rule” and the “I don’t see color” perspective, the myth of meritocracy was another idea that ran rampant within my family. I frequently received the message that success was possible for anyone who worked hard enough to achieve it. There was little to no acknowledgement of systemic barriers that were in place to achieving success for people of color.

When racism was specifically addressed by my family members, it was described as if it had been largely resolved after the Civil Rights Movement. The continued impact of racism was minimized. When family members witnessed other individuals attempting to address racism’s continued presence, particularly individuals of color, family members would often respond by rolling their eyes, and making comments such as, “oh, they’re just playing the race card again.”

Although the majority of the racism I was exposed to was more covert in nature, there were a few incidents that occurred in my childhood where direct hostility was expressed by family members toward people of color. When these incidents occurred, I would become highly uncomfortable, as I already had in place a strong belief in the “golden rule,” and the belief that
all people, regardless of their race, should be treated equally due to having the shared experience of being human. In contrast to these incidents, I also had what I refer to as shining moments in my childhood, where family members attempted to have an honest discussion with me about racial oppression. The majority of these moments occurred with my father, where he would attempt to raise my awareness of the privilege I possessed, and would encourage me to challenge the historically positive portrayal of white individuals.

It was not until I attended college that my perspectives on racism began to shift. For both my undergraduate and graduate work, I attended universities in Michigan. Although both universities had a majority-white population, I was exposed to greater racial diversity within those contexts than I had been in any others. It was during my undergraduate work at Central Michigan University that several shifts occurred for me. Within that time frame, I declared myself as agnostic, and I began to more strongly align with liberal perspectives. My perspectives on racism began to shift after I took an undergraduate course focused on race and religion in the United States. I identify this course as being the catalyst for my journey toward developing an anti-racist identity.

My attitudes and perspectives on racism underwent further transformation while completing my graduate-level work at Western Michigan University. For both my master’s and doctoral programs, there was a heavy multicultural emphasis, with particular focus being placed on racism. As I advanced in my professional development as a counseling psychologist, I carried that multicultural emphasis with me. I credit my doctoral program with having the greatest influence on my development of an anti-racist identity. Through the courses I took, and the relationships I established with faculty, colleagues, and supervisors, I became inspired to fight
against racism, and raise awareness of the continued impact racism has on white individuals and people of color. My anti-racist values and perspectives have become aspects that are deeply engrained within my identity as a counseling psychologist.

In summary, the background information highlighted above helps to capture how my perspectives on racism shifted over time, to where I eventually began to align with anti-racist values and perspectives. With this background information in mind, I now provide an account of how my shift in perspectives on racism impacted my relationships with others.

As I reflect on the early years of my graduate work, I smile as I remember how fiery and passionate I had been. I not only had passion for developing an anti-racist identity myself, but also for helping others to develop such an identity. Although the motivation I had was admirable, my passion was unbridled, which led me to be somewhat rigid and militant in the way I approached others about racism. If individuals did not support and share my passion for working toward an anti-racist society, I believed that this discrepancy meant that they did not support me on a general level, and had a complete lack of understanding of who I was as a person. Such a belief led me to disconnect from several friends and family members, who for the majority of my life, had been positive forces. I started to minimize my phone calls and visits. I shut myself out from the love and care they tried to convey to me. If these people weren’t invested in fighting against racism, why even invest the time and energy on them?

As I gradually disconnected from those who had been influential during my childhood and adolescence, I began to develop a new family with individuals within my academic and professional communities. My fellow cohort members and other colleagues became my siblings in a sense. My professors, supervisors, and committee members became parental figures. These
were the people I connected with, and who I felt understood me the most. These were the people who supported my continued development of an anti-racist identity through challenging me, and calling to attention occasions when I was blind to my own privilege. With these individuals, I could express and continue developing my anti-racist identity with the comfort of knowing that I would not face ridicule, invalidation, or rejection. I felt safe, supported, and fulfilled.

In addition to placing greater emphasis on my academic and professional relationships, I also began to intentionally work toward building relationships with individuals of color, both in my personal and professional lives. Through developing greater understanding of racism, and remaining open to continued learning and growth, I observed that I was better able to connect to individuals of color. This increased ability to connect was particularly salient in my therapeutic relationships with clients of color. My willingness to directly address racism, white privilege, and racial differences ultimately led to strengthening of my therapeutic relationships with them. In addition to my relationships with clients, I was also able to develop strong, meaningful relationships with colleagues and faculty of color. In my personal life, my relationships with friends of color strengthened, and acquired greater depth.

Collectively, my relationships with people of color, and those within my academic and professional circles became my focal point, and my area of investment. These individuals comprised my new family. Despite the nurturing, care, and acceptance I received in these relationships, a painful void remained present within me. I missed the connection I had once felt with my family and friends. I longed for their support and acceptance of my anti-racist identity. Each time I would reminisce on my friendships and family relationships, a strong sense of sadness would consume me, as I realized that these relationships were deteriorating over time.
Throughout my masters-level training, and the first half of my doctoral work, I remained emotionally and physically disconnected from family members, hometown friends, and even my romantic partner at the time. I did not feel safe with them, and often dreaded visits and interactions. It was frustrating to interact due to them having a different level of understanding of racism. Interactions were also frustrating due to the fact that these individuals generally avoided having racism be a topic of discussion. Productive dialogues about racism with family, hometown friends, and my romantic partner were virtually impossible. Tension and strain were always present in these relationships. I wanted these individuals to be on the same page as me, and to share my passion for anti-racism work. I continually had to grapple with the pain of recognizing that the people I had always loved deeply did not support or understand an important piece of my identity. I felt angry and hurt, which naturally fueled my decision to remain disconnected. Minimizing my time with family, friends, and my partner meant minimizing my exposure to pain and anguish.

The relationship tension I experienced with family, friends, and my partner would often be strongest when racist attitudes were conveyed through their jokes, comments, or actions. When such incidents would occur, my muscles would tense, my throat would tighten, and my mind would begin to race. Internally, I would ask myself, “What should I do right now? Should I confront them?” While part of me would feel inspired in these moments to confront and educate, another part of me wanted to remain silent for fear that I would only create further tension and conflict. In these moments, I often felt hopeless and confused. I was apprehensive about confronting individuals about their racist attitudes due to worrying about the potential impact it would have on my relationships with them. I was also apprehensive about making the choice to
remain silent, as such a choice would lead me to feel guilty for not acting according to my anti-racist values. In essence, my feelings of hopelessness and confusion arose from recognizing that any choice I made would likely have a negative outcome.

My choice to confront individuals about their racist attitudes was generally based on the degrees of comfort and closeness I felt in the relationships, with confrontation being more likely to occur in relationships with higher levels of comfort and closeness. I often made the choice to remain silent with individuals who I did not know well, or felt the relationship could be significantly damaged through confrontation. During my masters-level training, and the early years of my doctoral work, my confrontation style was somewhat aggressive, where I would point out others’ racist attitudes in a blameful manner, and would try to explain in a condescending fashion why others’ beliefs and ideas were wrong. Predictably, these confrontations would typically have negative outcomes, where others would become defensive, and I would leave the confrontation feeling angry, discouraged, and invalidated. These confrontations served as another factor further perpetuating my disconnection from individuals in my personal life.

Around the third year of my doctoral work, I began to experience a developmental shift, where my guilt related to white privilege began to decline, and I started to come to terms with the fact that my privilege would always be present. I began to recognize that although I could not rid myself of privilege, I could use my privilege in positive and productive ways to promote justice and empowerment for people of color. This realization helped me embrace and find worth in my white identity, rather than feeling ashamed of it. In addition to developing a more positive perspective of my own white identity, the third year of my doctoral work was also around the
time when I began to more fully comprehend the systemic nature of racism. Rather than conceptualizing racism as a collection of individual acts, I began to view racism as being embedded within a larger system. My anger about racism shifted from being focused on individual racist acts, to being directed toward the fact that all individuals, regardless of race, are victims of racism. All individuals are exposed and influenced without choice, and racism ultimately hurts everyone.

The developmental shift I experienced midway through my doctoral work led me to experience shifts in my relationships. Through coming to better terms with my own white privilege, and through recognizing racism’s negative impact across all races, I began to develop greater empathy for white individuals. This increased empathy helped me to open myself once again to having meaningful relationships with my family and friends. I realized that although firm boundaries had to be in place with regard to the extent to which I could openly express my anti-racist beliefs, fulfilling relationships were still possible. I realized that my family and friends may never fully understand or support my anti-racist identity; however, I could still receive support and understanding from them for other aspects of myself.

In the present day, I have come to better terms with the intellectual disconnection that I experience from my family, friends, and my current romantic partner. I am learning to accept that there will always be a degree of disconnection and tension due to our differences in perspectives and beliefs about racism. In order to manage relationship tension, I find that I must strike a balance between expressing my anti-racist identity, and preserving my relationships. For example, when faced with making the decision whether to confront others’ racist attitudes, I must decide whether the confrontation is worth engaging in. I must pick and choose my battles.
On occasion, I make the determination that preventing damage to a meaningful relationship is more important than confrontation.

Over the years, my confrontation style has transitioned from being aggressive to more gentle and feeling-focused in nature. When I choose to confront others about their racist attitudes, I express my disagreement through sharing my own feelings, rather than making blameful statements aimed at inflicting shame or guilt. I also find points of connection when confronting others through making statements that convey empathy and understanding. When confronting individuals who are less receptive to learning about racism, my ultimate goal of confrontation is to voice to others where I stand on racism-related matters, but not pressure them to conform to my ideas. It is my hope that for some individuals I confront, voicing my perspectives might trigger them to reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs. Overall, utilizing a gentle, feeling-focused confrontation approach allows me to express my anti-racist identity while also being mindful of minimizing conflict in my relationships with those who do not share my perspectives. The three main goals I have for confrontation are to gently challenge attitudes, share my own voice, and express empathy, care, and understanding to those being confronted.

In summary, developing greater awareness and understanding of racism has led me to experience significant changes in my personal and professional relationships. My own development has helped me establish strong professional relationships with colleagues, faculty, supervisors, and clients. My relationships with people of color have particularly been enhanced through my development. With regard to relationships in my personal life (i.e. family, friends, and romantic partners), my increased awareness and understanding of racism has led to increased tension, and conflict. Management of tension and conflict in these relationships is an ongoing,
ever-present challenge. Although the pain of having to conceal my anti-racist identity continues to emerge at times, I have found meaning and fulfillment in the relationships I have with family members, friends, and my romantic partner. My learning about racism has been a challenging and complicated journey that has helped me better understand the complexity of relationships. I have learned that love, care, and respect may still be found in my relationships, even when certain aspects of myself are not fully supported and understood by my loved ones.

Overall, my own experiences of interpersonal change were key factors that inspired me to conduct the current study. I became particularly intrigued with exploring interpersonal changes related to learning about racism after recognizing that several of my white colleagues had experienced interpersonal changes similar to my own. Recognizing these commonalities made me question whether other white counseling psychology doctoral trainees were having similar experiences. The current study represents my attempt to identify and describe the interpersonal changes commonly experienced by white counseling psychology doctoral trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism.

In the four chapters to come, further details about the current study are provided. In the second chapter, a review is provided of the literature relevant to the current study. The third chapter provides details about the current study’s methods. In the fourth chapter, details are provided about the study’s results, namely, the interpersonal changes that were found to be commonly experienced by participants as they learned about racism. The fifth and final chapter provides a detailed discussion of the current study’s findings, which includes discussions about the study’s limitations, as well as the study’s implications for training and research.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the current study was to explore the interpersonal changes experienced by white doctoral-level trainees in counseling psychology as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. Of particular interest were the specific changes trainees experienced in their personal and professional relationships. Also of interest were the broader changes that occurred to trainees’ social networks and interactions with others. Together, these changes were important to address, as having greater knowledge and understanding of these changes may help to promote more effective multicultural training for white counseling psychology trainees. Multicultural education providers who have knowledge and understanding of the interpersonal changes white psychology trainees may face upon learning about racism may be better able to help trainees prepare for and cope with those changes. Helping trainees to effectively adapt to interpersonal change may help to build psychologists with strong, persistent anti-racist attitudes, which may ultimately help reduce the perpetuation of racism within the field of psychology.

The current study expanded upon prior research that has explored the changes experienced by white psychology and counseling graduate trainees as a result of their learning about racism. In general, previous research has primarily addressed the intrapersonal changes white trainees experience as a result of this learning, with considerably less research focusing on the interpersonal changes that occur (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Dickson, Jepsen, & Barbee, 2008; Evans & Foster, 2000; Murphy, Park, & Lonsdale, 2006; Rothman, Malott, & Paone, 2012; Smith, Constantine, Dunn, Dinehart, & Montoya, 2006). In order to help fill this research gap, the current study focused on the interpersonal aspects of learning about racism for white
counseling psychology trainees. The goal of this focus was to gain understanding of how trainees’ relationships, social networks, and interactions change as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism.

Prior to reviewing the literature associated with the current study, it is important to provide a definition of racism. For the current study, the definition proposed by Barndt (2007) was used. This definition describes racism as being the combination of race prejudice, and the misuse of power by systems and institutions. One of the favorable aspects of this definition is its acknowledgement of both individual and institutional racism, and the connection between them. According to the definition, race prejudice alone does not equate to racism. All individuals, regardless of their race, hold a degree of race prejudice. It is when race prejudice is enforced by systems and institutions that racism occurs. Essentially, racism is the collective power to enforce prejudice. In the present time, notions of white superiority and white normativity are systematically enforced in the United States.

In this literature review, an overview is provided of the research that serves as a foundation for the current study. The review consists of four sections summarizing different areas of research. The first section provides a broad overview of research on multicultural education, which is typically the component of graduate training where white psychology and counseling trainees are exposed to the topic of racism. The second section provides a review and critique of research that has explored the cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions white psychology and counseling trainees have reported experiencing to learning about racism and white privilege. In the third section, a review and critique is provided of research that has explored the outcomes of learning about racism for white trainees. Two learning outcomes that
are reviewed in depth are those of increased multicultural competence, and enhanced white racial identity development. Overall, the primary purpose of the second and third sections of the literature review is to provide background information about the intrapersonal aspects of learning about racism for white trainees.

The fourth section of the literature review provides a review and critique of research that has offered beginning evidence suggesting that learning about racism involves interpersonal change for white psychology and counseling trainees. The research addressed in this section is most central to the core purpose of the current study, and thus, is reviewed in greater depth in comparison to research reviewed in other sections. The fifth and final section of the literature review provides a summary of the reviewed research. As part of this summary, an overall critique is provided of the research conducted on changes experienced by white psychology and counseling trainees as they learn about racism. The summary concludes with a statement of the specific research questions that were addressed in the current study.

Multicultural Education: A Gateway to Learning about Racism

In response to growing racial diversity within the U.S., emphasis on multicultural concerns has increased over the past 50 years (Smith et al., 2006). The initial calls for greater emphasis on multicultural concerns were made in the 1960s and 1970s. African American scholars such as Clemmont Vontress, Joseph White, Wyatt Kirk, and Frances Cress-Welsing were a few of the earliest individuals to address the importance of attending to multicultural factors, particularly racism (Cress Welsing, 1974; Kirk, 1975; Vontress, 1969; White, 1984).

The fields of psychology and counseling have played an integral role in addressing multicultural concerns (Smith et al., 2006). Within both fields, multicultural education has
become a critical component of psychologists’ and counselors’ training. Multicultural education has traditionally served as the primary component of graduate training where psychology and counseling trainees learn about racism. In the beginning of this section, multicultural education is discussed from a broad perspective, where all diversity topics addressed within this education are acknowledged, including racism. Later in this section, the discussion transitions to focusing exclusively on racism being addressed within multicultural education.

According to Locke (1990), the primary purpose of multicultural education is to train clinicians to demonstrate counseling effectiveness with a variety of clients who are culturally different from themselves, including clients with different racial identities. Arredondo and Toporek (2004) identify multicultural education as the cornerstone for ethical practice, noting that in order for psychologists and counselors to provide services in an ethical manner, they must develop competence to effectively work with culturally diverse clientele. Within the American Psychological Association’s (APA) Code of Ethics (2010), it is stated under the ethical standard of competence that in order for psychologists to effectively implement their services to clients, it is essential that they have an understanding of diversity factors such as race, ethnicity, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, and socioeconomic status.

Within psychology, the APA has required since the mid-1980s that psychology graduate programs include multicultural education in their course curricula in order to receive accreditation (APA, 2006). It is broadly stated within the APA accreditation standards that psychology graduate programs must recognize the importance of race and other diversity factors in the training of psychologists. Additionally, the standards highlight the need for graduate programs to include within their curricula opportunities for students to learn about the roles that
race and other cultural variables play in the development and persistence of mental illness. In
general, the APA accreditation standards provide graduate programs flexibility with regard to
how multicultural education is structured.

Together, ethical codes and accreditation standards reflect current perspectives on
multicultural education. Rather than being viewed as an optional component, multicultural
education is now regarded as a training necessity (Smith et al., 2006). Across time, multicultural
education within psychology and counseling has undergone significant transformation, with
changes continuing to occur in response to growing trends within the two professional fields.
Five of these emerging trends are now discussed in detail.

A major trend that has emerged within the past two decades has been to take an
Historically, the integration approach was initially proposed for the multicultural education of
psychologists, as leaders recognized that multicultural education could not be adequately
provided in a single course. The integration approach was initially met with resistance, however,
leading to the favoring of a single dedicated-course approach. In 1992, Hills and Strozier
conducted a survey of the multicultural education in counseling psychology doctoral programs.
Of the doctoral programs surveyed, 87% indicated that they offered at least one multicultural
course. Overall, the single-course approach ensured that psychology training programs covered a
minimum amount of multicultural content.

Over time, it was broadly acknowledged that the single-course approach to multicultural
education was not adequately preparing psychology and counseling trainees to work with
culturally diverse populations. Focus was then placed on reintroducing an integration approach,
where, in addition to having designated multicultural courses, multicultural education was also incorporated into all other aspects of psychologists’ and counselors’ training. This approach is now widely accepted, and has been implemented in several psychology and counseling graduate programs (Cates & Schaefle, 2009; Lewis, 2010).

Reflective of the growing trend toward an integration approach, a second trend occurring within psychology and counseling is increased support to incorporate multicultural education into clinical supervision (Dickson et al., 2008; Falender, Burnes, & Ellis, 2013). Multicultural supervision has existed as a supervision approach for over two decades, and has been defined as an approach in which supervisors and trainees examine various cultural issues pertinent to effectively counseling diverse clients (Ancis & Marshall, 2010). Despite the existence of a multicultural supervision approach, research continues to suggest that multicultural factors are often not attended to in clinical supervision contexts (Falender et al., 2013; Gatmon et al., 2001). This concern was addressed by Ancis and Marshall (2010), who highlighted the importance of attending to multicultural topics within supervision, noting that addressing such topics is essential to helping psychology and counseling trainees conduct ethical and effective practice with culturally diverse clientele.

Similarly, Falender et al. (2013) addressed the need to attend to trainees’ multicultural development within the supervision context. Specifically, the authors suggested that a competency-based multicultural framework be utilized as a guide within supervision to evaluate trainees’ multicultural learning and development. Utilization of such a framework would promote an intentional focus on competencies related to multicultural knowledge, awareness, and skills, and would also promote structuring supervision in a manner that would facilitate
development of those competencies.

A third emerging trend that is impacting multicultural education, and is occurring within psychology in particular, is referred to as the competencies movement (Falender et al., 2013). A major aim of this movement is to provide a more comprehensive operational definition of competence in the field of psychology. In 2009, Fouad et al. published the Competency Benchmarks, which identify core competencies psychologists are expected to work toward developing. It has been suggested that these competencies be used to guide the development of psychology graduate programs, ensuring that training is structured to provide opportunities for development in each competency area. Included within the Benchmarks are competencies related to multicultural awareness, sensitivity, and skills. As the competencies movement gains support and recognition, multicultural education is likely to be impacted, where such education would be structured to assist psychology trainees with developing specific multicultural competencies. The effectiveness of multicultural education would be evaluated on the extent to which multicultural competencies are acquired by psychology trainees.

In addition to the competencies movement, a fourth emerging trend impacting multicultural education is the social justice movement (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007; Toporek & Vaughn, 2010). According to Constantine et al. (2007), social justice can be understood as a stance that involves valuing equity in resources, rights, and treatment for individuals who do not share equal power in society due to their race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, religious heritage, physical ability, gender, and/or sexual orientation. Individuals who take a social justice stance not only hold a particular set of values, but also take action to promote social change through assuming an advocate role. Constantine et al.
(2007) assert that with regard to multicultural education, it is not enough to focus solely on training psychologists and counselors to become competent to work with culturally diverse clientele at the individual level. These authors suggest that psychologists and counselors must also develop skills to advocate for clients, and facilitate systemic change.

Within their article, Constantine et al. (2007) identify nine social justice competencies that they propose be used as part of evaluation of trainees in psychology and counseling graduate programs. To facilitate development of these competencies, the authors recommend that graduate programs structure multicultural education to include opportunities to learn how to advocate for clients, navigate larger systems, and recognize unfair and inequitable practices. Overall, the social justice movement encourages multicultural educators to train psychologists and counselors to facilitate change at both individual and institutional levels.

A fifth and final trend that has emerged within multicultural education has been researchers’ increased interest in identifying and describing the interventions and activities included within multicultural education for psychologists and counselors (Dickson et al., 2008; Jones, Sander, & Booker, 2013; Pedersen, 2004). Upon multicultural education becoming a required training component, researchers recognized the necessity to provide a clearer, more comprehensive description of multicultural education, and what it may entail. In their summary of multicultural education within counseling graduate programs, Dickson et al. (2008) identified three types of multicultural education strategies that are commonly utilized: traditional, exposure, and participatory. Traditional strategies were described as classroom-based activities such as instructor lectures, reading assignments, and course papers. Exposure strategies were described as those aiming to expose trainees directly to a particular cultural aspect, through
activities such as listening to guest speakers, visiting communities, and participating in cultural events. Similar to exposure strategies, participatory strategies were described as those that encourage trainees to actively engage in learning about various cultural aspects. However, rather than learning occurring through direct exposure, the learning associated with participatory strategies occurs through indirect means such as group discussions and multicultural counseling role-plays. In summary, the strategy types identified by Dickson et al. (2008) offer one model that may be used to conceptualize multicultural education.

In addition to identifying broad intervention categories, multicultural researchers have also identified and described specific activities that may be incorporated into multicultural education (Jones et al., 2013; Pedersen, 2004). Within his book titled, *110 Experiences for Multicultural Learning*, Pedersen (2004) offers a list of experiential activities that may be incorporated into multicultural education, particularly within classroom contexts. Each listed activity is classified by risk level; specifically, the amount of emotional discomfort that is anticipated through engaging in the activity. In their article focused specifically on multicultural education within the psychology and counseling professions, Jones et al. (2013) provide a list of several multicultural teaching activities that may be utilized. Examples of such activities include having psychology and counselor trainees journal about their reactions to multicultural topics, and having trainees engage in multicultural case conceptualization, where intentional focus is placed on clients’ cultural identities and contexts.

Although several interventions and activities have been identified within multicultural education, questions remain with regard to their effectiveness at facilitating psychology and counselor trainees’ multicultural development (Jones et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2006). To date,
minimal research has been conducted examining the effectiveness of specific multicultural education interventions. This lack of research subsequently calls into question the overall effectiveness of multicultural education at facilitating desired learning outcomes, such as increased knowledge, awareness, and skills. The paucity of research on effectiveness serves as one of the current major concerns of multicultural education. D’Andrea and Heckman (2008) suggest that one reason underlying the paucity of research is lack of support from academic and professional institutions to conduct research on multicultural education effectiveness. In order to more clearly identify best practices within multicultural education, it is imperative that further studies be conducted on intervention effectiveness.

A second major concern for multicultural education is the variation that exists among psychology and counseling graduate programs with regard to how multicultural education is structured (Constantine et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2006). Specifically, graduate programs are found to vary with regard to the extent to which multicultural education is integrated into program curricula. While several programs have adopted an integrated approach, where multicultural education is addressed in all aspects of training, other programs continue to address multicultural topics within specific courses. Also varying across graduate programs are the interventions utilized within multicultural education, as well as the extent to which particular multicultural topics are addressed (Fetherson, 2011; Smith et al., 2006). One factor contributing to this variation across psychology and counseling graduate programs is the flexibility provided by accrediting bodies with regard to how multicultural education is structured. Within psychology, APA (2006) accreditation standards require that psychology graduate programs include multicultural education; however, leave it to the discretion of programs to determine the
specific structure of that education, the and interventions that are used. One of the primary concerns regarding this flexibility is the potential for psychology and counseling programs to provide low-quality multicultural education, leaving trainees ill prepared to provide services to culturally diverse clientele.

Despite the paucity of research on multicultural education effectiveness, and the variation in multicultural education structure across psychology and counseling graduate programs, the importance of multicultural education continues to be stressed by psychology and counseling educators. Multicultural education serves as one of the primary contexts in which trainees learn about various topics related to culture and diversity (Smith et al., 2006; Sue & Sue, 2003). As mentioned previously in this section, racism is one topic that has traditionally been included within multicultural education, and continues to be addressed. Due to racism being a primary topic of focus in the current study, an overview is now provided of the development of racism as a topic included within the multicultural education of psychologists and counselors.

Addressing Racism in Multicultural Education

During the 1980s, psychology and counseling educators began to address the clinical, academic, and personal importance of learning about racism (Smith et al., 2006). In the context of multicultural education, three primary factors helped to establish racism as a topic of focus. First was increased recognition by educators of the rapidly changing racial demographics in the United States (D’Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991). Educators realized that future psychologists and counselors would be more likely to work with clients of color who had traditionally been underserved in the field. A second factor that helped to establish racism as a multicultural topic was increased recognition by educators that psychologists and counselors were generally ill-
prepared to address racism and race-related concerns in their therapeutic relationships. This inadequate preparation placed clients of color at risk for psychological harm. The third and final factor that helped facilitate the establishment of racism as a multicultural topic was acknowledgement by educators of the continued existence of racism, and its negative impact on both people of color and white individuals (Smith et al., 2006). Educators recognized the systemic effects of racism, as well as its specific impact on the field of psychology. It was educators’ hope that through providing education about racism, psychologists and counselors would be better prepared to prevent its perpetuation in therapeutic and academic contexts.

Overall, within psychology and counseling professions, the establishment of racism as a multicultural topic occurred in response to changing racial demographics, recognition of psychologists and counselors’ inadequate education on racism, and recognition of the continued impact of racism on U.S. society (D’Andrea et al., 1991; Smith et al., 2006). Over the past 25 years, guidelines have been established for educating psychology and counseling trainees about racism. Guidelines have been offered by both the APA, and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Within the APA accreditation criteria for psychology doctoral programs, it is stated that multicultural education should provide trainees with race-related information in the areas of research, theory, and practice (Neville et al., 1996). Additionally, the APA adopted multicultural guidelines in 2003 that addressed the importance of acquiring knowledge about racial differences, and enhancing awareness of one’s own racial biases and racial identity (Smith et al., 2006).

In addition to organizational contributions, counseling psychology is one specialty area that has also helped shape how trainees are educated about racism (Iezzi, 2009). Constantine et
al. (2007) highlight that counseling psychologists have been leaders in developing and implementing guidelines to facilitate trainees’ learning about racism and race-related concerns. The development of such guidelines is reflective of counseling psychology’s commitment to facilitating social change. Similar to counseling psychologists, counselor educators have also played an integral role in establishing guidelines for providing education about racism (Smith et al., 2006). Collectively, the works generated by counseling psychologists, counselor educators, APA, and CACREP have influenced how psychology and counseling trainees are educated about racism within their training programs.

Through the development of guidelines, modifications have been made with regard to how racism is addressed in multicultural education (Todd & Abrams, 2011). Initially, discussions of racism focused primarily on the oppression of people of color. At the beginning of the 21st Century, however, educators began to emphasize the importance of addressing not only the impact of racism on people of color, but also its impact on white individuals. These educators realized that by omitting white individuals from discussions about racism, multicultural education was subsequently perpetuating racism by maintaining the invisibility of the dominant group, and the role they play in preserving the status quo (Wildman & Davis, 2012).

As whiteness became more salient within multicultural education, topics such as white privilege and white superiority began to be discussed more extensively (Todd & Abrams, 2011). A message that was increasingly conveyed was that everyone, regardless of race, is negatively impacted by racism. Everyone is hurt (Barndt, 2007). Overall, the incorporation of whiteness into discussions about racism marked a major shift within multicultural education.

Although multicultural education guidelines have been developed providing general
recommendations for addressing racism, there continues to be variation among psychology and counseling graduate programs with regard to the extent to which racism is addressed, and how it is addressed (Fetherson, 2011; Smith et al., 2006). For example, programs that focus on a wide array of cultural variables may address racism to a lesser extent in comparison to programs that have a more intentional, specific focus on racism. Another example of existing variation among programs is the aspects of racism that programs attend to, and address with trainees. While some programs may attend more to the systemic impact of racism, others may place greater emphasis on the impact racism has at the individual level.

One reason programs demonstrate variation in the manner they address racism is they select different philosophical frameworks from which to structure their multicultural education (Fetherson, 2011). Graduate programs that structure multicultural education to have a race-based philosophical framework are found to place heavy emphasis on addressing racism. Underlying the race-based framework is the assumption that race is a central aspect of institutionalized dominance in U.S. society, and therefore, is one of the most influential of all cultural identities (Carter & Qureshi, 1995). Operating from such a framework makes it imperative that racism be addressed within multicultural education. Graduate programs utilizing frameworks where racism is not placed at the forefront are less likely to emphasize racism, and, depending on the philosophical framework used, may place more attention on other diversity factors. Overall, among psychology and counseling trainees, there is variation in the extent and type of education they receive about racism during their graduate-level training.

Summary

In summary, multicultural education has become an integral component of training for
psychologists and counselors (Smith et al., 2006). This education exposes trainees to a wide array of multicultural topics, including racism. Over time, multicultural education has undergone significant transformation, and continues to be modified in response to current trends within the psychology and counseling professions. These current trends include growing support for an integration approach to multicultural education, and, related to this trend, increasing support for incorporating multicultural education into clinical supervision (Collins et al., 2015; Falender et al., 2013). In addition, the competencies movement and social justice movement have also had an impact on multicultural education (Constantine et al., 2007). Emerging from these movements is increased support for structuring multicultural education to address specific competencies, and emphasize social justice advocacy. A final trend that has been occurring within multicultural education research has been increased interest in identifying and describing multicultural activities and interventions (Dickson et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2013; Pedersen, 2004).

As multicultural education continues to develop, two major concerns have been called to attention, with one being the paucity of research conducted on multicultural education effectiveness (Jones et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2006). Future research on intervention effectiveness will be imperative to identify best practices within multicultural education. A second concern is the variation in multicultural education structure across psychology and counseling graduate programs (Constantine et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2006). Variation has been found across programs with regard to the extent multicultural education is integrated into training, the types of interventions and activities included, as well as the extent to which various topics are addressed. The primary question arising from this inconsistency is whether all psychology and counseling trainees are being adequately prepared to provide services to
culturally diverse clientele.

Despite concerns, multicultural education is found to provide trainees opportunities to develop greater awareness and understanding of various social and cultural aspects that may have an impact on individuals’ psychological health. Racism is one social aspect that typically receives attention within multicultural education, as it has been recognized by educators that racism continues to have a pervasive influence on U.S. society. Through the development of educational guidelines, many trainees now receive multicultural education that emphasizes the effects of racism for both people of color and white individuals (Todd & Abrams, 2011). It is important to note, however, that variation continues to exist among psychology and graduate programs with regard to the extent to which racism is addressed within multicultural education, and how it is addressed (Fetherson, 2011).

Previous research has found white psychology and counseling trainees to be a particular group that benefits from receiving multicultural education that addresses racism (Chao, Wei, Good, & Flores, 2011). This education is viewed as particularly crucial for white trainees, as their whiteness and racial privileges are often invisible to them prior to receiving education about racism (Wildman & Davis, 2012). For the remainder of this chapter, research is reviewed that examined white individuals’ experiences learning about racism. White individuals specifically examined in the research included graduate trainees in psychology and counseling, as well as undergraduate and graduate students in varying degree programs.

Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Reactions to Learning about Racism

Within psychology and counseling graduate programs, multicultural education often provides white trainees with in-depth exposure to the topic of racism (Sue, Rivera, Capodilupo,
Lin, & Torino, 2010; Utsey, Gernat, & Hammar, 2005. For a significant portion of white trainees, in-depth learning about racism is often an unfamiliar and uncomfortable experience. Much of the discomfort elicited by this learning relates to trainees’ long-held beliefs and assumptions pertaining to race.

When white trainees begin to learn about racism, they likely carry with them attitudes and beliefs about racism that were significantly influenced by their family, friends, and the mass media (Rothenberg, 2012). Many, if not the majority of trainees, were likely to have been socialized to avoid having discussions about racism, as such discussions are commonly deemed as inappropriate, especially by white individuals. Underlying this socialization process is the commonly-held belief that equal treatment of all individuals is only possible through making race invisible.

In addition to likely being socialized to avoid addressing racism, many white trainees are also often socialized to believe that racism is an element of the past that no longer exists in contemporary U.S. society (Rothenberg, 2012). As a result of prior socialization, white trainees often enter their multicultural courses believing in the myth of meritocracy: the existence of an equal playing field, where all individuals, regardless of race, can achieve success through effort and hard work. White trainees are often oblivious to the continued impact of racism, and the racial privileges they possess.

When exposed to education on racism, white psychology and counseling trainees may experience a sense of discomfort and threat as their previously-acquired assumptions about racism are challenged and discredited (Pieterse, 2009; Rothenberg, 2012; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). In opposition to their prior-held assumptions, white trainees often receive information
during their multicultural education about the continued existence of racism, and the resulting racial inequities. Additionally, in contrast to their prior socialization, white trainees are commonly encouraged to engage in dialogues about racism. This encouragement may create discomfort for trainees when the belief is held that racism is an inappropriate topic to discuss.

Within the introduction of her book, Rothenberg (2012) states, “If education is about learning to see the world in new ways, it is bound, at times, to leave us feeling confused, angry, or challenged.” Due to education on racism being unfamiliar and challenging, white trainees may experience a variety of strong reactions as a result. Based on prior research, education on racism may evoke feelings of sadness, disgust, anger, frustration, anxiety, and agitation (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; D’Andrea & Daniels, 2001; Utsey et al., 2005).

In the following subsections, reviews are provided of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions that have been found in studies to be commonly experienced by white participants as they learn about racism. It is important to note at the outset the variation that exists across the reviewed studies with regard to the samples selected, and the nature by which reactions were explored. Although all reviewed studies selected samples of white college students; these samples varied with regard to participants’ current level of college education, and the degree programs they were in. The majority of the studies selected samples of white graduate students enrolled in psychology or counseling programs at either the masters or doctorate level (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Pieterse, 2009; Rothman et al., 2012; Sue et al., 2010; Utsey et al., 2005). One study employed a mixed sample of white graduate and undergraduate students from various degree programs (Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008), and one focused exclusively on white undergraduate students (Todd, Spanierman, & Poteat, 2011).
In addition to the participant variation, the reviewed studies also differed with regard to the methods and procedures used to explore whites participants’ reactions to learning about racism. Although the majority of studies utilized qualitative methodology, various procedures for collecting data were employed. Focus group interviews were used to collect data in three studies (Rothman et al., 2012; Sue et al., 2010; Utsey et al., 2005), and individual interviews were used in two (Pieterse, 2009; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008). Ancis and Szymanski (2001) gathered data through having participants write reaction papers as opposed to engaging in an interview.

In order to help facilitate white participants’ discussion of their reactions to learning about racism, varied procedures were employed across studies. Pieterse (2009) and Rothman et al. (2012) asked participants to share their reactions to a course they recently completed that focused on racism and related topics. Spanierman, Oh, et al. (2008) and Sue et al. (2010) gathered information on reactions through having participants share their experiences related to racism. Other procedures used to facilitate discussion of reactions included having participants read an article on white privilege (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001), and having participants share their reactions to vignettes of racially provocative situations (Utsey et al., 2005).

In light of the existing variation, the collective study findings reviewed in this section offer insight into the potential reactions white psychology and counseling trainees may have when learning about racism. This section is divided into five sub-sections focusing on specific reactions. The subsections are as follows: surprise; denial, defensiveness, and minimization; anger; shame and guilt; and fear, anxiety, and discomfort. The section concludes with a summary and critique of the reviewed research.
Surprise

When initially confronted with the realities of racism, white graduate and undergraduate students have been found to react with surprise (Pieterse, 2009; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008). Two ways in which racism may be encountered are through personally witnessing acts of racism, and learning about racism in an academic context. When Spanierman, Oh, et al. (2008) asked white graduate and undergraduate students to reflect on their encounters with racism, where oppressive acts against people of color were witnessed, several students reported being surprised that racism was a continued reality in the United States. Students acknowledged that they had held the assumption that racism was an aspect of history no longer present in U.S. society.

Pieterse (2009) also found surprise to be a common reaction of white participants when they were exposed to racism. In his study, white counseling trainees were asked to reflect on their experiences taking an anti-racism course offered by their graduate program. A notable portion of participants acknowledged feeling surprised upon learning about the continued impact of racism. Many participants described their experiences of surprise as being overwhelming. Overall, the findings of Pieterse (2009) and Spanierman, Oh, et al. (2008) suggest that white graduate and undergraduate students often react with surprise when they encounter racism due to having held the assumption that racism was no longer an existing problem in society.

Denial, Defensiveness, and Minimization

In response to having their previous assumptions about racism challenged, white counseling trainees often become defensive, and/or deny or minimize the significance of racism (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Sue et al., 2010; Utsey et al., 2005). In a qualitative investigation by Utsey et al. (2005), white counseling trainees were presented with vignettes depicting
hypothetical situations in which race-related concerns were present in counseling and supervisory relationships. Upon being presented with the vignettes, a significant portion of trainees reacted to them by both denying and minimizing the significance of racism, despite the fact that each vignette was designed to be racially provocative.

Similar reactions were found by Sue et al. (2010), who examined white counseling psychology trainees’ reactions to discussions of racism in classroom settings. Based on trainees’ responses to interview questions, a common reaction to these discussions was to deny the significance of racial differences. This denial was demonstrated when trainees made statements during interviews such as, “We are all the same under the skin.” In addition to reacting with denial, trainees also reported becoming defensive during discussions about racism, particularly when they felt they were being blamed for racism’s continued existence.

White privilege is one particular aspect that has been found to elicit reactions of denial and defensiveness in white counseling trainees (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001). In their study, Ancis and Szymanski (2001) asked white, masters-level counseling trainees to share their thoughts and reactions to an article by Peggy McIntosh focusing on white privilege. Upon reading McIntosh’s article, 10 of the 34 participating trainees endorsed experiencing reactions reflecting denial and defensiveness. These 10 trainees demonstrated denial of white privilege and racism by attributing differential treatment of people of color to non-racial factors such as gender and socioeconomic status. Additionally, within the group of the 10 trainees, a few reflected a defensive stance by making the argument that people of color, rather than whites, were the individuals with racial privilege in U.S. society.

Collectively, previous research suggests that denial, defensiveness, and minimization are
common reactions experienced by white counseling trainees when they learn about racism (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Sue et al., 2010; Utsey et al., 2005). When trainees learn new information about racism that contradicts their prior-held beliefs, they may utilize denial and minimization in an attempt to avoid incorporating new information into their knowledge base. Furthermore, defensive reactions may serve as a protective mechanism for white trainees when they are exposed to information highlighting the negative aspects of their racial group.

**Anger**

In addition to reactions reflecting defensiveness, white research participants have also reported experiencing anger in response to learning about racism (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Pieterse, 2009; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008). Although a common reaction during this learning, considerable variation has been found with regard to how participants describe and explain their anger-based reactions. Specifically, white participants have attributed their anger to different aspects of their learning experiences.

In Ancis and Szymanski’s (2001) study, several white counseling trainees endorsed feeling angry upon reading McIntosh’s article about white privilege. When asked to further describe their anger, trainees stated that they felt the primary intention of McIntosh’s article was to make white individuals feel guilty about racism. According to Spanierman, Oh, et al. (2008), these particular responses are reflective of white anger, which they define as an emotion often experienced by white individuals when confronted with the realities of racism and white privilege. White individuals expressing this form of anger generally operate on several assumptions about race, including the notion that people of color, as opposed to whites, possess racial privileges. Another assumption commonly held by those expressing white anger is the
belief that people of color should be responsible for resolving racism, and that white individuals should not be held accountable for such a social endeavor.

In contrast to the reactions reported by Ancis & Szymanski (2001), white counseling trainees who participated in Pieterse’s (2009) study endorsed having anger-based reactions that were not reflective of white anger. These participants reported experiencing anger upon recognition that their prior education had been incomplete, and had provided them misleading information about the history of racism in the United States. Overall, Pieterse’s (2009) findings suggest that anger may be evoked for white counseling trainees when they realize that racism was concealed from them. For many white trainees, U.S. history may have been presented to them in a euphemistic manner, portraying the oppressive actions of white individuals as indicators of social and economic progress (Barndt, 2007).

Overall, previous research suggests that anger may be a common experience for white psychology and counseling trainees when they are presented with information pertaining to racism and white privilege (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Pieterse, 2009; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008). The anger evoked when learning about racism may take on many forms, and may be attributed to a variety of factors. While some white trainees may experience anger in response to feeling threatened by the information they are presented with, others may react angrily upon learning that their prior education had cheated them through concealing the realities of racism.

Shame and Guilt

Shame and guilt are two other emotions that white research participants have reported experiencing while learning about racism (Pieterse 2009; Rothman et al., 2012; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008). These emotions were reported to have been triggered as greater awareness of racism
and white privilege was acquired. According to Parker and Schwartz (2002), the primary factor distinguishing shame from guilt is the source that is perceived to be negative. When individuals experience guilt, it is a specific behavior they engaged in that is perceived negatively. One may feel guilty for engaging in what is perceived to be an inappropriate behavior. In contrast to guilt, individuals experience shame when they perceive their overall identity to be negative. Rather than a specific behavior, individuals who feel ashamed perceive their core selves as being “bad” or “unworthy.”

White guilt was found to be one particular guilt reaction reported by white research participants (Todd et al., 2011). White guilt refers to the sense of remorse white individuals feel about the oppression of people of color, and the subsequent racial privileges they possess as a result. Todd et al. (2011) found that white guilt was commonly experienced by white college students during times the students were taking racial diversity courses, or engaging in race-focused activities.

When comparing both shame and guilt, previous research suggests that guilt-based reactions may be healthier emotional responses (Parker & Schwartz, 2002). Within academic contexts, guilt reactions have been found to be associated with increased motivation to take action against racism. In contrast, shame reactions have been found to be related to feelings of submission, inhibition, and lowered self-confidence. In general, guilt may serve as a response that facilitates social action, while shame may operate as an immobilizing force.

Fear, Anxiety, and Discomfort

Three final reactions that white participants have reported experiencing when learning about racism are those of fear, anxiety, and discomfort (Rothman et al., 2012; Sue et al., 2010;
Utsey et al., 2005). In a study by Sue et al. (2010), where a sample of white counseling psychology trainees were interviewed, several trainees acknowledged feeling fearful that they may appear racist while engaging in discussions about racism with other individuals. Trainees feared that their racial biases would be revealed during discussions, and that others would identify their verbal contributions as racist. Within the same study, trainees also reported experiencing discomfort during discussions, stating that they felt uncertain how to effectively and appropriately participate in racial dialogues. Utsey et al. (2005) also found discomfort to be a common experience among white participants during discussions about racism. In their study, white counseling trainees were observed experiencing discomfort using the term race. To counter their discomfort, trainees would often substitute the word race with terms such as culture, ethnicity, and background.

In addition to fear and general discomfort, white participants have also been observed during studies to have physical symptoms of anxiety when discussing racism (Sue et al., 2010; Utsey et al., 2005). A significant portion of the observed symptoms involved verbal expression, such as a trembling voice, and difficulties with articulation and pronunciation of simple words. Additional symptoms that have been observed include flushing of the face, and heart pounding sensations.

In summary, prior research suggests that the challenging and often intense nature of learning about racism may evoke reactions of fear, anxiety, and discomfort in white psychology and counseling trainees (Sue et al., 2010; Utsey et al., 2005). These reactions may be common for trainees due to many having minimal experience discussing and exploring racism on both intellectual and personal levels. Similar to the reactions previously discussed, those of fear,
anxiety, and discomfort may create challenges for white trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism.

Summary of Reactions

White psychology and counseling trainees, as well as white undergraduate and graduate students in other degree programs, have been found to experience a wide array of cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions when exposed to education on racism (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Parker & Schwartz, 2002; Pieterse, 2009; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Sue et al., 2010; Utsey et al., 2005). These reactions include surprise, defensiveness, anger, shame, guilt, fear, and anxiety. Although these reactions are those most frequently documented in research, other reactions have been identified as well. In addition to the reactions previously highlighted in this section, white research participants have also reported experiencing feelings of powerlessness upon being exposed to information about racism (Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008). This research suggests that as whites acquire further information about racism and its subsequent effects, they may feel powerless to fight for social and institutional change. In addition to powerlessness, white participants have also reported experiencing the feeling that they have no right to discuss racism (Sue et al., 2010). Participants endorsed feeling that their voice has no place in discussions of racism due to their position of privilege, and lack of personal experiences with racial oppression.

Overall, through identifying and describing white participants’ reactions to education on racism, prior research has helped enhance understanding of the experiences that may occur for white psychology and counseling trainees as their awareness and understanding of racism increases. Although the value of this research is evident, it has not been without its concerns and
limitations. One particular concern is the potential for inaccurate interpretation by researchers. Reactions themselves are psychological and often abstract in nature, leaving them open to the possibility of being misinterpreted, and subsequently misrepresented in research. To decrease the possibility of inaccurate interpretation, the majority of the reviewed studies utilized qualitative designs, which employ strategies to promote accurate interpretation of participants’ experiences.

Another significant issue for research examining white participants’ reactions is the risk for socially desirable responding (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001). This risk is of particular concern due to researchers’ extensive use of participant self-report procedures. Through utilization of self-report strategies, there is increased likelihood that participants will be selective with the reactions they share, endorsing only those that place them in a favorable light, or are expected by researchers (Kernahan & Davis, 2007). The primary concern with socially desirable responding is the potential to communicate inaccurate or entirely false information. The existence of this risk makes imperative the need to critically analyze research findings.

Along with limitations related to researcher interpretation and participant responding, limitations also exist with regard to the degree to which white participants’ reactions can be explained. Although researchers have made significant progress with identifying and describing participants’ reactions to education on racism, it remains largely unclear why those particular reactions occur. Minimal research has been conducted to determine whether certain variables may influence the degree to which specific reactions are elicited when learning about racism (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001). In general, research has yet to provide sound answers with regard to the factors that influence the degree to which certain reactions are elicited.

Despite concerns and limitations, the research reviewed in this section has considerable
value for providers of education on racism within psychology and counseling graduate programs. Through identifying the potential reactions white trainees may experience when learning about racism, educators may be better prepared to address and work with these reactions as they emerge. Additionally, awareness of common reactions may help enhance understanding of the barriers white trainees may face in acquiring greater awareness and understanding of racism (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997). For example, strong emotional reactions, particularly those of shame, anger, and defensiveness, may prevent trainees from openly communicating about racism, or lead them to shut down both cognitively and emotionally (D’Andrea & Daniels, 2001). Overall, greater understanding of how white trainees may react to education on racism may help educators in psychology and counseling fields develop strategies to maximize trainees’ learning.

Outcomes of Learning about Racism: Experiences of Cognitive and Affective Change

Collectively, the research reviewed in the previous section offers evidence suggesting that white psychology and counseling trainees may often experience strong reactions when they learn about racism (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Pieterse, 2009; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Sue et al., 2010; Utsey et al., 2005). Although emotional reactions reflect an important aspect of white trainees’ learning about racism, these reactions alone do not provide a complete depiction of trainees’ learning journey. In order to provide a more complete depiction, the cognitive and affective changes that occur while learning about racism must also be addressed. In the current section, research is reviewed that examined the outcomes of learning about racism, focusing particularly on outcomes related to cognitive and affective change.

It is important to note at the outset that within the studies reviewed in this section, there is
considerable variation with regard to participant samples, and the racism-focused learning interventions that were examined. The populations sampled within studies included counseling trainees, undergraduate students, and currently practicing therapists. With regard to learning interventions, several of the reviewed studies assessed outcomes of multicultural courses, where learning about racism served as only one component of the course curriculum. Other studies examined educational interventions that focused exclusively on issues related to racism. Overall, it is important for readers to be mindful that not all the reviewed studies focused exclusively on white students in mental health professions, and not all examined educational interventions that had an exclusive emphasis on racism.

This section commences with discussions of multicultural competence and white racial identity, which are two factors found to be impacted as a result of learning about racism (Smith et al., 2006). These factors are perhaps the most widely researched of the outcome variables, and have been found to be significantly related to each other, with greater levels of multicultural competence being associated with more advanced white racial identity development (Constantine, Juby, & Liang, 2001; Middleton et al., 2005; Neville et al., 1996; Ottavi, Pope-Davis, & Dings, 1994; Vinson & Neimeyer, 2003). Following discussions of multicultural competence and white racial identity, research is reviewed examining other factors found to be impacted by white participants’ learning about racism. These factors include race prejudice, interracial comfort, and awareness of specific race-related concepts. The section concludes with a summary of the reviewed research.

Multicultural Competence

A common goal of psychology and counseling programs is to produce students who are
multiculturally competent. Over the past few decades, multicultural competence has become a critical component of psychologists’ and counselors’ professional development (Middleton et al., 2005). Evidence for the importance of this competence may be seen within accreditation standards for psychology and counseling graduate programs. In order to receive accreditation, these programs are required to include courses in their curricula aimed at building students’ multicultural competence.

According to Sue and Sue (2003), multicultural competence is an active, developmental, and ongoing process that is aspirational rather than achieved. Although mental health professionals may build upon their multicultural competence, there is never a point where they may proclaim themselves to be fully competent. Further growth always remains a possibility. In general, it is the aspirational nature of multicultural competence that makes it a process rather than an objective to be met.

In an attempt to identify the characteristics associated with multicultural competence, Sue et al., (1982) developed a tripartite model of multicultural counseling competencies, which has become the core model guiding the development and assessment of multicultural education (Worthington, Soth-McNett, & Moreno, 2007). Although the model has been expanded upon over the years, its core components have remained intact. According to the model, multicultural counseling competence may be divided into three core domains: awareness, knowledge, and skills (Sue & Sue, 2003; Worthington et al., 2007). Psychologists and counselors who demonstrate multicultural competence are keenly aware of their values, biases, and assumptions related to several multicultural factors. They possess knowledge of differing worldviews, and utilize skills that are culturally appropriate for the clients they work with.
In addition to the characteristics identified within the Multicultural Counseling Competency model, scholars have also identified other common traits of mental health professionals displaying multicultural competence. Those demonstrating such competence tend to focus less on changing their clients, and place more emphasis on changing their clients’ environmental conditions (Sue & Sue, 2003). They emphasize prevention as opposed to remediation, and avoid victim-blaming through viewing their clients as encountering problems rather than having problems. These individuals are also distinguished by their willingness to utilize non-traditional therapeutic interventions that may better serve their clients’ needs. Overall, mental health professionals with high competence levels demonstrate their genuine respect for diversity through both their words and behaviors.

In order to measure multicultural competence, researchers have developed several self-report measures. Three widely-used measures include the Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills Survey (D’Andrea et al., 1991), the Multicultural Counseling Inventory (Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994), and the Multicultural Knowledge and Awareness Scale (Ponterotto et al., 2002). All three measures have been used within research that has examined the impact of multicultural and racism-focused education on individuals’ competence levels. This research is now reviewed.

In general, multicultural and racism-focused educational interventions have been found to be associated with increased multicultural competence for psychology and counseling trainees of all races (Constantine, 2002; Constantine et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2006). Trainees with greater exposure to multicultural learning have been found to have higher competence levels in comparison to trainees with less exposure. Although trainees of all races appear to benefit from
multicultural education, a handful of studies have provided evidence suggesting that racial
differences may exist in multicultural competence levels, with trainees of color generally
exhibiting higher levels than white trainees (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999; Pope-Davis,
Reynolds, Dings, & Nielson, 1995). These racial differences have been found to remain stable
both before and after trainees completed their multicultural courses.

It is proposed that several factors may account for the racial differences in multicultural
competence. White individuals may find it particularly challenging to build their competence due
to many of the attitudes and preconceived notions they have pertaining to race. For example,
Neville, Spanierman, and Doan (2006) found in their sample of 130 psychology students and
mental health professionals that color-blind racial attitudes were associated with lower
multicultural competence. This correlation was found for both white and non-white participants.

In other studies, white psychology trainees and professionals holding color-blind attitudes
have been found to deny and distort the importance of race in the lived experiences of
individuals (Neville, Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001). They also have been found to blame
people of color for racial inequities, and to display general apprehensiveness toward anti-racist
action. With such attitudes and thought processes in place, it is anticipated that developing
multicultural competence may be a challenging endeavor for whites.

Despite potential difficulties, multicultural and racism-focused educational interventions
have been found to be effective at enhancing whites’ multicultural competence. In three studies
utilizing pretest-posttest designs and self-report measures, increases in all three areas of
multicultural competence (i.e. awareness, knowledge, and skills) were found to occur for
majority-white samples of counseling trainees following completion of multicultural courses
(D’Andrea et al., 1991; Murphy et al., 2006; Neville et al., 1996).

In contrast to this finding, other studies have found multicultural education to be effective at increasing only one area of multicultural competence. Castillo, Brossart, Reyes, Conoley, and Phoummarath (2007) found with their majority-white sample of 84 counselor trainees that completion of a multicultural course led trainees to experience significant increases only in multicultural awareness. The average improvement in trainees’ awareness was four percent. Differing from these findings, Spanierman, Poteat, Wang, and Oh (2008) found through their examination of 370 white psychology and counseling trainees that greater exposure to multicultural education was significantly related to increases in the knowledge aspect of competence, but not the awareness and skills aspects. Overall, although research utilizing participant self-reports has provided evidence suggesting that multicultural educational interventions enhance multicultural competence for psychology and counseling trainees, differences may exist with regard to the degree to which each aspect of competence is enhanced.

To avoid methodological issues associated with self-report measures, researchers have employed strategies such as observer ratings to measure individuals’ multicultural competence levels (Spanierman, Poteat, et al., 2008). A primary goal of employing such strategies is to provide a more objective assessment of multicultural competence, thereby strengthening evidence for the positive association between multicultural learning and competence levels. In a study by Constantine (2001b), the clients of 52 counselor trainees were asked to rate their counselor’s multicultural competence. The sample included 31 white counselor trainees, 11 Hispanic trainees, and 10 African American trainees. It was found that clients provided higher competence ratings to counselor trainees who had received more multicultural education in
comparison to other trainees. Additionally, clients provided higher competence ratings to Hispanic and African American counselor trainees in comparison to white trainees.

In another study by Constantine (2001a), a multicultural case conceptualization task was utilized to measure the multicultural competence of a majority-white sample of 128 counseling trainees and professionals. The trainees and professionals who had received the greatest amounts of multicultural education were found to demonstrate the highest levels of multicultural competence, as evidenced by the case conceptualizations they provided. In comparison to trainees and professionals with less multicultural education, those with more extensive training were found to be more likely to address racial and cultural factors within their conceptualizations. Together, Constantine’s two studies helped to strengthen evidence for the positive association between multicultural education and multicultural competence.

In summary, previous research suggests that multicultural and racism-focused learning interventions may facilitate development of multicultural competence for white trainees, as well as trainees of color (Smith et al., 2006). For white individuals, development of multicultural competence may be particularly challenging due to their existing racial biases and assumptions. Although difficulties may arise, the development of multicultural competence is certain to remain a critical component of training for white psychologists and counselors, as such development may help them become better prepared to work with racially diverse clientele.

Multicultural competence research, an area that has relied heavily on quantitative measures and designs, has not been without its limitations and serious concerns. One existing concern is the theory-research gap within the multicultural competency literature (Worthington et al., 2007). In general, multicultural competence is more thoroughly discussed by researchers
and scholars than it is empirically investigated. Within psychology and counseling fields, this lack of empirical investigation calls into question the effectiveness of using multicultural competency models to develop and assess multicultural educational interventions. Further research is clearly needed to determine the effectiveness of using such models for intervention development and assessment.

Another significant concern of multicultural competence research is the generalizability of study findings (Worthington et al., 2007). Due to a large portion of studies utilizing convenience samples of professional counselors and/or counseling trainees, the generalizability of findings to other mental health professionals and trainees is called into question. In addition to the use of convenience sampling, generalizability is also a concern in multicultural competence research due to the majority of studies utilizing samples that had unequal gender representation, namely, samples that had a female majority. The unequal gender representation in multicultural competence research calls into question whether multicultural education has the same impact on multicultural competence across genders. It is important to consider the possibility that the impact of multicultural education on multicultural competence may be different for white mental health trainees with oppressed gender identities (e.g. female trainees) compared to those with privileged gender identities. As indicated by Croteau, Talbot, Lance, and Evans (2002), the oppressed and/or privileged identities that an individual holds may shape her or his multicultural experiences.

A final concern of prior research on multicultural competence is the extensive use of self-report measures (Worthington et al., 2007). Through asking study participants to rate their own multicultural competence levels, researchers increase the risk of receiving socially desirable
responses, where participants provide over-estimations of their competence. In addition to this risk, researchers have also expressed concern about the overall validity of self-report measures. Researchers have proposed that self-report measures of multicultural competence may be measuring individuals’ perceived rather than actual competence levels (Constantine, 2002). It has also been proposed that these instruments may be measuring multicultural counseling self-efficacy as opposed to competence (Constantine & Ladany, 2000; Worthington, Mobley, Franks, & Tan, 2000). Overall, the concerns of self-report measures make it clear that other forms of multicultural competence assessment are needed in order to better determine the degree to which competence is impacted by multicultural and racism-focused educational interventions. Examples of alternative forms of assessment include use of client and instructor ratings of trainees’ multicultural competence levels.

With concerns and limitations in mind, a primary message to be taken from the research is that multicultural and racism-focused education may facilitate cognitive and affective changes associated with enhanced multicultural competence. This collection of research is only one of several indicating that multicultural education may promote personal and professional growth. In the next subsection, a second collection of research is reviewed that focuses on white racial identity development, and how it is impacted by multicultural and racism-focused educational interventions.

White Racial Identity

Within the broad field of psychology, there is a growing body of research being conducted that aims to enhance understanding of the development of racial identity for white Americans. Broadly defined, racial identity refers to the sense of group membership an
individual has based on the perception that she or he shares a common heritage with a particular racial group (Helms, 1990). To explore racial identity is to explore the psychological implications of racial group membership. In a society where racism has been institutionalized, and whiteness has become the invisible norm, white Americans face significant challenges in the development of their racial identities (Rothenberg, 2012).

Although racial identity development is experienced by individuals of all races, this development has unique aspects for each racial group (Sue & Sue, 2003). For whites, racial identity development refers to a process where greater awareness and understanding is gradually acquired of racial oppression and what it means to be white in U.S. society (Helms, 1990). Throughout this process, whites’ conceptualizations of race and racial oppression become increasingly complex. As a result, changes occur in their perceptions of themselves, others, and institutions (Ottavi et al., 1994).

White Racial Identity Models

In an attempt to describe and further understand the racial identity development of whites, a variety of developmental models have been proposed (Helms, 1995; Mio & Awakuni, 2000; Sabnani, Ponterotto, & Borodovsky, 1991; Sue & Sue, 2003). Although each model has unique features, a common characteristic shared by all is their attempt to explain the process by which whites develop greater awareness and understanding of race and racism. Together, these models have served as helpful guides for educators of racism, alerting them to the anticipated reactions and changes whites may experience as their awareness and understanding of racism increases (Riker, 2002).

Of the existing models of white racial identity development, the model developed by
Janet Helms is often considered the most elaborate and empirically sound (Sue & Sue, 2003). In comparison to other models, Helms’ model has been more widely cited, researched, and applied. Given these strengths, Helms’ model is given primary emphasis within this subsection. In addition to its basic strengths, Helms’ model is also given emphasis due to the wide use of her white racial identity measure within the studies reviewed in this subsection. Overall, in order to understand the research findings presented, a basic understanding of Helms’ model is needed.

A primary assumption underlying Helms’ model is that racism exists as a central aspect of the white American identity (Sue & Sue, 2003). As whites progress in their racial identity development, they become increasingly aware of the impact racism has had on whites, people of color, and themselves. Helms identified two distinct phases of white racial identity development, with the first being titled, “the abandonment of racism,” and the second titled “defining a non-racist white identity.” Both phases are divided into three statuses, making six total. According to Helms (1995), developmental statuses refer to the dynamic, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes that govern individuals’ interpretations of racial information in their environments. Typically, whites have a dominant developmental status from which they operate under most circumstances. Within certain contexts, however, whites may operate from a different, non-dominant developmental status.

The first phase of white racial identity development consists of the contact, disintegration, and reintegration statuses (Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011; Sue & Sue, 2003). Whites operating at the contact status typically display the following characteristics: general obliviousness to racism, belief in equal opportunities for success, and minimization of the importance of race. Color-blind attitudes are a common feature of the contact status, with whites
making statements such as, “I don’t see color,” or “Race does not matter. We are all human.”

Movement to the disintegration status usually occurs when whites have experiences that facilitate their awareness of whiteness and racial oppression (Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011). Common experiences facilitating such awareness are those where racist actions and behaviors are personally witnessed. In general, these experiences produce cognitive dissonance within whites due to the experiences challenging their prior assumptions about race and equality. This dissonance often leads whites to experience feelings of guilt, anxiety, and sadness.

As whites attempt to resolve their dissonance, they are presented with two primary options (Helms, 1995). One option is to retreat to their prior-held beliefs about race, leading them into the reintegration status. Whites operating within this developmental status have re-adopted their beliefs of white superiority, and tend to hold their beliefs in a more firm and conscious manner. The two defining characteristics of reintegration are the idealization of whiteness and the negation of people of color.

A second option whites have to resolve their dissonance is to modify their prior assumptions about race to better fit what they have witnessed and experienced (Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011). This option leads whites to the second developmental phase, which consists of the pseudoindependence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy statuses. Pseudoindependence represents the first status of the second phase, where whites make beginning attempts to understand race and racism at an intellectual level. To help enhance their understanding, whites often seek the assistance of people of color. At this point in development, whites place more emphasis on acquiring a conceptual rather than a personal understanding of race.
In contrast to pseudoinddependence, whites operating within the immersion/emersion status seek a more personal understanding of racism and what it means to be white (Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011). They display increased willingness to explore and confront their racial biases, and make beginning attempts to actively combat racism. In general, immersion/emersion represents a time when whites shift from attempting to change people of color to making attempts to change themselves.

Autonomy represents the final status of Helms’ model (Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011). Whites who reach this status are keenly aware of their racial identity, and acknowledge the role they play in perpetuating racism. Although these individuals acknowledge their role as an oppressor, they have developed a more positive outlook on their whiteness by also focusing on their progress toward developing a non-racist identity. There is an authentic valuing of racial diversity at this status, with whites actively seeking out interracial experiences. Many of the experiences sought involve activities aimed at eliminating racism within society.

In summary, Helms’ model provides insight into the development of racial identity for white individuals. Psychologists, counselors, and educators of racism have utilized this model to better understand the processes underlying clients’ and students’ conceptualizations of race and racism. Although Helms’ theory and model remain highly influential within the white racial identity literature, several criticisms and concerns have been brought to attention. Helms’ model has received criticism for operating under the assumption that whites begin their racial identity development in a state of obliviousness to racism and their own whiteness (MacDonald, 2007). It is argued that some whites may bypass the contact status due to acquiring awareness of racial diversity and their whiteness at early ages.
Another common criticism of Helms’ model concerns the linearity of racial identity development (Sue & Sue, 2003). Researchers and theorists have argued that white racial identity development may not be linear in nature, but rather, may be a process involving progression and regression throughout. In response to this criticism, Helms indicated that her use of the term status reflected a nonlinear description of racial identity development. Although Helms proposed that whites typically have a dominant status from which they operate, she also acknowledged that “pure” statuses do not exist. Helms stated that at any given time, whites may display a blend of statuses. The status most salient at a particular time may depend on the present circumstances.

The procedures used to develop Helms’ model have also received criticism from researchers (MacDonald, 2007; Sue & Sue, 2003). Helms’ model of white racial identity was largely based on her model of Ethnic Identity Development, thus operating under the assumption that the basic aspects of ethnic identity development are applicable to whites’ development. It is argued that due to whites developing their racial identity in the absence of oppression, their development is distinct from that of people of color, and therefore, should not be based on models describing racial development for non-white people.

A final criticism scholars have noted of Helms’ model is the terminology used within the descriptions of phases and statuses (Barndt, 2007). Terms such as “non-racist,” and phrases such as, “the abandonment of racism,” imply that whites have the ability to entirely eliminate their racist attitudes, biases, and assumptions. Scholars have argued that it is impossible for whites to completely rid themselves of the influence racism has had on them (Barndt, 2007; Kivel, 2011; Sue, 2003). The term anti-racist is often preferred over non-racist, as this term suggests that whites may actively work against racism, but may never fully eradicate it from their psyche.
Despite the existing concerns, researchers continue to refer to Helms’ model when examining whites’ racial identity development. For the majority of the studies reviewed in this subsection, Helms and Carter’s measure, titled the White Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (WRIAS), was utilized to assess whites’ development of racial identity. Directly based on Helms’ theoretical model, the WRIAS is a self-report measure consisting of five subscales that reflect five of the statuses of white racial identity development (Helms, 1990). The five statuses represented within the WRIAS include contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, and autonomy. Each subscale score provides an estimate of the degree to which whites’ attitudes reflect one of the five statuses. Each subscale consists of 10 Likert-type scale items, making a total of 50 items for the entire measure.

The WRIAS has played an integral role in prior research that has examined the impact of race-based education on whites individuals’ racial identity development. Through researchers’ use of the WRIAS, evidence has been gathered supporting the notion that education on racism promotes cognitive and affective change for white individuals. Research is now reviewed that examined white racial identity development, and how this development is influenced by education on racism.

Research Findings

In general, multicultural and racism-focused educational interventions have been found to be associated with enhanced racial identity development for white college students and trainees within psychology and counseling programs (Evans & Foster, 2000; Tatum, 1992; Tatum, 1994). Evans and Foster (2000) found in their investigation of white counseling trainees that those who had more education on racism were less likely to endorse having attitudes associated with the
reintegration status of racial identity development, which is considered the most racially biased status. Additionally, these trainees were found to be more likely to endorse attitudes associated with the autonomy status, the most advanced developmental level of Helms’ model. Overall, correlational studies have generated findings supporting a positive relationship between racism-focused education and white racial identity development.

In studies utilizing pretest-posttest designs, white counseling trainees have been found to experience racial identity growth upon completion of multicultural counseling courses (Brown, Parham, & Yonker, 1996; Neville et al., 1996; Parker, Moore, & Neimeyer, 1998). Neville et al. (1996) measured the racial identity attitudes of 28 white counseling trainees both before and after they completed a multicultural psychology course. Together, the pre- and post-intervention measures indicated that from beginning to end of the course, trainees experienced increases in attitudes reflecting more advanced statuses of racial identity development (i.e., pseudoindependence and autonomy). These attitude changes were found to remain stable one year following course completion. Collectively, results from pretest-posttest studies suggest that multicultural education may facilitate racial identity development for white individuals, with whites displaying more positive racial attitudes upon receiving such education.

Researchers have attempted to identify the specific aspects of multicultural education that promote racial identity development for white counseling trainees and psychology professionals. When researchers have asked these individuals to identify what helped facilitate their racial identity growth, they have often identified the multicultural education context as a general factor (MacDonald, 2007; Riker, 2002; Rothman et al., 2012). The education contexts that have been identified as facilitating growth have been described by white counseling trainees and
psychology professionals as being safe, supportive, challenging, and non-threatening. Such contexts have been reported to provide opportunities to safely process thoughts, feelings, and biases pertaining to racism. Instructors in these contexts have been described as being highly supportive of students’ growth. Overall, white racial identity development appears to be promoted in multicultural education contexts that are characterized as being safe, supportive, and challenging.

Collectively, the results of the research reviewed in this subsection suggest that white racial identity development is positively impacted by learning on racism (Brown et al., 1996; Neville et al., 1996; Parker et al., 1998). At this point in the section, both white racial identity development and multicultural competence have been identified as factors influenced by multicultural education and racism-focused educational interventions. Similar to the multicultural competence research, limitations exist within the research examining white racial identity, with two primary concerns being limitations to generalizability and the extensive use of self-report measures (Evans & Foster, 2000; Rothman et al., 2012). The samples selected for studies were often small and disproportionately female, thus questioning overall generalizability. Additionally, due to the wide use of the WRIAS, a self-report measure, socially desirable responding was a particular risk.

Along with addressing the WRIAS’ limitations as a self-report instrument, researchers have also noted concerns pertaining to its reliability. Across several studies, the internal consistency reliability of the contact subscale has been found to be particularly low (Constantine, 2002; Evans & Foster, 2000; Middleton et al., 2005; Ottavi et al., 1994). Such low reliability has at times prompted researchers to omit the contact subscale from their analysis of results.
In light of its measurement limitations, white racial identity development remains a critical factor to examine when determining the outcomes of learning about racism for white psychology and counseling trainees. Racial identity growth is highly desired and considered necessary for white trainees, as such growth has been found to be associated with more positive counseling outcomes. Specifically, white mental health professionals with more advanced racial identity attitudes have been found to be more likely to openly discuss racism-related matters with their clients (Rothman et al., 2012). When such discussions occurred with their clients of color, white mental health professionals were rated by their clients as being more credible, professional, and skilled (Zhang & Burkard, 2008; Chang & Berk, 2009). In contrast to white mental health professionals with more advanced attitudes, those whose racial identity attitudes were less advanced were found to have a greater tendency to downplay the importance of racism when working with clients (Gushue & Constantine, 2007). Mental health professionals who engage in such minimization may face significant difficulties establishing therapeutic relationships with clients, especially clients of color.

In summary, racial identity growth is now considered a necessary component of white psychologists’ and counselors’ professional development (Smith et al., 2006). Such growth has been found to be facilitated by multicultural education and racism-focused learning interventions. In the final subsection, research is reviewed that highlights additional cognitive and affective changes experienced by white individuals upon learning in greater depth about racism.

Additional Outcomes of Learning about Racism

In addition to multicultural competence and white racial identity, multicultural education
and racism-focused educational interventions have also been found to influence white counseling trainees’ race prejudice toward people of color (Castillo et al., 2007; Rudman, Ashmore, & Gary, 2001). There is evidence to suggest that such interventions may impact both explicit and implicit race prejudice. Explicit prejudice refers to the racial attitudes for which one is consciously aware, and implicit prejudice refers to racial attitudes outside of one’s awareness.

Castillo et al. (2007) examined the implicit race prejudice of a majority-white sample of counseling trainees to determine the degree to which such prejudice was impacted by a multicultural counseling course. Implicit race prejudice was measured before and after the course using the Race Implicit Association Test (IAT). Described briefly, the Race IAT is a response latency test, where the primary task is to pair pictures of white and black individuals with words that are either pleasant or unpleasant in nature. Race prejudice is assumed to be evident when test takers take significantly more time to pair black individuals with pleasant words in comparison to unpleasant words. Prejudice is also assumed to be evident when the response time to pair pleasant words with black individuals is greater in comparison to white individuals. The results generated by Castillo et al. (2007) indicated that counseling trainees experienced a decline in implicit race prejudice between the time they began and completed their multicultural counseling course. The average decline in prejudice was found to be nine percent.

Although several studies have offered evidence suggesting that race prejudice is significantly reduced by multicultural education, others have failed to produce such results. In her examination of school counseling trainees’ racial attitudes, Constantine (2002) found a non-significant relationship between multicultural education and race prejudice, thus indicating that such education may not facilitate change in prejudicial attitudes. Additionally, Boysen and Vogel
(2008) found multicultural education to have no effect on psychology trainees’ implicit race prejudice. Measurements taken before and after trainees received such education indicated that trainees’ implicit prejudice remained unchanged.

Overall, the results of race prejudice studies have been mixed, with questions remaining regarding the extent to which multicultural education reduces prejudice for white psychology and counseling trainees. Several factors may explain the existing discrepancies within race prejudice research, with one factor being the differences in the populations sampled across studies. For example, in the study by Castillo et al. (2007), which yielded findings suggesting that race prejudice was reduced by multicultural education, the sample included white counseling trainees who had no prior multicultural or racism-focused education. The two reported studies yielding contradictory results had employed samples of graduate students with varying levels of prior education (Boysen & Vogel, 2008; Constantine, 2002). These differences in sample characteristics may have partially contributed to the differences in the study findings.

Two other factors that may have contributed to the contradictory findings are the variation across studies in the type of race prejudice that was assessed (i.e. implicit or explicit), and the variation in the specific instruments that were used. Both Castillo et al. (2007) and Boysen and Vogel (2008) examined implicit race prejudice; however, Castillo et al. (2007) used the computerized version of the Race IAT, and Boysen and Vogel (2008) used the pen and paper version. Constantine (2002) examined explicit race prejudice through use of the New Racism Scale. Collectively, the mixed results may suggest that explicit and implicit race prejudice are impacted differently by multicultural education. Furthermore, the contradictory results may be suggestive of differences among the measures with regard to the accuracy by which race
prejudice is measured.

In addition to discrepancies across studies in sampling and measurement, it has also been proposed that the impact of multicultural education on race prejudice may differ depending on white psychology and counseling trainees’ level of racial identity development when they first begin receiving such education (Constantine, 2002). Although this hypothesis has been formulated, minimal studies have been conducted to test it. In general, further research is needed to determine the impact, if any, that multicultural education has on white trainees’ race prejudice.

Other changes in addition to race prejudice have been found to occur for white psychology and counseling trainees upon engaging in multicultural education. These changes include increased comfort with interracial interactions (Dickson et al., 2008; Parker et al., 1998), and increased desire to take action against racism (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Kernahan & Davis, 2007; Rothman et al., 2012). Several studies have also substantiated evidence suggesting that multicultural education increases white trainees’ awareness of specific aspects of racism, with these aspects including institutional racism and white privilege (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Case, 2007; Kernahan & Davis, 2007; Probst, 2003; Rothman et al., 2012). Prior research suggests that as awareness grows of these two aspects, white trainees begin to view racism through a more systemic lens, acknowledging the impact racism has at societal, institutional, and personal levels. White trainees begin to recognize that due to racism being embedded within institutions, all white individuals, with or without intention, receive privileges as a result.

Summary

Collectively, the research reviewed in this section offers evidence suggesting that multicultural education and racism-focused educational interventions may promote significant
cognitive and affective change for white psychology and counseling trainees (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Castillo et al., 2007; Constantine 2001b; Dickson et al., 2008; Evans & Foster, 2000; Neville et al., 1996; Rothman et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2006). In light of the potential intrapersonal changes that may occur, an important aspect to consider is the impact such changes may have on white trainees’ relationships, social networks, and interactions. According to systems theory, any change in one aspect of an individual’s system will affect all other components (Bowen, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Following this theory, it is anticipated that when white trainees experience intrapersonal changes reflective of their learning about racism, their relationships, social networks, and interactions will subsequently undergo change as well.

In the following section of this chapter, research is reviewed that has offered beginning evidence to suggest that learning about racism involves interpersonal change for white psychology and counseling trainees.

The Interpersonal Aspects of Learning about Racism

As white psychology and counseling trainees develop greater awareness and understanding of racism, it is anticipated, according to systems theory, that the cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes they experience will facilitate changes to their relationships and larger social networks (Bowen, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Furthermore, systems theory would predict that changes occurring to trainees’ relationships and social networks would either promote or hinder their development of further awareness and understanding of racism. In general, systems theory would predict that the intrapersonal and interpersonal changes trainees experience would mutually influence each other. In the current study, the focus was on the impact that intrapersonal change (i.e. trainees’ learning about racism) had on interpersonal
factors (i.e. trainees’ relationships, social networks, and interactions).

Although minimal in quantity, studies have been conducted that have offered beginning evidence to suggest that learning about racism involves interpersonal change for white psychology and counseling trainees (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Case, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Neville et al., 1996; Rothman et al., 2012; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). In general, these studies have offered more information on the intrapersonal aspects of learning about racism in comparison to the interpersonal. Within this section, studies are reviewed in which participants reported that their learning about racism either had an impact on, or was impacted by their relationships and social networks. Participants of the reviewed studies included white undergraduate students in varying degree programs, as well as white graduate students and professionals in psychology, counseling, and social work.

The current section is divided into two sub-sections, with the first subsection providing a review of studies that have identified interpersonal factors found to either promote or hinder white participants’ learning about racism (Case, 2012; Iezzi, 2009; MacDonald, 2007; Neville et al., 1996; Roosa-Millar, 2006; Tellett, 2004). The primary purpose for including this sub-section is to enhance understanding of the impact that white participants’ relationships and social networks may have on their process of learning about racism. In the second sub-section, a review is provided of studies that have identified various interpersonal changes that occur for white participants as they learn about racism (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Case, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Rothman et al., 2012; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). The primary purpose of this sub-section is to enhance understanding of the impact that learning about racism has on white participants' relationships, social networks, and general interactions with others.
In comparison to studies reviewed in the first sub-section, those in the second sub-section are reviewed in greater detail due to them being more closely connected to the purpose of the current study. As noted previously, the current study’s purpose is to explore the impact that learning about racism has on white counseling psychology trainees’ relationships, social networks, and interactions. Collectively, the studies reviewed in both sub-sections offered evidence suggesting that learning about racism both influences, and is influenced by white participants’ relationships and social networks. Following the two sub-sections, this section concludes with a discussion of research limitations.

Interpersonal Factors Promoting or Hindering Learning about Racism

In studies for which counseling trainees have been asked to identify factors either promoting or hindering their learning about racism, trainees have identified aspects of their relationships with family and friends as being hindering factors. In their study combining quantitative and qualitative methodology, Neville et al. (1996) included as part of the qualitative component a Guided Inquiry survey, with the purpose of having counseling trainees identify factors promoting or hindering their learning about racism. A total of 38 graduate-level counseling trainees participated in the study, with approximately 75% of trainees identifying as white. Societal racism was one factor that approximately 13% of trainees endorsed hindering their learning about racism. Those who endorsed societal racism as a hindering factor discussed how their learning about racism had been negatively impacted by interactions they had with family and friends who displayed race prejudice.

In a later qualitative study, MacDonald (2007) interviewed white trainees in counseling and psychology graduate programs about the challenges they experienced while completing a
multicultural course. One theme that emerged was the negative impact trainees’ friendships and family relationships had on their learning about racism. Trainees indicated that one of the challenges they experienced while completing their multicultural course was the minimal support they received from family and friends to continue building their awareness and understanding of racism. They described this minimal support as being a factor that hindered their learning.

Together, the findings of MacDonald (2007) and Neville et al. (1996) suggest that learning about racism may be difficult for white counseling trainees when minimal support is received to engage in such learning, and when there is frequent exposure to individuals with contradictory racial attitudes and beliefs. Given the nature of systemic racism, it is anticipated that many, if not the majority of white trainees, have been frequently exposed to negative racial attitudes, as well as beliefs about white superiority (Barndt, 2007; Rothenberg, 2012). This exposure poses concern, as evidence suggests that such exposure may serve as a barrier to learning about racism.

Although friendships and family relationships have been reported by white trainees to hinder their learning about racism, these same relationships have also been reported to promote learning under certain circumstances. White counseling trainees have reported their learning being enhanced when they were able to discuss with family members their experiences learning about racism (Neville et al., 1996). Additionally, trainees have reported that their learning about racism was enhanced through interactions with white friends with anti-racist attitudes (Roosa-Millar, 2006). In general, prior research suggests that white trainees’ learning about racism may be promoted through interacting with white friends and family members who demonstrate anti-racist attitudes, and who are willing to listen to their learning experiences.
Several studies have offered evidence suggesting that friendships with people of color may promote white trainees’ learning about racism (Coleman, 2006; Gurin et al., 2002; Neville et al., 1996; Reason et al., 2005; Roosa-Millar, 2006; Tellett, 2004; Whitt et al., 2001). In previous studies, white counseling trainees have reported that their learning about racism was enhanced through having opportunities to share their thoughts about racism with friends of color (Neville et al., 1996; Tellett, 2004). An additional finding through prior research is white participants’ report that their awareness of racism and white privilege increased as a result of witnessing acts of racial discrimination against their friends of color (Case, 2012; Iezzi, 2009; Tellett, 2004). Participants of these studies included white undergraduate students, as well as white trainees and professionals in psychology and social work. This finding in particular offers support for Helms’ theory of white racial identity development, which postulates that witnessing acts of racism may facilitate racial identity growth for whites (Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011).

In summary, previous research offers evidence suggesting that white psychology and counseling trainees’ relationships may have significant influence on their learning about racism. Interpersonal factors found to enhance such learning include the following: having friendships with people of color and white individuals with anti-racist attitudes, receiving support from family and friends to continue learning about racism, and having opportunities in relationships to share learning experiences (MacDonald, 2007; Neville et al., 1996; Roosa-Millar, 2006; Tellett, 2004).

In contrast to the research described above, white trainees’ learning about racism has been found to also be negatively impacted by their friendships and family relationships
(MacDonald, 2007; Neville et al., 1996). This negative impact has been found to occur when minimal support is received from family and friends to continue learning about racism, and when there is frequent exposure to family and friends with negative racial attitudes. Collectively, the research reviewed in this sub-section offers evidence suggesting that white psychology and counseling trainees’ relationships may have an influence on their learning about racism. In contrast to this research, the following sub-section presents research suggesting that trainees’ relationships not only influence their learning about racism, but are also impacted by such learning.

Interpersonal Impact of Learning about Racism

Several qualitative studies have utilized samples of white undergraduate students, as well as white trainees and professionals within mental health fields, in an attempt to describe the experiences these individuals encounter as they learn in greater depth about racism (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Case, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Rothman et al., 2012; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). These studies have focused primarily on understanding the intrapersonal changes that occur for white participants while completing courses focused on multicultural issues, and/or engaging in racism-focused learning activities and discussions. Oftentimes within these studies, which have frequently utilized open-ended interviewing techniques, white participants have discussed the changes that occurred to their relationships, social networks, and interactions as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. For these participants, changes in attitudes and beliefs about racism appeared to facilitate interpersonal change.

In a qualitative study utilizing grounded theory, MacDonald (2007) interviewed 17 white
trainees in counseling and psychology graduate programs about the challenges they experienced while learning about racism in a multicultural course. Trainees were invited to participate in a total of three individual interviews, with the first occurring midway through the multicultural course, the second directly following course completion, and the third between six to twelve months after course completion. All 17 trainees participated in the first interview, 11 participated in the second, and 5 participated in the third. During the interviews, trainees were invited to describe the difficult experiences they encountered when learning about racism during their multicultural course. The constant comparative method was used to identify common experiences across trainees. One common experience that emerged was the sense of discomfort trainees felt about sharing with others their experiences learning about racism. Trainees reported feeling particularly uncomfortable sharing their learning experiences with family and friends. During their interviews, trainees acknowledged having a desire to share with family and friends their experiences learning about racism; however, indicated that they felt too uncomfortable to actually share such information. Trainees’ discomfort with sharing was attributed to them not feeling psychologically safe in relationships with family and friends, and worrying about the potential for sharing to result in increased interpersonal conflict.

In addition to this hesitancy, white trainees have also been found to be hesitant to confront family and friends who make statements reflecting racist attitudes. In a qualitative study by Rothman et al. (2012), grounded theory was utilized to explore 43 white counseling trainees’ experiences learning about racism. Upon completing a course focused on racism and the culture of whiteness, trainees were asked to complete a survey, which was an adaptation of the Guided Inquiry Protocol. Trainees also participated in a one-hour focus group formatted as a semi-
structured interview. Collectively, the Guided Inquiry Protocol and focus group were utilized to examine trainees’ experiences learning about racism, and the challenges they faced with this learning both within and outside of the context of their completed course. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used to identify themes across trainees’ shared experiences. One theme that emerged was trainees’ resistance to confrontation. Several trainees acknowledged having experiences where they resisted confronting family members who they had witnessed making racist statements. Reasons reported for such resistance included perceiving the confrontation as being too difficult, and believing the target individual’s opinions could not be changed.

In another qualitative study utilizing grounded theory, Case (2012) also found resistance to confrontation to be a common experience acknowledged within her participant sample. Participants included white female graduate students, undergraduate students, faculty members, and university staff, who were members of a discussion group titled, “White Women Against Racism.” Each participant engaged in a semi-structured interview, which included questions aimed at understanding participants’ experiences confronting racist attitudes of others. Based on data gathered from interviews and discussion group meetings, a theme that emerged from participants’ shared experiences was resistance to confronting the racist attitudes of family members. Participants identified the following as reasons for resisting confrontation: desire to respect elder family members, perceived ineffectiveness of the confrontation, feeling too exhausted to confront, and avoidance of disapproval and conflict.

For white counseling trainees and college students who choose to confront family and friends about racist statements, it has been found that such confrontations often lead to increased
interpersonal tension and conflict (Case, 2012). In Case’s (2012) study, white female graduate and undergraduate students reported that when they chose to confront family members about racist comments, the family members often responded in a defensive manner. Upon being confronted, participants reported that family members would deny being a racist, accuse them of being over-sensitive, attempt to switch the topic of conversation, and occasionally, physically leave the room.

Overall, prior research suggests that as white psychology and counseling trainees acquire greater awareness and understanding of racism, the prejudiced attitudes of other white individuals become increasingly salient (Case, 2012; Rothman et al., 2012). When white trainees witness such attitudes being displayed by family and friends, they may have a strong desire to confront the individuals, but may hesitate due to foreseeing negative consequences. Under these circumstances, white trainees may feel they must decide to either fight against racism, or preserve their relationships. If trainees choose to confront, they risk creating tensions within their relationships that may have a lasting negative impact. Trainees may often choose silence over confrontation in an attempt to avoid tension, rejection, or a complete relationship loss.

In addition to experiencing confrontation-related conflicts, previous research also suggests that white psychology and counseling trainees may experience feelings of isolation as their awareness and understanding of racism increases. This sense of isolation was identified in Tellett’s (2004) qualitative study that utilized a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of white graduate students and professionals in social work, who participated in a project titled, The Learning Circle. The primary objective of this project was to enhance project participants’ understanding of Native American people, culture, history, and worldviews. Each
participant of the study engaged in three in-depth interviews, where they were invited to reflect on the changes they experienced as a result of engaging in the Learning Circle project. One theme that emerged from participant interviews was an increased sense of isolation resulting from the learning that occurred while engaging in the Learning Circle. Several of the interviewed participants reported that as their awareness of racial oppression increased during the project, they experienced a heightened sense of isolation from both white individuals and people of color. The participants reported feeling isolated from people of color due to perceiving themselves as never being able to completely understand experiences of racial oppression. Participants endorsed feeling isolated from other white individuals due to having different perspectives about racism. Some participants acknowledged that their friendships with other white individuals had become increasingly disconnected on emotional and psychological levels due to their differing perspectives.

Similar reports of isolation were found by Spanierman, Oh, et al. (2008), who conducted a qualitative study that examined how white college students respond to racism, and how they are affected by racism. Of the 11 participants, 9 were undergraduate students, and 2 were graduate-level students. Participants engaged in one semi-structured interview, where they were invited to share their experiences with racism, their perceptions of people of color, and their perceptions of white individuals. The Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method was employed to analyze the data gathered from participant interviews. One theme that emerged from data analysis was participants’ sense of disconnection from their own racial group. Two participants endorsed experiencing an increased sense of disconnection from their own racial group as a result of acquiring greater awareness of racism. These participants acknowledged that
as their awareness of racism increased, they felt increasingly isolated and alienated from other white individuals, particularly those who had minimal awareness of white privilege, and the detrimental effects of racism.

Feelings of isolation were also endorsed by participants of Caldwell and Vera’s (2010) qualitative study, which utilized grounded theory to identify and define experiences that facilitate development of a social justice orientation, which includes having awareness and understanding of racism. The study sample included 36 counseling psychology doctoral students and professionals, with the majority of the sample identifying as white. Participants completed the Critical Factors Questionnaire, which instructed participants to describe specific incidents that facilitated their development of a social justice orientation. Within their descriptions, several participants endorsed experiencing changes in their personal and professional relationships as a result of their social justice orientation development. Specifically, participants reported feeling greater disconnection from individuals who did not share the same social justice values. In contrast, participants endorsed feeling greater connection to individuals who, similar to themselves, demonstrated a commitment to social justice. Overall, the results of Caldwell and Vera’s (2010) study suggest that the relationship changes that occur when learning about racism (i.e. increases or decreases in connectedness) may be attributed in part to shifts in attitudes and values.

Collectively, previous research suggests that white psychology and counseling trainees may experience changes in their relationships as they acquire greater awareness and understanding of racism (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). Trainees may begin to feel greater connection to individuals who share the same attitudes and
perspectives of racism. In contrast, trainees may feel increasingly disconnected from individuals who do not share the same attitudes and perspectives. Based on the findings of Tellett’s (2004) study, white trainees may experience a general sense of isolation and disconnection from both white individuals and people of color. As a result of their racially privileged position, white trainees may feel psychologically disconnected from people of color, doubting their ability to adequately understand oppression due to having privilege. Additionally, white trainees may feel disconnected from their own racial group due to recognition that their perspectives of racism challenge the status quo, and do not reflect the beliefs of the majority of white individuals.

In essence, isolation represents one of the negative outcomes of racism that white trainees may experience (Barndt, 2007; Goodman, 2001). It is the destructive nature of racism that may lead white trainees to be in a chronic state of disconnection from people of color. Additionally, racism may force white trainees to make the difficult choice of either following the status quo, or face the painful consequence of being isolated from their own racial group.

Summary

The research highlighted within this section offers beginning evidence in support of the core assumption underlying the proposed study, which is that learning about racism is associated with interpersonal change for white psychology and counseling trainees. Collectively, the highlighted research suggests that trainees’ learning about racism both influences, and is influenced by their social relationships, networks, and interactions. In one set of reviewed studies, white trainees’ social relationships were found to influence their learning about racism through either promoting or hindering such learning (MacDonald, 2007; Neville et al., 1996; Roosa-Millar, 2006; Tellett, 2004). Promoting factors included having friendships with people of
color and/or whites with anti-racist attitudes, receiving support from family and friends to continue learning about racism, and having opportunities in relationships to share learning experiences. Hindering factors included receiving minimal support from family and friends to continue learning about racism, and being exposed to family and friends with racist attitudes and beliefs.

In a second set of studies highlighted in this section, evidence was offered suggesting that learning about racism has an influence on the social relationships, networks, and interactions of white college students, and white trainees and professionals within mental health fields. Across several studies, white participants endorsed experiencing interpersonal changes that they attributed to learning in greater depth about racism (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Case, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Rothman et al., 2012; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). One change participants reported was increased desire to confront individuals about racist attitudes and comments. Despite participants having this increased desire, a common theme that emerged across studies was participants’ resistance to engaging in such confrontation, with a primary concern being the impact confrontation would have on their relationships. Additional changes participants reported were changes in levels of connectedness in relationships and larger social networks. Participants indicated that as their awareness and understanding of racism increased, they felt a greater sense of connection to individuals who shared similar perspectives on racism as them, and less connected to those who did not share the same perspectives. Additionally, participants endorsed feeling a broader sense of isolation and disconnection from both people of color and their own racial group. This change was attributed to having greater awareness and understanding of racism and white privilege.
Similar to the studies reviewed in previous sections, those highlighted within this section possess limitations that are important to address. For studies that employed samples of white college students outside of the psychology and counseling professions, it cannot be assumed that the experiences reported by those samples directly apply to white psychology and counseling trainees (Case, 2012; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008). Thus, the findings offered by these studies may be less applicable to the proposed study, as these studies do not provide direct evidence for the interpersonal changes experienced by white trainees in psychology and counseling professions. Findings most applicable to the proposed study are those offered by studies for which the same population was examined (i.e. white psychology and counseling trainees).

An additional limitation of the studies reviewed in this section is the use of small participant samples. It is important to clarify, however, that for qualitative studies, which comprise the majority of studies reviewed within this section, limitations related to generalizability are not a concern. For qualitative research, the goal is to describe in detail the experiences of the participant samples, without the objective of generalizing outside of the samples.

One of the primary concerns about small sample sizes in qualitative research is whether enough data can be gathered from small samples to reach saturation. According to Morrow (2005), data saturation refers to the point in research where the data gathered can adequately describe the phenomena being investigated. For the studies reviewed in this section, saturation of data is often called into question, as several researchers did not directly address saturation within the reports of their studies. When data saturation was addressed by researchers, the discussions within reports were often brief, and typically did not elaborate on the specific processes that were
employed to determine when saturation was reached. One exception within the reviewed studies was the study conducted by MacDonald (2007), who provided within her dissertation manuscript a detailed account of how data saturation was determined in her study. Due to data saturation being questionable for the majority of the studies reviewed in this section, one question to be considered is whether more information would have emerged about the interpersonal aspects of learning about racism with larger sample sizes.

A final limitation that exists for several of the studies reviewed in this section is their focus on white trainees’ overall experience learning about racism (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Case, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Rothman et al., 2012; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). Such a broad focus places limits on the extent to which specific aspects of learning about racism can be explored. Although exploration of the overall experience of learning about racism has offered the opportunity for researchers to explore both intrapersonal and interpersonal change, the common pattern for the majority of previous studies has been to place greater emphasis on the intrapersonal changes that occur. For studies that have addressed interpersonal changes related to learning about racism, they typically have done so after the changes emerged during participant interviews as being critical factors of participants’ learning experiences. Rather than being an initial core focus of previous studies, interpersonal change was recognized as a key aspect of learning about racism after participants endorsed experiencing such change.

Despite limitations, the research reviewed in this section offers beginning evidence to suggest that learning about racism involves interpersonal change for white psychology and counseling trainees. The goal of the current study was to provide additional support for this finding. In the following and final section, a summary and brief critique is provided of the
research that has been reviewed within this chapter. The summary concludes with a statement of the specific research questions that were addressed in the current study.

Chapter Summary

In order to prepare psychology and counseling trainees to effectively work with racially diverse clientele, and work toward social change, education on racism is provided to them during their graduate-level training (Smith et al., 2006). This education is found to be particularly critical for white trainees due to them often having limited awareness and understanding of racism and white privilege (Wildman & Davis, 2012). For many white trainees, the education on racism that they receive during their graduate work serves as their first experience engaging in an in-depth analysis of racism, white privilege, and related topics. Due to the unfamiliar and often intense nature of learning about racism, white trainees often experience a variety of cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions. Common reactions include those of surprise, defensiveness, anger, discomfort, shame, and guilt (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Parker & Schwartz, 2002; Pieterse, 2009; Spanierman et al., 2008; Sue et al., 2010; Todd et al., 2011; Utsey et al., 2005).

Although white trainees often find learning about racism to be intellectually and emotionally challenging, there is evidence to suggest that many experience positive outcomes from such learning. One outcome that has been reported is the development of multicultural competence (Castillo et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2006; Neville et al., 1996; Smith et al., 2006). It is important to note, however, that due to the extensive use of self-report measures, and the lack of empirical investigation on multicultural competence models, it remains questionable whether competence is truly enhanced through education about racism. In addition to multicultural competence, education on racism has also been found to facilitate white trainees’ racial identity
development, reduce their race prejudice, increase their comfort with interracial interactions, and increase their motivation to take action against racism (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Brown et al., 1996; Castillo et al., 2007; Dickson et al., 2008; Evans & Foster, 2000; Neville et al., 1996; Parker et al., 1998; Rothman et al., 2012).

Collectively, these reported outcomes suggest that white psychology and counseling trainees may undergo significant cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes as a result of learning about racism (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Castillo et al., 2007; Constantine 2001b; Dickson et al., 2008; Evans & Foster, 2000; Neville et al., 1996; Rothman et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2006). According to systems theory, such change is anticipated to have an impact on trainees’ relationships and social networks (Bowen, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Furthermore, it is anticipated that changes to relationships and social networks will either promote or hinder trainees’ development of further awareness and understanding of racism. In essence, systems theory predicts that trainees’ learning about racism will influence and be influenced by their relationships and social networks.

The research reviewed in the fourth section of this chapter offers support for systems theory’s predictions. In previous studies, white trainees have identified interpersonal factors that either promote or hinder their learning about racism (MacDonald, 2007; Neville et al., 1996; Roosa-Millar, 2006). Such learning was reported to be hindered when trainees received minimal support from family and friends to continue developing their awareness and understanding of racism. In contrast to this finding, trainees indicated that their learning about racism was facilitated when they had opportunities to share and process their learning experiences with friends and family. Having friendships with people of color was especially found to enhance
white trainees’ learning about racism (Coleman, 2006; Gurin et al., 2002; Neville et al., 1996; Reason et al., 2005; Roosa-Millar, 2006; Tellett, 2004; Whitt et al., 2001).

In addition to reporting interpersonal factors that either promote or hinder their learning, trainees have also reported experiencing changes to their relationships, social networks, and interactions as a result of learning about racism. Specifically, white counseling trainees and white college students have reported experiencing an increased desire to confront the racist attitudes of family and friends as a result of such learning (Case, 2012; Rothman et al., 2012). Often accompanying this desire is apprehensiveness toward engaging in such confrontation due to foreseeing negative consequences. In general, previous research suggests that when white psychology and counseling trainees have opportunities to address racism, they may feel they must choose between fighting against racism or preserving their relationships.

When white counseling trainees and college students decide to confront individuals about racist attitudes, they report that these confrontations are often received negatively (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Case, 2012). They report that those being confronted by them have reacted to confrontations by denying being racist, making personal verbal attacks, and attempting to end the dialogue altogether by changing topics or physically leaving. In general, research suggests that white psychology and counseling trainees may often find that addressing racism, especially with other white individuals, may lead to increased interpersonal tension and conflict.

Along with conflicts related to confrontation, white research participants have also reported that their learning about racism impacted the level of connectedness they felt in various relationships (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). Participants reported feeling an increased sense of connection to individuals who shared similar social justice
values, and less connected to those who did not share the same values. Participants have also reported feeling an increased sense of isolation and disconnection from both people of color and their own racial group. This particular finding suggests that as white psychology and counseling trainees become increasingly aware of their racially privileged position, they may feel that their privilege creates disconnection between them and people of color. Additionally, having heightened awareness of racism and white privilege may lead to a sense of isolation from other white individuals, as it is recognized that their new perspectives on racism do not follow the status quo, challenging the beliefs held by the majority of white individuals.

Overall, a primary goal of this chapter was to review research to help readers better understand the experiences that occur for white psychology and counselor trainees as they learn about racism. Based on the research reviewed, there is beginning evidence to suggest that white trainees experience interpersonal changes as their awareness and understanding of racism increases (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Case, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Rothman et al., 2012; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). In order to enhance understanding of these interpersonal changes, further research is needed.

As mentioned previously, no study prior to the current has focused exclusively on the interpersonal changes that occur for white psychology and counseling trainees as they learn in greater depth about racism. The majority of previous studies have addressed in greater depth the changes that occur at the intrapersonal level (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001; Dickson et al., 2008; Evans & Foster, 2000; Murphy et al., 2006; Rothman et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2006). Specifically, previous studies have addressed the cognitive and attitudinal changes that occur for trainees in response to them taking college courses on multicultural issues, and/or engaging in
racism-focused activities and discussions.

For studies that have addressed the interpersonal changes associated with learning about racism, the majority have employed qualitative methods, with most utilizing grounded theory as the qualitative approach to inquiry (Case, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Rothman et al., 2012). It is important to note that within these studies, the primary objective was to focus on the broad experience of learning about racism, and not to specifically explore the interpersonal changes associated with such learning. Oftentimes within these studies, interpersonal changes were brought to attention when participants began describing during interviews how learning about racism had impacted their relationships with others. In general, the interpersonal changes associated with learning about racism have not been an intentional focus in previous research, but rather, have emerged as a significant topic during participant interviews.

In addition to lacking an intentional interpersonal focus, prior research has varied with regard to the participant samples selected. Prior studies that have attempted to describe the interpersonal aspects of learning about racism have employed samples of white undergraduate and graduate students in varying professional fields (Case, 2012; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008). For studies that did not employ samples of white psychology and counseling trainees, it is questionable whether the experiences described by those samples can be applied to white trainees’ experiences.

In light of the sample variation and lack of an intentional interpersonal focus, prior research is limited with regard to the information it can provide about the interpersonal changes white psychology and counseling trainees experience as they learn about racism. A primary aim of the current study was to gather further information about these changes through use of
qualitative methods. Of particular focus in the current study were the changes that occur to white counseling psychology trainees’ relationships, social networks, and interactions as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. The current study was guided by the following research questions:

(1) What interpersonal changes do white counseling psychology trainees experience as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism?
(2) How do trainees’ interactions in their relationships change?
(3) How do trainees’ relationships change with regard to levels of connection and intimacy?
(4) What broad-level changes occur to trainees’ social networks?

The first question reflects the central, overarching question of the current study. This question was exploratory in nature, and identified the phenomenon that was examined, which was the experience of interpersonal change that occurs in the context of developing greater awareness and understanding of racism. In general, it was the exploratory nature of the central question that made a qualitative research approach an appropriate fit for the current study. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative approaches are particularly useful when research aims to explore and describe a phenomenon for which minimal understanding has been acquired. Such approaches promote in-depth exploration of the phenomena being investigated.

In addition to its central question, the current study also addressed three issue-oriented sub-questions. Creswell (2007) notes that the primary aim of issue-oriented sub-questions is to break down the phenomenon identified in the central question into more specific topics for examination. This break down helps facilitate detailed exploration of the phenomenon of interest.
For the current study, the three sub-questions reflect the specific interpersonal changes that were explored.

In conclusion, the current study addressed four research questions with the primary aim of exploring the interpersonal changes that occur for white counseling psychology trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. These changes were explored through use of qualitative methodology. In the following chapter, a detailed overview is provided of the methods utilized in the current study.
CHAPTER III
METHODS

The current study explored the interpersonal changes experienced by white counseling psychology trainees as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. Prior to the current study being conducted, no study had ever focused exclusively on examining these changes. Due to interpersonal change being minimally explored in previous research, one of the primary goals of the current study was to further enhance understanding of how white psychology trainees’ relationships, social networks, and interactions change as they learn about racism. Qualitative methods were highly suitable for the current study due to it examining a phenomenon for which minimal understanding had been obtained.

In this chapter, a rationale is provided for the current study’s utilization of qualitative methods. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the exploratory and descriptive nature of the current study’s research questions provided initial support for the use of a qualitative research approach. Other aspects of the study that supported use of qualitative methods are highlighted in this chapter. The chapter commences with overviews of qualitative research methods, and the constructivist paradigm. Following these overviews, a summary of phenomenology is provided, which was the qualitative approach selected for the current study. Additionally, the chapter provides descriptions of the current study’s participant sample, as well as the methods and procedures utilized in the study for participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and data verification. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research refers to a broad class of empirical procedures designed to describe
and interpret the experiences of research participants (Ponterotto, 2005). Creswell (1998) noted that a primary purpose of qualitative research is to build a complex and holistic picture of participants’ experiences. When researchers employ qualitative methodology, they operate under several philosophical assumptions. These assumptions may be classified into the following categories: ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological (Creswell, 2007). In this section, the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research are outlined, and explanations are provided for how each assumption corresponded to the current study.

With regard to ontology, qualitative researchers operate under the assumption that multiple realities exist, and that reality is subjective in nature (Creswell, 2007). The experience of reality is believed to vary across individuals. This ontological assumption corresponded well to the current study, as it was assumed by the author that white psychology trainees have different perceptions of reality with regard to their learning about racism. Trainees who experienced interpersonal changes in the context of such learning were assumed by the author to attribute different meanings to the changes, with the meanings being based on the realities they constructed. Although the ontological assumption encourages qualitative researchers to consider the uniqueness of human experiences, it is important to note that while acknowledging this uniqueness, the current study simultaneously focused on identifying commonalities across individuals’ experiences of interpersonal change related to their learning about racism.

The epistemological assumption focuses on the level of connection between participants and researchers (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative researchers place particular emphasis on developing trusting and collaborative relationships with their participants (Morrow, 2007). To build these relationships, researchers work closely and collaboratively with participants. This
feature was represented in the current study through the author working collaboratively with participants throughout the collection and analysis of data. Given the sensitive nature of the information participants were asked to share in the current study, it was critical for trusting and collaborative relationships to be developed between the author and participants. Through building such connections, participants were more likely to feel comfortable disclosing information about their learning about racism, which in return was likely to help minimize the risk of socially desirable responding. Overall, high levels of participant openness were critical for the current study, as such openness helped facilitate the gathering of rich and detailed information.

The axiological assumption focuses on the role researchers’ values and assumptions play in their studies (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative researchers assume that their studies are value-laden, and are influenced by the assumptions they hold about the phenomena they examine. Researcher self-awareness is regarded as being critical to the effective implementation of qualitative studies (Yeh & Inman, 2007). In general, it is important that researchers develop awareness of how their values and assumptions influence the processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This stance on researcher self-awareness was particularly applicable to the current study, as the author had considerable experience with the phenomenon she examined. Through utilization of a qualitative approach, the author had the opportunity to acknowledge the assumptions she held about white psychology trainees’ learning about racism, and the interpersonal changes that may occur for trainees in the context of such learning. Acknowledgment of her assumptions was one of the steps the author took to minimize the influence her assumptions had on the research process.
The rhetorical assumption provides a perspective on the writing structure of qualitative research. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative researchers write in a manner that is personal, literary, and based on definitions that emerge during the research process. The findings of qualitative research are typically presented in everyday language, and often incorporate participants’ own words and statements (Ponterotto, 2005). This particular writing style corresponded well to the primary objective of the current study, which was to provide a rich and detailed description of the interpersonal changes that occur for white counseling psychology trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. In general, the writing style encouraged more detailed description, and helped capture participants’ experiences in a more genuine form. Authenticity may have been compromised in the current study if a more objective writing style had been utilized.

The fifth and final assumption emphasizes qualitative research methodology. The methodological assumption notes the importance of qualitative studies operating under an emergent/intuitive framework. Creswell (2007) describes the emergent/intuitive framework as one that encourages flexibility throughout the entire research process. Researchers remain open to change at all phases of research, making modifications when necessary to study procedures, research questions, and data interpretations. For the current study, incorporation of the emergent/intuitive framework promoted attentiveness to participants’ experiences, and encouraged flexibility as new data emerged. This framework will be described in further detail later in the chapter.

Summary

In summary, there are five philosophical assumptions that underlie qualitative research.
These assumptions offer perspectives on the nature of reality, the researcher-participant relationship, and the role of researchers’ assumptions and values. The philosophical assumptions also provide perspectives on the writing style and methodological framework appropriate for qualitative research. Together, the philosophical assumptions corresponded well with the objectives of the current study, as well as the author’s assumptions about human experience, and the general research process. This correspondence made qualitative methodology an optimal choice for the current study.

Although the noted assumptions transcend across all qualitative research, there is variation across studies with regard to the paradigms and interpretive frameworks utilized as a foundation. Qualitative researchers select specific paradigms to serve as the philosophical foundations of their studies (Creswell, 2007). For the current study, a constructivist paradigm was utilized. In the following section, the constructivist paradigm is outlined, and its correspondence to the current study is addressed.

The Constructivist Paradigm

In qualitative research, paradigms are selected to provide frameworks from which to situate studies (Creswell, 2007). Paradigms serve as lenses that help shape the research process. Defined broadly, the term paradigm refers to a basic set of beliefs that guide action (Guba, 1990). For the current study, the constructivist paradigm was selected as the philosophical framework. This paradigm is particularly fitting for qualitative studies due to its assumptions corresponding well to those of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Morrow, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005). The constructivist paradigm and its assumptions are now outlined.

According to Creswell (2007), researchers operating from the constructivist paradigm
seek understanding of the world in which they live. In the context of research, emphasis is placed on the meanings participants make of their experiences. In general, an overarching goal for researchers utilizing the constructivist paradigm is to rely as much as possible on participant meanings and perspectives. As noted earlier, the philosophical assumptions of constructivism are similar to those of qualitative research, which were highlighted in the previous section. To avoid unnecessary redundancy, the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions of constructivism are briefly described.

Constructivist thought rests on the ontological notion that there are multiple and equally valid realities (Ponterotto, 2005). The concept of reality is constructed in the mind of the individual, and is profoundly influenced by contextual factors. Such factors that shape reality include individuals’ experiences and perceptions, as well as aspects of their social environment, such as race, class, gender, etc. In the current study, race was a contextual factor given particular focus. A key objective of the study was to obtain greater understanding of the realities constructed by white psychology trainees who experienced interpersonal change as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism.

With regard to epistemology, it is assumed that the interactions researchers have with participants facilitate overall understanding of participants’ experiences (Ponterotto, 2005). Constructivist researchers view the research process as collaborative, where both they and their participants co-construct the meaning of study findings through engaging in dialogues. This co-construction highlights the notion that both researchers and participants influence research results.

The axiological assumption of constructivism highlights that a researcher’s values and
lived experiences cannot be entirely separated from the research process. Rather than seeking to eliminate the influence of their values and experiences, constructivist researchers aim to explore, describe, and acknowledge the influence they have on their research. It is common practice for constructivist researchers to directly acknowledge their experiences and assumptions in their written works (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). Overall, constructivist researchers recognize that the interpretations they make of participant data are largely based on their lived experiences and cultural backgrounds (Creswell, 2007).

In light of the philosophical assumptions, one reason the constructivist paradigm was selected for the current study was the accordance the paradigm’s assumptions have to the author’s own assumptions. In her daily life, the author operates from a constructivist framework, where she views reality as being unique to and constructed by each individual. The author places high priority in building relationships with research participants, and holds the belief that researcher values and assumptions may never be entirely eliminated from the research process. Rather than deny the presence of values and assumptions, the author believes it is important to acknowledge these aspects, and then employ procedures to minimize their influence.

In addition to corresponding with the author’s assumptions, the constructivist paradigm was also selected due to its correspondence with the primary objective of the current study, which was to gather rich, detailed information about the interpersonal changes experienced by white counseling psychology trainees as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. In general, a qualitative approach with a constructivist lens encourages detailed description of phenomena that are examined. Through the current study’s utilization of a constructivist, qualitative approach, rich and detailed information was gathered about the
interpersonal changes experienced by trainees.

The constructivist paradigm was also selected for the current study due to its particular fit with multicultural research. Ponterotto (2002) advocated strongly for the use of a qualitative constructivist approach for multicultural-based research, stating that such an approach may facilitate multicultural growth for both researchers and participants. For the current study, which focused specifically on the multicultural topic of racism, researcher-participant dialogues may have facilitated multicultural growth for both participants and the author through deepening their understanding of the impact their learning about racism had on their relationships and larger social networks.

Summary

In summary, the constructivist paradigm was selected for the current study due to its applicability to multicultural research, as well as its correspondence to the study’s objectives and the author’s assumptions. Although the selection of a paradigm is one step taken to narrow and specify qualitative research, further specification is needed. A key step in the development of qualitative studies is to select a specific approach to inquiry (Creswell, 2007). In the following section, an overview is provided of the phenomenological approach, which was the qualitative approach to inquiry utilized in the current study.

Phenomenology

Within the broad field of qualitative research, there are several approaches to inquiry. For the current study, a phenomenological approach was selected due to its compatibility with the study’s purpose and objectives. Researchers who utilize a phenomenological approach aim to describe what their study participants have in common with regard to a particular phenomenon
Commonalities across participants’ experiences are typically referred to as themes. According to Creswell (2007), the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a collection of themes, which represent the essence of a phenomenon. The essence has been described by Van Manen (1990) as a grasp of the very nature of the phenomenon. Although the essence provides a composite description based on individual experiences, its aim is to build the complexity of the phenomenon rather than oversimplify it. For the current study, the phenomenon of interest was the experience of interpersonal change that occurs for white counseling psychology trainees as they learn in greater depth about racism. A phenomenological approach was selected due to the approach aligning with the study’s objectives, which were to identify commonalities across trainees’ experiences, and to describe the essence of interpersonal change that occurs for white psychology trainees in the context of learning about racism.

The foundation of the phenomenological approach is comprised of four primary philosophical assumptions (Creswell, 2007). One assumption focuses on the importance of searching for wisdom, which is considered a traditional task of phenomenology that has roots in Greek philosophy. Researchers who utilize a phenomenological approach operate under the assumption that seeking wisdom and knowledge is a high priority in research. An ultimate goal of phenomenology is to gather information about individuals’ experiences in order to enhance knowledge and wisdom of a particular phenomenon.

A second assumption of the phenomenological approach is that judgments about reality are to be suspended until founded on a more certain basis (Creswell, 2007). When utilizing a phenomenological approach, researchers must remain continually mindful of the existence of
multiple realities, and must distinguish their own reality from those of their participants. The common essence that is produced in phenomenology is developed only after participant realities have been thoroughly explored. Without such exploration, the common essence, a description of a shared perspective on reality, cannot be developed.

A third assumption of phenomenology focuses on the intentionality of consciousness (Creswell, 2007). Described briefly, the intentionality of consciousness refers to the idea that consciousness is always directed toward an object, and that the reality of an object is related to one’s consciousness of it. The phenomena that become reality for individuals are those they attend to consciously.

Related to the third assumption, the fourth and final assumption of phenomenology reflects the notion that the reality of an object is based on the meaning one attributes to it (Creswell, 2007). The establishment of reality first becomes possible through conscious awareness, and is then created by one’s perceptions and meanings. Individuals’ experiences with a particular phenomenon are based on how they perceive and make meaning of it.

Collectively, the four assumptions of phenomenology served as components of the current study’s philosophical foundation. As mentioned previously, the foundation of the current study was also comprised of the assumptions underlying constructivism. In general, the philosophical assumptions of phenomenology are compatible with those of the constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2007). Morrow (2007) described the phenomenological approach as being a subset of constructivism with similar philosophical underpinnings. Overall, it is the philosophical compatibility between phenomenology and constructivism that make the approach and paradigm a desired combination. This particular combination corresponded well to the current study’s
purpose and objectives.

Interpretive Phenomenology

Upon selection of phenomenology as the qualitative approach to inquiry, researchers then determine a specific phenomenological approach to utilize (Creswell, 2007). For the current study, the specific approach that was selected for use was interpretive phenomenology. The primary purpose of the interpretive phenomenological approach is to capture participant voices through exploring in detail how participants make meaning of their experiences (Creswell et al., 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Smith & Osborn, 2008). As opposed to focusing on researcher interpretations, interpretive phenomenology places emphasis on how participants interpret phenomena. The role of the researcher is to make sense of participant meanings.

In order to maintain focus on participant interpretations, researchers engage in a process called bracketing, where they set aside, as much as possible, their assumptions and experiences with the phenomena they investigate (Creswell, 2007). Although bracketing serves as a primary method for minimizing researcher bias, it is impossible for researchers to entirely set aside their assumptions and experiences. This impossibility makes it imperative that researchers engage in the process of reflexivity, where they continually reflect on the ways they influence each phase of their research (Given, 2008).

Although bracketing is expected to occur throughout the entire research process, it is of particular importance that researchers engage in bracketing at the outset of their studies (Creswell, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2008). When using an interpretive phenomenological approach, researchers initiate the bracketing process by first articulating their experiences with and assumptions about the phenomena they investigate. The author of the current study entered
her research with prior experiences with the phenomenon of interest, which, as mentioned, is the experience of interpersonal change that occurs for white counseling psychology trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. Throughout her graduate work, the author, a white counseling psychology doctoral student, experienced changes in her relationships and larger social network as she developed greater understanding of racism, and what it means to be white in U.S. society.

To facilitate the bracketing process in the current study, the author was interviewed by a fellow colleague about her experiences related to the phenomenon of interest. The interview occurred prior to participant recruitment, and provided the author the opportunity to articulate her experiences with the phenomenon she studied. Overall, the interview helped to increase the author’s awareness of her experiences, allowing her to be more attuned to the impact her experiences may have on the research process. Additionally, the interview helped to enhance the author’s understanding of how the interview process might be experienced by study participants.

The author entered the current study with specific assumptions about the phenomenon of interest, as well as broader assumptions about racism, racial identity development, and racism-focused education. These assumptions included the following:

1. When whites develop greater awareness and understanding of racism, changes can occur to their relationships and larger social networks.

2. There is benefit to exploring the interpersonal changes white psychology trainees experience as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. Through discovering and increasing awareness of these changes, a more comprehensive understanding may be acquired of white trainees’ experiences learning about racism.
(3) The progression of white psychology trainees’ understanding of racism may create challenges in their relationships. Such development may increase interpersonal tension and conflict.

(4) For white individuals, developing greater understanding of racism is an ongoing, continuous process for which competence is never fully achieved.

(5) Racism-focused education has the capacity to enhance white individuals’ awareness and understanding of racism. Additionally, such education may inspire white individuals to take action against racial oppression.

(6) Although white individuals can enhance their understanding of racism and fight against it, it is impossible to eliminate racism from their psyche and worldviews.

(7) To facilitate systemic change with regard to racism, modification must occur at the source of power (i.e. white individuals and institutions). This modification involves making visible to whites their privilege, as well as the destructive nature of racism for all individuals, regardless of their race.

(8) Racism involves prejudice and power. To be deemed a racist, one must possess the power to oppress.

(9) Racism hurts everyone.

In order to remain continually aware of the potential influence her experiences and assumptions may have on her research, the author wrote self-reflective memos throughout the data collection and data analysis phases of the current study. Memoing is one strategy commonly used in qualitative research to facilitate the bracketing process (Creswell, 2007). Within the memos, the author reflected on how her experiences and assumptions related to the investigated
phenomenon compared and contrasted with her participants’ reported experiences. Additionally, the author reflected on how her experiences and assumptions may have influenced the processes of data collection and data analysis. Through writing self-reflective memos, the author had opportunities to explore the lenses she was applying to her research, assess the extent to which such lenses were informing the research process, and identify strategies to minimize the impact her experiences and assumptions had on her research.

Overall, the interpretive phenomenological approach was particularly suitable for the current study due to its emphasis on capturing participant voices, and having researchers bracket their experiences. Due to the author having considerable experience with the phenomenon she investigated, it was imperative for her to bracket her experiences in order to ensure primary focus was given to how participants made meaning of their experiences with the phenomenon. Through use of bracketing and an intentional participant focus, likelihood was increased that the current study’s results reflected the multiple realities of participants rather than the single reality of the author. In general, the interpretive phenomenological approach provided respectful ground for the author to acknowledge her experiences while simultaneously attending to how participants interpreted and made meaning of their experiences with the examined phenomenon.

The Emergent/Intuitive Framework

In order to successfully accomplish the objectives of interpretive phenomenology, it is important that studies employing the approach be strongly grounded within an emergent/intuitive framework (Given, 2008). In light of this requirement, the emergent/intuitive framework served as a methodological foundation for the current study. This framework requires that research be conducted in a flexible, open, and relatively unstructured manner. The research process is viewed
as being circular as opposed to one that is linear with well-defined stages. Researchers operating within an emergent/intuitive framework engage in a cycle where they reflect on the research process, identify new ideas, modify aspects of their research in response to the new ideas, and then return to reflection. Overall, modification is the norm rather than the exception when utilizing an emergent/intuitive framework, with research questions and procedures being continually adjusted in response to new, emerging information (Wertz et al., 2011).

There are two core assumptions that underlie the emergent/intuitive framework. First, it is assumed that emergent ideas are products of human thought and reflection (Wertz et al., 2011). In order to facilitate such emergence when conducting research, it is critical for researchers to carefully examine their data and engage in deep, prolonged reflection. A second assumption underlying the emergent/intuitive framework is the notion that knowledge is fluid, and evolves over time (Given, 2008). Rather than being fixed, the knowledge researchers possess about the phenomena they examine evolves throughout the course of their studies.

The emergent/intuitive framework was highly suitable for the current study due to the framework creating a research atmosphere conducive to achieving the primary objectives of interpretive phenomenology, which are to capture participant voices and communicate the meanings participants make of their experiences (Given, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Utilization of the emergent/intuitive framework required the author to continually engage in a reflexive process, where she identified and described the ideas that emerged as she conducted her research. Within self-reflective memos, the author described how emerging ideas were reflective of participants’ stories, and how the ideas challenged and/or were congruent with her own experiences and assumptions. In order to ensure that participant voices were communicated in
her research, the author continually reflected on how well she felt she was understanding the meanings participants made of their experiences with the phenomenon of interest, while simultaneously acknowledging the role her assumptions played in interpreting such meanings. Overall, utilizing the emergent/intuitive framework promoted an atmosphere in the current study that encouraged openness to exploring all aspects of the phenomenon under investigation, including aspects that did not fit with the author’s experiences and assumptions.

**Summary**

In summary, phenomenology was the qualitative approach to inquiry selected for the current study. This approach was utilized to explore the phenomenon of interpersonal change that occurs for white counseling psychology trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. The core assumptions underlying phenomenology served as part of the foundation for the current study. The specific phenomenological approach that was utilized in the current study was interpretive phenomenology operating within an emergent/intuitive framework. This approach was selected due to its focus on the following factors: participant interpretations, reflexivity, and the modification of research in response to new, emerging information. Together, the elements of the current study’s design supported the objectives of capturing participant voices and the meanings they attribute to their experiences with the phenomenon of interpersonal change that occurs in the context of learning about racism.

Thus far in the chapter, the constructivist paradigm, the interpretive phenomenological approach, and the emergent/intuitive framework have been identified as the fundamental aspects of the current study. Together, these aspects comprise the current study’s overall design. This particular design was ideal for exploration of the interpersonal changes that occur for white
counseling psychology trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. The chapter now transitions to focusing on the specific methods and procedures that were utilized in the current study. In the following section, procedures utilized for participant selection and recruitment are reviewed.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

For phenomenological research, it is commonly recommended that a criterion-based sampling procedure be utilized for participant selection (Creswell, 2007; Heppner & Heppner, 2004). This procedure involves researchers identifying criteria that their prospective participants must meet in order to be eligible for research participation. For phenomenological studies, there are two general criteria that must be met by prospective participants. First, they must have experienced the phenomenon under investigation, and second, they must be able to elaborate on their experiences with the phenomenon. Overall, the primary purpose for utilizing criterion-based sampling is to ensure that information is obtained about the phenomenon under investigation.

Criteria for Study Participation

For the current study, criterion-based sampling was used for participant selection. In order to be eligible for participation, participants were required to meet six specific criteria. First, it was required that all participants identified as white. Second, participants needed to be currently completing a doctoral degree from an APA-accredited counseling psychology program. Together, these two criteria were included to ensure the participant sample was reflective of the population of interest, which was white counseling psychology doctoral trainees.

A third criterion that was required for participation was for participants to have had prior
exposure during their doctoral training to education on racism. This exposure may have occurred, for example, through taking multicultural courses that included an educational component focused on racism. Exposure may have also occurred while completing clinical practica or internships. The primary rationale for including this criterion in the current study was to ensure that participants had learning experiences that helped enhance their awareness and understanding of racism.

A fourth criterion that was required of participants was they were not to have a close personal or professional relationship with the author. White counseling psychology trainees who were excluded from participating in the current study were those who took courses and/or completed practica or internships with the author. Also excluded were trainees who had direct and extended interactions with the author on more than three occasions in academic and professional contexts. Trainees who had any direct and extended interaction with the author outside of academic and professional contexts were also excluded from study participation. For the purpose of the current study, extended interaction was defined as interactions that were greater than 60 minutes in duration.

This fourth criterion was included in the current study in order to promote authentic responding from participants, and to increase the likelihood of gathering rich information about the phenomenon under investigation. Individuals who had close personal and/or professional relationships with the author may have felt less comfortable sharing their experiences learning about racism, thus compromising the richness of information gathered. Another potential risk was that of socially desirable responding. Individuals who have close relationships with the author may have been more likely to have knowledge about the background of the current study,
and, given the nature of the relationship, may have been more inclined to respond in a manner that provided confirmation of the author’s assumptions about the phenomenon under investigation. In order to minimize the risk of socially desirable or restricted responses, participants selected for the current study were to have either no prior relationship with the author, or to have a prior relationship characterized by minimal interaction.

A fifth criterion required for study participation was participants had to express initial willingness to participate in two phone interviews. Details about the interviews will be provided later in this chapter. The sixth and final criterion for participants was to have experienced the phenomenon under examination. Specifically, participants needed to be able to identify and elaborate on the interpersonal changes they experienced as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism.

Together, the six identified criteria of the current study guided the participant recruitment process, and ultimately helped ensure that information was acquired during data collection about the phenomenon under investigation. With regard to recruitment goals, the aim of the current study was to recruit between 8 to 10 participants for the interview portion. This sample size was considered appropriate due to it falling within the range of participants recommended for phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007). According to Polkinghorne (1989), it is recommended that between 5 to 25 participants be recruited for phenomenological studies. Participant Recruitment Procedures

In the current study, participant recruitment commenced with an online search for counseling psychology doctoral programs using the APA website. Counseling psychology programs that were selected for recruitment were those that were APA-accredited, and located
within the United States. Exclusive selection of programs within the United States occurred due to the current study having a specific focus on the interpersonal changes that occur for white psychology trainees as they learn about racism that occurs within the United States.

Upon identification of 65 eligible doctoral programs, the author sent an e-mail message to each program’s training director (see Appendix A for a full script of the initial contact). Within the e-mail, the author introduced herself, and provided a brief description of the focus of the current study. She also made a request to directors that they forward a participation invitation to their students. The invitation was attached to the e-mail message (see Appendix B for a full script of the research participation invitation). In order to maintain a record of the locations for which invitations were forwarded, the author requested that training directors copy her to the forwarded invitations. Included within the invitation was information about the current study’s purpose, and the eligibility criteria for participation. Additionally, a brief description was provided of what participation entailed, and instructions were given to contact the author by either phone or e-mail if there was interest in participation.

A total of 28 training directors responded to the e-mail message, with 27 forwarding the participation invitation to their students, and 1 declining to forward the invitation. For the 37 training directors who did not respond to the email within two weeks of it being sent, they received a follow-up phone call to determine whether they planned to forward the participation invitation (see Appendix A). Directors were given advanced notice in the initial e-mail sent to them that a follow-up phone call would be made pending no response was received in two weeks. In response to the follow-up contact, a total of five training directors forwarded the participation invitation to their students. No further attempts were made to contact the 32 training
directors who did not respond to the initial e-mail or the follow-up phone call.

A total of 14 counseling psychology doctoral students contacted the author expressing interest in research participation. These individuals were sent via postal mail a background questionnaire, and two copies of an informed consent document (see Appendix C for the background questionnaire, and Appendix D for the informed consent document). Individuals who decided to participate upon review of these materials were instructed to return to the author a completed background questionnaire, and one signed copy of the informed consent. They retained one copy of the informed consent for their records. A stamped envelope was included with the questionnaire and informed consent documents in which to return completed materials.

The background questionnaire was used to assist with selecting individuals best suited for participating in the interview portion of the current study (refer to Appendix C). On the questionnaire, participants were instructed to provide basic demographic information, such as race, gender, and age. Additionally, the questionnaire instructed participants to describe their status within their program (e.g. first-year student). The questionnaire included four short-answer questions, with the first question instructing participants to identify the locations in which they resided during their lifetime. The second question instructed participants to provide a brief description of their previous education on racism. The third question prompted participants to describe how learning about racism facilitated change in themselves, and the fourth question instructed them to describe how such learning facilitated change in their personal and professional relationships.

As noted previously, individuals who were interested in participating were instructed to return with the completed questionnaire a signed copy of an informed consent document (refer to
Appendix D). Through providing a signature, participants granted their consent to participate in the current study. The informed consent document included information about the study’s purpose, as well as the eligibility criteria for participation. Details were provided about what participation entailed, the risks and benefits of participation, and how participants would be compensated for the time they invested in the study. Compensation involved participants receiving a 10-dollar gift card to Amazon.com following completion of both interviews. Also included within the informed consent was information describing how participant confidentiality would be protected. It was noted within the informed consent that participation could be declined at any time during the research process.

Upon mailing of the initial materials (i.e. background questionnaire, informed consent documents, and return envelope), participants were given two weeks to return the materials to the author. If materials were not returned within the two-week time period, the author either called or e-mailed participants to inquire whether they planned to complete the initial materials (see Appendix E for a script of the follow-up contact). The method of contact was determined based on the method participants used to initially express interest in the current study. A second contact attempt was made one week following the first follow-up contact. No further attempts were made to contact participants following the second inquiry.

Of the 14 individuals who were mailed the initial materials, a total of 12 returned the completed materials to the author. The two individuals who did not return initial materials never responded to the two follow-up contacts made to them. The returned initial materials were reviewed to determine the 12 participants’ appropriateness of fit for participation in the interview portion of the current study. Specifically, returned background questionnaires were reviewed to
confirm that participants were currently pursuing a doctoral degree in counseling psychology from an APA-accredited program, and that they identified as white. Additionally, questionnaire responses were reviewed to determine whether participants had prior exposure to education on racism, and if so, whether such education was associated with changes to themselves, their relationships, and their social networks. Participants who were given strongest consideration for further study participation were those who endorsed on the background questionnaire that they experienced both intrapersonal and interpersonal changes associated with learning about racism.

As mentioned previously, the goal for the current study was to recruit between 8 to 10 participants for the interview portion. Due to 12 participants completing the initial materials, and thus exceeding the recruitment goal, selection for further study participation was based on the content of participants’ responses to the four short answer questions. Participants who were selected for further study participation were those who best demonstrated through their responses that they would be able to provide information that would likely help enhance understanding of the investigated phenomenon.

Following review of their background questionnaires, all 12 participants were contacted by the author, and informed about their study participation status. For each participant, this contact occurred within one to two weeks after the author received through mail the participant’s background questionnaire and informed consent document. Participants were contacted by e-mail, as all participants identified e-mail as their preferred mode of communication.

Due to all 12 participants being deemed as appropriate for further participation in the study, none of them were directly declined for further participation (see Appendix F for a script of the notification of decline for further study participation). Two participants, however, were
informed that confirmation of their study participation status was delayed due to the goal of recruiting 8 to 10 participants already being reached (see Appendix G for a script of the notification of delay of study participation decision). These two participants were selected to have their participation status delayed due to the content of their background questionnaire responses providing, in comparison to other participants, the least amount of information about their experiences with the phenomenon under investigation. These two participants were later contacted by the author, and informed that they had been declined for further study participation due to there being no need for additional participants.

A total of 10 participants were selected for further participation, and were subsequently invited to schedule an initial phone meeting with the author (see Appendix H for a script of the invitation for further study participation). Participants who did not provide a response within one week of receiving confirmation were contacted on a second occasion by the author. A third contact was made one week following the second, if no response was received from participants. No further contacts were made following the third attempt.

Participant Demographics

All 10 participants responded to the author’s contacts, and agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study. All identified as white counseling psychology doctoral trainees between the ages of 25 and 42. With regard to gender identity, six participants identified as female, three as male, and one as transgender. For sexual orientation, seven participants identified as heterosexual, and three identified as queer. All participants provided information about their doctoral program status, with two participants identifying themselves as first-year doctoral trainees, three as second-year trainees, one as a fourth-year trainee, and four as trainees
within their fifth year or higher. With regard to geographic location within the United States, three participants reported residing in the Midwest region, two in the North Atlantic, two in the Southeast, two in the Pacific, and one in the Continental region. Overall, across the 10 participants, there was variation with regard to age, gender identity, sexual orientation, geographic region, and doctoral program status.

Summary

In summary, a criterion-based sampling procedure was utilized for the selection of study participants. Eligibility for participation was based on six specific criteria. Participants were recruited from APA-accredited counseling psychology doctoral programs located within the United States. Determination of interview participants was based on information gathered on a background questionnaire.

A total of 10 participants were selected to participate in the interview portion of the current study. In the following section, a summary is provided of the data collection procedures that were utilized. The section commences with a description of the procedures that were employed to prepare for participant data collection. Following this discussion, descriptions are provided of the interviews and tasks study participants were asked to engage in throughout the duration of the current study. The section concludes with a discussion of how participant confidentiality was protected throughout the research process.

Data Collection

For phenomenological research, in-depth interviews are the primary means for collecting data (Creswell, 2007; Heppner & Heppner, 2004). In the current study, in-depth interviews were conducted to gather information about the interpersonal changes participants experienced as they
developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. Participants completed a total of two phone interviews. Prior to the interviews occurring, steps were taken to prepare both the author and participants for the interviewing process. The author prepared for the interview process through conducting a trial run of the first phone interview. Participants were prepared for interviews through having an initial phone meeting with the author. First phone interviews were approximately 60 minutes in duration. The follow-up interviews were between 45 to 60 minutes in duration. Both the first and follow-up interviews were audio recorded for data analysis purposes. Further description of the two phone interviews will be provided later in this section.

Preparation for First Interviews

As mentioned, the author prepared for the interview process through conducting a trial run of the first phone interview. The trial run occurred prior to participant recruitment, and provided the author an opportunity to practice the interview procedure. A primary goal for conducting the trial run was to ensure that the interview procedure promoted the gathering of rich, detailed information about the examined phenomenon. The interviewee selected for the trial run was one of the author’s colleagues from her doctoral program. The selected colleague identified as white, confirmed that she had prior education on racism, and confirmed that she had experienced interpersonal changes as a result of developing greater awareness and understanding of racism.

The author and selected colleague mutually agreed upon a time to conduct the trial phone interview. While conducting the trial run, the author utilized the script developed for the first phone interview to gather information about her colleague’s experiences with the examined phenomenon. Directly following completion of the trial interview, the author’s colleague was
debriefed. During the debriefing period, the author’s colleague was invited to share her reactions to the interview, as well as any concerns or difficulties she faced during the interview process. Additionally, the author’s colleague was encouraged to share what it was like to describe her experiences with the examined phenomenon.

During the debriefing period, the majority of feedback that the author’s colleague provided about the interview process was positive in nature. Although her feedback was largely positive, the author’s colleague did acknowledge that the open-ended nature of the primary interview question led her to experience mild difficulty formulating a structured and coherent response. Upon completion of the trial interview, it was determined that no modifications would be made to the current study’s interview procedures. Although the author’s colleague expressed mild concern about the open-ended format of the primary interview question, it was decided that this format would be retained due to an open-ended format being necessary when conducting an interpretive phenomenological study operating within an emergent/intuitive framework. Such a format allows for participant experiences to emerge without restriction.

In the current study, data collection began initially with the distribution of background questionnaires to participants (see Appendix C for a copy of the background questionnaire). As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, the primary purpose of the background questionnaire was to assist with selecting participants best suited for participating in the interview portion of the current study. The questionnaire was used to gather information pertaining to participants’ race, gender, age, status within their doctoral programs, previous education on racism, and residential history. In addition, information was gathered about the intrapersonal and interpersonal changes participants experienced as they learned in greater depth
about racism. As detailed in the participant selection and recruitment section of this chapter, eligibility for further study participation was determined based on participants’ questionnaire responses.

The 10 participants who were selected for further study participation were invited to schedule an initial phone meeting with the author. The two major purposes of the initial meeting were to establish rapport with participants, and to provide information about the first phone interview (see Appendix H for a script of the initial phone meeting). Initial phone meetings were between 20 to 30 minutes in duration, and commenced with a brief self-disclosure by the author. As part of her disclosure, the author provided participants information about her educational background, and identified racism as an area of research interest. In addition, the author acknowledged that she had experiences with the examined phenomenon. Following the author’s disclosure, participants were invited to share about themselves, as well as their feelings about participating in the first interview. Participants were provided the opportunity to address any questions or concerns they may have had pertaining to their study participation. Initial phone meetings concluded with the arrangement of a date and time to conduct first interviews.

First Interviews

For each participant, the first interview commenced with a review of the informed consent document, which participants previously signed and mailed to the author (see Appendix J for a script of the first interview). It was clarified to participants that through signing the document, they had provided their consent to participate in two audio-recorded interviews. In addition to reviewing the informed consent document, the author briefly described to participants the interview process. Additionally, participants were invited to share any questions or concerns
they may have had regarding the interview.

Following review of informed consent and the interview process, participants were asked to spend three to five minutes reflecting on how learning about racism impacted their personal and professional relationships, as well as their larger social networks. After being provided time to reflect, participants were asked to describe the changes they experienced to their relationships and social networks as their awareness and understanding of racism increased. Throughout the interview dialogue, the author utilized the interview script to guide the process when needed (See Appendix J). Listed on the script were a series of probe questions that were occasionally used when further elaboration was desired from participants on the experiences they shared. Examples of probe questions that were used included, “tell me more about that,” and “can you explain that further?” Overall, the interview script served as a guide when it was necessary for the author to provide direction during interviews, and gather further information about participants’ experiences. Direction by the author was kept minimal in order to avoid disrupting the natural emergence of information.

Participants were debriefed following conclusion of their first interviews. During this time, participants were invited to share their thoughts, feelings, and concerns with regard to the interview process. No major concerns were addressed by participants during the debriefings; however, a couple participants requested that the author review with them the measures employed in the current study to protect their confidentiality and privacy. At the end of the debriefing period, participants were provided general information about the follow-up phone interview, and were informed that they would be contacted by the author in approximately two months to arrange the follow-up.
Within 48 hours following each of the first phone interviews, the author wrote a self-reflective memo with the purpose of reflecting on the overall interview process. The author noted within her memos how participant information compared and contrasted to her experiences and assumptions about the examined phenomenon. Also noted were her general thoughts and feelings about the conducted interviews. The author frequently commented on her developing strengths as a researcher, and her areas of growth.

All first interviews were transcribed within four weeks following their completion. Transcription was followed by the analysis of interview data. The data analysis process is described in further detail later in this chapter. Following transcription and analysis of first interviews, participants were sent by e-mail a copy of their transcribed interview. Included with the interview transcription was a message instructing participants to review the transcription in preparation for the follow-up interview. Also included within the message was a request for participants to contact the author to arrange a date and time for the follow-up (see Appendix K for a script of the request for transcript review). Participants who did not respond within two weeks of the transcription being sent were contacted on a second occasion. If no response was received two weeks after the second attempt, a third and final contact attempt was made.

Follow-Up Interviews

All 10 participants responded to the author’s contacts, and completed the follow-up phone interview. One major purpose of the follow-up interview was to provide participants the opportunity to elaborate further on the interpersonal changes they experienced as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism (see Appendix L for a script of the second phone interview). During the first portion of the follow-up, participants were encouraged to reflect on
the content they shared during their first interview, and were invited to provide additional information about their experiences. New data that was gathered from follow-up interviews was later analyzed.

Another purpose of follow-up phone interviews was to share with participants the collective themes that emerged from the first interviews, and work with participants to interpret those themes. During the second portion of the follow-up, participants collaborated with the author to co-construct meanings of the themes that emerged. To facilitate co-construction, participants were asked to describe how they made meaning of the themes.

At the conclusion of follow-up interviews, participants were reminded that they would receive a gift card to Amazon.com in the amount of 10 dollars. The gift cards served as compensation for the time participants invested in the study. Gift cards were distributed via e-mail within one week after participants completed their follow-ups. Overall, the follow-up interviews helped ensure that rich, detailed information was gathered from participants about the interpersonal changes they experienced as their awareness and understanding of racism increased. In addition to ensuring the gathering of detailed information, the second interview also helped ensure that the identified themes were reflective of participants’ experiences with the examined phenomenon.

Approximately three months after completion of follow-up interviews, participants received a final e-mail contact inviting them to provide an optional review of the draft of the study results, which was attached to the e-mail (see Appendix M). Participants were specifically invited to review the statements they made during their interviews that were included within the study results draft. To assist participants with this review, they received a copy of the study
results draft that had their specific quotes highlighted. Quotes from other participants were omitted for confidentiality purposes. Participants were encouraged to contact the author if they had any concerns. A two-week time period was given to participants to provide feedback on the final results draft. A second contact attempt was made to participants who did not respond within the two-week time period. It was assumed that if participants did not respond within one week after the second contact attempt, they had chosen either to not participate in the review of study results, or did not have any feedback they felt was necessary to provide to the author.

A total of eight participants responded to the final e-mail, and provided feedback on the draft of the study results. All of the feedback provided by participants was positive in nature, with all eight participants denying having concerns about how their information was represented within the study results draft. Three participants noted within their feedback that they felt the results draft accurately captured the experiences they had shared during their two interviews. Several participants expressed appreciation for having the opportunity to review their information included within the results draft. The review of study results marked the conclusion of participation in the current study.

Protection of Participants’ Confidentiality and Privacy

Throughout their participation, several measures were taken to ensure participants’ confidentiality and privacy. One way these aspects were ensured was through the use of letters to identify participants. For interview transcripts and other research documentation (e.g. dissertation manuscript), participants’ names were replaced with a letter. Selection of letters were based on the order in which participants were interviewed, with the first interviewed participant being referred to as “A,” the second as “B,” and so forth. A document was created listing
participant names along with their selected letter.

Confidentiality and privacy were further ensured through storing all paper documents that included participant identifying information (i.e. participant letter identification list, informed consent documents, and background questionnaires) in a locked and secure location within the author’s home. Interview transcripts were stored on the author’s personal computers and flash drive, which were all password-protected. The flash drive was locked in a secure location within the author’s home.

Although the author assumed primary responsibility for the secure storage of study documentation, it is important to note that throughout the duration of the current study, information was made accessible to members of the author’s research team. This team included the author’s advisor, an external auditor, and an interview transcriber. Both the author’s advisor and the interview transcriber had access to participant identifying information. The interview transcriber was instructed to de-identify participants on interview transcripts through replacing participant names with letters, and removing proper names (e.g. names of academic institutions) that would potentially reveal participant identities. The external auditor did not have access to participant identifying information, reviewing only de-identified material. Collectively, all members of the author’s research team received training in research ethics and confidentiality. Throughout the research process, the author consulted with her research team to ensure all appropriate measures were being taken to protect the confidentiality and privacy of participants.

For a minimum of three years following completion of her dissertation defense, the author and her advisor will retain all paper and electronic documentation gathered during the current study. The author and her advisor will store paper documentation in locked and secure
areas, and will store electronic documentation on password-protected computers and/or flash drives. When no longer needed, paper documentation will be shredded, and electronic documentation will be permanently deleted from respective devices.

Summary

In summary, in-depth interviews served as the primary mode of data collection for the current study. For each participant, two phone interviews were conducted. Several measures were taken throughout the research process to ensure protection of participants’ confidentiality and privacy. The data gathered from participant interviews was analyzed with the primary goal of enhancing understanding of the interpersonal changes participants experienced as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. In the following section, a review is provided of the data analysis procedures that were utilized in the current study.

Data Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological studies are grounded within an emergent/intuitive framework in order for study objectives to be successfully accomplished (Given, 2008). Although the emergent/intuitive framework typically guides all phases of interpretive phenomenological research, it is of particular importance during the phase of data analysis. This framework supports the primary objective of interpretive phenomenology, which is to communicate participant voices and the meanings they attribute to their experiences with phenomena being investigated (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This compatibility made the emergent/intuitive framework appropriate to employ for data analysis in the current study. The process of emergent/intuitive data analysis is now described.
General Activities of Emergent/Intuitive Data Analysis

There are three general activities that occur throughout the entire process of emergent/intuitive data analysis. These activities include bracketing, memo writing, and data immersion (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell, 2007; Given, 2008). Together, the three activities help minimize researcher bias and facilitate accuracy during data analysis. Researchers engage in these activities in order to maintain participant voices as they analyze and interpret data (Given, 2008).

As mentioned previously, bracketing involves researchers setting aside, as much as possible, their assumptions about and experiences with the phenomena they examine (Creswell, 2007). Although bracketing generally occurs throughout all research phases, it plays a prominent role during data analysis. As researchers analyze their data, they continue to explore and acknowledge their biases, and attempt to minimize the influence their biases have on how they make meaning of participants’ reported experiences.

Memo writing serves as another activity in emergent/intuitive data analysis that helps to facilitate accuracy and minimize researcher bias (Given, 2008). Of importance during data analysis are two types of memos: self-reflective and analytic (Creswell, 2007). The purpose of self-reflective memos is to facilitate the bracketing process. These memos provide space for researchers to reflect on their assumptions and experiences related to the phenomena they examine, and to consider how such assumptions and experiences shape their analysis of data.

The primary purpose of analytic memos is to capture the outflow of researchers’ emerging ideas, insights, and observations (Creswell, 2007; Given, 2008). There is an emergent quality to analytic memos, where the ideas recorded are found to evolve over time, increasing in
complexity, clarity, and accuracy. Each analytic memo written provides researchers an opportunity to explore the ideas that have emerged during their research, and to consider whether those ideas may need to be negated, amended, extended, and/or clarified in response to new information. Together, self-reflective and analytic memos help enhance researchers’ overall understanding of the phenomena they are studying, and help them remain focused on participant meanings and interpretations.

Data immersion is another activity researchers engage in during emergent/intuitive data analysis to facilitate accuracy and minimize bias (Bazeley, 2013). This activity involves active, careful reading of data sources such as interview transcripts. Researchers read, re-read, and reflect on each piece of data with the goal of increasing understanding of the examined phenomenon. This process facilitates the emergence of new ideas and research questions, which researchers record in analytic memos. In general, data immersion helps researchers develop a more complex understanding of the phenomena they study that is based on the information they gather from their participants.

Emergent/intuitive data analysis in the current study included the activities of bracketing, memo writing, and data immersion. During analysis, the author frequently reflected on her assumptions about and the experiences she had with interpersonal change in the context of learning about racism. As part of this reflection, the author explored how her assumptions and experiences may have been shaping her analysis and interpretation of participant data. This exploration was facilitated through the creation of self-reflective memos throughout the data analysis process.

In addition to writing self-reflective memos to aid with bracketing, the author also wrote
analytic memos to record her emerging ideas as she engaged in data analysis. Data immersion in the current study involved careful, line-by-line reading of participant interview transcripts. Each transcript was read, re-read, and reflected upon with the goal of identifying new ideas, insights, and observations. Together, the activities of bracketing, memo writing, and data immersion helped to ensure that the results of the current study reflected how participants made meaning of the interpersonal changes they experienced as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism.

Phases of Emergent/Intuitive Data Analysis

Emergent/intuitive data analysis is a process that is inductive in nature (Given, 2008). Gradual abstraction occurs as researchers transform their raw data into codes, and then their codes into themes. The themes are then used to develop overarching descriptions of the phenomena under investigation. The transformations that occur to participant data represent different phases of emergent/intuitive data analysis. These phases are now described in detail.

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative data analysis, regardless of the specific approach used, involves an initial phase of data preparation. Such preparation may involve, for example, the transcription of participant interviews. In emergent/intuitive data analysis, data preparation follows with a coding phase. In general, coding refers to a process by which researchers identify interesting events, features, and/or statements within their collected participant data, and then assign labels to them (Given, 2008). Overall, coding in emergent/intuitive data analysis is regarded as a circular process. As participant data is read and re-read, codes undergo refinement as new information emerges.

An open coding process is typically utilized in emergent/intuitive data analysis, whereby
researchers identify within the data as many significant statements as possible without concern for how they relate to the original research interests and goals (Given, 2008). To facilitate open coding, researchers ask questions as they read their data, such as, “what is going on,” and “what is the meaning of this.” The significant statements identified through this questioning are then assigned a code representative of the statements. In general, open coding provides an optimal climate for the emergence of information and ideas, allowing researchers to explore a wide range of aspects of participants’ experiences.

With regard to code creation, in-vivo codes are a code type of particular importance in emergent/intuitive data analysis (Given, 2008). Defined as codes pulled directly from raw data, in-vivo codes retain the language used by research participants. The goal of creating in-vivo codes is to stay as close as possible to participants’ language in order to ensure that analysis is anchored in their worlds (Charmaz, 2014). The use of in-vivo codes allows for ideas and concepts to emerge from data in their natural form. Although other code types may be created in emergent/intuitive data analysis, in-vivo codes serve as the primary type, helping to ensure participant experiences are accurately captured.

The coding phase in emergent/intuitive data analysis follows with categorization, which is a phase that involves organizing identified codes into categories (Given, 2008). The categories are created through combining together codes that are similar in meaning. Similar to codes, categories are subject to change as new information emerges from participant data (Saldana, 2009). Throughout the categorization phase, categories are modified to reflect current understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Categories undergo further abstraction during the theme development phase. Broadly
defined, themes are outcomes of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection (Saldana, 2009). Structurally speaking, they are phrases that identify specific aspects of phenomena under investigation. To develop themes, researchers examine their data sources, memos, codes, and categories to identify reoccurring patterns (Bazeley, 2013; Given, 2008). Upon identification, the patterns are transformed into theme titles.

A critical aspect of the theme development phase is testing the viability of the themes that are generated (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Several strategies may be employed to test theme viability. One strategy is to conduct an active search for data providing evidence disconfirming the presence of themes. Another strategy is member checking, in which research participants are asked to determine the extent to which generated themes are reflective of their experiences. An additional strategy to test theme viability is to employ an external auditor to review the generated themes. The role of an external auditor is to examine raw data, codes, and code categories to evaluate whether the themes generated are connected to participant data. Overall, themes undergo viability testing in emergent/intuitive data analysis to ensure they are reflective of participants’ experiences with the phenomena under investigation.

Emergent/intuitive data analysis ends with the interpretation of data. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), the major purpose of data interpretation is to bring meaning and coherence to identified codes, categories, and themes. When utilizing interpretive phenomenology grounded within an emergent/intuitive framework, the process of interpretation may be broken down into three major steps: the development of the textural description, development of the structural description, and finally, the development of the composite description. These three steps will now be described.
Data interpretation commences with the development of a textural description of participants’ experiences with the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). In general, the textural description provides information about what participants experienced with a phenomenon. Following the textural description is the development of the structural description of participants’ experiences, which provides information about the contexts in which participants’ experiences with phenomena occurred. In contrast to the textural description, which simply aims to describe participants’ experiences, the structural description aims to identify the processes underlying and the context surrounding such experiences.

The final step of data interpretation is the development of the composite description (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions, the composite description reflects the essence of a phenomenon. Overall, the primary purpose of the composite description is to enhance readers’ understanding of the overall nature of the phenomenon being studied.

Collectively, the textural, structural, and composite descriptions offer summaries of the themes identified within an interpretive phenomenological study. One strategy to ensure that the descriptions are reflective of identified themes is to utilize an external auditor to examine the descriptions. Through examination, an external auditor can evaluate whether the textural, structural, and composite descriptions capture the full breadth and depth of the identified themes.

Emergent/Intuitive Data Analysis in the Current Study

In the current study, emergent/intuitive data analysis followed in accordance to the phases previously described. It is important to note, however, that data analysis was conducted on two different occasions during the current study, with the first occurring after completion of
first interviews, and the second occurring after completion of the follow-up interviews. Data analysis following the first interviews commenced with interview transcription. The author transcribed two of the first interviews, and the remaining eight interviews were transcribed by the hired transcriptionist. To immerse herself in the eight interviews she did not transcribe, the author read through each interview transcript while listening to the respective interview audio recording.

For each of the 10 first interviews, an open coding process occurred, which first involved identification of all significant statements made by participants. These statements were highlighted on electronic copies of interview transcripts. Following identification of significant statements, the statements were then transformed into in-vivo codes. Code transformation involved shortening the length of significant statements to include only the key point the was conveyed by each statement. Although codes were a shortened version of participants’ significant statements, the language of participants was retained in codes. In each first interview transcript, a list of the created codes was added. Following the creation of in-vivo codes, the categorization phase of data analysis occurred, where all codes were categorized based on similar meaning. An electronic document was created listing each category that emerged, and the codes included under each. The categorization phase followed with theme development, which involved combining the identified categories together to represent larger themes. The electronic document listing categories and codes was modified to include theme titles. Listed under each theme title were the associated categories and codes.

Throughout the analysis of first interviews, codes, categories, and emerging themes were regularly examined to determine whether data saturation had been reached. Morrow (2005)
defines data saturation as the point in the research process where no new information emerges through further data collection. In order to reach saturation with small participant samples, qualitative researchers employ data collection procedures that promote gathering information from participants that is both rich and thick (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Richness refers to the quality of information, and thickness refers to quantity. When such procedures are employed, data saturation is more likely to be reached with small sample sizes.

To reach data saturation in the current study, an open-ended format was used for first interviews in order to promote the gathering of detailed information. Following analysis of each of the transcribed first interviews, the author wrote analytic memos that provided documentation of the new ideas that emerged from analysis. Data saturation was determined to be reached in the current study when the analysis of first interviews no longer yielded new information about the examined phenomenon. Specifically, data saturation was reached when the codes pulled from first interviews consistently reflected categories and themes that had already emerged, and did not lead to the generation of new categories and themes. In the current study, saturation was determined to be reached after analysis of the 10 first interviews. Saturation became apparent after analysis of the final two interviews, as the codes pulled from those interviews were reflective of already-existing categories and themes.

In order to test the viability of the themes that emerged from analysis of the first interviews, an external auditor was employed to examine the themes. The major purpose of the auditor’s examination was to determine whether the generated themes accurately represented participants’ shared experiences. The auditor’s examination included detailed review of two first interview transcripts, and close review of approximately 20 percent of the identified codes.
These reviews were conducted in order to determine whether codes were structured into
categories and themes in a manner that reflected participants’ experiences. Also included as part
of her examination, the auditor completed a general scan of each identified theme in order to
determine accuracy of theme structure. Specifically, the auditor examined the code categories
that fell under each theme to determine whether the placement of code categories was reflective
of the experiences participants shared.

The audit resulted in one major revision occurring to the generated themes, where one
theme was integrated into another. The theme titled confrontation was integrated into the theme
titled relationship tension and conflict due to it being determined that confrontation represented
one element of relationship tension and conflict. In addition to this major revision, the audit also
resulted in two minor revisions being made to the generated themes. First, one new code that had
been identified by the auditor was integrated into the theme of relationship tension and conflict.
Second, two codes were transferred from the theme titled relationship disconnection to the theme
titled relationship tension and conflict due it being determined that the codes more accurately
reflected the latter theme. Overall, the audit offered general confirmation that the generated
themes were reflective of the experiences shared by participants. However, in order to further
enhance the themes’ representativeness of participants’ experiences, three revisions were made.

Analysis of the follow-up interviews was generally similar to the analysis of first
interviews, with a few minor differences. Transcription was the first phase, with the author
transcribing four of the follow-up interviews, and the hired transcriptionist transcribing the
remaining six. In order to immerse herself in the six interviews she did not transcribe, the author
read through each interview transcript while listening to the respective interview audio
recording. Each of the 10 follow-up interviews underwent an open-coding process that involved identifying all significant statements made by participants, and then creating in-vivo codes. After codes were created, they were carefully reviewed to determine whether they reflected new ideas and experiences that had not been shared by participants during first interviews. The codes reflecting new ideas and experiences were the codes selected for categorization. These codes were incorporated into the electronic document listing the themes, and the categories and codes associated with each theme. The codes that reflected participants’ ideas and experiences shared during first interviews were not categorized in order to avoid unnecessary repetition.

All of the codes from the follow-up interviews that were selected for categorization were determined to fall into already-existing categories, and therefore, were determined to reflect the themes that had already been generated. The codes integrated from the follow-up interviews helped to provide further elaboration and expansion on the generated themes. Overall, the information that emerged from the analysis of follow-up interviews did not warrant the development of new themes. It was determined that the themes generated from the analysis of first interviews would be retained.

Auditing occurred on a second occasion by the same external auditor, and was conducted directly following the analysis of follow-up interviews. The auditing process was similar to that of the first, where the auditor reviewed in detail approximately 20 percent of the codes, and two of the follow-up interview transcripts. The auditor reviewed follow-up interview transcripts for different participants than she reviewed during the audit of data and analysis of first interviews. In addition to reviewing 20 percent of the codes and two of the follow-up interview transcripts, the auditor again conducted a general scan of the identified themes to determine accuracy of
codes and categories placed under each theme.

Similar to the first audit, the second audit provided general confirmation that the generated themes accurately represented participants’ shared experiences. However, a few revisions were suggested by the auditor in order to enhance theme accuracy. The second audit resulted in two major revisions being made to the themes. First, the theme titled, developing new perspectives on people/relationships, was eliminated entirely. It was determined that this theme was unnecessary to retain due to the codes within that theme being more reflective of the other generated themes. A second major revision that occurred was the integration of one theme into another theme. It was determined that the theme titled, protecting and shielding others from racism represented one element of the theme titled transitioning into new roles. In addition to the major revisions, the second audit also resulted in a couple minor revisions being made. First, two categories under the theme of transitioning into new roles were integrated due to the categories reflecting the same meaning. These two categories were titled, becoming an outsider, and becoming too serious. Second, two codes from the theme of relationship disconnection were transferred to the theme of relationship tension and conflict due to the codes being more reflective of the latter theme.

Upon completion of the second audit, and revisions being made to the generated themes, analysis then transitioned to the data interpretation phase. Although interpretation occurred throughout data analysis in the current study, it was following the second audit that the generated themes were reviewed and then summarized through the development of textural, structural, and composite descriptions. The textural description described the types of interpersonal changes participants experienced as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. The
structural description elaborated on the textural description through describing how such interpersonal changes occurred, as well as the context in which changes took place. The composite description of the current study was the combination of the textural and structural descriptions. These two descriptions combined reflected the essence of participants’ experiences of interpersonal change that occurred as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism.

Summary

In summary, data analysis for the current study was grounded within an emergent/intuitive framework. This particular framework was chosen due to its suitability for studies utilizing interpretive phenomenology. Throughout data analysis, the author engaged in the activities of bracketing, memo writing, and data immersion. The primary purposes for engaging in these activities were to minimize researcher bias, and accurately represent the meanings participants made of their experiences with the examined phenomenon. To further assist with accurate representation, an external auditor was employed to review the analyzed data on two occasions.

In the current study, data analysis involved the transcription of participant interviews, open coding of participants’ significant statements, categorization of the codes created, and the integration of categories into larger themes. Emerging from data analysis were five themes that reflected the essence of the examined phenomenon. Specifically, the themes captured the essence of the interpersonal changes that occur for white counseling psychology trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. The five themes are described in further detail in the results chapter.
In the following section of this chapter, data verification is discussed. Throughout the current study, several measures were taken to verify the overall trustworthiness of data. These measures, as well as the criteria for data verification, are now reviewed.

Data Verification

In qualitative research, the primary goal of data verification is to enhance the overall trustworthiness of the data that is collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Creswell, 2007; Morrow, 2005). According to Yeh and Inman (2007), trustworthiness refers to the authenticity and consistency of data interpretations. When researchers enhance the trustworthiness of their data, they subsequently enhance the overall quality of their research. In the current section, Lincoln and Guba’s trustworthiness criteria are reviewed, which were used in the current study to guide data verification. Additionally, the measures that were taken in the current study to meet trustworthiness criteria are identified and described.

Lincoln and Guba’s (2000) criteria for trustworthiness are commonly used to assess the quality of qualitative research (Morrow, 2005). In their framework, Lincoln and Guba (2000) identify four qualitative criteria for trustworthiness, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of the four criteria are now described in detail.

The criterion of credibility refers to the extent to which study findings accurately reflect the experiences of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Morrow, 2005). In order to promote credibility in the current study, several measures were taken, with one measure being the writing of self-reflective and analytic memos. Self-reflective memos helped establish credibility through assisting the author with bracketing her experiences and assumptions. Within the memos, the author explored how she was making meaning of the examined phenomenon. As participant data
was collected and analyzed, the author utilized self-reflective memos to compare and contrast her understanding of the phenomenon to the understandings and experiences of her participants. This reflective process helped the author maintain focus on participant meanings and experiences, which subsequently promoted the emergence of themes that reflected participants’ realities rather than her own.

In addition to self-reflective memos, analytic memos were also written to help promote the current study’s credibility. These memos were written during the data analysis phase, and served as a means for recording the ideas that emerged as the author examined participant data. Similar to self-reflective memos, analytic memos helped the author maintain focus on participant experiences with the examined phenomenon. In general, the author’s writing of analytic memos promoted an intentional focus on drawing conclusions from participant data rather than from her own experiences and assumptions. Through writing analytic memos, likelihood was increased that the findings of the current study reflected participants’ understandings of interpersonal change in the context of learning about racism.

Credibility was also promoted through use of participant quotes, completion of member checks, and employment of an external auditor. To ensure accurate representation of participants’ experiences, direct quotes from participant interviews were incorporated into the descriptions of the generated themes. The theme descriptions are presented in the following chapter. In addition to using direct quotes from participants, credibility was also promoted through conducting member checks. These checks occurred during follow-up phone interviews. During this time, participants were invited to work with the author to co-construct understanding of the themes that emerged from data analysis. In general, participants offered confirmation
during follow-up interviews that the emerging themes represented their experiences of interpersonal change related to learning about racism. Although minimal, there were a few occasions when participants acknowledged feeling like elements of their experiences were not represented by the themes that emerged. For the majority of these occasions, however, upon receiving further clarification of the themes by the author, participants found that the elements of their experiences they initially perceived to not be well represented were actually acknowledged by the themes. When elements of participants’ experiences were determined to not be represented within themes, these elements were often more reflective of participants’ personal growth rather than their experiences of interpersonal change.

Along with member checks, an external auditor was employed to promote the current study’s credibility. Data was audited on two occasions, with one audit occurring after analysis of data from the first participant interviews, and the second audit occurring after analysis of the follow-up interviews. For both audits, the auditor evaluated the analyzed data to determine whether study findings were representative of participants’ shared experiences. The revisions made to the data after both audits were previously described in the data analysis section of this chapter.

In addition to data accuracy, another aspect of credibility is the overall adequacy of data (Morrow, 2005). In order to promote credibility of studies, researchers must gather a substantial amount of data from their participants. In phenomenological research, having adequate data helps to ensure that the essence of the examined phenomenon is captured. To promote data adequacy in the current study, participants engaged in two phone interviews. Following completion of first phone interviews, participants engaged in a follow-up phone interview, where
they were asked to provide additional information about their experiences with the examined phenomenon. Follow-up interviews provided participants an opportunity to expand upon the experiences they shared during their first phone interviews, thus promoting adequacy of the data collected. In addition to having participants engage in two phone interviews, data adequacy was also promoted through taking measures to ensure data saturation was reached. Participant interviews continued to be conducted and analyzed until the interviews no longer yielded new information about the examined phenomenon.

A second criterion of trustworthiness is transferability, which refers to the extent to which readers are able to apply study findings to their own context (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Morrow, 2005). To assist readers with making this determination, it is important for researchers to provide sufficient information about their studies. To promote transferability in the current study, detailed information was provided about the author, the participants, as well as the research context and procedures. Of particular importance was the information provided about participants. Information that was provided included detailed demographic information, as well as information about the criteria participants needed to meet in order to be eligible to participate in the study. Through communicating this information, greater understanding of the participant sample could be obtained, thus enhancing the current study’s transferability.

Dependability is defined as the extent to which a study may be conducted consistently across time, researchers, and across different research approaches (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Morrow, 2005). To increase dependability, researchers must provide thorough descriptions of the procedures employed during their studies. To enhance dependability in the current study, an audit trail was developed, which provided a detailed outline of the procedures that were
employed during data collection and analysis. This outline included documentation of the changes that were made to study procedures and participant data over the course of the study. Specifically documented within the audit trail were the dates when each theme emerged, as well as all of the changes that occurred to the structure of themes following their creation. For example, the audit trail provided documentation of when changes were made to theme titles, and to the codes and categories included under each theme.

Confirmability refers to the extent to which study findings represent the examined phenomenon rather than the assumptions and biases of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Morrow, 2005). One way in which confirmability was promoted in the current study was through the author writing self-reflective and analytic memos. In general, memo writing provided the author opportunities to continually reflect on the impact her assumptions were having on her research, as well as to record her ideas that emerged as participant data was examined. For example, in one of her memos, the author noted her observation that early on while conducting first interviews with participants, she had a tendency to ask more follow-up interview questions about the negative interpersonal changes participants experienced in comparison to positive changes. The author acknowledged in her memo her suspicion that she may have been asking more follow-up questions about negative changes due to these changes being the most reflective of her own experiences. In subsequent memos, the author wrote about how she made conscious efforts to equally explore experiences of positive and negative interpersonal change.

In addition to writing memos, confirmability was also promoted in the current study through the author’s consultations with her advisor, and the external auditor. Both individuals
reviewed the analyzed data during the two auditing phases in order to ensure that the data was representative of the examined phenomenon. All data revisions that were suggested after both audits were completed by the author. Collectively, these revisions helped to ensure that participant data was analyzed and interpreted in a manner that reflected participants’ experiences with the examined phenomenon.

In summary, several measures were taken during the current study to promote trustworthiness of the collected and analyzed data. Lincoln and Guba’s (2000) trustworthiness model was used to guide the process of data verification. This model contains the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Overall, Lincoln and Guba’s (2000) model served as a guide for ensuring the quality of the current study.

Chapter Summary

For the current study, qualitative methods were employed to explore the interpersonal changes white counseling psychology trainees experience as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. Serving as a foundation to the study were the philosophical assumptions underlying the constructivist paradigm. The specific qualitative approach that was utilized was interpretive phenomenology operating within an emergent/intuitive framework. Overall, a constructivist, phenomenological, and emergent approach was considered appropriate for the current study due to its correspondence with the study’s objectives. Additionally, this approach has been found to be highly applicable to research on multicultural topics such as racism (Ponterotto, 2002).

Criterion-based sampling was employed for the selection and recruitment of participants. In order to be eligible to participate, participants needed to meet six specific criteria. A total of
12 participants were recruited from APA-accredited counseling psychology doctoral programs located within the United States. Of these 12 participants, 10 completed the interview portion of the current study. The remaining two participants were not needed for the interview portion due to data saturation being reached with 10 participants.

Participant data was collected through conducting two phone interviews. Prior to first interviews taking place, participants completed an initial phone meeting with the author. This meeting was conducted for the purposes of establishing rapport with participants, and communicating information to participants about first phone interviews. Following initial phone meetings, first phone interviews took place, and were approximately 60 minutes in duration. The follow-up phone interviews occurred after analysis of the first interview data. Follow-ups were between 45 to 60 minutes in duration. Data collected from both sets of interviews was analyzed using an emergent/intuitive approach to data analysis. This particular approach was utilized to identify themes within the data, and discover the essence of the examined phenomenon.

Several data verification strategies were employed to promote trustworthiness of the current study. These strategies included writing self-reflective and analytic memos, creating an audit trail, providing detailed descriptions of study features (e.g. participants and study procedures), conducting member checks, and consulting with an external auditor. Lincoln and Guba’s (2000) trustworthiness criteria served as a guide to the data verification process. Together, the verification strategies that were employed helped to enhance the current study’s credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

In conclusion, the methods utilized in the current study helped capture the essence of interpersonal change that occurs for white counseling psychology trainees as they develop
greater awareness and understanding of racism. Comprising the essence are the five themes that emerged from the analysis of participant interviews. The five themes comprising the essence are described in detail in the following chapter.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of the current study was to explore the interpersonal changes that occurred for 10 white counseling psychology doctoral trainees as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. The study addressed four specific research questions. The central, overarching question of the study was: what interpersonal changes do white counseling psychology trainees experience as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism? In addition to the central question, the study also addressed the following three sub-questions: how do trainees’ interactions in their relationships change? How do trainees’ relationships change with regard to levels of connections and intimacy? What broad-level changes occur to trainees’ social networks?

In this chapter, the results of the current study are presented. Analysis of participant interviews resulted in the emergence of five common themes. Together, the five themes represent the essence of the examined phenomenon, which was the experience of interpersonal change that occurred for white counseling psychology trainees after learning about racism. The themes emerged through a process of first identifying significant statements in participants’ stories, then categorizing the statements based on similar meanings, and finally combining categories to reflect broader ideas, which became identified as a themes. All themes emerged after analysis of participants’ first phone interviews. During the follow-up interviews, participants offered information that provided further elaboration and expansion on the identified themes.

The first section of this chapter provides descriptions of the stories shared by participants
during the two phone interviews. Each participant’s story is briefly summarized. In the five sections that follow, descriptions are offered for each of the five common themes that emerged in the study. The five emerging themes included relationship tension and conflict, development and strengthening of relationships, relationship disconnection, relationship dissolution, and transitioning to new roles. To help illuminate each theme, quotes from participants’ shared experiences are presented. The quotes selected for presentation were determined to offer the best representation of the themes. Together, the five theme descriptions represent the textural description of the examined phenomenon, which specifies what participants experienced with regard to interpersonal change related to learning about racism.

In the final section of this chapter, a summary is provided of the five themes that emerged in the study. Included with this summary is a discussion about the interconnection that was found among the themes. The discussion of theme interconnection represents the structural description of the examined phenomenon. Although the structural description is discussed in greatest detail in the final section of this chapter, it is important to note that structural elements are also highlighted within the sections describing each individual theme. Overall, the final section of this chapter represents the composite description of the examined phenomenon. This description combines the textural and structural elements to form the essence of the experience of interpersonal change that occurs for white counseling psychology trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism.

Description of Participants’ Narratives

All 10 participants of the current study endorsed experiencing interpersonal changes upon developing greater awareness and understanding of racism. Each participant reported
experiencing changes in both personal and professional relationships; however, variation existed with regard to the extent to which participants shared about relationship changes that occurred within either their personal or professional lives. For example, several participants placed greater emphasis on sharing about the changes that occurred in their personal relationships in comparison to professional. Other participants provided a relatively balanced account of the changes that occurred in both their personal and professional relationships. A couple participants utilized the follow-up interview as an opportunity to provide a more balanced account of their experiences through discussing the changes that occurred in relationships they had not addressed during the first interview. Collectively, when prompted to describe their experiences of interpersonal change, participants would reflect on specific incidents that occurred in their various relationships. The specific incidents that were shared captured how participants made meaning of the interpersonal changes that occurred for them as their awareness and understanding of racism strengthened and deepened.

In the following paragraphs, a summary is provided of each participant’s experiences of interpersonal change that were shared during the two interviews with the author. Participant A spent her two interviews reflecting on changes that occurred in her academic and professional relationships, including those with supervisors, colleagues, and faculty members. The majority of changes A identified were described by her as being positive in nature. A also spent time during her interviews describing the challenging interpersonal changes that occurred in her relationships with family members and friends in her hometown. When invited to identify the major theme(s) encompassing her experiences of interpersonal change, A indicated that she felt the major theme of her experiences had been how learning about racism led her to experience the “spectrum” of
relationship connection and disconnection.

Participant B spent a significant portion of his two interviews describing the challenges that emerged in his relationships with family members and hometown friends. In addition to challenges in his personal relationships, B also described challenges that emerged in his relationship with one of his former clinical supervisors. Also described by B during his interviews were the positive changes that occurred in his relationships with people of color. Within his summary of his experiences, B indicated that he felt the major theme to be taken from his experiences of interpersonal change was his increased frustration with and disconnection from individuals who lacked awareness and understanding of racism.

Participant C spent her interviews describing the changes that occurred in several of her personal and professional relationships. She described the positive changes that occurred in her relationships with her mother, advisor, and her colleagues. Also described by C were the challenges that emerged in her relationships with her conservative family members. Additionally, C spent a significant portion of her interviews reflecting on a previous romantic relationship. She reported that the ending of this relationship was largely due to her shift in perspectives about racism and white privilege. C indicated that the major theme encompassing her experiences of interpersonal change was the “dichotomy” she experienced, where, as a result of acquiring greater awareness and understanding of racism, she experienced the strengthening of some relationships, and the deterioration of others.

Participant D utilized her two interviews to provide a detailed account of the interpersonal changes she experienced in her relationships with faculty, clients, friends, her sister, and her grandmother. D reported that she experienced positive changes in her relationships
with faculty, clients, and her sister. In contrast, D indicated that challenges emerged in her friendships, and her relationship with her grandmother as a result of acquiring greater awareness and understanding of racism. D identified two major themes from her experiences of interpersonal change, with one theme being her shift to taking more frequent risks to openly address racism, and confront others about their racist attitudes. D indicated that a second major theme to be taken from her experiences was the general strengthening of her professional relationships, and how those relationships ultimately helped her to further develop her awareness and understanding of racism.

Participant E spent his first interview reflecting on the challenges that emerged in his relationships with friends and family members, and how his interactions with these individuals underwent change. E provided detail about an experience he had with his brother, where positive change eventually occurred in their relationship, despite facing earlier challenges related to E’s shifting perspectives about racism. E spent a significant portion of his first interview reflecting on a previous romantic relationship that he reported had ended after he recognized that he and his partner no longer had perspectives on racism that aligned. With regard to professional relationships, E briefly shared about the positive changes that had occurred in his relationships with colleagues.

During his second interview, E reflected on the interpersonal changes that had occurred for him following the first interview. He described the positive changes that occurred in his relationships with people of color, as well as his current dating partner. E also described how he was managing the interpersonal challenges that had emerged in his various family relationships as a result of him acquiring greater awareness and understanding of racism. When
asked to identify the major theme(s) to be taken from his experiences of interpersonal change, E indicated that learning about racism ultimately led him to experience greater discomfort and conflict in relationships with individuals who had less awareness and understanding of racism in comparison to himself. E noted that the particular challenge that emerged with these individuals was determining how to maintain positive relationships, despite having differing levels of awareness and understanding.

Participant F spent her first interview describing the changes that occurred in her relationships with family members, friends of color, faculty, colleagues, her romantic partner, and a neighbor. With regard to family relationships, F focused particularly on the positive changes that occurred in her relationships with her mother and her two children, as well as the challenges that emerged in her relationship with her brother. F reflected on both the positive changes and challenges she experienced in her relationships with her romantic partner, and her friends of color. Additionally, F briefly reflected on an experience where her increased awareness and understanding of racism ultimately led her to end contact with a neighbor. With regard to professional relationships, F described how the challenges she initially faced with faculty and colleagues eventually led to positive change in the relationships.

F spent her second interview reflecting on the interpersonal changes that occurred for her following completion of the first interview. Specifically, F reflected on the positive changes that had occurred in her relationship with her romantic partner. F also described how her relationship with her brother had deteriorated to the point where she felt a relationship with him no longer existed. Additionally, F briefly shared about the changes that were continuing to occur in her relationships with her children.
When summarizing her experiences of interpersonal change, F identified three major themes to be taken from her experiences. One theme she identified was the increased conflict she experienced in several of her personal and professional relationships as a result of her acquiring greater awareness and understanding of racism. F noted that over time, she became more comfortable with the conflict being present in her relationships. A second theme that F identified was how learning about racism led her to experience shifts in the levels of connectedness she felt with other individuals. F reported that she began to feel a greater sense of connection to individuals who shared her anti-racist values, and began to feel disconnected in relationships where anti-racist values were not shared. The third theme that F identified from her experiences was her increased “embodiment” of an anti-racist identity. F reported that her increased embodiment led to shifts in all her relationships, where her anti-racist identity ultimately guided how she interacted with other individuals.

Participant G spent the majority of her first interview reflecting on the changes she experienced in her professional relationships as her awareness and understanding of racism increased. She specifically reflected on a positive experience that occurred in her relationships with her advisor, and an African American colleague. Participant G also described the challenges that emerged in her relationship with a former clinical supervisor, as well as with other professional staff members. With regard to personal relationships, participant G spoke briefly during her first interview about both the positive changes and the challenges that emerged in her friendships and her relationship with her romantic partner.

Participant G utilized her second interview to focus primarily on the changes that occurred in her family relationships as her awareness and understanding of racism increased. The
majority of the changes shared were described as being challenging and negative in nature. Within her summary of her experiences of interpersonal change, G identified two major themes that encompassed her experiences. One theme described by G was how learning about racism often led her to experience increased tension and conflict in her relationships. G clarified that on some occasions, tension and conflict would remain present, while on other occasions, would dissipate over time. The second theme identified by G was her experience of relationship strengthening. G reported that although her increased awareness and understanding of racism often resulted in conflict within her relationships, there were also several occasions where her relationships strengthened as a result of her learning.

Participant H utilized his two interviews to share about the positive changes that occurred in his relationship with his romantic partner, as well as in his professional relationships. In contrast to these changes, H reflected on his experiences of negative change that occurred in his relationships with various family members. He also reflected on the challenges that he has faced building relationships with people of color. H indicated that across his experiences of interpersonal change, there were two major themes that emerged for him. One theme H identified was that of increased relationship tension and conflict, where his learning about racism led to tension and conflict in his relationships. The second theme H identified was the theme of seeking relationships with individuals who shared similar anti-racist values as him.

Participant I spent a significant portion of her first interview reflecting on the challenges that emerged in her relationship with her father as she acquired greater awareness and understanding of racism. Additionally, participant I described the positive changes that occurred in her relationship with her sister, as well as with people of color in general. With regard to
people of color, participant I specifically endorsed experiencing positive changes in her relationships with friends, clients, and colleagues of color.

During her second interview, participant I provided further information about the challenges that emerged in her relationship with her father, and how she was managing those challenges. Additionally, participant I discussed on a general level the positive changes that occurred in her professional relationships. Three major themes were identified by participant I as encompassing her experiences of interpersonal change. One identified theme was the general observation that I’s learning about racism had a significant impact on all of her relationships, both personal and professional. A second theme participant I identified from her experiences was her increased willingness to address racism, and how her increased willingness had both positive and negative consequences to her relationships. The third theme identified by participant I was how learning about racism led her to experience stronger negative emotions when individuals she cared for expressed racist attitudes.

Participant J spent his first interview sharing about the positive changes that occurred in his relationships with clients, and with people of color in general as a result of him acquiring greater awareness and understanding of racism. J focused primarily on the changes he experienced in his friendship with an African American male, as well as in his relationship with his African American fiancée. During his second interview, J reflected on how the relationships he had discussed during his first interview were continuing to undergo change as he continued to learn about racism. When summarizing his experiences of interpersonal change, J identified two major themes from his collective experiences. One theme J identified was his general shift to becoming more cognizant of his identity as a white male. The second identified theme was J’s
shift to taking a “listening stance” with individuals, particularly individuals of color. J clarified that the listening stance involved him making it a priority to listen to others, and to try to understand their perspectives. J noted that this shift helped him develop stronger relationships.

Collectively, each of the 10 participants offered a unique account of the interpersonal changes they experienced as they acquired greater awareness and understanding of racism. Although participants’ stories contained unique elements, there were also identifiable similarities. The primary goal of data analysis in the current study was to identify common themes across participants’ shared experiences in order to capture the essence of interpersonal change that occurs for white counseling psychology doctoral trainees as their awareness and understanding of racism increases.

Resulting from data analysis was the identification of five common themes. These themes included relationship tension and conflict, development and strengthening of relationships, relationship disconnection, relationship dissolution, and transitioning to new roles. Table 1 provides a visual summary of the five themes and their respective sub-themes. Included in Table 1 is a listing of the participants associated with each theme and sub-theme. In addition, for each theme and sub-theme, an illustrative quote is provided.

Table 1
*Summary of the Five Emerging Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Associated Participants (Total)</th>
<th>Illustrative Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Tension &amp; Conflict</td>
<td>A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J (10)</td>
<td>“I felt this tension of: I want you to understand [racism] better, but I don’t want to push you away, and I don’t want to like, make you feel bad.”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Sub-Theme</td>
<td>Associated Participants (Total)</td>
<td>Illustrative Quotes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Factors Promoting Tension and Conflict</td>
<td>A, B, C, E, F, G, H, I (8)</td>
<td>“The realization that your family is not so perfectly aligned with your values … That was always there, which is kind-of really scary.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apprehension: The Emotional Experience of Relationship Tension and Conflict</td>
<td>A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J (10)</td>
<td>“To me, it feels like we’re afraid that [addressing racism] will break our friendship.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Strategies Utilized to Manage Relationship Tension and Conflict</td>
<td>A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I (9)</td>
<td>“I personally just don’t put myself out there, because I don’t want to keep opening myself up for hurt.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development and Strengthening of Relationships</td>
<td>A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J (10)</td>
<td>“… my cohort are like my family. We are very close, and I feel like in some ways, I have never felt more known or understood.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Changes to Larger Social Networks</td>
<td>A, E, F, H, J (5)</td>
<td>“I chose to surround myself by a lot of people of color.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Conditions Promoting Strengthening of Relationships</td>
<td>A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J (10)</td>
<td>“My relationships with friends have improved, because their awareness [of racism] has improved in its own time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Sub-Theme</td>
<td>Associated Participants (Total)</td>
<td>Illustrative Quotes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship Disconnection</td>
<td></td>
<td>A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H</td>
<td>“We just don’t honestly talk a lot. I don’t really go on family trips anymore … And, when we do interact, it’s pretty superficial.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Conditions Promoting Relationship Disconnection</td>
<td>A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H</td>
<td>“… I would love to share [about racism] with them, but I just don’t think that they will get it. It has been somewhat distancing.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship Dissolution</td>
<td></td>
<td>B, C, E, F</td>
<td>“I realized that there is no relationship as who we are now as adults. Because, who I am is invisible to [my brother].”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 4)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transitioning into New Roles</td>
<td></td>
<td>A, B, D, E, F, G, H, I, J</td>
<td>“That’s kind-of been a transition into less fun, more serious me.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Becoming an Educator of Racism</td>
<td>D, E, F, G, I</td>
<td>“I regularly pause if we’re watching something, and I notice a piece of systemic racism in the film … I stop it, and we have a talk about it.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 5)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Protecting and Shielding Others from Racism</td>
<td>F, H, J</td>
<td>“We haven’t been in a situation where anybody has called us out on [our interracial relationship] …but, my first priority would be to protect [my fiancée in that situation].”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Becoming an Outsider</td>
<td>A, B, E, F, I</td>
<td>“I feel like I’ve become the holiday black sheep a little bit. Like, I am kind-of like, the Daria doomsday person whenever we’re at holidays.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although each of the themes are presented separately in this chapter, it is important to note that there was considerable overlap and interconnectedness among the themes. This interconnectedness will be discussed further at the end of this chapter. The five common themes are now described in detail.

Relationship Tension and Conflict

All 10 participants of the current study acknowledged that as they acquired greater awareness and understanding of racism, they experienced increased tension and conflict in several of their relationships. Participants offered explanations for why this increase occurred. Participant B explained in his following quote why tension and conflict increased with his family members after he acquired greater awareness and understanding of racism:

I mean, realizing that some of the people that you love are, are themselves, [laughs] very flawed … That realization that your family is maybe not so perfectly aligned with your values … That was always there, which maybe, is kind-of really scary.

Similar to B, participant G also endorsed experiencing increased tension and conflict in her personal relationships, particularly with her friends. G offered an explanation for why tension and conflict increased in her friendships upon her learning about racism:

I felt this tension of: I want you to understand this [i.e. racism] better, but I don’t want to push you away, and I don’t want to like, make you feel bad. You don’t really know if they’re ready to hear it, and you don’t know how they’re going to respond, but you feel like you have to do it [i.e. address racism]. It’s just uncomfortable.

Overall, participants’ descriptions of the tension and conflict they experienced consisted of the following elements: identification of factors contributing to increased tension and conflict
in relationships, identification of apprehensiveness as the primary emotional response to tension and conflict, and identification and description of strategies utilized to manage tension and conflict in relationships. These three elements are described further in the following sub-sections.

Factors Contributing to Relationship Tension and Conflict

Within participant descriptions of tension and conflict, five factors that contributed to increased tension and conflict in relationships were identified. One factor identified as contributing to increased tension and conflict was having differing levels of awareness and understanding of racism. Participants reported experiencing conflict with individuals who, in comparison to themselves, had less awareness and understanding of racism. This conflict is reflected in the following quote from participant C, who specifically shared about the conflict she experienced with a former romantic partner:

I think the conversations that were most salient were about white privilege. That was something that he, uh, I think really couldn’t understand, especially because he, um, his family came from kind-of a lower SES background, and he experienced some disadvantages that came from that. I think he really wasn’t able to see some of the privilege that he gained from being white, and couldn’t kind of separate the experience of being poor from the experiences that he had from being white. That really created a lot of conflict in the relationship.

Participant E also endorsed experiencing conflict with individuals who had less awareness of racism in comparison to himself. E described in his following quote the conflict he has experienced with white individuals who lack awareness and understanding of racism:

…the struggle of how to negotiate a relationship with certain white people who have like,
different levels of racial consciousness. And like, figuring out when to like, sever those relationships … How do I rationalize it to myself? Make it okay that certain people have these beliefs [reflecting a lack of awareness of racism], and they’re still going to be a part of my life.

In addition to tension and conflict increasing due to others lacking awareness and understanding of racism, participants also reported that tension and conflict increased in relationships where there were differences in political values. The majority of participants identified as being more liberal on the political spectrum, and endorsed experiencing tension and conflict with individuals who identified as being more conservative. Participant C described the tension and conflict she experienced with her more conservative family members:

I think with my Dad’s side of the family, I felt there were some conflicts as I had more awareness of like, subtle forms of racism and discrimination. I think that side of the family is, I would say more conservative, definitely more religious. I don’t think they would think of themselves as racist or prejudiced, and they would be quite upset if I were to, you know, kind-of point out some things that they say that are prejudiced.

Along with differing political values, participants also endorsed experiencing tension with individuals who did not agree with anti-racist beliefs and perspectives. Participant G highlighted this tension in her statement, “There are certain family members that I have that don’t share my beliefs about it [i.e. racism], and aren’t as aware. It’s been really challenging.”

For participant G and several other participants, the presence of differing values, beliefs, and perspectives created challenging dynamics in their relationships.

With regard to relationships within the professional realm, participants reported that they
experienced increased tension and conflict with colleagues, faculty, and supervisors who they perceived as lacking commitment to anti-racist and social justice values. In these relationships, participants expressed their disapproval of others’ lack of commitment, and also expressed feelings of impatience, anger, and frustration. Disapproval and frustration was specifically expressed by participant G, who shared her feelings about the faculty members in her doctoral program who she perceived to be reluctant to openly address racism:

It [i.e. faculty members’ reluctance to address racism] made me question a lot of people in my program, and question their commitment to social justice. The fact that some of my professors talked about it [i.e. racism] in class, and it was really helpful and meaningful. The ones that didn’t, I just consistently felt frustrated, because I felt like they were better than that, and they were not really showing their commitment to something that was really important.

Participant F also endorsed experiencing conflict in her professional relationships due to perceiving others as lacking commitment to anti-racist and social justice values. F specifically reflected on the anger she felt toward her colleagues in her doctoral program:

I went through a kind of angry phase where I was impatient with peers who, to me, felt like they were just hiding, um, behind silence, and not doing anything. Um, not showing up to events that were like, you know, exactly what they said they wanted to engage in in the multicultural class. Feeling like people were all talk, and not doing anything outside of multicultural class.

A final factor that contributed to increased relationship tension and conflict was outward expression by others of racist attitudes. A total of eight participants described experiences where
tension and conflict increased due to others making racist comments in their presence. The majority of these experiences involved comments being made by friends, family members, and romantic partners. Participants endorsed experiencing strong emotional reactions to others’ racist comments, with common reactions being general discomfort, anger, and frustration. When invited to share his reactions to hearing others make racist comments, participant B stated, “There’s definitely frustration, and just maybe a little anger in dealing with that.” Participant I also shared her reactions to hearing racist comments, specifically those made by her father. Her reactions are reflected in the following quote:

Every now and then, especially if he [i.e. father] was hanging out with his side of the family, I would hear him kind-of slip the “N” word into conversations, um, and things like that. And, it always bothered me, even when I was younger.

In summary, participants attributed increased tension and conflict in their relationships to the following five factors: differences in awareness and understanding of racism, differences in political values, differences in beliefs and perspectives about racism, others lacking commitment to anti-racist and social justice values, and others’ outward expression of racist attitudes. In addition to participants identifying factors that contributed to increased tension and conflict, participants also spent time during their interviews describing the emotions they experienced as a result of facing tension and conflict in their relationships. Across participants’ shared experiences, apprehensiveness emerged as the key aspect of their emotional experience of relationship tension and conflict. This aspect is described in the following sub-section.

Apprehension: The Emotional Experience of Relationship Tension and Conflict

For all 10 participants of the current study, apprehensiveness emerged as the key
emotional response to relationship tension and conflict. Three different types of apprehensiveness were reported by participants. First, a few participants reported feeling apprehensive in relationships where they questioned others’ overall commitment and adherence to anti-racist values. For example, participant G reflected on the wariness she felt with several faculty members of her doctoral program due to questioning whether these members would maintain their commitment to anti-racist and social justice values. In another example, participant H described his worries about expressing his anti-racist identity in professional relationships where he questioned adherence to anti-racist values. His worries are reflected in the following quote, where he describes his apprehensiveness about expressing anti-racist values at his future pre-doctoral internship site:

And when I’m thinking about going on internship, I’m also thinking about, like, is that space safe? Is it going to be a place where they’re open to having conversations about race and diversity? Or, is it going to be a place where it’s like totally, totally resistant, and it’ll be, like, unsafe for me to do anything, or for me to say anything? I think about those things every single day.

For both participants G and H, the apprehensiveness they experienced in professional relationships reflected worry about the potential consequences of others not committing or adhering to anti-racist and social justice values. Another type of apprehensiveness participants reported experiencing was apprehensiveness about racist attitudes being expressed in the future, either by others or by themselves. Participants described how they felt the need to be “hyper-aware,” and “on alert” for any expression of racist attitudes. Participant F reflected on the worry she experiences when she and her African American partner visit family. In the following quote,
F described the worry she had about family members making racist comments in her partner’s presence:

I do find that I’m on alert a lot of the time when we’re around my family. Because, I know how white people can say things that, um, they’re not aware of. That can be offensive. So it’s a little bit anxiety provoking, just wondering like if it’s going to be okay. You know what I mean? Like, if anybody’s going to say anything.

Participants also shared about their worries of potentially expressing racist attitudes themselves. This worry was present for a few participants due to recognizing that despite their increased awareness and understanding of racism, they continued to harbor racist attitudes as a result of being influenced by racism throughout their lives. One of the major concerns participants identified about expressing racist attitudes themselves was the potential to hurt others, and subsequently damage meaningful relationships. Participant H reflected on his worry about expressing racist attitudes while interacting with an African American friend and colleague. His worries are expressed in the following quote:

It’s a little bit more difficult to talk about race with each other. I don’t know. To me, it almost feels like, like we’re afraid that it will break our friendship. I don’t know, it’s like, I think because I know that I have the potential to say something that could be really hurtful and so damaging that it could break our friendship. And, maybe she feels the same way.

For participants like F and H, the emotional experience of relationship tension and conflict involved worry about racist attitudes being expressed in the future, and the potential consequences of such expression. The final type of apprehension experience that participants
described was apprehensiveness about whether or not to confront when other individuals expressed racist attitudes. This apprehension was endorsed by nine of the participants. Several reasons were identified for feeling apprehensive about confronting others. In family relationships, participants expressed apprehensiveness about confronting their elders due to feeling like confrontation was disrespectful. This element is reflected in the following quote from participant C:

I think challenging some of the things that they say goes against that, this idea that people who are older have more wisdom. So in one way that felt uncomfortable, about challenging: saying something about that their comments made me uncomfortable. It went against that sort of family value of age, and respecting elders and their wisdom.

In addition to feeling apprehensive about confronting elder family members, participants also expressed worry about confronting individuals in their professional lives who were in a position of power. Specific individuals that participants endorsed feeling uncomfortable confronting were clinical supervisors and faculty members. Participants worried in particular about the potential for confrontation to jeopardize their professional reputation.

Apprehensiveness to confronting professionals in a position of power was reflected in the following quote by participant G:

When you’re not in a position of power, and you’re trying to analyze this kind of situation, it becomes really complicated. Because, you know don’t want to make assumptions about your supervisor and the system, and you also don’t want to jeopardize yourself.

Participants identified several other reasons for feeling apprehensive about confronting
others’ racist attitudes. For a few participants, there was worry about confrontation having a negative impact on their relationships. Participants acknowledged worrying that others might respond negatively to confrontation. Worry was also expressed about the potential for confrontation to lead to further conflict, and potentially deterioration of relationships. Participant D described her worry about confrontation leading her to be negatively perceived by her friends. This worry is reflected in her following quote:

   But then, I also am in this tough position of, well, I’m the most educated of all my friends by far, and I don’t want to come across as like this elitist, like, know-it-all. That would not be my intention, but I think that’s how it would come across given my life experiences and how far in school I have gone.

   Another aspect of participants’ apprehensiveness to confrontation was doubting their own abilities to confront effectively. This doubt was acknowledged by participant D when she stated, “…and I just don’t know if, like, I have the capabilities. Maybe I’m not brave enough.” For some participants, self-doubt served as a barrier to confronting others about racist attitudes.

   Along with feeling apprehensive about confronting other individuals, participants also acknowledged feeling apprehensive about making the decision to not confront. Under circumstances where they must decide whether to confront individuals, several participants endorsed feeling internal pressure and drive to confront, as confrontation would reflect them acting accordingly to their anti-racist and social justice values. Internal pressure and drive to confront was reflected in the following quote from participant C:

   You know, you’re sort-of fired up about injustice, and wanting to like, make a difference.

   Because, you’re at that point. You’re like, what can we do? Like, they’re just so awful, I
need to do something. I really felt that tug to want to say things to them to raise their own awareness.

As highlighted in participant C’s statement, the internal pressure and drive to confront was not only about acting accordingly to one’s values, but also about wanting to increase others’ awareness and understanding of racism. An additional aspect of the internal pressure and drive was not wanting to further perpetuate racism through being silent. A few participants acknowledged that not confronting others would lead them to feel guilty due to recognizing they were playing a role in perpetuating racism. Guilt was expressed by participant I in the following quote, where she recalls incidents were she chose to not confront her father about his racist attitudes:

I’m like, yeah, let’s fight all racism, and do all these things, and let’s confront everybody. But then, when I’m faced with the situation where my own dad is saying racist things, it’s almost like, where’s that warrior spirit? Like, where did it go? [Laughs] I experience a little bit of guilt.

Overall, participants described their apprehensiveness about confrontation as an internal conflict. What emerged from participants’ shared experiences was that apprehensiveness to confrontation reflected a conflict between participants wanting to adhere to their anti-racist values, and also wanting to minimize conflict in their relationships. Participant A described this conflict in her statement, “I think that, for me, the real like, apprehension around like, how to proceed, and how to like, maintain relationships with people, whether it be family, or friends, or otherwise.” The conflict was also addressed by Participant C, who described in the following quote the conflict she experienced between wanting to express her anti-racist values and minimize relationship conflict.
But also, that war with the social justice side of me that says, how can they come to that place if I don’t say anything? But, understanding that I couldn’t hit them over the head with it, that they would not be receptive to that.

In summary, apprehension was a key emotion encompassing the experience of relationship tension and conflict. Three types of apprehension occurred for participants. Apprehensiveness was experienced in relationships where others’ commitment to anti-racist values was questioned. Participants also experienced apprehensiveness about racist attitudes being expressed in the future, either by others or by themselves. Finally, apprehensiveness also occurred for participants when deciding whether to confront others’ racist attitudes. In the following sub-section, the final element of participants’ descriptions of relationship tension and conflict is addressed. In addition to reflecting on why tension and conflict increased in their relationships, as well as how they experienced tension and conflict on an emotional level, participants also described how they tried to manage tension and conflict in their relationships.

Management of Relationship Tension and Conflict

Participants utilized several different strategies to manage the tension and conflict that increased in their relationships as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. Strategies participants identified were categorized into four different types. First, in order to manage the tension they felt in relationships with others who expressed racist attitudes, a few participants endorsed engaging in a rationalization process, where they would rationalize the racist attitudes of others. Within their rationales, participants talked about how others’ racist attitudes were founded on good intentions. This focus on intention was present in a statement by participant G, where she exclaimed, “I know that, um, my friends are coming from a place of
good intention, and they don’t mean to be carrying bias with them.” Participants also rationalized others’ racist attitudes through concluding that such attitudes were a product of others’ cultural background and/or the specific generation they lived in. In the following quote, participant I identified cultural background as a factor that contributed to her father’s racist attitudes:

I know the background and the culture he was raised in. Um, you know, like, a lot of his family members unfortunately are racist, kind-of like, white conservative Christian folks from the South. And, so I think maybe some of those messages were sort-of passed down through time.

Based on participants’ shared experiences, attempts to rationalize others’ racist attitudes reflected a deeper attempt by participants to reconcile the fact that they loved and cared for individuals who demonstrated such attitudes. Rationalization made it easier for participants to justify to themselves why they loved, cared for, and had a continued desire to maintain relationships with others, despite racist attitudes being expressed.

In addition to rationalization, participants also reported utilizing strategies that were avoidant in nature to manage the tension and conflict they experienced in various relationships. A total of nine participants endorsed utilizing such strategies, with the majority of these strategies being used in personal relationships, where other individuals did not support, or did not adhere to anti-racist values. Participants reported that they would avoid expressing their anti-racist values to others through avoiding confrontation and conversations about racism. This avoidance was described by participant A in her following quote:

I withdraw in that particular realm of me [i.e. anti-racist values]. Like, I don’t engage in that conversation as much. Um, but I still feel like we move forward in terms of spending
time together, and talking about other things in life. So, there’s just a withdrawal of that part.

In situations where participants witnessed others making racist comments, participants reported that they would sometimes make the decision to avoid expressing their anti-racist values by remaining silent. Participant B acknowledged that there were times when he would respond to others’ racist comments by simply biting his tongue, and rolling his eyes.

In addition to complete avoidance of confrontation and conversations about racism, participants also reported that they would avoid fully expressing their anti-racist values through engaging in a process of consciously filtering their verbal dialogues with others. Participants used phrases such as “tip-toeing” and “walking on eggshells” to describe the filtering process. Overall, based on the experiences participants shared about avoiding expression of their anti-racist values, such avoidance meant to participants that they were choosing to sacrifice being authentic in relationships in order to minimize tension and conflict.

While reflecting on their use of avoidant strategies, participants frequently offered explanations for why they decided to avoid confronting others about racist attitudes, and avoid having general discussions about racism. Although conflict management was a primary reason reported for avoiding confrontation and conversations about racism, a few participants reported that they also avoided confrontation and conversations due to recognizing that they could not alter others’ attitudes and perspectives about racism. Participant A reported recognizing her inability to change her family members’ attitudes and perspectives, and noted that this recognition led her to avoid having conversations about racism with them. A specifically stated, “I feel really strongly about these things [i.e. race and racism], but, you know, I can’t change
their mind … Like, they might just not be where I am, and I’m not going to get them there.”

Impression management was another reason participants cited for avoiding confrontation and conversations about racism. When providing his rationale for avoiding conversations about racism with others, participant B stated, “I don’t want to come off as like, pretentious, and almost like I’m better than other people.” For B and a few other participants, avoiding conversations about racism served as a means to prevent oneself from being negatively perceived by others. In addition to preventing negative perception, participants also shared how avoiding conversations about racism served as a means to protect them from psychological pain. When describing her avoidance of racism-focused conversations, participant A stated, “I personally just don’t put myself out there, because I don’t want to keep, you know, opening myself up for hurt.”

A final reason participants identified for avoiding confrontation and conversations about racism was feeling too exhausted, and feeling like confrontation and conversations required too much effort on their behalf. In her rationale for avoiding conversations about racism with family, participant G stated, “It feels like talking about it [i.e. racism] is, like, not worth the effort, almost, with them. Because, it would be so much education on my part, and I don’t even know if they would really understand.” Participant E described how he felt too exhausted to confront and converse with his family members about racism:

I’ve not wanted to bring it [i.e. racism] up as much with certain people, because it’s exhausting. So, it’s made certain relationships with people easier, because I’ve been, like, too tired to bring the conversations up. So it’s like, alleviated some of the stress…

Overall, participants attempted to manage tension and conflict in their relationships through avoiding confrontations with others, avoiding general conversations about racism, and
essentially, avoiding expression of their anti-racist values. Emerging from participants’ experiences of avoidance was that their use of avoidant strategies often reflected a process of negotiating between their desires to adhere to their anti-racist values, and maintain their relationships. Participants’ use of avoidant strategies reflected their decision to sacrifice outwardly expressing their anti-racist values in order to attend to maintaining their relationships with others.

Although avoidance was often the strategy of choice for managing tension and conflict in relationships, participants also reported frequently utilizing confrontation in an attempt to manage the tension and conflict they were experiencing. Two different confrontation approaches were utilized by participants: one was message-focused confrontation, and the other was feeling-focused confrontation. With regard to the message-focused confrontation approach, a total of nine participants described experiences where they utilized this approach with others. The primary goal of message-focused confrontation was to clearly communicate a message about others’ racist attitudes. With this approach, minimal emphasis was placed on attending to the feelings of those being confronted.

Message-focused confrontation often involved participants directly expressing disagreement with others’ attitudes and beliefs about racism. Participant H described an experience where he directly expressed disagreement with a racist comment made by his uncle-in-law. H reported that he directly confronted his uncle-in-law by stating, “Your comment was very disparaging and hurtful. I’m not going to take your comment lightly. It’s not right.” Message-focused confrontations also involved participants identifying and challenging others’ racist attitudes and behaviors. Participant F described how she would directly challenge other
individuals:

When something happens [i.e. racist attitudes and/or behaviors are expressed], I handle it straightforward. I might offend people, but like, my thought is I’d rather make a stand for what’s right than worry about taking care of people. I think my approach is a little more fierce.

Within their descriptions of their experiences using message-focused confrontation, participants talked about the outcomes such confrontation had. In general, participants reported experiencing negative outcomes when they expressed disagreement with others’ beliefs about racism, and/or pointed out and challenged others’ racist attitudes. The majority of the negative confrontation experiences that participants shared had involved confrontations with family members. Participants reported that in response to confrontation, individuals would often go on the defensive, where they would make statements personally attacking participants, or would invalidate and not take seriously what participants were trying to communicate. Participant F shared about her experience using message-focused confrontation with her brother after he demonstrated racist attitudes and behaviors. In her description of the outcome of the confrontation with her brother, F stated, “…he was very combative; didn’t really answer my questions. Just started accusing me of things. So, it didn’t end well.” Participant I also shared about a negative confrontation experience she had with a family member. In the following quote, I described the outcome of using message-focused confrontation with her father after he communicated racist attitudes:

…I have shared my concerns with my Dad about some of the racist things that he has said in the past, and he’s just sort of brushed them off. It makes me feel angry, because it
makes me wonder whether or not he’s really taking a moment to think about how his words affect me.

In addition to participants being personally attacked and invalidated, message-focused confrontations would also occasionally result in others completely withdrawing from confrontation through physically removing themselves. This outcome is reflected in the following quote from participant A, where she describes the outcome of confronting her mother:

…my mom made some comment. I cannot remember what she said, she just made some comment that was like, kind-of basically glorifying white privilege. I called her out on it, and it like, didn’t go well. She kind-of threw a fit, and locked herself in her room…

In contrast to message-focused confrontation, more positive outcomes were reported by participants when a feeling-focused confrontation approach was utilized with others. Similar to message-focused confrontation, a primary goal of the feeling-focused confrontation approach was to communicate a message about others’ racist attitudes. However, the key factor differentiated feeling-focused confrontation from message-focused was the additional goal that the feeling-focused approach had of attending to the feelings of individuals being confronted.

A total of eight participants described experiences where they utilized feeling-focused confrontation with others. For several participants, feeling-focused confrontation was described as a gentle approach, and also as an approach that emerged over time. Participants acknowledged that they had initially taken a more aggressive approach to confronting others before transitioning to a feeling-focused approach. Participants indicated that one of the factors that led them to transition to a feeling-focused approach was their development of greater awareness of their own internalized racist attitudes. This recognition helped participants to develop greater
empathy and patience for white individuals who struggled to acknowledge and understand their internalized racism. An additional factor that led participants to transition to a feeling-focused confrontation approach was their recognition that aggressive confrontation was not productive, and generally led to negative outcomes in their relationships.

One of the elements participants described as being important for feeling-focused confrontation was management of their own emotions. Participants reported that they needed to regulate their own emotions, and focus on remaining calm when confronting others. As part of emotional regulation, participants highlighted the importance of being aware of their in-the-moment reactions, and taking others’ reactions less personally. Participant E described how he regulated his emotions during confrontation through focusing on the important messages he wanted to communicate, and saving his processing of emotional reactions for after the confrontation was finished. This process is described in E’s following quote:

I think when I enter into that mode where I’m having that conversation [i.e. confronting others about racist attitudes], it’s like, okay, I’m going to feel these feelings, sure, but maybe I just need to process them later, and right now, the importance is on the dialogue.

Another element participants described as being part of feeling-focused confrontation was use of “I” language. In response to others making racist comments, participants would confront others by sharing their own reactions to the comments rather than scolding or blaming others. Participant I reported that she used “I” language on one occasion when confronting her father about his racist attitudes. In her description of this confrontation, participant I stated, “I’ve confronted him in a more gentle way, and said, this is why this [father’s racist attitudes] bothers me, and I hope that you understand that.” Use of “I” language was also endorsed by participant
C. She described her use of “I” language in her following statement: “I might say things like, that makes me uncomfortable; the language that you’re using. What I ended up kind of settling on was just saying how I felt hearing some of their comments.” For participants I and C, feeling-focused confrontation involved focusing on sharing their own feelings and reactions to the racist attitudes expressed by others.

Participants identified the use of mild challenging as another component of feeling-focused confrontation. When describing their experiences of mildly challenging others, participants used phrases such as “dropping seeds.” Based on participants’ descriptions, mild challenging involved providing others small amounts of information contradictory to their perspectives and beliefs, and then inviting others to make use of the contradictory information as they see fit. Participants attempted to soften the blow of confrontation through encouraging others to take the “seeds” offered to them, and then do with them as wished. Participant G described how she utilized this type of confrontation in her following quote:

I was very careful not to be overly, like, aggressive, but I wanted to at least share the knowledge that I had. So, I think a lot of it was just like, this is the information I know. This is the data and research that I know about this, so take it and make your own opinions.

Similar to G, participant D described how she gently challenged her grandmother’s racist attitudes:

I kind-of left it with, you know, Grandma, this [i.e. racism] is bringing up a lot for people across the country, and I’m not saying you’re wrong in your beliefs. I’m just saying here’s a different way of looking at it. We kind-of left it at that, and we’ve never talked
about it again. And, maybe it’s my naiveté, but I’m hopeful like, that planted a seed.

A final element participants identified as being important for feeling-focused confrontation was the use of empathy. Participants reported that when confronting others about racist attitudes, they would listen to and validate the feelings that others’ were experiencing related to the confrontation. Use of empathy in confrontation was described by some participants as being a skill they acquired over time. Participant B stated, “I’m gaining some skills with how to empathically interact with individuals that do express racism.” For B, development of a more empathic approach to confrontation was a continued area of growth. Use of empathy was also endorsed by Participant E, who in the following quote, was describing a specific incident where he communicated empathy to his brother during a confrontation:

I think just connecting to his [i.e. brother’s] experience, and like, listening to him, and then validating any frustration that he might have, and then sort-of dismantling the racism that’s underlying it, right? Because, at the end of the day, if someone steals money from the safe at your job where you’re the business owner, like, that’s going to suck no matter who stole the money, right? Um, so, you know, acknowledging those emotions.

Overall, feeling-focused confrontation served as another strategy participants utilized to manage relationship tension and conflict. Such confrontation was often perceived by participants as highly desirable, as a feeling-focused approach allowed participants to express their anti-racist values, and also attend to maintaining positive relationships with others. For several participants, use of feeling-focused confrontation was described as an indicator of their own personal growth, where use of this approach occurred in conjunction with developing greater awareness and understanding of racism.
The current sub-section highlighted the various strategies participants reported employing in an attempt to manage tension and conflict in their various relationships. Strategies that were identified included the following: rationalization of others’ racist attitudes, avoidance of expressing anti-racist values, use of message-focused confrontation, and use of feeling-focused confrontation. In the following sub-section, a summary is provided for the theme of relationship tension and conflict.

Summary

All 10 participants of the current study endorsed having experiences where tension and conflict increased in their relationships as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. Participants’ descriptions of relationship tension and conflict included the following elements: identification of factors contributing to increased tension and conflict, identification of apprehensiveness as the key emotional response to tension and conflict in relationships, and the identification and description of strategies utilized to manage tension and conflict.

The factors identified by participants as contributing to increased relationship tension and conflict included having different levels of awareness and understanding of racism compared to others, having different political values, having different beliefs and perspectives about racism, others lacking commitment to anti-racist and social justice values, and others’ outwardly expressing racist attitudes. In relationships where increased tension and conflict occurred, participants reported experiencing a significant amount of apprehensiveness. Three types of apprehension were described by participants. Apprehension was experienced in relationships where participants questioned others’ adherence and commitment to anti-racist values. In addition, participants reported feeling apprehensive in relationships due to worrying that either
they or others would express racist attitudes at a future time. Participants also experienced apprehensiveness when trying to decide whether or not to confront others’ racist attitudes.

Participants reported employing different strategies to manage the increased tension and conflict in their relationships. Identified strategies included rationalizing others’ racist attitudes, avoiding expression of anti-racist values, using message-focused confrontation, and using feeling-focused confrontation. Overall, increased tension and conflict emerged as one of the interpersonal changes participants experience as they developing greater awareness and understanding of racism. Although tension and conflict was commonly experienced in relationships, participants also endorsed experiencing positive interpersonal changes as a result of their learning about racism. One positive change that emerged as a theme in the study was the development and strengthening of relationships. This theme is described in detail in the following section.

Development and Strengthening of Relationships

All 10 participants of the study endorsed having experiences where relationships developed and strengthened as a result of them acquiring greater awareness and understanding of racism. With regard to relationship development, several participants described a major shift occurring to their social networks, where relationships in their professional rather than personal life became their primary sources of support. Members of participants’ academic and professional communities would sometimes be referred to as family, as stated by participant A in the following quote:

In some ways like, the community I have here, my cohort are like my family. Um, we are very close, and I feel like in some ways I have never felt more known or understood than
I do by some of the relationships I have here.

Similar to A, participant H also shared about how his professional relationships strengthened and deepened as he developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. When describing the strengthening of his professional relationships, H stated, “it’s kind-of like … building an intentional family. Like, you’re building an intentional, you know, friendship. It feels a little bit deeper.”

In addition to the shift to focusing on developing professional relationships, participants reported that they also shifted to focusing on developing meaningful relationships with people of color, both in their professional and personal lives. Participant J endorsed making this shift, stating, “I specifically sought out the opportunity to make friends with people who were racially different from me.” Similar to J, participant E also reported that he began to focus on developing relationships with people of color. In his description of developing these relationships, E stated:

I chose to surround myself by a lot of people of color, because, I just felt really uncomfortable being around white people that say dumb shit all the time… I found it a lot easier to connect with [people of color on] my values on like, ending white supremacy.

An additional shift participants described was intentionally working toward developing relationships with like-minded people who specifically shared their anti-racist values and perspectives. Participant H endorsed making this shift, stating, “I’ve reached out a lot to other people who are anti-racist.” Participant F also reported that she began to develop relationships with individuals who shared her anti-racist values. She described the development of these relationships in her following quote:

Across the long-term friends that I’ve had that are white, I do notice that I feel closer and
more invested in the friendships with my white friends who are invested and committed to anti-racism work. Out of my like, eight or nine good, long-term friends, there’s a couple of those, maybe three, that are, um, more doing their own work, and like, also learning. Those are the friends that I talk to more often, that I feel more close to.

For participant F, the shift that occurred in her relationships with white individuals in particular was her placing greater investment in relationships with white individuals who shared her commitment to anti-racist values.

Overall, participants endorsed experiencing broad-level changes to their social networks. These changes included seeking out psychological support from professional rather than personal relationships, focusing intentionally on developing relationships with people of color, and placing greater investment in relationships with like-minded individuals. In addition to broad-level changes to social networks, participants also described incidents where strengthening occurred in specific relationships as a result of them acquiring greater awareness and understanding of racism. Within their descriptions of these incidents, participants identified several conditions that promoted strengthening of various relationships. These conditions are now described.

Participants reported that for both personal and professional relationships, strengthening would occur when others demonstrated openness to learning about racism. Participants described experiences where others demonstrated openness to learning through being willing to engage in dialogues about racism. A total of nine participants endorsed having experiences where other individuals demonstrated openness to having dialogues about racism. Within her description of her mother’s openness to discussing racism, participant C stated, “…she was really open to it,
and kind-of asked for just more reading materials. So, I shared some books with her about like, privilege and power and racism. I think that strengthened our relationship, and helped.” In addition to highlighting the positive impact of others’ openness to having dialogues about racism, participants also described how their own openness to having dialogues led to strengthening of their relationships, particularly with people of color. Participant I described how a “door had been opened” in her relationships with clients and friends of color as a result of her increased willingness to openly discuss racism.

In addition to openness to dialogue, participants reported that others’ openness to learning about racism was also demonstrated through their willingness to have their attitudes and perspectives on racism be challenged. Several participants described incidents in which others’ openness to being challenged ultimately led to the relationships being strengthened. Participant D described an incident in which her sister demonstrated openness to having her perspectives on racism be challenged. When sharing her response to her sister’s openness, D stated, “I feel like, closer to her, because she’s doing that really tough work, and I tell her all the time, like, I really respect and admire this.” Along with others’ openness to being challenged, participants also described how their own openness to challenge and feedback promoted strengthening of their relationships. Participant J described how his relationship strengthened with his African American fiancée as a result of him being willing to receive feedback from her after he communicated microaggressions. J shared in his following quote how he reacted and responded to his African American fiancée pointing out his microaggressions, and how his willingness to be challenged by his fiancée strengthened their relationship:

I had to really catch myself, and just check those biases and like look at them. Analyze
them, and be like, damn, that’s kind of messed up. Like, I love these people, and I have these weird hidden biases that are coming out of nowhere. I feel like she [i.e. fiancée] and I, the first year of our relationship, we really ironed out a lot of wrinkles.

J also shared how his friendship strengthened with an African American male due to him being willing to have his racial biases be identified and challenged by his friend. J described the strengthening of this relationship in his following quote:

He [i.e. African American friend] and I became kind-of close. He kind-of mentored me. He felt like a big brother. So, he would give me shit every now and then in a way that I appreciated. And, I think he kind-of helped me understand [my racial biases].

Overall, participants identified openness to learning about racism as one condition promoting strengthening of their relationships. In addition to general openness to learning, participants reported that they also experienced strengthening of their relationships when other individuals made progress toward having increased awareness and understanding of racism. Participants described experiences where they felt strengthened connections with family members, friends, and romantic partners upon recognizing that these individuals were developing awareness and understanding of racism to a level that more closely paralleled their own. Participant G specifically stated, “My relationships with friends have improved, because their awareness has improved in its own time.” A couple participants shared how they had witnessed family members have “lightbulb moments,” where awareness and understanding of racism appeared to increase. Participant D reported experiencing one of these moments with her sister:

I saw like, a real lightbulb moment in her. Like, when she sort-of was able to step back
from that defensiveness. And, I really saw this moment where she just sort-of like, got it, maybe a little bit more. Or, maybe it’s not that she got it, but it was like, a shift in her perspective. That was really enlightening to see.

What became apparent from participants’ experiences was that as individuals’ awareness and understanding of racism increased, there was greater opportunity for participants to build a stronger connection with these individuals.

A final condition that participants identified as promoting strengthening of relationships was communication of safety, support, and understanding, either by others, or by themselves. All 10 participants described experiences where specific relationships strengthened due to either themselves or others feeling safe, supported, and understood. Participants described how relationships would strengthen when they felt safe to discuss racism, share their feelings, and express their authentic self, including their anti-racist values. Participant H shared how his relationships with colleagues were strengthening due to him feeling safe to share his feelings with them. In his description of this experience, H stated, “You’re like, really talking about vulnerabilities that you have, and fears, and insecurities. And, that’s not something that you necessarily talk with every single friend about. So, it’s, it’s really creating a deep sense of trust.”

Participant I described how her willingness to openly discuss racism created a greater sense of safety in her personal and professional relationships with people of color. She indicated that due to her own willingness to discuss racism, she perceived people of color as feeling more safe to address and express their feelings about racism with her. Participant I made the comment, “it’s almost like they [i.e. people of color] feel like they can be more themselves around me if the elephant in the room [i.e. race and racism] is actually addressed.” Participant I described a
specific experience in which one of her clients of color gradually felt more safe in the therapeutic relationship due to her being willing to openly address race and racism:

…it was actually really cool, cause I had a situation with a client at one point where I had that conversation [about race and racism], and she was just like, I’m so glad you brought that up, because I felt like it has been an elephant in the room that I really wanted to talk about.

Together, the experiences of participants H and I described above demonstrated how communication of safety ultimately led to the strengthening of relationships.

In addition to relationships strengthening through communicating safety, participants described how various relationships strengthened through both the provision and receipt of psychological support. Different examples were provided by participants for how support was either provided or received in their relationships. Examples of support included providing space to discuss racism, advocating or defending others, being able to rely on others, providing validation, reaching out, attending events, and participating in others’ research. With regard to receiving support, participant F shared about the support she received from a faculty member when she was serving as a teaching assistant for the faculty member’s class. When describing the support she received, F stated, “…whenever I speak in class about race and racism, she [i.e. faculty member] always nods. She backs me up. She doesn’t like, go against what I’m saying.” F later described how the support she received from the faculty member ultimately led to their relationship strengthening.

In contrast to receiving support in professional relationships, participant C reflected on the psychological support she received from her mother while developing new perspectives on
racism, and developing as a counseling psychologist in general. In her description of her
mother’s support, C stated, “she was um, willing to like, sit with me through that, and I could
talk about my struggles.” C later acknowledged that her mother’s support helped to strengthen
their relationship over time.

Participants reported that within several of their relationships that strengthened, there was
a mutual understanding of the importance of addressing racism and engaging in anti-racist work,
as well as an understanding of the impact racism has on white individuals and people of color.
Several participants shared experiences where their relationships strengthened with others who
shared their perspectives on racism, as well as their anti-racist values. Additionally, participants
described experiences where their relationships strengthened with people of color upon them
communicating to these individuals their understanding of the pervasive impact of racism on
people of color’s lives. In the following statement, participant G described how her relationship
with an African American colleague strengthened due to her validating rather than dismissing the
impact racism was having on her colleague:

So, being able to, I guess, share and empathize with her in a way that was very
supportive, and acknowledging that race seemed like it was a part of it. I think it was very
helpful for our relationship. It allowed her to trust me more, because I wasn’t just
dismissing.

In contrast to participant G’s experience, where understanding was communicated by the
participant, F described a powerful experience of relationship strengthening that occurred with
her African American partner. F reported that strengthening occurred as a result of her partner
communicating understanding of the impact racism had not only on F, but also white individuals
in general. F described in the following statement her reactions to her partner’s increased understanding:

She’s really become more, like, compassionate and kind toward me, and accepting that I can’t give away my privilege. [Laughs] And, I’ve relaxed. Like, I feel less tense about it. It’s made me feel more loved. I think that I was feeling like my privileged part was not lovable. Now that I know that she, like, has a better understanding, or more space for that part of me, um, I feel less shame. And I feel, like, more accepting of myself too. Like, I’m fully in the relationship.

Overall, participants reported that their relationships often strengthened with others who shared their understanding that racism is important to address, is important to fight against, and has an impact on everyone, regardless of race. When such an understanding was shared, participants felt safe to express their anti-racist values, and felt like expression of their values was supported. Based on participants’ shared experiences, the relationships that often strengthened over time were those where both individuals in the relationship felt safe, supported, and understood.

In summary, all participants endorsed having experiences where relationships developed and strengthened upon them developing greater awareness and understanding of racism. Major shifts occurred to participants’ social networks, where professional relationships rather than personal became the primary sources of psychological support. Other shifts that occurred included increased focus on developing relationships with people of color, as well as with individuals who shared the same anti-racist values and perspectives. Collectively, these shifts led to new individuals being integrated into participants’ social networks, and also led to participants
modifying their levels of investment in specific relationships.

Participants described experiences in which specific relationships strengthened upon them developing greater awareness and understanding of racism. Participants reported that their relationships often strengthened under the following three conditions: when participants or other individuals demonstrated openness to learning about racism, when other individuals’ awareness and understanding of racism increased, and when there was communication of safety, support, and understanding by either participants or other individuals. When these three conditions were absent in relationships, participants reported that the opposite effect would often occur, where participants’ connections with others would deteriorate rather than strengthen. In the following section, the theme of relationship disconnection is described.

**Relationship Disconnection**

Eight participants described experiences where their development of greater awareness and understanding of racism led them to disconnect from certain relationships. Disconnection occurred at both physical and psychological levels. Participants reported physically disconnecting from other individuals through spending less time with them, and keeping physical distance. Psychological disconnection in relationships involved withdrawing emotionally, and intentionally keeping interactions superficial.

Participants identified specific conditions under which disconnection would occur in their relationships. First, several participants reported disconnecting from others who lacked awareness and understanding of racism. When reflecting on her various relationships with family members, including with her father, participant G made the comment, “it’s quite challenging, because I would love to share [about racism] with them, but I just don’t think that they will get
it…it has been somewhat distancing.” Participant F also endorsed experiencing disconnection from family members due to them lacking awareness and understanding of racism. F specifically described how she disconnected from her brother, stating, “…my younger brother refuses to see his privilege. He’s got a poor me, I’ve been disadvantaged my whole life story about himself. And um, so yeah, we haven’t really spoken since the election [of Donald Trump as president].” For F, disconnection occurred from her brother due to him specifically lacking awareness and understanding of white privilege.

Another condition participants identified under which disconnection would occur was when others were avoidant or resistant to having dialogues about racism. Avoidance of dialogues was demonstrated by others through them being quiet during dialogues and not engaging, or shifting to other topics. In her following statement, participant F described how one of her African American friends avoided dialogues about racism with her:

Like, she doesn’t want to talk about racism in the way that I have like, learned about it now. Like, this kind of language, she doesn’t really want to engage with that. She just wants to talk about like, our lives, our kids, and like her new job, or whatever... She just wants to talk about like, this is how we’re succeeding, and we’re doing well. Most of our exchanges are around that, and there’s not really much conversation around, um, race and racism, you know? I mean, I think that I just chose to adjust and not really talk about it a lot with her.

F’s decision to refrain from openly discussing racism represented how she disconnected from her friend. Through her deciding to minimize discussion of racism, the opportunity to have an authentic, deep, and meaningful connection to her friend was also minimized.
Several participants acknowledged having experiences where their attempts to discuss racism were met with active resistance. Participants reported that others would become defensive when racism was addressed. Participant E reflected on the resistance he faced from others when attempting to have dialogues about racism:

Talking about race has been more difficult, because it’s more value-laden. People will say, “Oh, you’re just bitter that Trump was elected,” and, they think that it’s about that, and they can’t see past that. They think it’s like, I’m just a sore loser... People don’t listen to it, and I feel like it’s been more difficult, because now, when I try to have those conversations, like, these conservative white people that I’d grown up with, and I know, and I live around, feel emboldened to just discredit anything I have to say.

E later shared how others’ resistance to dialogues led him to disconnect from them through deciding to no longer discuss racism, and express his anti-racist values. Collectively, what emerged from participants’ experiences was their belief in the importance of discussing racism. When there were barriers to having such discussions in relationships, disconnection to some degree would often occur.

A final condition identified by participants under which disconnection would occur was when there was a lack of safety, support, and understanding within their relationships. Within both personal and professional relationships, participants described experiences where they would disconnect from others when they did not feel psychologically safe. Participant A described how her senses of safety and trust diminished in her relationship with her former clinical supervisor after witnessing him become defensive when confronted by others about his racial biases. In her following statement, A describes her disconnection from her supervisor:
Yeah, that would definitely be an instance which I withdrew from the relationship. Um, I
kind-of kept it very logistical, and sought out supervision elsewhere from someone else at
the practicum site, when it came to like, more meaningful concerns for me.

A’s disconnection from her supervisor involved both physical and psychological withdrawal,
where she refrained from having deep, meaningful dialogues with him, and turned to other
clinicians for support and assistance.

When other individuals communicated a lack of understanding and support for
participants’ anti-racist values and perspectives, participants endorsed experiencing emotional
pain, and feelings of isolation. When describing his reactions to his family’s lack of
understanding of his anti-racist values, participant E stated, “...it’s disappointing, I think. It
definitely makes me feel isolated in a way, and it makes it harder to connect.” Participant A also
reported feeling like her anti-racist values were misunderstood by her family members. She
described her disconnection from family in her following statement:

We just don’t honestly talk a lot. I don’t really go on family trips anymore, like, that kind
of thing. And, when we do interact, it’s pretty um, superficial. It will just be like day-to-
day, did you see this gossip magazine, and um, have you heard back about internship
interviews? Like, that kind of thing, like, day-to-day checking in kind of stuff. Which is,
you know, one aspect of knowing me, and I just don’t think they could like, piece
together what my life looks like either.

In summary, participants reported that within certain relationships, their development of
greater awareness and understanding of racism led them to disconnect physically,
psychologically, or both. Disconnection was reported to occur when specific conditions were
present in relationships. Participants reported disconnecting from relationships where other individuals lacked awareness and understanding or racism, and/or when others demonstrated avoidance and resistance to having racism-focused dialogues. Additionally, participants reported disconnecting from relationships in which they did not feel safe, supported, or understood. For the majority of participants, the disconnection they experienced in various relationships was only partial in nature, where despite feeling disconnected, they continued to maintain relationships with others. On occasion, however, participants described experiencing a more extreme form of relationship disconnection, where relationships would completely dissolve. Relationship dissolution emerged as another theme of the study, and is described in the following section.

Relationship Dissolution

Four participants endorsed having experiences where their development of greater awareness and understanding of racism led to the complete dissolution of relationships. Participants reported choosing to end relationships with individuals who acted in ways that went against their anti-racist and social justice values. Participant B described how he cut off contact with an acquaintance on social media after the acquaintance posted a cartoon with strong racist undertones. Similarly, participant F shared her experience of cutting off contact with a neighbor after the neighbor made racist comments to her African American partner. Participant E reported that the ending of his relationship with a former romantic partner was prompted by his partner acting in ways that contradicted the social justice values he proclaimed to have. In his following statement, E shared his thoughts about the ending of his relationship with his partner:

His lack of understanding around those things, and this seeming, um... It felt like lip service values, you know? I didn’t feel like they were genuine or authentic. I didn’t think
he lived his values. And I need like a connection between your values and your lifestyle.

Participants reported that relationships would also end when they felt their anti-racist and social justice values were not being supported, or were being ignored, invalidated, or rejected by others. Participant F described how her relationship with her brother dissolved not only due to his general lack of awareness and understanding of racism, but also due to his lack of acknowledgment and support for her anti-racist values. F described in the following statement her thoughts and feelings about the breakdown of her relationship with her brother:

I feel sad about it, but I also feel resolute. You know, that if something doesn’t change, I can’t invest. Like, I realized that there is no relationship as who we are now as adults. Because, who I am is invisible to him, and I don’t matter to him. We had a relationship as kids and young adults, but we don’t, now.

Participant C reported that the ending of her relationship with a former romantic partner was largely attributed to her partner’s invalidation of her social justice values. She described her partner’s invalidation in the following statement:

...in some ways, he really invalidated the, the new identity that I was forming as a counseling psychologist, and someone who’s really passionate about social justice and advocacy. I would talk about some of the research that I’d read, and he was really suspicious of the research and findings, and I think at one point, said that he really didn’t believe research. And, that really affected me personally, because I was like, I am a researcher. The way that I felt was that he was saying that what I was doing was not sort-of valid and important.

For participant C, the decision to end her romantic relationship was largely prompted by her
recognition that within the context of that particular relationship, her social justice values would be invalidated, and essentially rejected.

In summary, four participants described how their development of greater awareness and understanding of racism led to the complete dissolution of specific relationships. Dissolution reflected one of the most extreme changes that participants reported experiencing while developing anti-racist values. Across all of participants’ experiences, dissolution occurred in relationships where there was an ultimate failure by others to support or act in accordance to participants’ anti-racist and social justice values.

Thus far in the chapter, the themes that have been described have reflected how levels of tension and connectedness changed upon participants developing greater awareness and understanding of racism. Along with these changes, participants also described during the study how their interactions in relationships changed. In the following section, a review is provided of the final theme that emerged from the study. This final theme describes how participants’ interactions changed as they transitioned into new roles within their relationships.

Transitioning into New Roles

A total of nine participants reported that as their awareness and understanding of racism increased, their interactions with others changed as they transitioned into new roles within their relationships. Three specific roles were identified by participants as roles they began to assume upon further development of their awareness and understanding of racism. These roles included that of educator, protector, and outsider. The three roles are described in the following sub-sections.
Becoming an Educator of Racism

Five participants reported that within certain relationships, they began to assume an educator role. This role involved participants modifying their interactions with others to spend greater time sharing their knowledge in an attempt to increased others’ awareness and understanding of racism. Participants reported that they attempted to raise others’ awareness and understanding through sharing personal stories related to racism, inviting others to provide responses to challenging questions, and describing the impact of racism in layman’s terms. Participant E described how he assumed an educator role with his brother:

...helping him understand how the system of poverty, and the way that like, capitalism has also impacted our family specifically, and how that historically has impacted communities of color disproportionately. Um, I think it’s been helpful for him. I think helping him using non-academic language has been helpful.

Participant F also reported assuming an educator role, particularly in her relationships with her children. In her following statement, F identified one strategy she has used in an attempt to help educate her children about racism:

...pointing out things in films. Like, I regularly pause if we’re watching something, and I notice a piece of systemic racism in the film, or whatever; stereotyping, or anything like that. I stop it, and we have a talk about it.

In addition to pointing out examples of racism in films, participant F also reported attempting to educate her children about racism through identifying how racism was reflected in current events:

...daily conversations explaining like, even through the election, explaining the systemic
dynamics of what was happening around the election. Explaining Obama’s administration, and all of the um, resistance that he got. Just having conversations about our world through a lens of the white racial frame. You know, like, that’s a daily part of our life now.

Within her recollection of her assuming an educator role, F shared her feelings about the impact her education about racism was having on her children. F specifically stated, “I feel proud, because I feel like I’ve corrected something in our family…There’s not silence around it anymore.”

Overall, participants described their educator role as one that was rewarding at times, and challenging on other occasions. Participants reported that their assumption of an educator role elicited mixed responses from others, with some being open to learning about racism, and others being more resistant to such learning. Participant E reported that assuming an educator role with his brother resulted in positive outcomes. E noted specifically that his brother expressed openness to learning about racism, and when describing his brother’s openness, E stated, “He [i.e. brother] always wants to talk about these things [i.e. racism] via text.” Participant F reported experiencing mixed reactions when she assumed an educator role with others, stating, “…it seems like certain people avoid those topics [i.e. racism] with me, and then other people will like, purposefully engage.” In general, participants’ desire to assume an educator role reflected their desire to share with others the knowledge that they had acquired about racism in order to help enhance others’ awareness and understanding.

Protecting and Shielding Others from Racism

Three participants described how their development of greater awareness and understanding of racism prompted them to assume a protector role in their relationships.
Assumption of this role involved participants modifying their interactions with others to where they made more attempts to protect and shield others from external racism. Participants reported that their protector role was specifically assumed in relationships with people of color. Participant F reflected on the steps she took in an attempt to prevent her African American partner from encountering racial microaggressions:

> When I knew she was going to meet my family last Thanksgiving, I sent an email to my whole family, and I just said look, you need to talk to all of your children, and I don’t want [my partner] to feel uncomfortable. I don’t want her to be microaggressed. These are the things I don’t want anybody to do, and like, write me back and tell me if this is a problem, because if it is, we’re not coming.

Similar to F, participant J also reported assuming a protector role with his romantic partner, who he noted was African American. J described how he would try to protect his partner, in the event they encountered individuals who expressed disapproval of their interracial relationship:

> We haven’t been in a situation where anybody has called us out on it, or anything like that. But, my first priority would be to protect her. Um, but then after that, you know, I think I would be pretty angry if anybody were to have a problem with our relationship.

Participants reported that their protector role not only involved them protecting people of color from racism expressed by others, but also from their own internalized racist attitudes. Participants reported taking measures in order to ensure that their internalized attitudes were not expressed to others. Participant J reported taking such measures with his African American romantic partner, due to recognizing that he could potentially objectify her. J clarified his meaning of objectification by stating that within the context of his romantic relationship,
objectification meant using his partner as a token to clearly demonstrate to others that he was anti-racist due to having an interracial relationship. In his following statement, J shared his thoughts and feelings about the protector role he assumes with his partner:

It’s hard for me, because I’m definitely proud of my fiancée for all of her accomplishments, and her beauty. And uh, I never want her to be an object for me; as something that I can show off, or something that I can show off, just because she’s black. I’m proud of her for a million reasons, and I’m proud of her for being a black woman in America, because that’s a hard thing to be. But, I just don’t want to see her as an object. And that’s like, a constant reminder. I always have to be continually checking myself.

In summary, three participants shared that as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism, they began to assume a protector role in their relationships with people of color. Participants reported that this role involved protecting people of color from the racist attitudes of others, as well as their own internalized racist attitudes. Transition into the protector role reflected participants’ attempts to adjust their interactions to be more closely aligned with the anti-racist values they were developing. Protecting people of color represented participants’ attempt to stand up against racism.

Becoming an Outsider

Five participants described how they transitioned into an outsider role in various relationships as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. Participants reported that this transition occurred within their personal relationships, particularly those with white individuals. For participants, being an outsider meant being unpopular, being dissimilar, and being too far removed. Participant E shared his experience of becoming an outsider with friends and family in his hometown. He described how he felt his friends and family perceived
There’s this perception, or maybe feeling that, like, [E is] not one of us anymore, if that makes sense. That like, I’m too far removed from the experience that I had, or that I used to share. So, what’s the word? Like, uppity, you know? Like, oh, you think you’re too good for us, now. And like, you know, you didn’t use to have a problem when people would make jokes like this, but now that you have this education, you’re just being too PC [i.e. politically correct], or you think that you’re better.

Within his statement, E indicated that one of the reasons he became an outsider in his friendships and family relationships was due to him modifying his interactions with others to where he no longer treated racism as a matter to be taken lightly. Including E, the decision to take racism seriously was identified by several participants as the catalyst for them becoming an outsider within various personal relationships. Participant A described how taking racism seriously led her to play an outsider role in her family:

I feel like I’ve become the holiday black sheep a little bit. Like, I am kind-of like, the Daria doomsday person whenever we’re at holidays. Like, everyone is just trying to have fun, and then you’re always pointing a shining light on moments that are like, missteps all the time.

Participant B described an experience similar to that of A, where he became an outsider within his group of long-time friends due to beginning to take racism seriously. In the following statement, B described how his interactions with his friends changed over time:

I think I was easier to get along with, and I just kind-of like, went with things. Um, I just kind of, I mean, God knows I made, you know, racist stupid jokes and stuff when I was a
kid. I didn’t know any better. And, you know, I’m sure pretty awful, stupid things. And, you know, I’m sure I was a lot easier, and kind-of fun to be with. Um, and now, I think that’s kind-of been a transition into, you know, less fun, maybe more serious me.

B later shared his thoughts and feelings about becoming an outsider in his friend group, stating, “I almost in some ways enjoy playing that [outsider] role, and being that person. But also, yes, it’s very, very frustrating as well. It’s a complex feeling.”

Participant I also endorsed having experiences where she assumed an outsider role, particularly in her family relationships. Similar to the participants previously discussed, participant I indicated that she became an outsider in her family due to treating racism as a serious matter. When describing her transition into an outsider role, participant I stated, “I am now categorized as the politically correct one in the family, so that’s been super annoying.”

Overall, five participants reported that their increased awareness and understanding or racism led them to assume an outsider role within various personal relationships. The decision to treat racism as a serious matter often served as the catalyst for participants’ transition into outsider roles. When participants’ perspectives on racism no longer aligned with the perspectives of others with whom they had relationships, participants felt like they were then treated as if they no longer fit in.

Summary

In summary, several participants indicated that one of the outcomes of learning about racism was assuming new roles in their relationships, which subsequently led them to interact differently with others. The roles that participants reported transitioning into were the roles of educator, protector, and outsider. Collectively, these role transitions may reflect participants’
attempts to modify their interactions with others in order to act in better accordance with their newly acquired perspectives on racism.

**Summarizing the Five Themes: The Essence of Participants’ Experiences**

In conclusion, five major themes emerged from the current study, with these themes reflecting the essence of white counseling psychology trainees’ experiences of interpersonal change resulting from their development of increased awareness and understanding of racism.

One theme that emerged was the experience of increased tension and conflict in relationships. Within their descriptions of the tension and conflict they experienced, participants identified the following factors as promoting increased relationship tension and conflict: having greater levels of awareness and understanding of racism compared to others; having different political values; having different beliefs and perspectives about racism; others lacking commitment to anti-racist and social justice values; and others’ outwardly expressing racist attitudes. Also within their descriptions of tension and conflict, participants described how apprehensiveness was one of their key emotional responses to the increased tension and conflict they experienced in relationships. Furthermore, participants included within their descriptions discussions of the various strategies that they utilized to manage relationship tension and conflict. Specific strategies that were reported to be utilized included rationalizing others’ racist attitudes, avoiding expression of anti-racist values, using a message-focused confrontation approach, and using a feeling-focused confrontation approach.

A second theme that emerged in the study was the development and strengthening of relationships. Participants identified and described major shifts that occurred to their larger social networks. These shifts included participants seeking out psychological support from professional
rather than personal relationships, seeking out relationships with people of color, and also seeking out relationships with individuals who shared their anti-racist values and perspectives. In addition to broad-level changes, participants described experiences where strengthening occurred to specific relationships as their awareness and understanding of racism increased. Participants reported that strengthening would occur in their relationships when either they or others demonstrated openness to learning about racism. Strengthening also occurred when other individuals demonstrated progress in developing greater awareness and understanding of racism. Finally, participants’ relationships with others strengthened when there was communication of safety, support, and understanding from both participants, and the individuals for whom they had relationships.

A third theme that emerged from the study was the experience of relationship disconnection. Participants described experiences where they disconnected from various relationships upon developing greater awareness and understanding of racism. Disconnection from relationships involved physical withdrawal, psychological withdrawal, or both. Participants identified three specific conditions under which disconnection would occur in relationships. Disconnection was reported to occur in relationships where others lacked awareness and understanding of racism. Disconnection also occurred in relationships where others demonstrated avoidance or resistance to having racism-focused dialogues. Additionally, participants reported that they often would disconnect from relationships where they felt a lack of safety, support, and understanding.

Reflecting a more extreme form of disconnection, relationship dissolution was a fourth theme that emerged from the study. A few participants described experiences where their
increased awareness and understanding of racism led to the complete dissolution of specific relationships. Across participants’ experiences, relationship dissolution occurred when others failed to support or act in accordance with participants’ anti-racist and social justice values.

The final theme that emerged from the study was the transition into new roles in relationships. Participants reported that as their awareness and understanding of racism increased, they began to assume new roles in their relationships, which ultimately led them to interact differently with others. Participants identified three specific roles that they transitioned into within specific relationships. These roles included educator on racism, protector against racism, and the outsider.

Although each theme was presented as distinct in this chapter, it is important to highlight the interconnectedness among the themes. Several participants described how the experience of one interpersonal change (i.e. theme) led to the experience of another. For example, several participants described how their learning about racism led them to assume new roles in their relationships, which would subsequently lead them to experience increased relationship tension and conflict. This increase in tension and conflict would then lead to shifts in levels of connection and intimacy in relationships. Participants who reported assuming an educator role within their relationships reported that the role shift sometimes led to the strengthening of relationships, especially when others were open to learning about racism. Alternatively, participants reported that disconnection would often occur when others demonstrated resistance to learning about racism. Participants who assumed a protector role in their relationships with people of color often reported that assuming such a role would often result in increased tension and conflict initially, but later, would facilitate the strengthening of those relationships. For
participants who assumed an outsider role in their relationships, they reported that assumption of that role often led to increased tension and conflict, and later on, disconnection or dissolution of relationships.

In another example of interconnection among the themes, several participants described the process of how relationship tension and conflict led to either the strengthening or deterioration of their relationships. Participants indicated that the outcomes of relationship strengthening or deterioration would occur depending on how well tension and conflict was managed. Participants reported that when tension and conflict could not be resolved or adequately managed in their relationships, they would gradually disconnect, or the relationships would completely dissolution. In contrast, participants reported that when tension and conflict could be resolved or adequately managed, their relationships with others would often strengthen.

Collectively, the stories shared by participants offered insight into the interconnectedness, or the structure of the five themes. Based on participants’ stories, the transition into new roles within relationships was often one of the first changes made in response to developing greater awareness and understanding of racism. Participants’ assumption of new roles often led initially to increased tension and conflict in their relationships, as “normal” relationship functioning had been disturbed. Depending on how well the tension and conflict was managed over time, participants eventually experienced strengthening or deterioration of their relationships. Overall, these observations of the interconnection among themes represent the structural description of the examined phenomenon. This description helps illuminate how the five individual themes combine together to reflect the essence of white counseling psychology trainees’ experiences of interpersonal change that resulted from them developing greater awareness and understanding of
In conclusion, the individual descriptions of the five themes (i.e. textural description), combined with the description of the interconnections among them (i.e. structural description), formulate the composite description, or the essence of the interpersonal changes that occur for white counseling psychology trainees as their awareness and understanding of racism increases. Together, the five themes reflect the various interpersonal changes that occur for participants as they attempt to navigate their relationships with newly-acquired perspectives on racism. Upon development of new perspectives, participants often transition into new roles within their relationships, which involves them changing how they interact with others. Such a shift often leads participants to experience increased tension and conflict in their relationships. Participants utilize various strategies in an attempt to manage or resolve the increased tension and conflict. This process of managing tension and conflict, however, often becomes complicated, as
participants face conflict between wanting to adhere to their anti-racist values, and wanting to preserve their relationships with others. At times, participants recognize that both options are not possible. Depending on the outcomes of attempting to manage tension and conflict, participants experience strengthening of their relationships, disconnection, or at the most extreme, complete relationship dissolution.

Overall, the stories shared by participants of the current study offered further insight into the impact that learning about racism has at both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. Based on participants’ stories, the development of greater awareness and understanding of racism may lead white counseling psychology trainees to not only experience changes within themselves, but also changes to their relationships and larger social networks. The five themes that emerged in the current study helped to capture the complexity of the changes that may occur to white trainees’ relationships and social networks as trainees begin to develop an anti-racist identity.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

The current study examined the phenomenon of interpersonal change that occurs for white counseling psychology doctoral trainees as they acquire greater awareness and understanding of racism. Four research questions were addressed as part of examination of this phenomenon. The first section of this chapter provides a discussion of the current study’s findings in the context of the four research questions. The second section addresses the connections the current study findings have to previous literature and research. The third section provides a discussion of the study’s implications for training and research. The fourth section addresses the study’s limitations. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

A Return to the Research Questions: What were the Findings?

The current study addressed the following four research questions: What interpersonal changes do white counseling psychology trainees experience as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism? How do trainees’ interactions in their relationships change? How do trainees’ relationships change with regard to levels of connection and intimacy? What broad-level changes occur to trainees’ social networks? In the following sub-sections, the findings of the study are discussed in the context of each research question.

What Interpersonal Changes do White Counseling Psychology Trainees Experience as they Develop Greater Awareness and Understanding of Racism?

One of the major ideas that emerged from the stories of participants was that interpersonal change is often an outcome of white counseling psychology trainees’ development of greater awareness and understanding of racism. All 10 participants of the study endorsed experiencing changes in their relationships and larger social networks as their awareness and
understanding of racism increased.

One change that all participants reported experiencing upon developing greater awareness and understanding of racism was increased tension and conflict in relationships. Such tension and conflict was reported to be present in relationships with others who lacked awareness and understanding of racism, and/or did not adhere to anti-racist values. Participants often described relationship tension and conflict as being an internal experience, where under certain circumstances, they struggled to decide whether to express their anti-racist values, or preserve their relationships with others. This internal conflict emerged from the experiences participants shared about deciding whether or not to confront others on racist attitudes and behaviors. Participants reported feeling driven to confront others in order to act according to their anti-racist values; however, also acknowledged feeling apprehensive about confrontation due to worrying about the potential to damage relationships.

Another interpersonal change that study participants reported experiencing as they acquired greater awareness and understanding of racism was the development and strengthening of specific relationships. This interpersonal change involved participants developing new, relationships, as well as strengthening relationships that had been previously established. The development and strengthening of relationships was one factor that led to the restructuring of participants’ larger social networks.

In contrast to the development and strengthening of relationships, participants of the current study reported that as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism, they also had experiences where they disconnected from relationships. Four participants reported that they experienced disconnection at its extreme, where a few of their relationships completely
dissolved. In general, participants’ experiences of disconnection and dissolution occurred in relationships with others who lacked awareness and understanding of racism, and/or expressed disagreement and disapproval of anti-racist values.

A final interpersonal change that participants reported experiencing as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism was the transition into new roles within their relationships. Participants reported that within certain relationships, they began to assume an educator role, where attempts were made to increase others’ awareness and understanding of racism. Also endorsed by a few participants was the transition into a protector role, where they attempted to defend and shield others from racist attitudes, either expressed through various media sources, or by specific individuals. Finally, participants also shared experiences where they assumed an outsider role in relationships as a result of no longer sharing with others the same attitudes and perspectives on racism.

In summary, five specific types of interpersonal change emerged from the study as changes experienced by white counseling psychology trainees as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. These changes included increased relationship tension and conflict, the development and strengthening of relationships, relationship disconnection, relationship dissolution, and the transition into new roles. In the following sub-section, a discussion is provided on how trainees’ interactions in relationships changed.

How do Trainees’ Interactions in their Relationships Change?

All participants of the current study acknowledged that their learning about racism served as a catalyst for them to change how they interacted in various relationships. One change that participants reported occurring for them was more frequently engaging in open dialogues about
racism with others. Participants’ increase in engaging in dialogues was particularly displayed in their professional relationships, such as those with clients, colleagues, and faculty. Participants also reported that they began to have more frequent dialogues about racism with people of color within both personal and professional contexts. With regard to relationships with family and friends, participants reported that they began to more frequently discuss racism with family members and friends who demonstrated openness to learning about racism. In addition to having more racism-focused dialogues, participants reported that they became increasingly open to having their own internalized racist attitudes be identified and challenged by others. Overall, participants reported that having more dialogues about racism, as well as having increased willingness to be challenged, often had a positive impact on their relationships with others.

Several participants acknowledged that their learning about racism led them to change how they interacted in relationships with individuals who did not share or support their anti-racist values. Participants reported that in an attempt to minimize relationship tension and conflict, they would often avoid having dialogues about racism, and would avoid confronting others on racist attitudes that were expressed. Such avoidance was reported by a few participants to lead them to have less authentic and meaningful relationships with others.

In contrast to avoiding confrontation and racism-focused dialogues, several participants reported that their learning about racism led them to become more confrontational with individuals who did not share their anti-racist values. Participants reported that they became more willing to confront others when racist attitudes or behaviors were expressed. A few participants shared how their confrontational style changed over time, where it shifted from being aggressive to more gentle and feeling-focused in nature. This shift was prompted upon
participants recognizing their own internalized racist attitudes, and subsequently being able to empathize more with the internalized racist attitudes of other individuals. The shift to a more feeling-focused confrontation style was also prompted by participants’ recognition that others were better able to hear and respond positively to confrontation that was less aggressive and blameful.

As mentioned in the previous sub-section, several participants of the current study reported transitioning to new roles in their various relationships. Three specific roles emerged as roles that participants transitioned into upon developing greater awareness and understanding of racism. These roles included those of educator, protector, and outsider. For each of the three roles, participants reported that the role transition had involved them changing their interactions with others. For those who assumed an educator role, participants reported that they became more willing to educate others about racism in an attempt to enhance others’ awareness and understanding. For the protector role, participants reported that their interactions changed to where they increasingly engaged in behaviors to try to defend and shield others from racism. For the role of outsider, participants reported that when they assumed this role in relationships, they became increasingly disagreeable and confrontational with others due to others having attitudes and perspectives on racism that no longer aligned with their own.

In summary, participants of the current study endorsed having experiences where their learning about racism led them to change how they interacted with others. Participants reported that as awareness and understanding of racism increased, they began to engage in more dialogues about racism in professional relationships, relationships with people of color, as well as in personal relationships where others were open to learning about racism. In relationships where
anti-racist values were not shared by others, participants reported that when wanting to avoid conflict in these relationships, they would avoid engaging in confrontation and racism-focused dialogues. Alternatively, participants reported that they often would choose to become more confrontational in these relationships, especially when others demonstrated racist attitudes and behaviors. When participants transitioned into the roles of educator, protector, and outsider, each role transition involved participants changing how they interacted with others. Collectively, the findings of the current study suggest that for white counseling psychology trainees, interpersonal change in the context of learning about racism involves change in how trainees interact in their various relationships. In the following sub-section, a discussion is provided on how levels of connection and intimacy changed in white counseling psychology trainees’ relationships after they acquired greater awareness and understanding of racism.

How do Trainees’ Relationships Change with Regard to Levels of Connection and Intimacy?

All participants of the current study acknowledged that as they began to develop greater awareness and understanding of racism, levels of connection and intimacy in their relationships began to shift. While strengthening occurred in some relationships, disconnection occurred in others. Occasionally, participants’ learning about racism led to the complete dissolution of relationships.

With regard to relationship strengthening, participants described experiences where strengthening occurred to personal and/or professional relationships. Several experiences were described where relationships strengthened with people of color. Participants identified specific conditions under which strengthening occurred in their personal and professional relationships. First, participants reported that strengthening occurred when openness to learning about racism
was demonstrated by either themselves and others. Strengthening was also reported to occur in relationships when others demonstrated growth in their awareness and understanding of racism. Finally, strengthening was reported to occur in relationships where there was mutual communication of safety, support, and understanding. Overall, participants’ relationships strengthened when they felt their anti-racist values and identities were being supported by others.

Participants of the current study not only reported experiencing strengthening of various relationships, but also described experiences where their increased awareness and understanding of racism led them to disconnect from others. Participants described their disconnection from others as being physical, psychological, or a combination of both. Across the majority of participants’ shared experiences, disconnection occurred in relationships with other white individuals. One of the major elements of disconnection that emerged from participants’ experiences was the identification of three conditions under which disconnection from relationships would occur. First, participants reported that they often disconnected from others who lacked awareness and understanding of racism. Additionally, disconnection was also reported to occur from individuals who demonstrated avoidance or resistance to having racism-focused dialogues. Finally, participants indicated that disconnection occurred in relationships where they did not feel safe to express their anti-racist values, and did not feel like their anti-racist identity in general was supported or understood.

The three conditions that prompted relationship disconnection were the same conditions that often led to the complete dissolution of participants’ relationships. Dissolution was identified as the most extreme form of relationship disconnection experienced by participants in the current study, and involved participants completely ending their relationships with individuals. The experience of dissolution was identified as a separate theme in the current study.
due to this experience differing from experiences of partial relationship disconnection, where, rather than completely ending relationships, participants maintained their relationships, but increased their physical and/or emotional distance. A total of four participants acknowledged having experiences where relationships completely dissolved.

In summary, the experiences shared by participants offered further confirmation that for white counseling psychology trainees, the development of greater awareness and understanding of racism may have an impact on the levels of connection and intimacy experienced within relationships. Participants shared experiences where their learning about racism led to strengthening of some relationships, and disconnection from others. Such learning was also occasionally reported to facilitate the complete dissolution of relationships.

What Broad-Level Changes Occur to Trainees’ Social Networks?

In addition to describing changes that occurred to specific relationships, participants of the current study reported experiencing changes at a broader level, where their development of greater awareness and understanding of racism led to modification of their larger social networks. Participants reported that upon developing new relationships, particularly relationships within the professional realm, they often began to restructure their social networks. Restructuring often involved participants placing greater emphasis and investment into their professional relationships, such as those with colleagues, faculty, and clinical supervisors. For many participants, professional, rather than personal relationships, became the foundation of their support systems. Participants’ restructuring of their social networks was also reported to involve them intentionally building relationships with people of color, as well as with individuals who shared their anti-racist values.
Collectively, the experiences shared by participants of the current study offered evidence suggesting that for white counseling psychology trainees, development of greater awareness and understanding of racism may lead trainees to make modifications to the overall structure of their social networks. Based on participants’ experiences, intentional efforts were made to structure social networks to where there was increased racial diversity, as well as increased investment into professional relationships. In addition, participants made efforts to structure their networks in a way that created an atmosphere where they felt their anti-racist identities were valued, accepted, and supported by others.

Summary

In this section, the results of the study were discussed in the context of the four research questions. The major finding that emerged from the current study was that participants experienced five different types of interpersonal change as they acquired greater awareness and understanding of racism. These changes included the following: increased relationship tension and conflict, development and strengthening of relationships, relationship disconnection, relationship dissolution, and the transition into new roles.

Collectively, the five identified interpersonal changes offered insight into how participants’ interactions with others shifted over time, as well as how levels of connection and intimacy in relationships shifted. The identified changes also offered insight into the broad-level changes that occurred to participants’ larger social networks. Although the five interpersonal changes were presented as distinct, interconnectedness was found to exist among them, where one interpersonal change often facilitated the onset of another type of change. Overall, through identifying five types of interpersonal change, the current study provided further insight into the
interpersonal impact of learning about racism for white counseling psychology trainees. In the following section, a discussion is provided on the connections the current findings have to previous literature and research.

Connecting Current Findings to Previous Literature and Research

The findings that emerged in the current study are supported by previous literature and research that has addressed the impact that learning about racism has for white psychology and counseling trainees. One of the primary conclusions taken from the current study’s findings was that the development of greater awareness and understanding of racism seems to facilitate interpersonal change for white psychology trainees. This conclusion receives support from systems theory, which states that any change in one aspect of an individual’s system will affect all other components (Bowen, 1985; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Following this theory, changes to one’s relationships and social networks would be expected to occur as one’s awareness and understanding of racism undergoes change.

The experience of increased relationship tension and conflict in response to learning about racism is a finding of the current study that receives support from previous research (Case, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Rothman et al., 2012). The specific aspect of tension and conflict addressed most by previous studies has been the tension and conflict that occurs for trainees when they are deciding whether to confront others’ racist attitudes, and when they are actually confront others.

Similar to the current study, having conflicted feelings about confrontation was an experience endorsed by participants of studies by Case (2012) and Rothman et al. (2012). Participants in these studies reported feeling internal pressure to confront others’ racist attitudes,
but acknowledged that they simultaneously felt apprehensive about engaging in such confrontation due to the potential consequences it may have on their relationships. The reasons participants identified for feeling apprehensive about confrontation were similar to those identified by participants of the current study. The reasons included believing others’ opinions couldn’t be changed, perceiving confrontation as being too difficult or too exhausting, wanting to avoid increasing tension and conflict, and wanting to not be disrespectful toward elders or individuals with higher power. Overall, the findings of both the current study and previous research suggest that when white psychology trainees develop greater awareness and understanding of racism, they often experience an internal conflict, where they feel they must decide whether to act in accordance with their anti-racist values (i.e. confront others), or try to preserve their relationships (i.e. not confront others).

Similar to the current study, previous research has found that in order to manage relationship tension and conflict, the decision is often made to avoid confrontation and racism-focused dialogue with others (Case, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Rothman et al., 2012). This strategy for managing tension and conflict has been found to be common for white counseling trainees, as well as white undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and university staff from a variety of professional fields. Collectively, findings from both the current study and previous research suggest that white psychology trainees may opt to avoid expressing their anti-racist values in an attempt to minimize tension and conflict in relationships. Avoidance may be most likely to occur in relationships where anti-racist values are not shared.

Although avoidance of confrontation has been found to be a common method for preventing relationship tension and conflict, both the current study and previous research have
found that learning about racism often leads white research participants to become more confrontational about racism-related matters. The experience of becoming more confrontational was addressed in Case’s (2012) study. Several of the white female students, faculty, and university staff that participated in the study reported that upon learning about racism, they more frequently engaged in confrontation when others’ demonstrated racist attitudes and behaviors. Similar to the current study, participants of Case’s (2012) study reported that confrontation would often result in negative outcomes. Collectively, the findings of the current study and previous research suggest that in order to act in accordance with their acquired anti-racist values, white psychology trainees may become increasingly confrontational with those who express racist attitudes and behaviors. The current study specifically suggests that for some trainees, confrontation may shift over time to become gentler and more feeling-focused in nature. Such a shift may occur in an attempt to make confrontation more effective, and to strike a balance between expressing anti-racist values, and minimizing relationship tension and conflict.

An additional finding of the current study that is supported by previous literature and research is white psychology trainees’ experience of relationship strengthening that occurs in response to them developing greater awareness and understanding of racism (Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011; Caldwell & Vera, 2010). In general, previous literature and research has identified relationship strengthening as being an interpersonal change associated with learning about racism; however, description of this experience has been limited. Helms’ theory of white racial identity development alludes to relationship strengthening being a potential outcome of developing greater awareness and understanding of racism (Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011). Helms’ theory specifically suggests that as white racial identity development progresses, white
individuals may begin to seek out relationships with people of color, as well as with other white individuals who are striving to develop “non-racist” identities. It is predicted that seeking out such relationships may ultimately result in relationship strengthening.

In more recent research, relationship strengthening was briefly addressed by Caldwell and Vera (2010), who found that learning about racism led counseling psychology trainees and professionals to feel a greater sense of connection to individuals who shared their social justice values. This particular finding also emerged in the current study, as several participants acknowledged that their connections to others would strengthen when there was mutual understanding and support for anti-racist values.

The experience of relationship disconnection is another finding of the current study that is supported by previous research (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). Of the five interpersonal changes identified in the current study associated with learning about racism, relationship disconnection is the interpersonal change that has received the most acknowledgment in previous literature and research that has addressed the impact of learning about racism for white psychology and counseling trainees. The experience of relationship disconnection is predicted by Helms’ theory of white racial identity development, which suggests that as white individuals make progress in their identity development, they will begin to distance themselves from people who do not share their attitudes and perspectives on racism (Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011).

In more recent research, Spanierman, Oh, et al. (2008) found, similar to the current study, that relationship disconnection was experienced by white college students who developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. Of the 11 students who were interviewed by Spanierman, Oh, et al. (2008), 2 students reported that as their awareness and understanding of
racism increased, they began to feel a general sense of disconnection from other white individuals, particularly from white individuals who lacked awareness and understanding of racism. In addition to these findings, those from Caldwell and Vera (2010), and Tellett (2004) also offer support for relationship disconnection being an outcome of learning about racism for white individuals in mental health professions. Both studies found that developing greater awareness and understanding of racism led white mental health trainees and professionals to disconnect from relationships with individuals who did not share their social justice values, and their perspectives about racism.

Collectively, findings from the current study and previous research offer support for relationship disconnection being one of the common interpersonal changes experienced by white psychology trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. The current study replicated the finding from previous research that disconnection often occurs in relationships with others who lack awareness and understanding of racism, and/or do not support anti-racist values (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004).

Another finding of the current study that is supported by previous research is the experience of role transition the occurs for white psychology trainees upon learning about racism (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). Although previous studies have not identified and described specific role transitions that occur for trainees, these studies have alluded to role transitions occurring, particularly the transition into an outsider role. Participants of previous studies reported feeling senses of disconnection and dissention from others who did not share their anti-racist values and perspectives. Overall, both previous research, and to a greater extent the current study, suggest that learning about racism often leads
white psychology trainees to assume new roles in their relationships.

The final finding of the current study supported by previous research is white psychology trainees’ experience of broad-level change to their social networks (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011). Previous literature and research specifically offers support for white trainees’ intentional development of relationships with people of color, and individuals who share their anti-racist values. The intentional development of these relationships is predicted by Helms’ theory of white racial identity development (Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011). Helms’ theory specifically suggests that as white individuals advance in their development, they begin to actively seek out relationships with people of color, and with individuals who, similar to themselves, are striving to fight against, and ultimately eliminate racism.

The shift to developing relationships with like-minded, anti-racist individuals is also supported by the findings of Caldwell and Vera’s (2010) study. Within their examination of counseling psychology doctoral students and professionals, Caldwell and Vera (2010), found that as these students and professionals began to develop greater awareness and understanding of racism, they began to focus on developing relationships with individuals who shared their values pertaining to social justice. Together, the findings of the current study and previous research suggest that when white counseling psychology trainees develop greater awareness and understanding of racism, they begin to restructure their social networks to where greater investment is placed into relationships where anti-racist values are shared and supported.

In summary, the findings of the current study support and extend previous research that has addressed the interpersonal impact of learning about racism for white psychology and counseling trainees (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Case, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Rothman et al.,
The interpersonal changes that emerged in the current study have also emerged in previous studies as changes commonly experienced by white individuals in mental health professions as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. Of the five interpersonal changes identified in the current study, relationship tension and conflict, and relationship disconnection are the two interpersonal changes that have received the greatest amount of acknowledgement and support from previous literature and research.

Unique Contributions of the Current Study

Although previous research has offered brief acknowledgment of the five interpersonal changes that were identified in the current study, the descriptions of these changes were limited due to previous research lacking an intentional focus on the interpersonal aspects of learning about racism for white trainees in mental health professions (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Case, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Rothman et al., 2012; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). Due to its intentional focus on interpersonal aspects, one of the major contributions the current study was able to make to the existing research base was its elaboration on the interpersonal changes experienced by white psychology trainees as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism.

With regard to the interpersonal change of increased tension and conflict, the current study provided a more detailed description of this change through being the first study to identify and describe the specific elements that comprised the experience of increased tension and conflict as white counseling psychology trainees learned about racism. In contrast to the current study, previous research offered a more broad description of the experience of tension and conflict, and focused primarily on tension and conflict related to the act of confronting others.
about racist attitudes (Case, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Rothman et al., 2012). For the interpersonal change of relationship strengthening, the current study expanded on previous research through being the first study to describe the specific conditions under which relationship strengthening occurred for white counseling psychology trainees as they learned about racism.

Similar to relationship strengthening, the current study offered further elaboration on the experience of relationship disconnection through being the first to identify and describe the conditions under which relationship disconnection occurred for white counseling psychology trainees. Although disconnection is the interpersonal change that has received the most attention in previous research, descriptions of this change have traditionally been brief, and have provided minimal detail (Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). Another notable contribution the current study made related to relationship disconnection was its identification and description of the experience of relationship dissolution, which was conceptualized as the most extreme form of relationship disconnection. Prior to the current study being conducted, the experience of dissolution had not been explicitly identified and described. In general, the current study’s identification and description of dissolution helped to capture the variation across participants’ experiences of relationship disconnection; specifically, the variation in disconnection severity.

Another interpersonal change that the current study expanded upon was the experience of role transition that occurred for white counseling psychology trainees as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. Although previous research alluded to role transitions being a potential outcome of learning about racism for white psychology and counseling trainees, the current study specifically identified and described the experience of role transition (Caldwell
& Vera, 2010; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008; Tellett, 2004). A major contribution the current study made to the understanding of the role transition experience was its identification and description of three specific role transitions that occurred for trainees as greater awareness and understanding of racism was obtained.

A final contribution made by the current study was its elaboration on the broad-level changes that occur to white counseling psychology trainees’ social networks as they learn about racism. Although previous studies identified and acknowledged some of these broad-level changes, descriptions of the changes were generally limited in detail (Helms, 1995; Helms & Cook, 2011, Caldwell & Vera, 2010). It was the current study’s intentional focus on examining broad-level changes that made it unique in comparison to previous research, and allowed for greater detail to be gathered about the broad-level changes that occurred for white counseling psychology trainees as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism.

In summary, the current study offered elaboration on the findings of previous studies that have acknowledged and briefly described the various interpersonal changes that white psychology and counseling trainees experience as their awareness and understanding of racism increases. The current study specifically provided greater elaboration on the experiences of relationship tension and conflict, relationship strengthening, and relationship disconnection. In addition, the current study also provided elaboration on the broad-level changes that occur to trainees’ social networks as greater awareness and understanding of racism is obtained. The current study was the first to identify and describe the experience of relationship dissolution, and was the first to identify and describe three specific role transitions that occurred for trainees as they learned about racism. Overall, the findings of the current study help enhance understanding
of the interpersonal changes that occur for white counseling psychology trainees as their attitudes and perspectives of racism begin to shift.

Implications for Training

The collective findings of the current study have several implications for the training of counseling psychologists. First, the current study provides additional support for the importance and effectiveness of multicultural education. Several participants of the current study acknowledged that the multicultural education they received during their graduate work helped to enhance their multicultural counseling skills. Two participants specifically noted that their multicultural education helped them become more skilled at directly addressing race and racism in therapy, which subsequently led them to develop stronger relationships with clients, particularly clients of color.

Participants’ reports of multicultural education effectiveness are supported by previous research. Studies by D’Andrea et al. (1991), Murphy et al. (2006), and Neville et al. (1996) found multicultural education to be effective at enhancing the multicultural counseling skills of psychology and counseling trainees. Despite multicultural education effectiveness in the current study being based on self-reports from a small participant sample, the study offers further support for the importance of multicultural education in preparing counseling psychology trainees to address racism in the therapy context. Such support, even with its limitations, is a welcomed addition to the research base, as effectiveness of multicultural education continues to be called into question (Smith et al., 2006).

In addition to its implications for multicultural education, the current study also has implications specifically for clinical supervision. A few of the experiences shared by study
participants alluded to the importance of clinical supervisors being willing to address multicultural issues with supervisees. A few participants shared experiences where conflict emerged in their supervisory relationships due to their clinical supervisors demonstrating avoidance or resistance to having dialogues about race and racism. Participants reported that the conflict often led them to disconnect from supervisors, with disconnection often involving participants seeking supervision from other professionals, or maintaining conversations with supervisors at a superficial level. This finding is of particular concern, as disconnection from supervisors may have a negative impact on trainees’ learning, which may ultimately place trainees’ clients at greater risk for psychological harm.

Overall, one of the messages that emerged from the experiences shared by participants was that it is important for clinical supervisors to address multicultural issues with their supervisees, particularly issues related to racism and racial diversity. When such issues were not addressed by participants’ supervisors, the supervisory relationship was often negatively impacted. Previous research offers additional support for the importance of addressing multicultural issues in the supervision context (Duan & Roehlke, 2001; Toporek, Ortega-Villalobos, & Pope-Davis, 2004). Prior studies have found that when clinical supervisors demonstrate willingness to address multicultural issues, their supervisees report having greater satisfaction with supervision, and also report that supervision helped them to develop multicultural competence. Together, the findings of the current study, as well as those from previous research, offer evidence suggesting that when a multicultural education component is integrated into clinical supervision, there often are positive outcomes for both the supervisory relationship, as well as supervisees’ multicultural development.
Perhaps the most important training implications the current study has are implications specifically for providers of multicultural education. Providers within counseling psychology programs may benefit from acquiring further understanding of the interpersonal changes experienced by white psychology trainees as trainees develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. Through acquiring such understanding, providers of multicultural education may become better equipped to prepare white trainees for the changes that they may face to their relationships and social networks. As part of preparation, multicultural education providers may want to consider integrating discussions of potential interpersonal changes into class lectures. These discussions could occur in a whole-class format, or within smaller groups. As part of discussions of interpersonal change, it may be beneficial to specifically discuss strategies to manage and cope with changes when they do occur.

Multicultural education providers may also help prepare white trainees to face interpersonal change by directing trainees to the literature that has addressed such changes. Although this literature could be used as a tool to alert trainees of potential changes they may face in the future, such literature could also be used as a means to provide white trainees reassurance and validation, especially for trainees who have already experienced changes to their relationships and larger social networks. When participants of the current study were provided information about the themes that emerged, one of the main reactions that participants had to the themes was feeling like their experiences of interpersonal change had been validated by the study. Additionally, participants felt reassured that they were not alone in their experiences of change.

Overall, multicultural education providers may be able to play an integral role in helping
white trainees prepare for and cope with the interpersonal changes that occur as awareness and understanding of racism increases. It is important to note, however, that despite providers’ best efforts to prepare trainees to navigate the world with anti-racist values, some trainees may choose to reject such values, and maintain the status quo. Relationships are often highly important and influential aspects of trainees’ lives, and when faced with the possibility of relationships being damaged, trainees may choose to avoid situations where such damage could occur. In the context of learning about racism, trainees may choose to reject anti-racist values in order to ensure their relationships are preserved.

Although intervention success cannot be guaranteed, when difficult changes do occur for white psychology trainees, providers can help create an educational climate where trainees feel their experiences of change are validated, and trainees feel reassured that their change experiences are common outcomes of developing greater awareness and understanding of racism. Providers can create such a climate through directing white trainees to existing literature on the interpersonal impact of learning about racism. This climate can also be created through facilitating class discussions of interpersonal change, where trainees and their fellow colleagues have the opportunity to share their experiences. When a supportive climate is in place, and steps are taken to help white trainees prepare for and manage interpersonal change, it is anticipated that trainees will be better equipped to sustain and continue developing their anti-racist identities, even when exposed to environments where their identities face hostility, invalidation, and rejection. Through fostering white trainees’ ability to overcome the adversity that is often faced when an anti-racist identity is assumed, steps are ultimately taken toward reducing the perpetuation of racism, and promoting systemic change.
Implications for Research

The current study employed qualitative methodology to explore the interpersonal changes that occurred for white counseling psychology trainees as they developed greater awareness and understanding of racism. The changes experienced by white trainees were categorized into five different types: increased relationship tension and conflict, the development and strengthening of relationships, disconnection from relationships, relationship dissolution, and the transition into new roles within relationships. To date, the current study has been the only study to have an intentional, exclusive focus on the interpersonal impact of learning about racism for white psychology trainees. The majority of previous studies that have examined the impact of learning about racism have focused on the intrapersonal changes that occur for white trainees, such as the development of multicultural competence. When interpersonal changes have been addressed in previous studies, descriptions of these changes have typically been brief, as the objective of these studies was often to focus on the broad range of outcomes of learning about racism, rather than to focus specifically on the interpersonal outcomes.

Due to the current study being the first to have an intentional focus on the interpersonal impact of learning about racism for white counseling psychology trainees, the study can serve as a beginning point for further research. Given that interpersonal change in the context of learning about racism is an area that has been minimally explored, further qualitative research in this area would be highly beneficial. As stated by Heppner and Heppner (2004), qualitative research is a process of discovery, where each study conducted on a particular phenomenon uncovers different “truths” about that phenomenon. Through conducting further qualitative research on the phenomenon examined in the current study, new “truths” may be uncovered about the
interpersonal changes experienced by white psychology trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. Conducting further research on this phenomenon may help to more fully illuminate its essence.

In future qualitative studies, it may be beneficial to focus on the changes that occur in specific types of relationships as white trainees’ awareness and understanding of racism increases. In the current study, changes in both personal and professional relationships were explored. Future qualitative studies may benefit from focusing exclusively on personal relationships, professional relationships, or specific relationships within one of those two realms. Overall, through focusing exclusively on specific types of relationships, future studies may help to enhance understanding of the particular changes that occur in such relationships as awareness and understanding of racism increases. These studies may also help to determine whether there are differences in how interpersonal change is experienced across various types of relationships. The findings of the current study offered beginning evidence to suggest that interpersonal change is experienced differently in personal and professional relationships. Several participants indicated that as their awareness and understanding of racism increased, more positive changes occurred in their professional relationships in comparison to those that were personal. In light of the evidence suggesting that learning about racism has a different impact on white trainees’ personal and professional lives, exclusive examination of either personal or professional relationships may be beneficial.

In addition to focusing on changes that occur within specific types of relationships, it may also be beneficial for future studies to focus exclusively on specific types of interpersonal change that occur for white psychology trainees as they learn about racism. For example, the
experiences of relationship disconnection, and relationship tension and conflict have been identified by both the current study and previous studies as common changes experienced by white psychology and counseling trainees upon development of greater awareness and understanding of racism. Due to the repeated acknowledgment and description of these two experiences, it may be beneficial for future studies to focus exclusively on either relationship disconnection, or tension and conflict. Exclusive focus on a particular experience of interpersonal change may help to more fully illuminate the different elements of that experience.

Another suggestion for future research involves expanding the range of identities that are explored with white psychology trainees. In the current study, race was the aspect of white counseling psychology trainees’ identities that was given primary focus. Although other aspects of trainees’ identities were identified and briefly acknowledged, what was not addressed in the current study was the potential role these other aspects may have played in trainees’ learning about racism, and the subsequent interpersonal changes they experienced. Future studies may benefit from exploring the full range of privileged and marginalized identities possessed by white psychology trainees. Such exploration may help enhance understanding of how the combination of various identities may influence the types of interpersonal changes trainees experience associated with learning about racism. As part of exploring the influence of combined identities, it may be beneficial for studies to utilize homogeneous samples, where the interpersonal changes associated with learning about racism are examined with groups of white individuals who share the same combination of privileged and marginalized identities. Use of homogeneous groups would allow for rich and detailed information to be gathered about the interpersonal changes experienced by particular groups of white individuals.
Future studies may benefit from utilizing grounded theory as the qualitative approach to exploring white psychology trainees’ experiences of interpersonal change. In the current study, interconnection was found amongst the five types of interpersonal change that were described by participants, where one experience of interpersonal change would often facilitate another type of change to occur. For example, participants reported that increased tension and conflict in their relationships often led to disconnection and deterioration of those relationships, and occasionally, complete dissolution. Interconnection was also evident when participants described how their transition into an outsider role within their relationships often led to physical and/or psychological disconnection.

Finally, it is recommended that future studies be conducted to determine whether learning about racism helps to promote systemic change in the long term. Although several participants in the current study acknowledged that their learning about racism helped to enhance their clinical work with clients of color, what was discussed to a lesser extent was how learning about racism helped them take steps to promote larger-scale, systemic change. In general, an important question that remains to be answered is whether receiving education on racism leads white psychology trainees to behave in ways that promotes the reduction of racism in society at large. In order to develop greater understanding of the impact of racism-focused education, it would be beneficial for researchers to explore the potential role this education plays in the promotion of systemic change.

Collectively, these examples of interconnectedness suggest that the interpersonal changes experienced by white psychology trainees reflect a process that occurs over time as trainees develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. In order to better capture the process
behind interpersonal change, future studies would benefit from using grounded theory as their qualitative approach, as the primary goal of this approach is to provide an explanation, or theory, about a particular process (Creswell, 2007). Through use of grounded theory, future studies may be able to develop a conceptual framework explaining how white trainees’ relationships change over time, and why certain changes occur in trainees’ relationships.

In summary, the current study serves as a beginning point for conducting further research on the interpersonal changes experienced by white psychology trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. Due to this topic being one that has been minimally addressed, it is recommended that further qualitative research be conducted in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of white trainees’ experiences of interpersonal change. In order to enhance understanding, it is recommended that future studies explore changes that occur in specific types of relationships. It is also recommended that qualitative studies be conducted on specific types of interpersonal change, rather than trying to identify and describe several different types. Additionally, it is recommended that the full range of privileged and marginalized identities possessed by white psychology trainees be explored in order to enhance understanding of how various identities influence the interpersonal changes that occur associated with learning about racism. It is also recommended that future qualitative studies be conducted that utilize a grounded theory approach in order to more fully capture the process that might be underlying the changes white trainees experience to their relationships and social networks. Finally, it is recommended that future studies explore the potential role that racism-focused education plays in promoting systemic change, in order to better determine whether such education helps reduce racism at a societal level.
Overall, through conducting further studies, researchers may be able to provide a more detailed and comprehensive answer to the question: how do white psychology trainees’ relationships and social networks change as they begin to navigate the world with anti-racist values and perspectives? Although the findings of the current study offer valuable insight into the changes experienced by trainees, it is important to acknowledge that the study was not without its limitations. In the following section, limitations of the current study are identified and discussed.

Limitations

The current study had limitations and boundaries that are important to acknowledge, as such limitations may have had an influence on the research outcomes. One limitation was the study’s exclusive focus on white doctoral trainees from counseling psychology programs. The results obtained from the study may not be applicable to white psychology doctoral students in other psychology fields. Additionally, on a broader level, it is questionable whether results can be applied to white individuals outside of the psychology profession in its entirety. In general, it is critical for readers to refrain from applying the study’s findings to all white individuals, as only a small, specific subset of the white population was examined. The findings of the current study are best understood in the context of the 10 participants.

An additional limitation of the current study was its use of phone interviews as the primary means for data collection. It is to be noted that for the current study, the primary rationale for conducting phone interviews was to allow for data collection to occur across a large region. Phone interviews allowed for white doctoral trainees from several counseling psychology programs across the United States to be considered for study participation.
Although phone interviews offered opportunities to interview participants from several U.S. regions, a major concern about phone interviewing was the potential risk for technological problems, which occurred on a few occasions during participant interviews. The primary concern about experiencing technological problems was the potential for the interview process to be disrupted to a point where the gathering of detailed information about participants’ experiences was compromised. A second concern related to phone interviewing was the inability to visually observe participants as they shared their experiences. Participants’ nonverbal gestures and emotional expressions can often bring greater context and further richness to the experiences they share. Phone interviews were limited to verbal dialogue without visual context. A final concern related to phone interviewing was the barriers that were created for developing rapport with participants. Due to interactions being by phone rather than in person, participants may have been more likely to experience discomfort with sharing their experiences, which might potentially lead them to minimize the amount they disclose. An attempt to address this concern was made in the current study through the author arranging a pre-interview phone contact with each participant. The primary purpose of this phone contact was to build rapport with participants, and increase their sense of comfort prior to conducting interviews.

Although a highly suitable approach, the current study’s use of phenomenology created boundaries with regard to the information that could be generated. Due to phenomenology’s focus on capturing the essence of individuals’ experiences with a phenomenon, the approach places less emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual’s experience (Creswell, 2007). In general, the current study had an existing boundary in which emphasis was placed on participants’ shared experiences with the phenomenon of interest as opposed to the unique
aspects of their experiences.

A final limitation of the current study was its exclusive focus on participants’ perceptions of their learning about racism, and how their learning impacted their relationships. Although focusing on participants’ perspectives was appropriate for the current study, given its use of phenomenology, it is important to remember that the experiences participants shared reflect only their perspectives. To demonstrate this limitation, several participants in the study noted that learning about racism led them to speak up about racism more frequently, and to develop stronger relationships with people of color. Although these participant self-reports provide important information, what is missing is information about how others perceived participants to be standing against racism. Information that may have been beneficial to gather was how the people of color in participants’ lives perceived their relationships with participants, and how people of color perceived participants to be acting against racism.

In order to incorporate the perspectives of people of color, future studies would benefit from examining the experiences people of color have in their interactions with white individuals who have received multicultural and/or racism-focused education. Research incorporating the experiences of people of color could address questions such as whether people of color perceive their relationships with white individuals to improve when whites develop greater awareness and understanding of racism; and whether people of color perceive racism-educated whites to be taking action to promote systemic change. Collectively, the findings from research focusing on perspectives of people of color could potentially shed light on the degree to which learning about racism leads white individuals to take active steps to fight against racism.

Despite its limitations and boundaries, the current study helped to enhance understanding
of the interpersonal changes that occur for white counseling psychology trainees as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. In light of the current study’s limitations, caution should be taken when interpreting the study’s findings, and determining their transferability. In the following section, a summary is provided of this chapter, which marks the conclusion of this dissertation.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the results of the study were discussed in the context of the four research questions. These questions included: what interpersonal changes do white counseling psychology trainees experience as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism? How do trainees’ interactions in their relationships change? How do trainees’ relationships change with regard to levels of connection and intimacy? What broad-level changes occur to trainees’ social networks? The collective findings of the current study offered insight into each of these questions. Also addressed within this chapter were the current study’s implications for both training and research. Limitations of the study were also addressed.

In conclusion, the stories that were shared by participants of the current study offered several take-away messages about the interpersonal outcomes of learning about racism. Collectively, participants’ stories conveyed that when white counseling psychology trainees engage in learning about racism, they ultimately embark on a developmental journey that not only involves them experiencing changes to themselves, but also changes in their relationships with others. As trainees begin to navigate their world with new attitudes and perspectives on racism, they shift how they interact with others in order to act in accordance with their newly-acquired attitudes and perspectives. These shifts in interaction often lead trainees to turn toward
certain relationships, disconnect from others, and occasionally, completely walk away from relationships. For many trainees, their development of new perspectives on racism often creates conflict in their relationships, prompting them to try to strike a balance between acting in accordance to their new perspectives, and preserving their relationships with others.

Overall, white counseling psychology trainees face several challenges upon developing greater awareness and understanding of racism, with challenges particularly occurring in their relationships with others. In addition to challenges, however, trainees’ development also brings them experiences of inspiration, fulfillment, and a sense of belonging to new social groups. For white counseling psychology trainees, learning about racism is a complex, complicated process that has the potential to affect all aspects of their lives. When the choice is made to act against the status quo, and fight against racism, trainees also make the choice, consciously or unconsciously, to open themselves to changes within their social systems.
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APPENDIX A

Script for Initial Contact with Training Directors

The following script will be used for initial contact with training directors of the selected counseling psychology doctoral programs. All directors will first be contacted by e-mail. Directors who do not respond to the e-mail within two weeks will be contacted by phone. No further contact attempts will be made following the phone call.

Initial Contact Script (E-mail)

Dear (director name),

My name is Molly Beagle, and I am a counseling psychology doctoral student at Western Michigan University. I am currently in the process of recruiting doctoral students in counseling psychology to participate in my dissertation study. My study focuses on the changes that occur to doctoral students’ relationships and social networks as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. My study received approval by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board on November 1, 2016.

I am contacting you to see if you would be willing to share with your doctoral students the opportunity to participate in my dissertation study. If you choose to share this opportunity, please forward to your students the study participation invitation attached to this e-mail, and please notify me when you have forwarded the invitation. Receiving this notification will allow me to keep track of the institutions where my participation invitation has been distributed.

The study participation invitation includes more detailed information about my study, and lists the eligibility criteria for participation. Please review this document at your leisure. If I do not receive a response from you within two weeks, I will be following up with a phone call. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me by e-mail or phone (517-331-2926). Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Molly Beagle, M.A.
Directors who forward the participation announcement will receive the following e-mail:

Dear (director name),

I received notification that you forwarded my study participation invitation to your students. Thank you very much for providing me the opportunity to recruit from your program. Please contact me by e-mail or phone (517-331-2926) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Molly Beagle, M.A.

Script for Follow-Up Phone Contact

Hello (director name). My name is Molly Beagle, and I am a counseling psychology doctoral student at Western Michigan University. Approximately two weeks ago, I sent an e-mail asking whether you would be willing to share with your students an invitation to participate in my dissertation study. I am calling to confirm that you received my e-mail, and if so, I was wondering if you would be willing to share the participation opportunity with your students?

Director Responses:

[No, I did not receive your e-mail]

Okay, thank you for letting me know. To provide some background, I am currently recruiting counseling psychology doctoral students to participate in my dissertation study, which focuses on the interpersonal changes that occur for students as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. I was wondering if you would be willing to forward to your students an invitation to participate in my study? (Directors who accept the request will be asked to provide their e-mail address, and will be sent the initial e-mail including the participation announcement. Directors who decline will be thanked for their time).

[Yes, I received your e-mail, and will forward the invitation to my students/interns]

Thank you very much for your assistance. Please forward to your students the participation invitation I sent to you, and copy me to the forwarded message. Thank you again.

[Yes, I received your e-mail, but will not be forwarding the invitation to my students/interns]

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.
APPENDIX B

Research Participation Invitation

The following invitation will be sent via e-mail to training directors for distribution to their doctoral students. The invitation will also be posted on select listservs if further recruitment is needed after completion of recruitment from the selected doctoral programs.

Invitation Script

Dear Students,

My name is Molly Beagle, and I am a doctoral student in the counseling psychology program at Western Michigan University. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting as part of my dissertation. The primary purpose of my study is to examine the changes white psychology doctoral students experience in their relationships and social networks as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism. I am interested in exploring the changes that occur to students’ personal and professional relationships, and am also interested in exploring the broader changes that occur to students’ social networks.

I, the student investigator, will be conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Mary Z. Anderson, who is a faculty member of the Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology Department at Western Michigan University. In order to be eligible to participate in the study, the following criteria must be met:

(1) Students must identify as white.

(2) Students must be currently pursuing a doctoral degree in counseling psychology.

(3) Students must not have a close personal or professional relationship with the student investigator. Students considered to have had a close relationship with the student investigator include the following: students who completed courses, practica, or internships with the student investigator; students who have had direct and extended (i.e. greater than 60 minutes) interactions with the student investigator on more than three occasions in academic/professional contexts; and students who have had any direct and extended interaction (i.e. greater than 60 minutes) with the student investigator outside of academic/professional contexts.

(4) Students must have had prior exposure during their doctoral work to race-based education and learning (e.g. taking multicultural courses that included a race component; learning about race-related issues and concepts during clinical practica or internships).

(5) Students must express initial willingness to participate in two interviews.

(6) Students must have experienced changes in their relationships and social networks, and must perceive the changes as being associated with their race-based learning and development.

Study participation is divided into four phases. During the first phase, individuals who express interest in study participation will be sent by mail a background questionnaire and two copies of an informed
consent document. Provided individuals remain interested in participating, they will be instructed to return a completed background questionnaire and one signed copy of the informed consent. Completion of these materials is expected to take between 15 to 20 minutes. Information gathered from background questionnaires will be used to determine individuals best suited for further study participation. Individuals who will be considered well suited for participation will be those who meet the criteria identified above, and demonstrate on the background questionnaire that they have had experiences that are representative of the study’s focus. Individuals who are not selected for further study participation will be notified by either phone or e-mail depending on their identified contact preference.

Individuals selected for further participation will be notified and invited to participate in phases two, three, and four of the study. Phase two will include two components: an initial phone meeting with the student investigator, and the first phone interview. The initial phone meeting is expected to take 20 to 30 minutes to complete. First phone interviews are expected to be 60 minutes in duration.

Phase three will occur approximately 2 months following the first phone interview, and will involve completion of the second phone interview. Prior to the second interview being conducted, participants will be instructed to review transcripts of their first phone interviews. This review is expected to take between 15 to 20 minutes. Second phone interviews are expected to be 45 to 60 minutes in duration.

Phase four of the study, which will be optional, will involve participants reviewing a draft of the final study results. This review is expected to take between 15 to 30 minutes to complete. Overall, it is anticipated that the total time commitment for study participation will be approximately 220 minutes (3 hours, 40 minutes), with this time being distributed over approximately 4 months. In compensation for study participation, participants will receive a gift card for Amazon.com in the amount of $10.00. This gift card will be distributed upon completion of the second phone interview.

Throughout the participation process, all information gathered from participants will remain confidential. Participant responses that are reported within the dissertation manuscript will not include names or other identifying information.

Please know that whether or not you choose to participate, your decision will not affect your standing within your doctoral program. Your program will not be informed about your participation decision. If you are interested in participating in my study, or have further questions, please contact me by phone (517-331-2926) or by e-mail (molly.k.beagle@wmich.edu). Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Molly K. Beagle, M.A.  Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University  Western Michigan University
(517) 331-2926  (269) 387-5113
molly.k.beagle@wmich.edu  mary.anderson@wmich.edu
Thank you for your interest in participating in the following study:

A Qualitative Investigation of the Interpersonal Changes White Psychology Trainees Experience During their Race-Based Learning and Development

In order to be considered for participation, please complete this background questionnaire and sign the informed consent documents. Using the enclosed stamped envelope, please return the completed questionnaire and one signed copy of the informed consent document. One copy of the informed consent is to be retained for your records.

The information requested on the background questionnaire will be used for selection of individuals to participate in the interview phases of this study. After background questionnaires are received and reviewed by the student investigator, you will be notified within one to two weeks about your interview participation status. If you have any questions with regard to the study or the enclosed materials, please contact the student investigator by phone (517-331-2926) or e-mail (molly.k.beagle@wmich.edu). Should you decide not to participate in the study, please inform the student investigator by phone or e-mail.

Name: ____________________________________________________________

Mailing Address: __________________________________________________

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__________________________________________________________________

Telephone Number: ________________________________________________

E-Mail Address: ____________________________________________________

How would you prefer to be contacted? (circle one): Phone E-Mail

(Page #1)
Demographic Information

Race: _________________________  Age: ____________

Gender Identity: _________________________________

Sexual Orientation: _______________________________

Degree Currently Pursuing: __________________________________________

Briefly describe your status within your degree program (e.g. first-year student, all-but-dissertation, currently completing pre-doctoral internship):

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Short Answer Questions

Please identify the locations (i.e. cities, states, and/or countries) where you have resided during your lifetime. Briefly note when you resided in these locations.

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______________________________________________________________________________
Briefly describe the race-based education you have received during your doctoral training. In particular, the education you have received about racism. In your description, identify the context(s) in which such education was received (e.g. multicultural courses, trainings in the community, and/or trainings during clinical practica or internships).

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Briefly describe how learning about racism has impacted you personally. How have you changed as a result of learning about racism?

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(Page #3)
Please write about how learning about racism has led to changes in your personal and professional relationships (e.g. relationships with colleagues, professors, supervisors, family members, friends, and/or romantic partners).

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Thank you for your time and consideration.
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Document

Western Michigan University
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology

Principal Investigator: Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D.
Student Investigator: Molly K. Beagle, M.A.

Title of Study: A Qualitative Investigation of the Interpersonal Changes White Psychology Trainees Experience During their Race-Based Learning and Development

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled, “A Qualitative Investigation of the Interpersonal Changes White Psychology Trainees Experience During their Race-Based Learning and Development.” This project will serve as Molly Beagle’s dissertation study for the fulfillment of requirements to obtain a doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project, and will go over the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely, and please ask any questions if you need more clarification. Questions may be directed to the student investigator, principal investigator, the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, or the Vice President for Research. Contact information for these individuals is listed at the end of the document.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
The purpose of the current study is to explore the changes white psychology trainees experience to their relationships and social networks as they develop greater awareness and understanding of racism.

Who can participate in this study?
To be considered for participation in this study, you are required to meet the following criteria:

(1) You must identify as white.

(2) You must be currently pursuing a doctoral degree in counseling psychology.

(3) You must not have a close personal or professional relationship with the student investigator. You are considered to have had a close relationship with the student investigator if the following have occurred: you have completed courses, practica, or internships with the student investigator; you have had direct and extended (i.e. greater than 60 minutes) interactions with the student investigator on more than three occasions in academic/professional contexts; or you have had any direct and extended interaction
(i.e. greater than 60 minutes) with the student investigator outside of academic/professional contexts.

(4) You must have had prior exposure during your doctoral work to race-based education and learning (e.g. taking multicultural courses that included a race component; learning about race-related issues and concepts during clinical practica or internships).

(5) You must express initial willingness to participate in two interviews.

(6) You must have experienced changes to your relationships and social networks, and you must perceive these changes as being associated with your race-based learning and development.

Participation eligibility and selection will be determined through use of a background questionnaire. The questionnaire will be mailed to you to complete and return to the student investigator. Selection for participation will be based on your questionnaire responses, which will be reviewed to confirm that you are currently pursuing a doctoral degree in counseling psychology, and identify as white with regard to race. Your responses will also be reviewed to determine whether you have had prior exposure to race-based education, and if so, whether such education was associated with changes to your relationships and social networks.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
During the first phase of this study, as a prospective participant, you have been mailed this informed consent document and a background questionnaire. After reviewing the consent document, you are asked to decide whether or not you wish to participate. Provided you do wish to participate, you are asked to sign one copy of the consent document, complete the background questionnaire, and then return these documents to the student investigator using the enclosed envelope. Upon review of the background questionnaires, you will either be invited or declined to participate in the interview phases of the study.

The second phase of this study is broken down into two parts. First, to prepare you for the first phone interview, you will be requested to have an initial phone meeting with the student investigator. This meeting is expected to be 20 to 30 minutes in duration. The second part of phase two is the first phone interview. During this interview, you will be prompted to describe how your relationships and social network(s) have changed as a result of you developing greater awareness and understanding of racism. The interview is expected to be 60 minutes in duration, and will be audio-recorded for data analysis purposes.

The third phase of this study will begin approximately 2 months after the first phone interview. This phase will involve you reviewing the transcript of your first phone interview, and engaging in a follow-up phone interview with the student investigator. The follow-up interview will be audio-recorded for data analysis purposes. During the follow-up interview, you will be given the opportunity to provide additional information about the experiences you shared in the first phone interview. In addition, you will be provided information about initial study results, and will be
invited to provide feedback. Follow-up interviews are expected to be 45 to 60 minutes in duration.

Phase four will occur upon completion of the follow-up interview, and will be an optional component of participation. During this phase, you will receive an electronic copy of the results of the study, and will be asked to specifically review the information from your interviews included in the results. This review is to help ensure that all content included from your interviews is presented in a manner that protects your confidentiality and privacy.

**Where will this study take place?**
All correspondence with you will occur by phone, e-mail, or postal mail. You will be able to choose your preferred method of contact. For the two phone interviews, it is recommended that you select a quiet location with minimal distractions.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**
Completion of initial materials (i.e. background questionnaire and informed consent document) is expected to take between 15 to 20 minutes. Initial phone meetings for interview preparation are expected to take 20 to 30 minutes to complete. First phone interviews are expected to be 60 minutes in duration. Review of interview transcripts prior to second phone interviews is expected to take 15 to 20 minutes, and second phone interviews are expected to be 45 to 60 minutes in duration. Review of the final study results is expected to take between 15 to 30 minutes to complete. It is anticipated that the total time commitment for study participation will be approximately 220 minutes (3 hours, 40 minutes), with this time being distributed over approximately 4 months.

**What information is being gathered during the study?**
You will be asked to complete a background questionnaire on which you will provide demographic information. Additionally, you will provide contact information, identify the specific degree you are pursuing, and provide information about your residential history. The questionnaire will also ask you to provide information about your previous race-based education, the impact this education had on yourself, as well as your relationships and social networks.

If selected to participate in the second and third phases of the study, you will engage in two phone interviews. During these interviews, you will be asked to share information about your previous education on racism, and how this education facilitated changes in your relationships and social networks. Both interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis purposes.

**What are the risks of participating in this study, and how will these risks be minimized?**
Risks associated with participating in this study are expected to be minimal. During interviews, you may experience mild distress due to sharing personal information and discussing your struggles. In order to minimize distress, a debriefing period will occur directly following completion of first phone interviews. During the debriefing period, you will be invited to process
and reflect on your experiences being interviewed. You will be asked to share any concerns you may have related to the interview process.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**
Participation in this study provides you the opportunity to share and process the changes you have experienced in your relationships and social networks as a result of learning about racism. Such an opportunity is not often provided in personal, professional, or traditional academic settings. Through engaging in interviews, you may leave this study with a deeper understanding of the impact that learning about racism has had on you both personally and professionally.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**
Monetary costs for participating in this study are expected to be minimal. Potential expenses may include those accumulated through phone usage. The primary cost for participation will be time-related, with you spending approximately 220 minutes total participating in the study.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**
Following completion of the two phone interviews, you will receive a gift card for Amazon.com in the amount of $10.00. The gift card will be distributed to you following completion of the second phone interview. You will receive the gift card via e-mail or postal mail, depending on your preferred method of receipt.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**
Interview recordings and all documents containing your identifying information will be accessible only to the principal investigator, student investigator, and a transcriber. These individuals will keep your identifying information confidential. Recordings and documents will be stored in areas to which only the research team will have access. All data and documentation will be stored a minimum of three years following completion of the study. When no longer needed, paper documentation will be shredded, and electronic documentation will be permanently deleted off computers and flash drives.

Once completed, the student investigator’s dissertation manuscript will be open for the public to access. Select quotes and information you provide during interviews may be included in the dissertation manuscript. When your information and/or quotes are included, your name, and all other identifying information (e.g. name of your academic institution), will be removed. A letter will be used to replace your name. Prior to publication of the student investigator’s dissertation, you will be provided the opportunity to review your quotes and shared information that is planned to be included as part of the study findings.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**
You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. Your doctoral program will not be informed about whether or not you participate in the study. The investigators of the study will not impose any academic or personal consequences if you choose to withdraw participation. Should the need arise, the investigator(s) can decide to stop your participation in the study.
without your consent. In the event this situation occurs, you will be contacted directly by the student investigator.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you may contact the student investigator, Molly Beagle, at 517-331-2926 or molly.k.beagle@wmich.edu. You may also contact the principal investigator, Mary Z. Anderson, at 269-387-5113 or mary.anderson@wmich.edu. The Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at Western Michigan University may be contacted at 269-387-8293. The Vice President for Research at Western Michigan University may be contacted at 269-387-8298. This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

__________________________________________
Student Investigator

___________________________________________
Participant’s signature

Date
APPENDIX E

Script for Follow-Up Contact after Mailing of Initial Materials

The following script will be used to follow-up with prospective participants who do not return the requested materials (i.e. background questionnaire and informed consent documents). The first follow-up contact will occur two weeks after materials were mailed. A second follow-up contact will occur two weeks after the first if materials have yet to be returned. No further contacts will be made after the second contact attempt. Contacts will be made either by phone or e-mail, depending on the means by which prospective participants initially contacted the student investigator. The following script will be used for both contact attempts.

Follow-Up Script

Hello (prospective participant’s name),

Approximately (two/four) weeks ago, a packet was mailed to you in response to your inquiry about participating in the study titled, A Qualitative Investigation of the Interpersonal Changes White Psychology Trainees Experience During their Race-Based Learning and Development. The packet included a background questionnaire, two copies of an informed consent document, and a stamped return envelope. In order to be considered for study participation, you are requested to return a completed background questionnaire and one signed copy of the informed consent document.

I am contacting you to inquire whether you plan to complete these materials. At your earliest convenience, please contact me to confirm whether you plan to proceed further with study participation. You may reach me by phone (517-331-2926) or e-mail (molly.k.beagle@wmich.edu). Thank you very much for your time and consideration. (the final three sentences will be excluded from direct phone contacts)

The following will be stated upon receiving a response to follow-up contacts:

**Answer:** [Yes, I am still planning to return the materials]
Thank you very much for letting me know. I look forward to receiving your materials.

**Answer:** [No, I am not planning to return the materials]
Thank you for expressing interest in my study. I wish you the best.
APPENDIX F

Script for Notification of Decline for Further Study Participation

The following script will be used for contacts made to prospective participants who were not selected for further study participation. Contacts will be made by either phone or e-mail, depending on prospective participants’ preferred method to be contacted.

Phone Contact Script

Hello (name). This is Molly Beagle. A few weeks ago, you expressed interest in participating in my dissertation study, and materials were sent to you to complete and return. I wanted to let you know that I received your materials, and upon review, have decided not to select you for further participation. Due to the nature of my study, I selected a very small number of participants, and unfortunately, was unable to include all individuals who expressed interest in participation. I greatly appreciate you taking the time to complete the initial materials, and thank you for expressing interest in my study.

Contact Script for E-mails and Phone Voice Messages

Greetings (name),

A few weeks ago, you expressed interest in participating in my dissertation study, and materials were sent to you to complete and return. These materials included a background questionnaire and two copies of an informed consent document. I wanted to let you know that I received your materials, and upon review, have decided not to select you for further participation. Due to the nature of my study, I selected a very small number of participants, and unfortunately, was unable to include all individuals who expressed interest in participation. Please know that I greatly appreciate you taking time to complete the initial materials, and thank you for expressing interest in my study.

Sincerely,
Molly Beagle, M.A.
APPENDIX G

Script for Notification of Delay of Study Participation Decision

The following script will be used to communicate to prospective participants that they meet the criteria for study participation, but due to the current status of participant recruitment, confirmation of their participation status is delayed. Communication of delay will occur by either phone or e-mail, depending on prospective participants’ preferred method to be contacted.

Phone Contact Script

Hello (name). This is Molly Beagle. A few weeks ago, you expressed interest in participating in my dissertation study, and materials were sent to you to complete and return. I wanted to let you know that I received your materials, and have determined that you meet the criteria to participate in my study. Although you meet participation criteria, I am unable to confirm at this time that you will be able to participate in my study due to the current status of participant recruitment. I plan to contact you within the next two weeks to inform you of your participation status. Do you have any questions or concerns for me at this time? [If yes, all questions and concerns will be answered accordingly.] I greatly appreciate your patience, and thank you for taking the time to complete the initial materials. I will be in touch with you soon.

Contact Script for E-mails and Phone Voice Messages

Greetings (name),

My name is Molly Beagle. A few weeks ago, you expressed interest in participating in my dissertation study, and materials were sent to you to complete and return. I wanted to let you know that I received your materials, and have determined that you meet the criteria to participate in my study. Although you meet participation criteria, I am unable to confirm at this time that you will be able to participate in my study due to the current status of participant recruitment. I plan to contact you within the next two weeks to inform you of your participation status. Should you have any questions or concerns for me at this time, please contact me by e-mail or phone (517-331-2926). I greatly appreciate your patience, and thank you for taking the time to complete the initial materials. I will be in touch with you soon.

Sincerely,
Molly Beagle, M.A.
APPENDIX H

Script for Invitation for Further Study Participation

The following script will be used for contacts made to prospective participants who were selected for further study participation. Contacts will be made by either phone or e-mail, depending on prospective participants’ preferred method to be contacted. Those who do not respond to the contact within one week will be contacted on a second occasion. If no response is received within one week of the second contact attempt, a third and final attempt will be made.

Phone Contact Script (use for first, second, and third contact attempts)

Hello (name). This is Molly Beagle. A few weeks ago, you expressed interest in participating in my dissertation study, and materials were sent to you to complete and return. I wanted to let you know that I received your materials, and upon review, have decided to select you for further participation. As a reminder, participation in my study will involve engaging in two phone interviews.

The next step we need to take is to arrange a date and time for an initial phone meeting. I would like to use this meeting as an opportunity to get to know you more before our interview. Also, I will provide you further information about the interview process during this meeting. What date and time will work best for you?

Response A, #1: [I am unable to schedule the initial meeting at this time]
Okay, when would it be better for me to call back and arrange the meeting? (a follow-up phone call will be made during the time the participant provides).

Response A, #2: [Provides a date and time for the initial meeting]
Thank you very much. Prior to our meeting, please feel free to contact me by phone or e-mail if you have any questions, or need to reschedule the meeting date and/or time. You may find my contact information within the informed consent document. Thank you again, and I look forward to meeting you. (additional contacts will be made if a new date and/or time needs to be arranged)

Response B: [I have decided to not participate in the study]
Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I wish you the best.
E-mail and Voice Message Contact Script (first contact attempt)

Greetings (name),

A few weeks ago, you expressed interest in participating in my dissertation study, and materials were sent to you to complete and return. I wanted to let you know that I received your materials, and upon review, have decided to select you for further participation. As a reminder, participation in my study will involve engaging in two phone interviews.

The next step we need to take is to arrange a date and time for an initial phone meeting. I would like to use this meeting as an opportunity to get to know you more before our interview. Also, I will provide you further information about the interview process during this meeting.

At your earliest convenience, please contact me by e-mail or phone (517-331-2926) to let me know dates and times that would work for you for the initial phone meeting. Thank you for your interest in my study. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Molly Beagle, M.A.

Response A: [Provides dates and times for the initial phone meeting]
Thank you very much for your response. If this will work for you, let’s plan our phone meeting for (date and time). Please respond to this e-mail to confirm that this date and time will work. If you have any questions prior to our meeting, or need to reschedule, please e-mail or contact me by phone (517-331-2926). I look forward to our meeting together. (additional contacts will be made if a new date and/or time needs to be arranged).

Response B: [I do not plan to participate further]
Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I wish you the best.
E-mail and Voice Message Script (second and third contact attempts)

Hello (name),

A few weeks ago, you expressed interest in participating in my dissertation study, and materials were sent to you to complete and return. I wanted to let you know that I received your materials, and upon review, have decided to select you for further participation. This is my (second/third and final) attempt to reach you. [Include the following sentence for third contact attempts] If I do not receive a response from you within one week, I will assume that you have chosen not to participate in my study.

As a reminder, participation in my study will involve engaging in two phone interviews. The next step we need to take is to arrange a date and time for an initial phone meeting. I would like to use this meeting as an opportunity to get to know you more before our interview. Also, I will provide you further information about the interview process during this meeting.

At your earliest convenience, please contact me by e-mail or phone (517-331-2926) to let me know dates and times that would work for you for the initial phone meeting. Thank you for your interest in my study. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Molly Beagle, M.A.

Response A: [Provides dates and times for the initial phone meeting]
Thank you very much for your response. If this will work for you, let’s plan our phone meeting for (date and time). Please respond to this e-mail to confirm that this date and time will work. If you have any questions prior to our meeting, or need to reschedule, please e-mail or contact me by phone (517-331-2926). I look forward to our meeting together. (additional contacts will be made if a new date and/or time needs to be arranged).

Response B: [I do not plan to participate further]
Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I wish you the best.
APPENDIX I

Script for Initial Phone Meeting

The following script will be used for the initial phone meeting with participants.

Hello (name). My name is Molly Beagle, and I am calling with regard to your participation in my study. We previously agreed to have our initial phone meeting at this time. I want to thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. As I had mentioned previously, I would like to use this meeting today to get to know you a little more, as well as provide you information about our first interview together. I anticipate that this meeting will take between 20 to 30 minutes.

Let me begin by first sharing a little about myself. I am in the counseling psychology doctoral program at Western Michigan University. My program is known for its strong multicultural focus, with particular emphasis being placed on racism and race-related matters. Throughout my doctoral training, I have had a passion for learning about racism, and understanding its impact on white individuals as well as people of color. Through my own experiences, and having interactions with my white colleagues in my program, I started recognizing a pattern in which building understanding of racism seemed to not only lead to personal change, but also changes in relationships with others. This recognition is what led me to selecting my dissertation topic, and now conducting my study. [Provide time for participant to share any reactions or ask questions]

I would like to hear from you now. Tell me a little about what interested you in participating in my study?
[Provide time for response]

Thank you for sharing. Let me provide you some information about our first phone interview together. The first interview will be 60 minutes in duration, and will be audio recorded for data analysis purposes. What I will be asking you to do during the interview will be to describe the changes you have experienced in your personal and professional relationships, and in your larger social network as your awareness and understanding of racism has increased. To prepare for the first interview, I would like you to spend a little time reflecting on the changes you have experienced. It would be helpful to recall specific experiences that have occurred for you.

Given this information, how are you feeling about the first interview at this time?
[Provide time to process participants’ feelings]

Do you have ideas about topics you will want to be sure to discuss during our first interview?
[Provide time for response]

Do you have any questions or concerns at this time?
[All questions and/or concerns will be addressed accordingly]
To conclude our meeting today, let’s schedule a date and time for our first interview. What dates and times would work best for you?

**Response #1:** [I am unable to schedule the first interview at this time]
Okay, when would it be better for me to call back and arrange the meeting? (a follow-up phone call will be made during the time the participant provides).

**Response #2:** [Provides dates and times for the first interview]
Let’s plan to meet on (date) at (time). Prior to our interview, please feel free to contact me by phone or e-mail if you have any questions, or need to reschedule the interview date and/or time. Thank you very much. I am looking forward to our interview. (additional contacts will be made if a new date and/or time needs to be arranged)
APPENDIX J

Script for First Phone Interview

The following script will be used for the first phone interview with participants.

Introduction

Hello (name). Before we get started today, there are a few items I would like to discuss with you. First, as a reminder, by signing the informed consent document that was mailed to you, you have granted consent to participate in two phone interviews. Please know that at any time, you may decline to participate further.

What I will be asking you to do in today’s interview will be to share information about how learning about racism has impacted your personal and professional relationships, as well as your overall social network. I anticipate that the interview will take 60 minutes to complete. For the majority of the interview, I will be having you share your experiences. There may be times when I might ask you questions that are aimed to clarify and help elaborate on the information you share.

I want to remind you that this interview will be audio-recorded for data analysis purposes. The interview recordings will be electronically stored on computers and flash drives to which my advisor and I will have access. The recordings will also be accessible to a transcriptionist, who will assist with transcription of the phone interviews. All individuals involved in my study will ensure that your information is kept confidential. The recordings will be stored for a minimum of three years following completion of my study, and when no longer needed, will be permanently deleted off the respective computers and flash drives. Do you have any questions or concerns before we move forward? [If yes, all questions and concerns will be answered accordingly. If no, the interview will progress]

Interview

Reflection: Before we begin, please take the next 3 to 5 minutes to reflect to yourself how learning about racism during your doctoral training has impacted your personal and professional relationships, and your larger social network. Recall specific experiences in which your relationships changed. [Give participant a pen and paper] You may use this pen and paper to write down your thoughts and reflections. Let me know when you are ready to begin the interview. [Wait for participant’s confirmation that she/he is ready to begin]

Interview Question: Now that you have taken a few minutes to reflect, please describe to me the changes you have experienced in your relationships and overall social network as your awareness and understanding of racism has increased. Let me know if you need me to clarify these instructions. [Participant will be provided between 45 to 60 minutes to describe her/his experiences]
**Additional Information:** Before we conclude this part of the interview, is there anything else you would like to share that you have not discussed? [If yes, participant will be provided between 5 to 10 minutes to share additional information. If no, participant debriefing will begin]

**Probes (will be used to assist participants with elaborating on their experiences, if needed)**

1. What other relationships have you experienced change in?
2. What changes have occurred to your (personal or professional) relationships?
3. How did your (thoughts, feelings, and/or perceptions) of that relationship change?
4. How did your interactions in that relationship change?
5. What are some of the thoughts you have about that experience/change now?
6. Tell me more about that. (or) Can you describe that further?
7. Can you provide me with specific examples?
8. How did you feel?
9. What was your reaction to that?

**Participant Debriefing**

Thank you for sharing your experiences with me. I would now like to provide you time to reflect on this interview experience. Please feel free to share your thoughts and feelings about the interview, and any concerns you may have. [Participants will be provided the remaining interview time to share their interview experiences. Support will be provided as needed.]

**Conclusion**

Thank you for taking time to participate in this interview today. The next step of participation will involve you engaging in a second phone interview, which is expected to take between 45 to 60 minutes to complete. In approximately two months, I will send you a transcript of the interview we completed today. Included with the transcript will be instructions for how to contact me to schedule a date and time for the second interview. I am giving you the option to have this documentation sent to you either by mail or e-mail. Which would you prefer? [Participants’ preferences will be noted, and documents will be sent accordingly]

Prior to the second interview taking place, I will ask that you review the transcript I send to you. During the second interview, you will be invited to provide additional information about the experiences you shared with me today, and will be asked to provide feedback you may have about your transcript. Additionally, we will work together during the second interview to identify and describe themes across the experiences you shared. Do you have any questions about the second interview at this time? [If yes, all questions will be answered accordingly. If no, the interview will conclude]

Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have questions or concerns about the study. Thank you again for your time.
APPENDIX K

Script for Request for Transcript Review

The following message will be sent to participants approximately two months following the first phone interview. The primary purpose of the message is to provide participants instructions for arranging and preparing for the second phone interview. This message will be sent either in the form of an e-mail or mailed letter depending on participants’ preferences. Participants who do not respond within two weeks will be contacted on a second occasion using their preferred method of contact. If no response is provided within two weeks of the second attempt, a third and final contact attempt will be made.

E-Mail and Letter Script (first contact attempt)

Dear (name),

I am sending this e-mail/letter to follow-up with you regarding your participation in my study, *A Qualitative Investigation of the Interpersonal Changes White Psychology Trainees Experience During their Race-Based Learning and Development*. I would like to arrange a date and time for our second phone interview. As a reminder, the second interview will take between 45 to 60 minutes to complete.

Please find attached/enclosed a transcription of your first interview. Please review this transcription prior to our second phone interview.

At your earliest convenience, please contact me either by e-mail (molly.k.beagle@wmich.edu) or phone (517-331-2926) to let me know dates and times that would work for you for the second phone interview. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Molly Beagle, M.A.
E-Mail and Letter Script (second and third contact attempts)

Dear (name),

Approximately (two/four) weeks ago, correspondence was sent to you by (e-mail/mail) that included a transcription of your first phone interview. This is my (second/third and final) attempt to reach you. I would like to arrange a date and time for our second interview. As a reminder, the second interview will take between 45 to 60 minutes to complete.

At your earliest convenience, please contact me either by e-mail (molly.k.beagle@wmich.edu) or phone (517-331-2926) to confirm whether or not you would like to proceed with the second interview. If you did not receive the initial correspondence, please let me know. Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Molly Beagle, M.A.
APPENDIX L

Script for Second Phone Interview

The following script will be used for the second phone interview with participants.

Introduction

Hello (name), this is Molly Beagle calling for our scheduled interview. Before we get started, I want to confirm that you have reviewed the transcription of your first interview. Has this been reviewed? [If yes, proceed with the interview. If no, instruct participant to review the transcription. A new date and time will be agreed upon to conduct the second interview].

I anticipate that today’s interview will take between 45 to 60 minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin? [If yes, all questions will be answered accordingly. If no, proceed with the interview]

First Portion of Interview: Gathering Additional Information

To begin, I would like for you to take a few minutes to reflect on the experiences you shared with me during our first phone interview. Specifically, I would like you to reflect on the changes you have experienced in your relationships and overall social network as your awareness and understanding of racism has increased. I will give you the next few minutes to reflect to yourself. Let me know when you are ready to proceed. [Wait for participant’s confirmation that she/he is ready to proceed with the interview]

For the first portion of this interview, I would like to provide you the opportunity to elaborate and expand upon the experiences you shared with me during the first interview.

What additional information would you like to provide about your experiences?
[The first portion of the interview is expected to take approximately 20 minutes.]

Second Portion of Interview: Interpreting Themes

Thank you for providing me additional information about your experiences. For the second portion of our interview today, I would like to share with you the collective themes that have emerged from the experiences that you and all other participants have shared during interviews. Before I share these themes, I wanted to get feedback from you about what you feel are the major themes from your own interview.
If you had to summarize your first interview with me, what would be the major points that you would want me to take away from it? [Provide participant time to respond]

Thank you for sharing your thoughts. I will now share with you the major themes I have found thus far in my study. After sharing these themes, I will ask you a few follow-up questions. [Participant will be provided a summary of the themes]

After hearing me share these themes, what reactions are you having?
What themes resonated with you, and why? Which ones did not, and why?
Based on your own experiences, what meaning do you make of the themes I shared with you?
Are there any elements of your experiences that you feel are missing from the themes?
[The second portion of the interview is expected to take 20 to 30 minutes.]

Conclusion

Thank you for taking time to participate in this interview today. In compensation for the time you have spent participating in my study, I will be giving you a 10-dollar gift card to Amazon.com. I may send the gift card to you via e-mail or postal mail. How would you like to receive the gift card? [Participant’s preferred method of receipt will be noted, and the gift card will be sent within one week via participant’s preferred method]

Thank you. Once I have developed a final draft of the study results, I will send the draft to you via e-mail for you to review. You will specifically be instructed to review the quotes from your phone interviews included in the final draft of the study results. This review will be the final phase of participation in this study, and will be optional. Do you have any questions for me at this time? [If yes, all questions will be answered accordingly. If no, proceed with the interview]

Should any questions or concerns arise after our interview today, please contact me by phone or e-mail. Thank you for participating. I will be in touch with you soon.
The following e-mail will be sent to participants after a draft of the study results has been developed. The purpose of the e-mail will be to provide participants a copy of the draft for them to review the quotes from their interviews included in the draft. Participants will be given two weeks to provide feedback on the draft before a second contact attempt will be made. It will be assumed that if participants do not provide feedback one week after the second contact attempt, they have chosen not to participate in the final draft review.

E-Mail Script (first contact attempt)

Hello (name),

I would like to thank you for your participation thus far in my study. The final (and optional) step of study participation is to review the attached draft of the study results. Specifically, I would like for you to review the quotes from your phone interviews that were included in the study results draft. Information and quotes from your interviews are highlighted in the attached draft. Information from other participant interviews is blacked out for confidentiality purposes.

If there is any portion of the draft where you feel your privacy and confidentiality is not being appropriately maintained, please send me a list of those parts. For each concerning area, please include the page number of the draft, as well as the specific phrase(s) of concern. It will also be helpful for you to provide suggestions for how you would like concerning areas to be modified.

The deadline to send your feedback on the draft is (date: will be two weeks after e-mail was sent). Please contact me by e-mail or phone (517-331-2926) if you have any questions, or would like to request additional time to review the study results. Thank you again for your time and participation.

Sincerely,
Molly Beagle, M.A.
E-Mail Script (second contact attempt)

Hello (name),

I would like to thank you for your participation thus far in my study. The final (and optional) step of study participation is to review the attached draft of the study results. This is my second and final attempt to contact you with regard to the draft review. I specifically would like for you to review the quotes from your phone interviews that were included in the study results draft. Information and quotes from your interviews are highlighted in the attached draft. Information from other participant interviews is blacked out for confidentiality purposes.

If there is any portion of the draft where you feel your privacy and confidentiality is not being appropriately maintained, please send me a list of those parts. For each concerning area, please include the page number of the draft, as well as the specific phrase you would like changed. It will also be helpful for you to provide suggestions for how you would like concerning areas to be modified.

The deadline to send your feedback on the draft is (date: will be one week after e-mail was sent). If I do not receive a response from you before this deadline, I will assume that you have chosen not to participate in the draft review. Please contact me by e-mail or phone (517-331-2926) if you have any questions. Thank you again for your time and participation.

Sincerely,
Molly Beagle, M.A.
APPENDIX N

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval

Western Michigan University
Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: November 1, 2016
To: Mary Z. Anderson, Principal Investigator
    Molly K. Beagle, Student Investigator for dissertation
From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair
Re: HSIRB Project Number 16-10-46

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “A Qualitative Investigation of the Interpersonal Changes White Psychology Trainees Experience During their Race-based Learning and Development” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: October 31, 2017