“Seeing with poetic eyes” is a phrase used by a teacher to describe one of his students, a teenager who could recognize the disconnect between U.S. society’s claims about racial equity and its actual commitment towards that equity. As a teacher, he saw it as his mission to help all of his students see the world in such a critical way with that hope that they would be motivated to pursue antiracism more actively in their lives. In this book, I discuss how critical race theory (CRT) can motivate research on race in sociology of education in a similar way. Specifically, I describe how CRT helped me work with seven white teachers on developing more critical understandings of race. In my ethnographic interviews with these teachers, the analytical tools of CRT gave me a way to openly dialogue with them about issues of race in education. I was able to not only learn from the teachers but also work with them on developing racial awareness. Instead of relying on more liberal forms of sociological research—where the researcher extracts data from participants—CRT helped me promote a more critical approach, one where the researcher and participants work together to actively pursue antiracism in the research act itself. So “seeing with poetic eyes” refers the way that I have come to view research as a means of antiracism. Similarly, I propose that CRT can promote such a critical approach to research on race in the field of sociology of education.
Seeing with Poetic Eyes
In this series, we are establishing a new tradition in the sociology of education. Like many fields, the sociology of education has largely assumed that the field develops through the steady accumulation of studies. Thomas Kuhn referred to this as ‘normal science.’ Yet normal science builds on a paradigm shift, elaborating and expanding the paradigm. What has received less attention are the works that contribute to paradigm shifts themselves. To remedy this, we will focus on books that move the field in dramatic and recognizable ways—what can be called breakthroughs.

Kuhn was analyzing natural science and was been less sure his ideas fit the social sciences. Yet it is likely that the social sciences are more subject to paradigm shifts than the natural sciences because the social sciences are fed back into the social world. Thus sociology and social life react to each other, and are less able separate the knower from the known. With reactivity of culture and knowledge, the social sciences follow a more complex process than that of natural science. This is clearly the case with the sociology of education. The multiplicity of theories and methods mix with issues of normativity— in terms of what constitutes good research, policy and/or practice. Moreover, the sociology of education is increasingly global in its reach—meaning that the national interests are now less defining of the field and more interrogative of what is important to know. This makes the sociology of education even more complex and multiple in its paradigm configurations. The result is both that there is less shared agreement on the social facts of education but more vibrancy as a field. What we know and understand is shifting on multiple fronts constantly. Breakthroughs is to the series for works that push the boundaries—a place where all the books do more than contribute to the field, they remake the field in fundamental ways. Books are selected precisely because they change how we understand both education and the sociology of education.
Seeing with Poetic Eyes

*Critical Race Theory and Moving from Liberal to Critical Forms of Race Research in Sociology of Education*

Benjamin Blaisdell
Dedicated to my son, Pablo, for reminding me why this work is important and when it is time to play.
SERIES PREFACE

BREAKTHROUGHS IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

This book series is seeking the unusual books in sociology of education. The usual books are working out the details of an already established paradigm of research and/or thought. These books are valuable for their contributions to confirming, elaborating, extending, fine tuning and critiquing aspects of established ways of thinking and studying. They are essential to getting things right within the paradigm they are working. The unusual books this series encourages do some of the above no doubt. Every study starts from somewhere. However, the unusual books are more about pushing boundaries, seeing things anew, and pursuing new paradigms of thought. I have titled the series *Breakthroughs* to signal this interest in the unusual books in the sociology of education.

*Breakthroughs* in any field are not easily categorized precisely because they tend to work away from the established but not necessarily in any patterned ways. While many book series have established themselves to pursue a particular promising line of thought, this is not my intention here. While I will encourage multiple books in any vein, I also wish to explore multiple veins. The goal is to encourage a wide range of approaches, each of which makes a claim to push the established boundaries of the sociology of education in some particular manner. The hope is that some of these new ideas and paradigms will be able to articulate what they offer over the established paradigms and if they prove sufficiently promising will become over time what we think of as usual ways of thinking in the sociology of education. Others may not become established as commonsense sociology but I intend with this series to celebrate both the spirit of experimentation and creativity that the sociology of education must have to progress.

It is in this spirit that I welcome Benjamin Blaisdell’s book, *Seeing with Poetic Eyes*, as the first in the series. Critical race theory is relatively recent in its application in sociology of education but has captured the interest of many young scholars of race. It substantive theme is that race is central to the workings of American society and that property rights have trumped human and civil rights in these workings. Blaisdell reviews critical race theory for those who need an introduction but more importantly he is pushing the theory into application. Most critical race studies to date are limited to analysis and critique, but Dr. Blaisdell wanted to see how critical race theory plays with teachers who see themselves, in varying degrees, as allies of students of color. critiques the sociology of education and elaborates what critical race theory can offer the discipline. Sociology of education is after all a creation largely of whites and acts as a form of property itself. Dr. Blaisdell does much more than offer his critique as he works with
teachers to examine their practice and what critical race theory offers it. *Seeing with Poetic Eyes* shows not only what the teachers learned from working with him in this but also how he learned as he worked from one teacher to the next. Here he shows how encounters at the level of practice can inform scholarship as well as how we are to work with those who will actually do the work of critical race theory with students.

I cannot think of a better book to begin this series, and I thank him for it. It pushes boundaries, challenges the extant paradigm of sociology of education, and reminds us that ideas are put to the ultimate test on the ground—not in theoretical works.

March 2009

*George W. Noblit, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to thank all of the teachers in this study. I respect them for the work that they do, and I hope I continue to honor their commitment to education.

I want to thank the scholars who helped me complete this project. I thank Dwight Rogers and James Trier for being encouraging mentors and friends and for their on-going support. I thank Adrienne Davis for sharpening my understanding and analysis of critical race theory. I send a special thank you to Soyini Madison, who has welcomed me into the world of performance and taught me to “feel” the value it bestows. I send a very special thank you to George Noblit for beautifully balancing education with inspiration and for being able to guide me in the world of educational scholarship. George has provided me an incomparable level and quality of mentorship and has taught me to do this work with heart as well as mind.

I also thank my colleagues and friends for your feedback and welcome diversions. In particular, I thank Myriam Casimir being a sounding board during the writing process and Sherick Hughes for welcoming me as a scholar on race. Both Myriam and Sherick have helped me navigate the complexities involved in race work. I also thank Paula Grubbs for helping me find time to write.

Finally, I thank my parents for their unending support. I thank my mom, Carol, and my stepfather, Al, for their encouragement and faith in me. I thank my dad, Lincoln, for his constant enthusiasm and warmest care. I send a special thank you to my stepmother, Millie, for walking me through the tumult and joys of graduate school and of fatherhood and for literally being there for me in all of the crunch times.
In this book, I examine the ways in which white educators discuss and conceptualize race. I report on an ethnographic study in which I used critical race theory (CRT) in a dialogic performance with seven white teachers in order to open up conversations about how white teachers can support or resist colorblindness, white privilege, and white racial dominance. Based on this study, I explain how CRT can help move white teachers from liberal to more critical understandings of racism and antiracism and move the field of sociology of education to approaches to research on race that are also more critical in practice, thus following the more transformative aspects of the race work present in the field.

The conceptual framework I describe below focuses on how CRT can inform critical perspectives on race in sociology of education, specifically in how the field can uncover and work against liberal accounts of race. I point out how in the field of sociology of education, scholarship already exists that uncovers white racism. I also point out that scholarship in the field already exists that exposes liberal ideology, an ideology that often supports institutional forms of racism. At the same time, as a teacher educator who has attempted to use the scholarship in the field to challenge white racism and much of its liberal underpinnings, I have had a hard time using much of the empirical research in the field to pursue the more transformative agenda/intentions of critical research. CRT offered me a useful way to pursue such an agenda.

Liberalism persists in schools (Apple, 2004) and in the thinking and practice of white teachers (e.g., see Kailin, 1999) and this persistence can negatively affect students of colors other than white. Sociology of education can challenge this liberalism (and has to some extent), but to more effectively work against those negative effects, I believe the field needs to further its development of critical approaches to what Morrow (2000) calls “mediational” analyses, especially when examining the persistence of liberalism and institutional racism in schools. So, in this book, I discuss how sociology of education can take advantage of the critical theory strain in the field and use CRT to combat liberal interpretations of race when conducting research on race.

In the study I employed a performance approach to research, which was useful in examining and even challenging the liberalism of the teachers in the study. The performance approach encouraged me to focus on the pedagogical aspects of the research (Denzin, 2003) not only in the traditional sense of how the data informs the field but also in the more reflective sense of how the research act itself informed my participants as potentially antiracist teachers and me as a potentially
CHAPTER 1

antiracist researcher and teacher educator. In this sense, performance methodology—and dialogic performance, in particular, which I discuss later in this chapter—enabled me to develop and pursue a more critical methodology.

As one of my goals with the book is to comment on sociology of education, I briefly discuss how the field traditionally has examined race. I focus the following conceptual framework on how empirical—and primarily qualitative—studies in the field are not always as effective at challenging liberal interpretations of race as they could be. I, then, use the framework to set up an argument about how CRT can foster more critical interpretations and, thus, promote more critical research practices. I do not intend to argue that no empirical studies that pursue a critical line of inquiry exist but rather that it is often the case that these studies offer only limited ways to use their research to challenge racism in whites that do not already adhere to more critical understandings of race.

As Morrow (2000) argues, “the dominant tendency in critical pedagogy is—despite much rhetoric to the contrary—to presume normative stances without pursuing the more complex strategy of dialogical communicative ethics…” (59–60). Basically, Morrow claims that much of the qualitative work in critical sociology of education does not discuss how to effectively analyze both the structural and agential dimensions of institutional oppression. He argues that much of the qualitative research that adheres to a critical theory perspective fails to “deal conceptually and analytically with…concrete power relations and structures of domination” (60). My claim is similar to Morrow’s. Specifically, while I believe critical theory has been effective in critiquing liberalism, empirical studies on race in the field of sociology of education have often fallen short in developing a critical ethnographic methodology that can be used to counter that liberalism.

As Gallagher (2000) argues, studies—including his own—that uncover racist comments from white participants fail to challenge the participants on the underlying logic of such comments. Rather, the “objective interviewer stance” of such studies “absolves the researcher and informant of the responsibility of challenging white racism and white privilege” (72–73). Most of the studies do not take on the goal of challenging racism as part of the direct research act, so they do not attempt to develop effective analytical techniques with which to work against structures of racial domination in school settings. Even the qualitative studies rely on what Denzin (2003) calls ethnographic textualism. Ethnographic textualism views data collection as a means to ascertain some sort of material truth about a given context rather than as a means of creating an interpretation of events or conditions in that setting. When studies rely on what is essentially a post-positivist understanding of data, they fail to position the research act as a transformative event. That is not to say that these studies do not offer valuable insight. However, a reliance on ethnographic textualism prevents the researchers from making the transformative possibilities of their research explicit, a step that could make these studies better achieve the transformative goals of critical theory itself. Furthermore, relying on ethnographic textualism prevents researchers from working against their complicity in “validat[ing] and justify[ing] the existing racial hierarchy that privileges whites” (Gallagher, 72). My goal in this book, then, is to discuss how CRT can be used in a more dialogic approach to research on race, an
addressing liberalism

approach that like many before it uncovers white racism but that also does not absolve itself of challenging white racism.

I discuss the potential transformative possibilities of a dialogic approach in the context of education research by specifically discussing how CRT can be used with whites (and white teachers specifically) towards developing dispositions and practices that counter liberal interpretations of race and racism. Such an approach can inform research in the sociology of education that has an agenda of combating racism can make its goals and possibilities for transformation more explicit.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

I want to put forth a couple of caveats before I discuss my claims about the field of sociology of education. First of all, while I critique the field of sociology of education and its employment of critical theory, I also want to be clear that both have enabled the development of more critical and comprehensive studies of race in education. Second of all, my critiques stem from my own experiences as a researcher and teacher educator who focuses on issues of race and racism. The limitations I have found in the field are based in my ability (and inability) to use empirical studies in the field to understand and communicate the existence and nature of institutional racism in education. My critique is not intended as an all-embracing denunciation of sociology of education but rather more as a formative assessment from my standpoint as a budding researcher and educator in the field. In this conceptual framework, I explain the way in which the remnants of liberalism in the field, in addition to in educational settings, hinder the political and transformative project of critical theory. The backdrop for this explication is my experience as a teacher educator and researcher who has attempted to use sociology of education to develop a dialogic method of the critical examination of institutional racism. It has been my experience that liberalism is one of the key impediments to moving white teachers to more critical understandings of race. My intent is neither to overstate the existence or influence of liberalism in the field nor to understate the ability of the field to develop more critical transformative projects. Rather, my goal is to propose one direction the field can take to challenge liberalism in educational settings, overcome the liberal remnants in empirical sociological research, and further the field’s potential in developing such critical projects.

Sociology of Education

Sociology of education has long been concerned with examining race and racism and in working against racial inequity in schools. The broader field of sociology has provided a firm basis from which to study race.

Sociologists of race deeply contextualize race and racism by historicizing race within the context of unequal social relations. Next, they help to shed light on the inextricable links between race and class and explore how race can be manipulated and constructed to benefit certain groups and disadvantage
others. Like critical race theorists in the law, sociologists of race call for a deeper understanding of racism that locates it at the very center of social, political and economic relations in society. (Lynn and Parker, 2006)

Recent work in sociology of education has analyzed, in particular, the existence of institutional racism (e.g., McNamee & Miller, 2004; Ballantine, 2001; Oakes, Wells, Jones, and Datnow, 1997; Fischer, Hout, Jaankowski, Lucas, Swidler and Voss, 1996; Omi and Winant, 1994). Furthermore, very recent studies (Feagin and O’Brien, 2003; Myers, 2003) have furthered seminal work of scholars like Frankenburg (1993) and examined the perpetuation of institutional racism via the everyday actions of individual actors. In this section, I examine and critique how the field of sociology of education addresses issues of race and racism with regard to liberal ideology—highlighting the field’s strengths, limitations, and possibilities—in order to then examine in the following section how CRT can further the field. In particular, I will argue how CRT can help sociology of education analyze and work against the presence of liberalism in teacher thinking as well as provide mechanisms for empirical research in the field to more closely connect the research act with a challenge to instances of institutional racism, potentially overcoming the remnants of liberalism that remain in the field itself.

The Influence of Critical Theory

Freeman (1990) explains why it is hard for people with racial privilege—and specifically whites—to envision broader structural change when he describes the concept of perpetrator versus victim perspectives. In his early piece of CRT, he explains how racialized groups of people that have not been traditionally marginalized hold on to a perpetrator perspective of the world. In this view, people believe they are free from complicity in racism, except for those few who actually perpetrate overt acts of racism. Therefore, remedies to racism exist only in controls on those few individuals. Alternatively, those who come from racialized groups that have been traditionally marginalized hold onto a victim perspective of the world. In this view, racism is a condition that permeates their lives more broadly. Since racism is a condition of life, the only way to end it is to address all the aspects of society that contribute to it. A victim perspective approach to the elimination of racism would require substantial changes in the structure of social institutions like education. Liberal ideology promotes a perpetrator view of racism. In the field of law, for example, the dominance of liberal ideology is apparent in policy and legal decisions that fall short of radical structural changes and that view institutional decisions that privilege racial minorities as unfair to whites, who allegedly have no direct role in overt racism.

In contrast to liberalism then, critical theory takes structural aspects of racism into account, attempts to work from a victim perspective of racism, and critiques social institutions more substantially. Issues such racism and sexism are not mere fissures in the structure of society but rather inherent to structure of social institutions themselves. Therefore, the goal of critical theory is to change those structures more radically. Part of why critical theory can envision more radical
change than liberalism does is because of how race is conceptualized in critical theory. Liberal accounts of race tend to hold onto static, even biological, notions of race. This type of vision of race fails to examine the historical and social construction of racial categorization. Gotanda (1995) argues that these accounts of race fail to examine the political construction of race, i.e. race becomes an apolitical categorization (p. 259). This type of categorization can lead to oversimplified remedies to racism, such as an over-reliance on integration in lieu of other possibilities. The argument is that if these racial groups (black, white, Latino, etc.), which are defined as fixed categories, are integrated into society—i.e., that they legally have the same rights as privileges as whites—then their lives will be better and society in general will be better off. Critical theory problematizes this view by analyzing how the construction of these categories has contributed to and continues to contribute to subjugation, even if integration and equal rights appear to exist. In its view that racial categories are socially and politically constructed, critical theory can historicize those constructions and analyze who gains and who loses in apparent attempts at racial remedy.

Critical theory’s understanding of the historical/political construction of race influences the way in which theory is used. Drawing from the developments of Marxist thought and the Frankfurt School, critical theory uses theory as a transformative activity. Since truth is contextual and political, theory is not important as a way to find absolute truth but rather as a mechanism to effect social change. Theory becomes about contextual action and not truth-seeking. The implications for this approach on how to address inequality in education are significant. Giroux (2001) argues that where liberal accounts of education don’t challenge the institution of schooling—i.e., they look at its continuity—critical theory looks for the breaks in that continuity. Rather than try to uncover instances of racism within institutions such as schools, critical theory attempts to uncover what he refers to as the hidden curriculum of schools, which itself may be racist. For example, critical theory would look at how tracking segregates students, illuminating how it claims to give students what they need (according to a social efficiency view of curriculum) but actually discriminates against students along racial and class lines. Giroux points out that critical theory has been influential in the way in which sociology of education analyzes issues such as racism.

The Persistence of Liberalism

At the same time, however, as Giroux (1997) also points out, liberalism in educational discourse persists in ways that continue to frame students as needy or deprived (of culture, experiences, etc.). In analyzing social injustice, liberalism focuses on individuals rather than on social groups or the structure of societal institutions in conceptualizing social change (Apple, 2004; Popkewitz, 1998). That is to say, a liberal approach to challenging racism would look at individuals who were overtly racist and might enact laws that prevent these types of racist acts on other individuals. In following this individualistic approach to resolving injustice, a liberal interpretation of the institution of education promotes principles that resist a
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more critical understanding of how the institution produces racial disparity. First, liberalism values neutrality. In education, this means that teachers believe schools to be culturally neutral in structure. Thus, the school rules, in-class discourse, and curriculum are assumed not to promote any one culture over another. In such a viewpoint there is no acknowledgement then of the link of those structures to whiteness. Second, therefore, liberalism promotes colorblindness. As institutions are culturally neutral, acknowledging racial difference and making decisions based on race are themselves practices betray fairness. Schools are assumed to be culturally neutral, so they do not privilege one race over another. As racial privilege does not exist for any group including whites, to make a decision based on race would thus be unfair and would not support a liberal approach equity.

Such a colorblind view of equity only recognizes intentional forms of racism. Since the institution itself is fair towards all, it cannot possibly marginalize any group of students based on race or any other cultural difference. Instances of racism are anomalies (not systemically inherent) and racial disparity is not caused by the institution itself. Rather, such disparity must stem from either these anomalies (which are intentional acts by those who do not follow the institution’s rules) or from outside sources (and in educational settings, teachers might name these sources as economics/poverty or the culturally deficient home lives of people from certain cultures). Therefore, the solutions to racial disparity do not exist at the institutional level. Instead, racial equity can be achieved by working against those anomalies or by addressing those factors that do not fall under the responsibility of the social institution. This might include working against those who practice explicit, intentional forms of racism. It might also include claiming that the responsibility for racial equity lays outside of the school or even with those who actually suffer the consequences of disparity. If only they had better resources or their families valued education more, racial equity could be achieved.

For example, in the case of school desegregation, laws were created to make it illegal to deny an individual access to a school or a class strictly because a student is a member of a racial minority. Such laws do not contradict a liberal ideological approach to social change, where the focus of change is on individuals or policies that overtly discriminate against racial minorities. In addition, such laws do not require those who are complicit in institutional racism to change their ideology with regards to the causes of racial disparity. That ideology dictates the normalized practices within schools and classroom—e.g., tracking or disciplinary practices—that disproportionately affect students of color. Since there is no dramatic change in how schools are run day-to-day, those practices can continue to affect students of color. In fact, with the official and overt barriers to equal resources out of the way, the victims of racism have the responsibility to also change their behavior if they are to access “equal” opportunities, resources, etc. In this way, liberalism promotes a slow, incremental approach to social change. Laws change first, which will eventually lead to a more egalitarian society as those who have been the victims of racism adapt to the existing structure of society and its institutions. This law-by-law approach does not radically challenge social institutions (rather it works through them), does not historicize those institutions, and does not examine
or utilize the relationship between ideological and material change, in effect not sufficiently affecting either.

Omi and Winant (1994) provide a concise explanation of how liberalism fails to challenge institutional racism. They claim that liberalism fails to acknowledge the inherent racism of the state and its policies.

The argument is that state actions in the past and present have treated people in very different ways according to their race, and thus the government cannot retreat from its policy responsibilities in this area. It [the state] cannot suddenly declare itself “color-blind” without in fact perpetuating the same type of differential, racist treatment. (57)

Liberal interpretations of race, which do in fact make such colorblind claims without historicizing societal institutions such as education, do not link race to social structure. Government initiatives that simply create new policies that attempt to counter racism without partaking in a broader antiracist agenda that includes a critique and analysis of the government and its history of racism will in fact perpetuate racism. Therefore, institutions like the government need to develop approaches to antiracism in a more comprehensive way. To use Omi and Winant’s phrase, the government (like other social institutions) needs to “fulfill its responsibility to uphold a robust conception of equality” (58), particularly with regards to race. Liberalism, by claiming the government and its policies to be colorblind, fails to rearticulate race in such a broad way. It does not critique the inherent and historical existence of institutional racism and relies on individual policies to counter racism.

Furthermore, liberalism fails to effectively counter institutional racism because it does not connect its definition of race to social structure. Omi and Winant (1994) explain that racial formation is “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p. 55) and that such formation is racist if it “creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race” (p. 71). So, when race is defined only in relation to “interest group, class fraction, nationality, or cultural identity” (p. 111), the connection to the social and political agendas that control the construction of racial categories and hierarchies is missed. Specific racial interest groups or cultural identities, for example, have been developed in response to that socio-political construction of race. The liberal view does not acknowledge the socio-political forces that continue to influence the development of those group affiliations and racial identities. Rather, it sees them more statically. By failing to link its conception of race to how race is constructed by social and political structure(s), liberalism can only understand racism as something that was developed in the past and not as something that continues to be promoted. In contrast to critical theory, which attempts to focus on the on-going social construction of race, liberalism continues to envision the remedy for racial disparity, then, in individual policies, without recognizing how those policies allow institutional racism to be perpetuated. As Apple (2004) and Dale (1976) have argued, the institution, along with its policies and standardized practices, becomes the remedy for social inequities like racial disparity.
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Liberalism in Empirical Studies of Race in Sociology

This type of liberal interpretation of race still exists in some empirical studies in the sociology of education, particularly in discussions of the causes of racial disparity in schools and how that disparity can be overcome. Racial identity and group affiliation in such studies is more statically defined and the cultural practices that go with them are measured and categorized according to an un-named racial norm. The focus of such analyses is on individual or cultural factors that contribute to minority students’ lack of academic achievement and not on the social and political structural practices that act on and marginalize those students. For example, The Black-White Test Score Gap, edited by Jencks and Phillips (1998), is a major work that tries to explain the gap in achievement on standardized tests between white and black students. While the study offers a comprehensive look at some of the factors that lead to the achievement gap, overall it fails to examine societal institutions such as schooling or the economic structure. The various authors, including Jencks and Phillips, do attempt to explain the persistence of the test score gap and at times try to shift blame away from the people who suffer most from it. For instance, they attack arguments that paint negative pictures of African American students’ innate academic ability and they argue that schools should push more lower socioeconomic status (SES) students into honors and advanced placement (AP) courses. However, the language they use and the paradigm of thought they employ do not include an analysis of how social institutions contribute to the conditions that minority and lower SES students live in. For example, they discuss how parenting practices have “more impact on children’s cognitive development than preschool practices” (p. 46) and how changing these practices (in addition to school changes) can positively affect this development. However, they never discuss the disconnect between school culture and home culture. They do not discuss the sociopolitical factors that affect those parental practices. While their intent is a broad look at both the causes of and solutions to the test score gap, their analysis and discussion is acontextual. More importantly, it is apolitical. For example, they call for theories that “pay more attention to the way family members and friends interact with each other” (p. 43), but they do not discuss how one type of interaction may be more valued in educational settings than another or how the racial nature of these interactions may affect how that valuation. In this way, their focus is on uncovering information that could lead to changes in educational practice and policy. They do not discuss how educational practice and policy themselves lead to the achievement gap. In this way they fail to incorporate a social structural interpretation of race and racism.

There are other examples of sociology of education that take similar approaches to the study of race (e.g., Hallinan, 1994; Kao, Tienda, & Schneider, 1996; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996). While these studies may highlight where inequality exists in school and examine the differences in the characteristics of various racial groups, most unintentionally put the blame for unequal academic achievement on individuals and on their families, cultural practices and communities, failing to acknowledge institutional factors that act on students’ lives. Similar to the studies in Jencks and Phillip’s volume, these works either do not take a strong social
ADDRESSING LIBERALISM

structural look at schooling or limit their structural analysis to individual policies. For the most part, in accordance with liberal ideology, they limit their interpretations of the existence of racism in institutions as fissures that can be mended by changes in behavior by the victims of racism. Furthermore, the mending process they envision is one that does not overtly call for any more drastic change in the current structure of schooling.

Studies That Challenge Liberalism. Sociologists of education have also attempted to work against that type of liberal discourse. Though I will point out some of the limitations of these scholars, what is common to all is their desire to work against the dominant discourses in education, which Giroux (1997) argues, “fail to understand how schools are implicated in reproducing oppressive ideologies and social practices” (p. 130). The strengths of the works I cite in the next three sections is that they do account for schools’ complicity in the reproduction of institutional racism and they do offer useful analyses that help uncover that complicity. My critique of the studies in the following two sections focuses on their lack of developing a way to counter such complicity. They do not extensively develop any mediational analyses. I understand that such an analytical approach was not the intent of these studies, but I critique them in order to argue that more work on race in the field is needed, particularly work that follows the motivation of critical theory and makes explicit the processes that can effectively counter institutional racism. Furthermore, by not challenging (or even discussing how to challenge) the white racism that is uncovered, these studies may actually promote inferential racism (Gallagher, 2000, drawing from Hall [1981]). In essence, by using the research act to get whites to express racist views and then not challenging the problematic premises of these views, researchers may actually allow such racist viewpoints to perpetuate themselves.

Studies That Examine Structural Practices. A good example of sociological research that does focus on uncovering the way in which educational institutional practices and policies do contribute to racial disparity is the work of Oakes, et al. (1997) in their analysis of school tracking practices. These authors show how attempts to detrack can actually be seen as threats to the institution of schooling. Although they acknowledge that detracking does not automatically guarantee students of color a better education, their analysis does highlight the detrimental effects of tracking and illuminates the politics of decisions to track or detrack. Thus, their work begins to look more closely at the political nature of how schools are structured in ways that contribute to racism.

The above example also shows that the perpetrator perspective is still prevalent in schooling, even in attempts at racial remedy. When schools detrack, parents with privilege can still manipulate school sites to maintain that privilege for their children. Therefore, as the analysis by Oakes, et al. (1997) shows, simple decisions that change one aspect of an educational institution can make it appear that racism has been addressed without actually affecting the institution’s inherent deeper racist roots, roots that cause the structure itself to be racist. Scholars such as Oakes who employ a critical theory approach attempt to take a victim perspective on
inequality, highlighting how singular changes such as detracking may not affect the deeper structure that maintains white privilege and racism with the hope of opening up space for more radical school change. A critique I have, as mentioned earlier, is that even though this research interprets the nature of racism in more critical and structural ways, it also often fails to address the material ways that change can be promoted. Furthermore, because the research adheres to traditional research roles, it fails to offer examples of how to use the research act itself for more immediate transformative ends. While I agree with Morrow (2000) that not all critical research needs to be participatory action research, I also believe that sociologists who follow critical perspectives need to develop research approaches that highlight potential ways to counter institutionally marginalizing practices, especially if they do not want to promote the inferential racism that Gallagher (2000) and Hall (1981) warn against. In the end, adherence to only traditional research approaches can limit researchers’ ability to achieve the transformative agenda of their work.

Studies That Examine Teacher Thought And Discourse. Another way recent work in sociology has critically analyzed race has been via studies that examine how people think about and discuss race. In these studies, sociology of education has been very useful in uncovering how race continues to be constructed in ways that lead to institutional racism (e.g., Frankenburg, 1993; Hytten and Warren, 2003). More recently, this work has been specifically effective in uncovering the links between white privilege and racism. For example, there have been recent studies that analyze how whites talk about race and how such talk is connected to various forms of racism (e.g.; Feagin and O’Brien; 2003, Myers; 2005). Feagin and O’Brien (2005) investigate how whites in positions with a certain amount of power either adhere to or work against racist attitudes and practices. Their rationale is that these whites have a certain amount of influence on the “social strata” and “social networks” (p. 28) which make up our society and thus uncovering their racial understandings is important to eventually work against racism. Myers (2003) similarly hopes to uncover how people, and not just whites, talk about race, especially in negative ways, which she calls racetalk. Her goals are to highlight such racetalk so as to show how it still exists in society and to comment on the damage that such talk can do, and she claims/implies that this illumination will help people challenge the practice of racetalk.

While my study is similar to these in that it also is a study of whites talking about race, there are some key differences as well. Perhaps the most significant difference is in the research approach itself. As I stated above, these studies have been very effective and useful in describing how racism is connected to white privilege and how the on-going construction of race contributes to that privilege. They follow Omi and Winant’s (1994) claim that understandings of race and racism have to be connected to social structures. However, similar to studies that examine structural practices such as Oakes (1997), these studies do not link their analyses to practices that can counter the racism they analyze. Put another way, because they, too, stick to traditional research roles they do not pursue an
extensively mediational analysis of racism and do not directly challenge the white racism they uncover.

Studies That Model Critical Methodology. Some studies in the field do break away from these traditional research roles and pursue a mediational agenda. A key example is Subtractive Schooling by Angela Valenzuela (1997). While Valenzuela is not explicit about developing a methodology to counter the institutional oppression she encounters, she does pursue a more critical research approach in her use of both methodology and theory. In her research, she did this in part by attempting to use the privilege and position as researchers to affect material change in the school she studied. For example, she involved herself immediately (to paraphrase Denzin [2003]) and worked to mediate a confrontation between a teacher and his students. Furthermore, Valenzuela’s analysis consciously narrates the actions of the students (actions that can be interpret ed as resistant to school policies and practices) and of the teacher (a culturally responsive and caring teacher) in critically racially conscious ways. She puts the both the students’ and the teacher’s behavior in the context of the social structure of the school. Thus, her analysis resists a liberal interpretation of the students’ and teacher’s actions that would ignore how those actions were influences by the policies and practices of the school itself. In doing so, Valenzuela takes a critical ethnography approach to research, an approach that uses the research act to challenge “taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control” (Madison, 2005, p. 5). Furthermore, she inserts herself in the research setting in way in which she can affect change immediately. In fact, such an approach—one that both puts students actions in the context of larger institutional structures and that involves the research as an active participant in is more common in Latino education and LatCrit.

In her study of white, female pre-service teachers, McIntyre (1997) had a similar agenda, and in fact, her approach is perhaps the most similar to mine. She employed what she calls a participatory action research approach to heighten the critical consciousness (regarding race) of the participants in her study. While her agenda may have been explicit as mine if attempting to change the views of her research participants, she did attempt to challenge some of their views on race and whiteness, especially as those views diverted the issues away from the responsibilities of whites and at times justified certain types of racetalk (or what McIntyre calls white talk). My study attempts a similar approach to McIntyre’s and incorporates into it a more explicit dialogic analysis of race via the use of CRT. Perhaps some differences between our projects (which in no way diminish the power of McIntyre’s project) are that I take this type of study to in-service teachers (who have more school-specific experiences to draw on in our dialogue) and that I do not focus in any depth on the construction white identity (which is certainly a strength of McIntyre’s study). By discussing with teachers their perspectives of daily classroom life, my focus is on how white teachers support or resist institutional forms of racism.
I want to reiterate that I believe the field has long been concerned with foregrounding the relationship between race and educational inequity. New scholarship exists (such as the examples above) that recognizes the importance of centering race in its analysis. The intent of my critique has been to point out that persistence of liberalism in much of the empirical research and how that liberalism can mitigate the transformative potential of research that has an antiracist agenda. While many of the researchers I cited do acknowledge the on-going social structural construction of race, the liberal remnants that remain exist in how the studies promote a challenge to racism. All but a very few studies, even those that employ the most critical interpretations of racism, fail to discuss how to uncover racism in their participants and also how to then challenge that racism more immediately in the research act. McIntyre (1997) and Frankenburg (1993) both discuss how raising awareness about white racism does not necessarily lead to participants changing what they do (and my study falls into that same trap). McIntyre even raises concerns similar to those articulated by Gallagher (2000) that allowing the white participants to discuss their views of race actually allowed them to maintain racist views. Because of the research approaches they employ, their intent is not to challenge racism in such an immediate sense. However, by not making a link to potential antiracist practices, the studies assume that their analyses—which are indeed important and informative—will lead to some progress towards the elimination of racism. This assumption itself falls into the trap of liberal ideology in that it assumes that the structures in place in academia will lead to transformation in institutional thought and practice. I am not asserting that scholarship should only lead clearly to direct action. I reiterate my agreement with Morrow (2000) that participatory action research is not the only form of research that can fall under the label of critical theory research. However, to avoid perpetuating inferential racism, I do believe that as researchers of race in particular, we should not be satisfied with following traditional research roles (especially if we adhere to many of the tenets of critical theory) and traditional avenues for recommending and affecting change. Therefore, my claim in this book, then, is that sociologists of education need to be more determinant and explicit in making the link between their analyses and potentially antiracist practices. In that sense, this book is a call to scholars of race—especially white scholars of race—to make our work more immediate in our agenda of antiracism. The hope is that research in the field can continue to move in more critically antiracist directions.

Toward that end, my study has an objective that is similar to Feagin and O’Brien’s (2003) and to Myers’ (2005) in that I want to highlight certain discourse with the hope that such exposure will help educators challenge it. However, drawing on the motivation of CRT to challenge racism (and not just study it) and on Ladson-Billings’ (1998) call to make this work relevant to teachers and students, I have attempted to use CRT to directly affect the practice of teachers in the study. Rather than only examine the phenomena of racetalk and extract information from my co-performers, I attempted to also challenge the colorblind and liberal views contained in such talk. I do not at all mean to indicate that studies
like Feagin and O’Brien’s and Myers’ are less useful than mine. On the contrary, they are fuller articulations of the complicated dynamics of racetalk. The scope of their studies exceeded mine in their examination of how whites talk about race and are especially useful in uncovering the key underlying ideologies that whites employ. The strength of my study is that I start to examine how to challenge racetalk and the colorblind ideology that supports it. My attempt has been to enact a mediational analysis that links critical social theory with a qualitative methodological approach that examines and challenges institutional racism. CRT was key for me in making this link.

**Critical Race Theory**

CRT is very much in line with critical theory in several ways. In CRT, theory is certainly a transformational, political act. It moves away from empiricism and positivism, especially as traditionally defined. It also retains a structural critique of social institutions. Critical race scholars would agree with Giroux (2001) that this critique must include the voices of traditionally silenced groups. CRT, however, would not see the need, as Giroux does, to highlight the importance of the Frankfurt school. Because it comes from the Frankfurt school, this version of critical theory comes from a European tradition that might not adequately represent or speak to the experiences of non-whites. Structural critique, then, must come from the margins, from new perspectives. Matsuda (1995/1987) describes the need to look to the bottom. Those who have experienced injustices such as racism, in fact those who are the continual victims of it, have a better understanding of that perspective. Just as civil rights lawyers often pursued their own agenda (rather than that of the parents they claimed to be fighting for) in school desegregation cases (Bell, 1995/1976), scholars who are not victims of racism may not be the most appropriate to lead the fight against racism. This is not to say that white scholars cannot do work against racism but that they should let scholars of color take the lead in the pursuit of this agenda (Delgado, 1995/1984; Guinier & Torres, 2002).

Equally important in CRT is that while sociologists of education often parallel race and class, CRT centers race. This is not to say that CRT scholars think class (or gender or language background for that matter) is unimportant. Rather, they believe that race has played a significant and central role in discrimination in society and social institutions like schools (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In fact, by centering race, CRT scholars believe that these other social ills can be addressed as well and that all forms of injustice can be examined for their intersectionality (Guinier & Torres, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). One of the primary ways that CRT centers race is by analyzing how racism is created and maintained via a system of norms rooted in whiteness. “Once we understand how our categories, tools, and doctrines influence us, we may escape their sway and work more effectively for liberation” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000, p. 213). For whites, this understanding must include an awareness of how those categories, tools, and doctrines make us complicit in racism. The ways we set guidelines, organize knowledge, and create policy are rooted in and perpetuate white privilege, and
CRT can help us expose the creation of that privilege, a privilege that makes us complicit in racism.

In this way, CRT maintains a connection to whiteness studies, both which uncover and challenge practices of white privilege. At the same time, CRT and whiteness studies differ somewhat in how they challenge white privilege. Both highlight practices of whiteness that marginalize people of color. The difference is in the specific concepts that CRT offers (some of which will be described below) that can be used to analyze and challenge those practices. In addition, where whiteness studies is at least in part concerned with working towards positive white identity formation (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998; Rodriguez, 2000), CRT uses these concepts to work more exclusively at tearing down material and ideological barriers to racial equality, and in particularly institutional racism as sustained by the practice of white racial dominance.

This nexus of material and ideological change is important for such social change to be sustained. The work of Iglesias (2002) and Delgado (1995/1984) shows that the ultimate goal of CRT is not to only change laws or rules but also to change ideology and action. Changing a rule within an institution without changing that institution’s ideology will only allow the institution to maintain its current inequities (Iglesias, 2002). So, changing institutional ideologies is necessary. Changes in rules and law are part of this project but they are not the end goal and we cannot rely on rules and laws alone. Bell (1995/1976, 1995/1980) has shown how changing laws is not sufficient. Laws can be circumvented or accommodated to maintain privilege. Segregation still exists in schools, and in some regions segregation has increased recently (Laosa, 2001). As Oakes et al. (1997) have shown, schools maintain an in-school form of segregation via tracking. Furthermore, desegregation has not guaranteed equitable educational resources and opportunities for students of color (Bell, 1995/1976). So, changing (or at least engaging) institutional ideology is also necessary in order to bring about changes in institutional practices that can have positive effects on the lives of people of color. An example of this is the University of Texas decision to develop an admissions policy that involves racial and class awareness. So, ideological change is a necessary to bring about material changes in people’s lives, and in the end, material change is the goal of CRT. CRT doesn’t fight for the idea of desegregation. It fights for better schools, better resources, and better curricula for people of color.

Critical Race Theory and Naming Whiteness

One of the primary ways CRT accomplishes this socio-political agenda is via an analysis of white racial dominance, or what I call naming whiteness. Following certain primary tenets, CRT analysis can explain the existence of white ways of seeing and being in very concrete ways, and it is this concreteness that makes it so useful as a critically transformative research approach. I have discussed these tenets along with CRT’s analysis of whiteness in other work (Blaisdell, 2005a, 2005b). Below, I summarize that work as I describe what I mean by naming whiteness.
Naming whiteness involves uncovering concrete and specific examples of how white privilege is maintained by institutional practices, and it includes an analysis of how those practices are maintained in both material and ideological ways. That is to say, institutional practices that perpetuate white privilege and dominance are the result of the specific practices of individuals and the relationship of those privileges to dominant ideologies. As I quoted from Delgado and Stefancic (2000) above, those practices and the ideologies from which they stem create and reify ways of categorization that afford or deny privilege. Therefore, the goal is to name those practices for the way in which they perpetuate racial dominance and to connect them to their adherence to and support of such ideologies. By focusing on how individuals are a legitimating and reproducing component of the construction of institutional racism, naming whiteness does not ignore that institutional racism has actors (i.e., it isn’t merely a monolithic “system” that exists beyond the scope of redress) and it allows for a conceptualization of agency (i.e., an ability to develop practices that do not merely support the dominant ideologies) that can occur in relation to the structure(s) contextualizing people’s lives. In other words, naming whiteness is a way to construct a mediational analysis that concurrently addresses (1) both social structure and individual agency and (2) both material and ideological change.

The first tenet that supports CRT’s analysis of whiteness is that racism is inherent to the structure of the societal institutions of the U.S. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Therefore, it counters the liberal understanding of racism as a set of abnormal occurrences that can be eliminated one-by-one. As the inherent-ness of racism is perpetuated by an ideology that fails to acknowledge its existence, what becomes important for CRT is to critique colorblindness. In school settings, this involves uncovering how school policies and norms privilege whites over non-whites. Scholars have illustrated how those policies and norms are rooted in whiteness and how they negatively affect students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Apple, 2000). So, a goal in using CRT with educators, and with white educators in particular, is to expose the normalcy of racism and perpetuate an understanding that we enact white ways of seeing and being (Blaisdell, 2005a) that help sustain white racial dominance.

Another key tenet that can help researchers communicate white’s complicity and name whiteness is the concept of whiteness as property. As Harris (1995/1993) explains, whiteness exists as a form of property that helps whites use and enjoy certain privileges, exclude those deemed not to be white from those privileges, and debase that which does not correspond to a white cultural standard. Researchers of race in education can explain how this process exists in the regulations of schools and the dispositions and actions of school personnel. In other words, researchers can uncover the ways in which educators categorize their students based on the white norms those students are able to live up to. As the ownership of whiteness confers benefits to those who have it and denies them to those that do not, the connection can then be made to how educators dole out or hold back curricular and instructional resources based on how their students adhere to and succeed based on white norms. Thus, the link can be made to how this whiteness as a form of property controls the equitable access to educational resources and success. In
making this link, researchers can again point out the specific practices of individual educators in their specific school contexts so as to make the connection between micro and macro level process—i.e., between individual practice and institutional, societal structures.

When the educational practices of whites are then named for their whiteness—i.e., when white ways of seeing and being are exposed for how they execute whiteness as a form of property—researchers can then work to “revision” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2000) the existence of institutional racism. That is to say, researchers can help explain institutional racism as a phenomena that exists because of how whites privilege whiteness through their actions and because of how they adhere to ideologies—such as liberalism—that mask how those actions make them complicit in white racial dominance. Traditionally, CRT has used narrative or counterstory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) to offer new accounts of racism that unmask its normality and that include the complicity of whites. As history is a tool that has been used by whites to maintain privilege, traditional accounts of history have left out the voices of the marginalized. Therefore, CRT uses narratives from these groups (in essence, looking to the bottom) to challenge the assumed neutrality and race-less-ness of those accounts, thus historicizing institutions and highlighting the voices of people of color. Researchers of race in education can similarly use the analysis of whiteness to create critical accounts of racism in school settings.

CRT’s implications for sociology of education lie in its ability to extend a critical examination of race to a critical methodology of race. In particular, I find that CRT’s specific analysis of whiteness lends itself well to a mediational approach to research. This analysis is similar to the recent work in the field that links how race is practiced in daily life to the institutional structures that treat people who have been categorized as non-white differently to those who have been categorized as white. In that way, CRT maintains the connection of materiality to ideology and of the individual to the structural in its analysis. In fact, naming whiteness furthers the project of sociologists like Myers (2005) and Feagin and O’Brien (2003) because it offers an approach that breaks the dichotomy between macro-level and micro-level analysis in the development of critically antiracist research. CRT can further such research by making researchers consider the political nature of how they represent and interpret their findings and by paying close attention to how they respond to white racism as occurs in a more immediate sense in the research process.

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE CHALLENGE TO LIBERALISM

I began this study by using CRT to examine the concept of colorblindness through the eyes of teachers in order to understand how teachers’ beliefs in colorblindness relate to their teaching practices. In my conversations with teachers, I moved from an examination of colorblindness, to one of whiteness, and then to discussions of race and racism more broadly. The hope was to dialogue with teachers about race in order to affect perceptions and practices that privilege whiteness and marginalize students of color. The teachers in this study all wanted to work
towards racial equity. They all already adhered to some practices that promoted that equity. In addition, none of them adhered to extreme forms of liberalism in their antiracist practices. Therefore, my intent with them became uncovering and eventually working against the remnants of liberalism in their approaches to racial equity. In effect, what I attempted to do in this study was to challenge the liberal aspects of the teachers’ personal ideologies and professional practices with the hope that they could use the social justice motivations they already possessed to develop more critical forms of antiracism. Using CRT helped me develop a conceptual framework for this goal. In essence, CRT aided me in an attempt to move the teachers towards more critical approaches to antiracism so that they could better realize the goals of equity they already carried with them. A performance ethnography approach to research, and in particular the practice of dialogic performance, was key in this attempt.

According to Denzin (2003) and Conquergood (1985, 1998), a performance approach challenges the maintaining of analytic distance from the participants, as this type of distance cannot lead to new ways of coming to understand the world. Rather, “[p]erformance approaches to knowing insist on immediacy and involvement” (Denzin, 2003, p. 8). The implication for such an approach in my study was that I had to focus on the research with teachers as an act where we came to understand the world in new ways, as an act of meaning making, and as an act that had relevance to the teachers themselves. Denzin asserts that performative research acts are inherently political—i.e., they are investigative processes that look at and critique events, the context in which those events occur, and even the people involved. In this study, the interviews with teachers became performances where the teachers and I examined and critiqued teachers’ experiences with race, racism, colorblindness, and whiteness.

In performance ethnography, the research act itself is a performance. The primary purpose of the research act is not intended for the researcher to extract knowledge from the participants. Rather, researcher and participants take the role of co-performers (Conquergood, 1991) in meaning making. From this standpoint, I look at the interview process as a reflexive act of what Langellier and Peterson (2004) refer to as storytelling and performing narrative.

Storytelling is performative in that the possibilities for our participation are marked out in advance, so to speak, by the discourse and by our material conditions. Stories also live after as well as live before performance. When we participate in storytelling…we reenact storytelling as a conventionalized form of communication as well as collaborate in the production of a unique story or performance. This story-telling event recites, recalls, reiterates previous storytelling events in general and in particular. In brief, storytelling is socially and culturally reflexive...because it is reflexive, any particular storytelling event has the potential to disrupt material constraints and discourse conventions and give rise to new possibilities for other storytelling events and for how we participate in performing narrative. (p. 4)
The discourse that the teachers and I performed on race, then, drew on our previous racial understandings and the racial stories we had heard and told in the past. At the same time, by being dialogic, the joint storytelling in which we participated in during this research helped us tell racial stories in new ways, potentially helping us come to new understandings.

In this reflexive sense, storytelling “can work both to legitimate and to critique relations of power” (Langellier and Peterson, 2004, p. 25). By using CRT to analyze the teachers’ conversations, discourses, and classroom practices, I did maintain the role of expert research/ethnographer who could determine the meaning of what the research participants did and said, but using a performance approach tempered this role. “The language of drama and performance [gives...] a way of thinking and talking about people as actors who creatively play, interpret, improvise, interpret, and re-present roles and scripts” (Conquergood, 1991, p. 187). In this study, the performance was an act of meaning making around race, whiteness, and colorblindness. This was an act that the participants and I performed together, and it was my hope that we did this in ways that critiqued rather than legitimated relations of power that reinscribe institutional racism. Of course, for all of my intentions of the type of change this research should effect in teachers generally, the teachers in this study will have a major and active role in determining if and how the change that occurs in their professional lives.

Therefore, a very important implication of this approach on my role as a researcher relates to what happens to this research when it is finished. Denzin (2003) asserts that performances are pedagogical. On the textual level, the researcher still does have the last word when the research appears in academic journals or books. In this way, the research can help the researcher’s career and hopefully might even advance the researcher’s discipline in a substantial way. However, another goal of performance ethnography is to challenge the dominance of textuality, or as Conquergood (1998) puts it “the hegemony of the text” (p. 25). A performance approach challenges ethnographers not only to take information they learn from their research and write it in scholarly journals or books. The transformative effects of the research need to be more immediate. So, it is important that their work becomes pedagogical in various ways that text alone cannot achieve. While the work of this study ended up as text in a dissertation, scholarly journals, and this book, and while it may make an effective commentary on the field of sociology of education, I also hope the research act affected the thought and practice of the teachers I worked with. I hope they came to new understandings and practices regarding traditionally marginalized students. Equally important, I hope I have been similarly affected by the research, and I believe I have to at least some degree. I have come to new understandings of teachers and students and of my research and teaching practices. These new understandings have helped me find new ways to work towards antiracism in education, particularly in how I discuss race in critical conversations as a teacher educator and researcher.
Interviews

The data collection for this study consisted of open-ended, ethnographic interviews with seven high school teachers. Data collection consisted of two to three rounds of formal interviews with each participant and informal follow-up conversations with three participants. The initial interviews lasted approximately one to two hours each. These initial interviews were intended to explore the teachers’ conceptualizations of colorblindness and perceptions of race and racism. While the research began with a set of research questions, the research design was flexible and emergent, which allowed me to react to the conversational flow of the participants and to follow pertinent topics of conversation as they arose. At the end of the initial interviews, each participant was given one or two articles, one that explains the basic tenets of CRT (given to every participant) and one that discusses whiteness and colorblindness (given to the first two participants only). As the study continued, the conversations around the CRT article were more relevant to the dialogues I was having with teachers, so I discontinued using the second article. The second interviews were conducted at a later date after the participants had read the article(s). This second round of interviews included a discussion of the articles and a reexamination of the conceptualizations of colorblindness and perceptions of race and racism. These interviews lasted from one to two hours. I conducted a third interview with two teachers. These teachers and I felt that we had more to discuss with each other. Each of these interviews lasted approximately two hours. In addition, with all of men and two of the women, I had several informal interviews, ranging from 5 to 10 minute conversations over coffee to half hour discussions, often at their schools (when I was there to meet with my student teachers). After transcribing the tapes and typing all of the handwritten field notes, I ended up with approximately 300 pages of typed field notes.

Four of the teachers were women and three were men. Interestingly enough, the men wanted to be interviewed in a group, and in more social settings (i.e., at a cook-out and at a bar), and I conceded with their request. So, while I took notes and tape-recorded each of the interviews with the women, I was able to tape record only the first formal interview with the men. For the second interview with them, I only took field notes. In later chapters, I will discuss the affect of the different setting on my conversations with the male participants and will examine the very gendered nature of my interviewing and analysis.

Dialogic Performance

In the interviews, I specifically employed a dialogic performance (Conquergood, 1985) approach. It is a way that the researcher balances commitment and detachment. A dialogic performance positioned me squarely as a participant in the study in a way that also made me acknowledge my position and power as researcher. Because the teachers and I were co-performers of a dialogue on colorblindness, whiteness, and race, I was not detached from the meaning making that took place. The aim of an ethnographic approach that involves dialogical performance is to “bring self and other together so that they can question, debate,
and challenge one another” (p. 9). Through the use of ethnographic interviews in this manner, I attempted to co-construct new understandings of colorblindness, whiteness, and race that the teachers (other) and I (self) arrived at together. By encouraging open conversation and debate, dialogical performance both acknowledges the distinctions between researcher and participant as it also challenges those distinctions.

In some ways, I adapted Conquergood’s (1985) conceptualization of dialogic performance, maintaining some aspects of that approach and changing others. Following a dialogic approach very strictly, I would have let the teachers control the direction of the study more comprehensively. For example, all of the teachers in the study and I agreed that racial disparity is an issue in schools. On that point, we were on the same page about the key issue to be addressed in the study. However, some of the teachers and I had different opinions about the causes of that disparity. My main concern was that white teachers are unintentionally complicit in institutional forms of racism that promote that disparity. One way these teachers maintained this complicity is by adhering to liberal forms of antiracism. So, one of my goals in this study is to use the interviews to move the teachers to adopting more critical approaches to antiracism so that they can challenge their complicity in the unintentional, institutional racism that leads to disparity. By pushing the teachers in this way, I maintained dialogic performance’s allowance for differences of opinion, but I also challenge a traditional approach to dialogic performance in that I came up with the agenda of challenging liberalism and colorblindness. My ultimate goal was to positively affect the academic success and schooling experiences of students of color, and in attempting to achieve that goal, I both worked with and against the teachers’ motivations when I interviewed them. I did, however, at least attempt to balance the ways I challenged them by adhering to dialogic performance’s commitment to also learning from the participants. Specifically, I tried to pay attention to how the teacher could inform me about how to frame the existence of colorblindness and the potential solutions to racial disparity.

Data Analysis

I analyzed each of the interviews according by using CRT to name whiteness as I discussed above. In addition, I looked at each series of conversations for both what they say about the interconnected topics of colorblindness, whiteness, and race and how they say it. To do this, I viewed each encounter as a performance. I looked at both the performative (what identities we performed) and the pedagogical (how the teachers and I came to new/different understandings) aspects of those encounters. So, in addition to examining teacher thought and practice via CRT, I drew Fuoss’ (1997) articulation of the three dimensions of contestation that can be used to analyze cultural contestation in cultural performance—the direction of effectivity, the modes of effectivity, and the spheres of contestation—and I specifically used the first two in analyzing the dialogues of this study.
The direction of effectivity refers to whether a cultural performance supports or adheres to dominant ideology (i.e., ideology that contributes to domination) or whether it resists that ideology. Fuoss (1997) uses Thompson’s (1990) articulation of ideology in describing the direction of effectivity.

‘Ideology involves ways in which meaning serves, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical—which I shall all relations of dominance. Ideology, broadly speaking, is meaning in the service of power’ (Thompson, 1990, p. 7). In his view, ideology involves a culture’s production, circulation, and reception of symbolic forms that either establish or perpetuate relations of dominance. (Fuoss, 1997, p. 84)

Thus, ideology as I use it in this book means liberal ideology as a dominant form of ideology in schools. The direction of effectivity refers to whether the teachers’ performances of racial understanding either supported or resisted that liberalism. The modes of effectivity, then, refer to the more specific ways in which those teachers’ performances either supported or resisted that ideology. That is to say, the modes of effectivity were the articulations teachers used to either support or resist liberalism and how they used those forms. To reiterate, in my analysis I describe how the teachers’ and my performances of the meaning of race and cycle of racism supported or resisted interpretations that rely on liberalism. I explore the specific ways in which we did that, focusing on the personal understandings that we each employed when we negotiated the meaning of race and our complicity in the existence of racism. In addition, I interpret how each of us made use of the interview itself, since analyzing the different ways that participants perform interviews can be pedagogical to how they and I also perform our understandings of race and racism. Using the analysis of the direction and modes of effectivity helped me interpret how liberal ideology interferes with more critically antiracist understandings and practices.

In each set of interviews I looked at how our explications of racism and complicity shifted (i.e., how we came to new understandings and how we may have advanced or regressed in our articulations) and how we contradicted ourselves. These shifts and breaks were the places where the performances were particularly pedagogical. Focusing on these breaks both between and within our rationales/logics—what McIntyre (1997) calls “‘aha’ experiences that emerged in the research project” (p. 658)—helped to determine the direction of the interviews and offered me a chance to deepen the dialogue that I had with these teachers. It was in these fissures where the teachers and I could challenge and inform each other. These “aha” moments helped structure my representation of the interviews as well.

Data Representation

In the following chapters, I present and interpret the dialogue I had with each teacher. In a certain respect, I present each teacher as a character in the overall
performance (i.e., this research study). I discuss what the dialogue with each character says about the related concepts of colorblindness, whiteness and race (i.e., each character’s frame of reference about these topics) and include the role CRT played in that dialogue.

I present these performances in a series of chapters. Some chapters focus on a single teacher. In other chapters, I group two or three teachers together as the “aha” experiences I encountered in discussions with each of them were similar. In Chapter 2, I present two of the teachers, Stephanie and Melissa. These were the earliest interviews I conducted, and my analysis of those conversations focused on how these conversations help set the stage for the rest of this study. Through my talks with these teachers, I learned some of the main issues relevant to white teachers’ conceptualizations of race, especially the complex and non-static nature of colorblindness. Conducting and analyzing these conversations helped me gain insight into how white teachers both adhere to and contradict colorblind and liberal accounts of race and racism. In addition, it was these early interviews that helped me learn to articulate CRT in a more coherent way.

In Chapter 3, I present the conversation I had with Sarah, a young middle-school teacher. The focus of this conversation was often Sarah’s attempt to understand the sticky issue of race. So, as I analyzed these conversations, I realized that much of the dialogue involved me learning how to play the expert about the issue of race and education. Sarah did not challenge my viewpoints very often. Rather, she wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how to deal with her own complicity in racism, especially via white privilege. Therefore, she challenged me to articulate my own racial understanding, something I think I learned to do in more nuanced ways because of my conversations with Sarah. In addition, Sarah’s dialogue highlights the complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction involved when race conscious whites try to address their own complicity. In effect, the conversation with Sarah helped me understand how CRT could be used a dialogic practice.

In Chapter 4, I present my dialogue with Elizabeth, a veteran middle school teacher and proclaimed feminist who demonstrated a contrast to Sarah’s desire to learn with a desire to debate and challenge. That is not to say that Elizabeth neither listened to new ideas nor wanted to promote more race conscious pedagogy. I believe she, indeed, wanted to promote racial equity as a teacher. However, more than any other teacher in the study, Elizabeth challenged my opinions and assertions. In part, her opposition seemed to stem from her feeling that teachers are not respected (especially by academics and politicians) as professionals who already attempt to address racial inequity. It also stemmed from her views on what counts as racism, views which both adhered to and countered liberal accounts. Interestingly enough, Elizabeth greatly enjoyed the interviews, an enjoyment that seemed to come from her stated pleasure of debating issues related to teaching. I also believe the dialogic nature of the interviews positioned her both as an intellectual and a professional, which she believes to be major characteristics of a teacher. As Elizabeth and I displayed a mutual respect and comfort in challenging each other, this is the interview that I believe best illustrates the notion of co-
performing in a dialogic performance manner and it is an example of actually using CRT as a dialogic practice.

In Chapter 5 I present Elijah, John, and David, three high school teachers whom I call The Boys. I present them together primarily because they preferred to be interviewed as a group. Many of the issues of the other chapters—e.g., the presence of liberalism—existed in these interviews but to a lesser extent. Two of The Boys, in particular, were highly racially conscious teachers and they spoke frankly about their recognition of their own racial privilege and their attempts to combat that type of privilege in their practice. What I gleaned from these conversations was their performative nature. The Boys and I very much positioned and narrated ourselves as racially conscious educators (in effect, disassociating ourselves from the many white teachers, whom we consider not to have the same worldview that we do). So, in some ways, analysis of these conversations helped me understand my aspirations as a race worker/social justice educator more deeply. In addition, my dialogic style in this chapter was distinct from the other chapters, and this was in part due to gender. Even though I would describe each of the women in the study as confident in their opinions, especially Elizabeth, I felt it more difficult to challenge The Boys, and I believe I let the fact that we are of the same gender affect my style of interaction. I will discuss how this interview was different from the others in Chapter 5, pointing out and critiquing the particularly performative and gendered nature of that dialogue.

I conclude the study in Chapter 6. In each of the narrative chapters, I will discuss what the conversations taught me about how to being a critical methodologist with regard to the examination of race and racism. In Chapter 6, I sum up what was learned, examine the pedagogical nature of the study in more general terms, and point out the implications for empirical research in sociology of education more specifically. In discussing what CRT can offer to sociological research, I bring the discussion back to the implications for how the field represents and interprets its findings. As I focus on the pedagogical aspects of the study (i.e., what we learned and what can be learned) as well as its limitations (i.e., what is still left unclear or unresolved), I will also discuss more in more detail the practice of dialogic performance.

NOTES
1 Even though Morrow is specifically critiquing Denzin and Lincoln’s (1994) volume, Handbook of Qualitative Research, the implication is for the field of qualitative studies in sociology of education more broadly speaking.
2 Giroux (2001, 1997) and Popkewitz (1998) are few examples of comprehensive arguments.
3 Greene (1995) gives a good example of this type of legal decision in his discussion of the Wards Cove case. In this case, Justice White did not require a cannery employer to change his racist hiring practices as it would be an unfair burden to the employer to devise a hiring scheme that lead to a more racially balanced workforce.
4 See West’s (1991) The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought for a thorough explanation of the use and purpose of theory and theorization in this manner. Stemming from Marx, West explains the goal of social research to be theorization (a contextual endeavor) rather than philosophy (an enterprise used more with the search for truth than for material consequences on people’s lives).
5 Valenzuela (1999) is a notable exception.
CHAPTER 1

6 Valenzuela actually helps mediate a disagreement the teacher and the students have, and her framing of the discussion within the larger institutional practices of the school helps them overcome their impasse to a large extent.

7 See Villenas (1996), Murrillo (1999), and Urrieta (2007) for examples and discussions of how researchers use the research act to work against the marginalizing racist practices that affect the participants of their studies.

8 She does want to raise their consciousness about their participation in white racism but also admits to focusing on how “the participants make meaning of whiteness” (p. 37, emphasis in original). In fact she discusses in depth the difficulty of being a white researcher attempting to critically analyze white racism with whites.

9 Giroux (2001) actually does make this claim but, at the same time, he also stresses the importance of the Frankfurt School.

10 See Guinier and Torres (2002, pp. 67–74) for a full description of the policy and its development.

11 Bell (1995/1976) makes this argument, which even goes back to the work of DuBois (1935).

12 I use this term in a similar way to Frankenberg (1993), who defines whiteness as “a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination” and argues that naming whiteness “displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of domination” (p. 6).

Research questions (with probes) included:

A) What does it mean to be colorblind? Is it a practice that you adhere to? Do you employ it in your classroom? If so, in what ways? What are the benefits of being colorblind? What are the drawbacks? To what extent is taking a colorblind approach to matters of race supported in your school?

B) What opportunities are there in your classroom for discussions of race? How frequently do such conversations occur? If they do occur, how is race talked about by your students and yourself? How is Whiteness conceptualized?

C) What are your perceptions on racism? To the best of your knowledge, what could you say about your students’ perceptions on racism?


Research questions with probes included:

A) After hearing/reading about critical race theory, what is your initial reaction? What parts of the theory ring true for you? What parts do you not agree with? What about the theory confuses you?

B) After hearing/reading about the critique of colorblindness, what is your initial reaction? What part of the critique rings true for you? What part do you not agree with? What about the critique confuses you?

14 Though liberalism is not necessarily the major view of education held by the teachers in this study. Rather, it is the ideology that acts on teachers via the structures of schooling.