

**White School Counselors Becoming Racial Justice Allies to Students of Color:**

**A Call to the Field of School Counseling**

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### **Abstract**

White school counselors must consider how racial identity, and whiteness as a construct, influences their work with students of color. This article addresses opportunities for White school counselors regarding how they may become allies to students of color and suggests way in which counselor educators can support the ally identity development in graduate students who are preparing to become school counselors. Intersections of racial privilege and ally identity development for White school counselors are described (Kendall, 2006; Mindrup, Spray & Lamberghini-West, 2011), and recommendations to the field of school counseling are made. Tenets of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and relational cultural theory (Jordan, 2010) are recommended as a theoretical framework for White school counselors' efforts.

*Keywords:* school counseling, racial justice allies, critical race theory, relational cultural theory, advocacy, counselor education

## **White School Counselors Becoming Racial Justice Allies to Students of Color: A Call to the Field of School Counseling**

Many school counselors interact with students of color in their daily activities, yet many White school counselors have limited knowledge of how whiteness and White identity development may influence their interactions with students of color (Helms, 1990; Mindrup, Spray & Lamberghini-West, 2011). Counseling literature suggests that mindfulness regarding white privilege and racism are important for White counselors to develop a positive connection with racially and ethnically diverse clients (Ancis & Sanchez-Hucles, 2000; Blitz, 2006; Chao, 2013; Constantine, Warren, & Miville, 2005; Mindrup et al., 2011). Furthermore, there is a close connection between ally identity development and advocacy work for White school counselors (Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahon, 2010). Therefore, there is a great need for identifying counseling theories and strategies which may support practicing White school counselors and White graduate students preparing to become school counselors, in both their development of awareness about their ethnicity and the role they may have as advocates when working with students of color.

In order for White school counselors to most effectively work towards social justice and address systemic barriers to students of color, a shift from traditional Eurocentric counseling theories (which often drive professional school counseling practice) to those with increased emphasis on the importance of race and relational practices may prove useful (Jordan, 2010; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Accordingly, this article proposes that White school counselors and counselor educators who work with preparing school counselors use theoretical tenets of critical race theory

(CRT) and relational cultural theory (RCT) in order to develop an approach to working with students of color that is attentive to whiteness and the counseling relationship, as well as the development of advocacy skills necessary for working with students of color (Jordan, 2010 & Taylor et al., 2009). In addition to reviewing the relevant theoretical tenets of RCT and CRT, the authors provide practice recommendations for White school counselors to become more effective allies to students of color and suggests ways in which counselor educators can utilize RCT and CRT as a theoretical framework to support graduate students' racial ally identity development (Jordan, 2010; Mindrup et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2009).

### **White School Counselors and Racial Privilege**

Scholars indicate self-awareness regarding white privilege and racism as a critical aspect of developing an empathic therapeutic alliance with racially and ethnically diverse clients (Mindrup et al., 2011). Hays et al. (2004) suggested that, since people cannot separate from their race, White individuals may observe racial discrimination with disinterest and or lack accountability for changing the status quo. In the context of school counseling, scholars often explain the status quo as a silence, which maintains white privilege in societies that deliberately minimize discussion around racism and privilege in the school setting (Taylor et al., 2009).

Kendall (2006) indicated that counselors may disregard their privilege because they see their whiteness as an arbitrary element of their identity, rather than a critical piece of their position in the profession of school counseling and the global community. However, current literature does not address the essence of how white privilege informs the work of White school counselors; never mind how it could be addressed in practice.

Privilege, however, has been a topic of conversation among academics. At their core, Kendall (2006) explained, privileges are often not granted based on earned qualities, but rather based on race by the systems in which we interact. Therefore, White school counselors cannot simply ignore that their white privilege exists, nor can they reject the professional and personal implications attached to it.

Helms introduced a White racial identity theory (1990) to increase White individuals' awareness about their importance and responsibility in creating and maintaining a racist society and the need to dismantle it. Helms's White racial identity model involves six sequential stages, which are divided into two phases (1990). The first phase, *abandonment of race*, consists of three stages: (a) *contact*, obliviousness to one's racial identity; (b) *disintegration*, premier acknowledgment of White identity; and (c) *reintegration*, acceptance of White superiority to non-whites and questions own racial identity (1990). The second phase, *defining a nonracist White identity*, contains three additional stages: (d) *pseudo-independent*, intellectualized acceptance of race; (e) *immersion/emersion*, genuine appraisal of racism and significance of whiteness; and (f) *autonomy*, internalizes a multi-cultural identity with non-racist whiteness as its core. White school counselors could fall anywhere within Helms's White racial identity model.

One barrier to White school counselors' positioning on the later stages of Helms's model is that White school counselors and preparing school counselors may neglect attending to their whiteness because it is not an elected privilege (Kendall, 2006). Additionally, a kind person may feel they are addressing racism because they do not demonstrate overtly racist behaviors (Kendall, 2006). Privileges, however, are given to those in the majority because of their race by the organizations within which they

interact, not because they have earned them as individuals (Kendall, 2006). Therefore, White school counselors cannot avoid having white privilege, nor can they avoid the huge responsibility attached to it. 'Liberal' or 'progressive' White school counselors, or people in general, often have the most difficulty sorting out the implications of white privilege. Perhaps Bell Hooks explained this concept best in her book *Talking Back* (1989) when she said:

When liberal Whites fail to understand how they can and/or do embody white-supremacist values and beliefs even though they may not embrace racism as prejudice or domination (especially domination that involves coercive control) they cannot recognize the ways their actions support and affirm the very structure of racist domination and oppression that they profess to wish to see eradicated (p. 113).

To this end, select scholars have worked to understand how the consciousness of White school counselors and preparing school counselors can be raised around white privilege and how the race of a school counselor informs practices in the school setting (Chao, 2013; Mindrup et al., 2011). Academics, such as Hays, Chang, and Dean (2004), have studied the power differential of domination and oppression as it relates to counseling in a variety of contexts. Many participants in the Hays et al. (2004) study (who functioned professionally in a variety of counseling capacities) generally demonstrated difficulty conceptualizing privilege and oppression. Nonetheless, based on findings around the conceptualization process for counselors, Hays et al. (2004) found that if participants were able to categorize observable cultural variables, such as race, as either privileged or oppressed and they were able to develop differential levels of awareness throughout life experience. Similarly, since practicing White school counselors and White graduate students preparing to function as school counselors

may have difficulty unpacking awareness of their own racial identity and privilege continuously “in a society that actively suppresses conversation about racism and privilege” it is important for professional school counselors to take note of their racial identity (Mindrup et al., 2011). Furthermore, as they work on assigning value and meaning to their privileged statuses and how it impacts their work in context, school counselors must remain cautious about becoming complacent regarding the extent of their internal examination as complacency with self typically mirrors how the counselor interacts with the system (Mindrup et al., 2011; Kendall, 2006).

Scholars indicate that counselors must go “beyond cultural competency” (Blitz, 2006) in practice by studying their own identities and points of privilege in order to best understand their position in the world as it relates to the client or issue they wish to advocate for (Blitz, 2006; Chao, 2013). Accordingly, Chao (2013) suggested the importance of school counseling programs actively addressing school counselors’ unique training needs with respect to race, ethnicity, and color-blindness. Additionally, Chao recommended counselor education and training programs tailor multicultural curricula to counselors’ specific, diverse backgrounds; including reflection on participants’ privileges and the societal impact of privilege, especially as it pertains to race (2013).

Accordingly, Brown and Perry (2011) suggested that for counselors to address issues of race, class, gender, patriarchy, homophobia, and white privilege, it is important that they (a) work toward raising their own awareness around these issues, (b) accept responsibility for their part in status quo conservation; (c) set an example of challenging systems of oppression; and (d) seek social justice. These steps are

important, according to the authors, because they are precursors to becoming effective counselors. Furthermore, these scholars indicated that these steps may help counselors directly affect their clients' potential for change and transformation. Also, without following these steps, school counselors risk falling into traditional therapeutic stances, which value neutral positions and engage techniques which support the oppressive and marginalizing practices (Brown & Perry, 2011).

### **White School Counselors as Racial Justice Allies and Advocates**

Advocacy is not a new construct to the field of counseling (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). The specific roles school counselors contribute to advocacy have received increased attention (Baker & Gerler, 2004). The Education Trust (1997), with support from the Dewitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, aimed to understand how school counselors operate to help all students succeed academically. The Transforming School Counseling initiative resulted in challenging school counselors to commit taking critical roles in closing the opportunity and achievement gaps. Initially the Transforming School Counseling initiative existed primarily in the structure and curriculum of counselor education programs, but ultimately the efforts of this initiative led to inclusion of advocacy to the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) National Model (2012).

The ASCA National Model (2012) indicates that advocating for the success of each student is a key role of school counselors; positioning them as leaders in promoting school reform. According to the ASCA National Model, school counselors' advocacy efforts are aimed at (a) removing barriers which obstruct students' development; (b) creating occasions to learn for all students; (c) guaranteeing access to



a quality school curriculum; (d) joining forces with others within and outside the school to help address student needs, and (e) promoting positive, systemic change in schools. Therefore, advocacy involves White school counselors working to eliminate barriers to students of color (ASCA, 2012).

The creation and implementation of the ASCA National Model has helped the school counseling profession make strides towards focusing school counselors' efforts into activities which affect systems rather than working with one child at a time to create change (Brown & Trusty, 2005). ASCA has called for an additional shift in the role of the professional school counselor from that of service provider to a role responsible for promoting ideal achievement for all students. School counselors play a pro-active role in identifying and responding to complex academic, social, and personal issues on a daily basis and have an ethical obligation to ensure equity in educational access. With pressure on schools to raise academic performance, all school counselors are charged with identifying and rectifying barriers that inhibit closing achievement and opportunity gaps (Brown & Trusty, 2005).

One way White school counselors can work to remove barriers that prohibit students of color from achieving to their greatest ability is to design their interventions towards a more socially just society. Kendall (2006) commented that working towards social justice is one way to make strides towards becoming an ally. Allies may be defined as "members of the dominant social groups (e.g., men, Whites, heterosexuals) who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based upon their social group membership" (Broido, 2000, p. 3).

Some critics of ally behavior question why members of privileged groups would voluntarily commit themselves to challenge their own privilege (Curry-Stevens, 2007). Yet, this mentality is, in and of itself, a privilege. In his book *Undoing Privilege*, Bob Pease (2010) explained:

One form of privilege is the ability to ignore calls for involvement in social justice campaigns. Those who do make commitment still have the privilege at any point of changing their mind and allowing their commitment to wane. Awareness of privilege can be reversed, but my experience in campaigns tells me that there comes a point of no return for allies. Significant reconstruction of subjunctives can occur to the point where turning away from activist involvement is no longer viable. (p. 184)

Therefore, ally aspiration is formed distinctly through improved awareness and “Increased awareness of the injustice of our privilege will hopefully lead to members of privileged groups becoming allies with oppressed groups” (Pease, 2010, p. 180).

In RCT the essential idea of mutuality, or the ability to engage in interpersonal conflict in a way that honors the interpersonal connection as well as the possibility of divergent thought, allow for equally distributed power within the counselor-client relationship, and may be the key to relieving limiting feelings among White school counselors while also providing a means to reduce oppression and move towards a just society (Jordan, 2011). This type of mutuality exists among allies, but the ways in which individuals choose to act as allies differs and scholars have not studied the nuances of how White school counselor ally identities evolve. Researchers, however, indicated that one element is consistent: ally identity transpires from acting as an agent for change (Kendall, 2006). The fact that one aspires to be an ally, then, becomes extremely

personal and can, at times, bring up many different feelings about power and privilege, such as anger, grief, disappointment, and resistance (Kendal, 2006).

In the spirit of helping counselors identify a framework for working with diverse clients, Sue et al. (1992) published their model of multicultural counseling competence (MCC). This model provided a widely accepted theoretical framework for multicultural counseling and, subsequently, for training in graduate programs and MCC in school counseling (Sue et al., 1992; ASCA, 2012). Yet, many White school counselors still may have difficulty working through the specific feelings of increased awareness as they work toward developing a racial justice ally identity and find ideals they previously held as truths challenged (Kendall, 2006). However, “Doing the personal work required to understand what it means to be White is the foundation for (...) striving to build a just world” (Kendall, 2006, p. 143). Those who are truly committed to racial justice, therefore, will work through their own discomfort.

Furthermore, Kendall (2006) indicated that an ally with privilege does not work simply to help another. In contrast, Kendall suggested that working to improve the greater good for all occurs by leveraging white privilege to promote change within the systems that keep people of color oppressed. In this vein, Kendall indicated that allies must “work continuously to develop an understanding of the personal and institutional experiences of the person or people with whom they are allying themselves” and further emphasized the personal element of alliance by stating that, “If the ally is a member of a privileged group, it is essential that she or he also strives for clarity about the impact of privileges on her or his life” (p. 144).

## **White School Counselors and Ally Identity Development**

Munin and Speight (2010) described allies as members of the dominant population who advocate against oppression, and site allies as an important element in the search to end oppression. Yet, as Munin and Speight suggested, ally development is complex because the role of the ally is pursuant of justice for those oppressed by privileges that the ally holds (2010). Edwards (2006) indicated that ultimately systems of oppression from which a dominant group appears to benefit may actually damage the privileged group in addition to the oppressed because of the systemic dysfunction oppression creates. In this sense, allies are produced from work they take towards their own liberation from an oppressive, limiting social structure. After all, social justice can be defined in terms of “full and equal participation for all groups, where resources are equitably distributed and everyone is physically and psychologically safe” (Reason & Davis, 2005, p.7).

Broido (2000) further explored factors associated with social justice ally development and found that social justice allies all held three common developmental markers. First of all, social justice allies amassed information around social justice and diversity issues to increase their competence as allies. Secondly, participants in Broido's study indicated that they yearned to make-meaning of the information they acquired by discussing it with others and reflecting on it. Finally, social justice ally participants in the Broido study indicated that they used the aforementioned acquired knowledge to push them towards action in pursuit of social justice. While Broido offered some ways for aspiring allies to work towards social justice, use of a stage model of

aspiring ally identity development may also prove beneficial in the ally development of White school counselors.

Edwards (2006) addressed aspiring ally identity development in a model that defines developmental stages of aspiring ally behavior: aspiring ally for self-interest, aspiring ally for altruism, and ally for social justice. Aspiring allies for self-interest are motivated and largely inspired to protect those they care about from being hurt. An ally in this developmental stage may wish to create an alliance with an individual with whom they have a personal connection, as opposed to a group or an issue (Edwards, 2006). Also, an ally in this stage tends to view themselves as protectors who intervene on behalf of a specific individual who identifies as part of an oppressed social group, and may frequently do so without consulting him/her. Finally, aspiring allies for self-interest may or may not identify with the term “ally” but instead will see their behavior in relational terms, such as being a “good friend or counselor” (Edwards, 2006).

Aspiring allies for altruism have an increased awareness of privilege and, therefore, seek to engage in ally behavior as a means of coping with guilt and emotion attached to knowing points of their privilege were unearned and gained in an immoral way (Edwards, 2006). For members of dominant groups, recognition of the systemic nature of their privilege may create a range of powerful emotional responses (Edwards, 2006). While Edwards (2006) indicated that the emotion of guilt can be helpful to raise the consciousness of aspiring allies in the dominant group, guilt cannot be the sole motivator because it does nothing to change the system granting privilege to some and oppressing others.

Finally, Edwards (2006) explained that individuals who are allies for social justice work with those from the oppressed group in collaboration and partnership to end systems of oppression. The collaborative and systemic aspects of how these allies view their role is congruent with definitions of social justice and recognize that members of dominant groups are also harmed by the system of oppression even though the way they are affected is not the same or comparable to the harm done to oppressed groups. Edwards explained that this final group of allies seeks to free the oppressed but also to liberate themselves and reconnect to their own full humanity.

Furthermore, Edwards (2006) specified application of the aforementioned concepts, indicating that the model is neither linear nor chronological, but rather fluid in nature and, consequently, the goal of development is to foster a more complex and sophisticated consciousness that is more stable and less likely to regress to earlier stages. Edwards (2006) also indicated that issues involving the “distinctions between intent and outcome, consistent anti-oppressive action, and the problematic nature of self-identifying as an “ally” need to be addressed in order to prevent aspiring allies from doing harm (p. 52). In this light, Edwards suggested (as indicated across the literature) that “the most credible naming of social justice allies is done by members of the oppressed group” (p. 54) but that the tools, such as this model, could still help aspiring allies more consistently engage in the type of anti-oppressive action that would result in members of the oppressed group identifying them as allies (2006). Lastly, Edwards cautioned aspiring allies not to ‘over-intellectualize’ the process because that may cause them to chastise other aspiring allies for their faults or become paralyzed into

inaction by fear of making mistakes and not being the 'ideal ally' – a paradox that can be common in the helping professions.

### **Intersection of Ally Identity and Advocacy for White School Counselors**

Oppression manifests itself at the individual (e.g., stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination), social/cultural (e.g., societal norms and values), and institutional levels (e.g., rules and policies), which begs for attention from the counseling profession. House and Martin (1998) have attributed oppressive social, political, and economic conditions to poor academic achievement for students of color and students from low-income families in K-12 schools. These types of inequities signify the need for school counselors to make a more concerted effort to address environmental factors that serve as barriers to academic, career, and personal/social development. To address this need, the American Counseling Association (ACA) has developed advocacy competencies to help structure counseling practice and encourage interventions and strategies that take place on multiple dimensions and levels (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002).

**ACA Advocacy Competencies.** ACA's advocacy competencies are grounded in multicultural counseling (e.g., Sue, Arredondo & McDavis, 1992) literature to provide a structure for counselors to identify levels of intervention that might be appropriate based on a client's case. The ACA's advocacy competencies model organizes advocacy into two dimensions: the first speaks to the extent the client/ student or community is engaged in the advocacy process and the second considers the level of intervention (individual, systems, or societal). Additionally, the two dimensions break advocacy into six domains in which counselors may be involved: client/ student empowerment,

client/student advocacy, community collaboration, systems advocacy, public information, and social/ political advocacy (Lewis, et al., 2002). Often, several forms of advocacy may be necessary and cultural competence and awareness is essential, regardless of the type of advocacy.

**Social Justice Counseling.** Social justice counseling supports White school counselors' work to challenge the status quo as a means of empowering clients while also confronting inequities. Specifically, Crethar, Torres, Rivera, and Nash (2008) are cited across the professional literature as defining social justice counseling as a "multifaceted approach to counseling in which practitioners strive to simultaneously promote human development and the common good through addressing challenges related to both individual and distributive justice" (2008, p. 269). Coupled with this definition of social justice counseling, these scholars include the importance of counselors' empowerment of the individual as well as active confrontation of injustice and inequality in society in order to impact the individuals with whom they work in addition to the systems which serve as the backdrop to the work they do (Crethar et al., 2008). In attending to the cultural, contextual, and individual needs of those served, social justice counselors direct attention to the promotion of four critical principles that guide their work; equity, access, participation, and harmony (Crethar et al., 2008).

Scholars have explored the school counselor as social justice advocates. For instance, Trusty and Brown (2005) point to Friedler's (2000) work around special education advocacy as a tool to help direct the advocacy work of White school counselors. This guide differs from the ACA's advocacy competencies (Lewis et al., 2003) in that their list organizes advocacy into the three following broad areas (rather



than dimensions/domains): (1) dispositions, (2) knowledge, and (3) skills. Most relevant to this article, Trusty and Brown suggested that 'dispositions' is the area most intimately integrated with school counselors' personal beliefs, values, and selves, making them axiomatic with ally identity (2005). Furthermore, advocacy dispositions are aligned to the current vision of school counseling (ASCA, 2012).

### **Using Relational Cultural Theory and Critical Race Theory to Identify White School Counselor Ally and Advocacy Skills**

At its most fundamental level, RCT (Miller, 1977) builds upon and expands humanistic principles to allow school counselors increased focus on the relational connections vital to individuals' psychological development and emotional well-being (Jordan, 2010). Meanwhile, critical race theory (Taylor et al., 2009) rejects the generally accepted understanding of educational policy in light of educational functioning in Western societies. Together, these theoretical perspectives offer White school counselors and preparing school counselors an alternative to traditionally accepted understanding of the construct of education and the role of school counselors within the educational structure with respect to implementing the ACA's advocacy competencies (2003) and comprehensive school counseling programs aligned with the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012; Lewis et al., 2002). A graphic representation of this conceptualization visually captures the relationship between these elements (Figure 1).

RCT provides White school counselors with a theory that complements the current multicultural/social justice movement in that it provides room for White school counselors to consider and value how oppression hinders the relational development of marginalized people across the life span (Comstock et al., 2008). Because the role of

the power differential between those with privilege and those who experience oppression creates an significant barrier between the interventions White school counselors initiate with students of color, RCT provides school counselors with an extensive model of relational development across the life span, which can be utilized to identify and deconstruct obstacles to mutuality that individuals encounter in diverse relational contexts (Comstock et al., 2008).

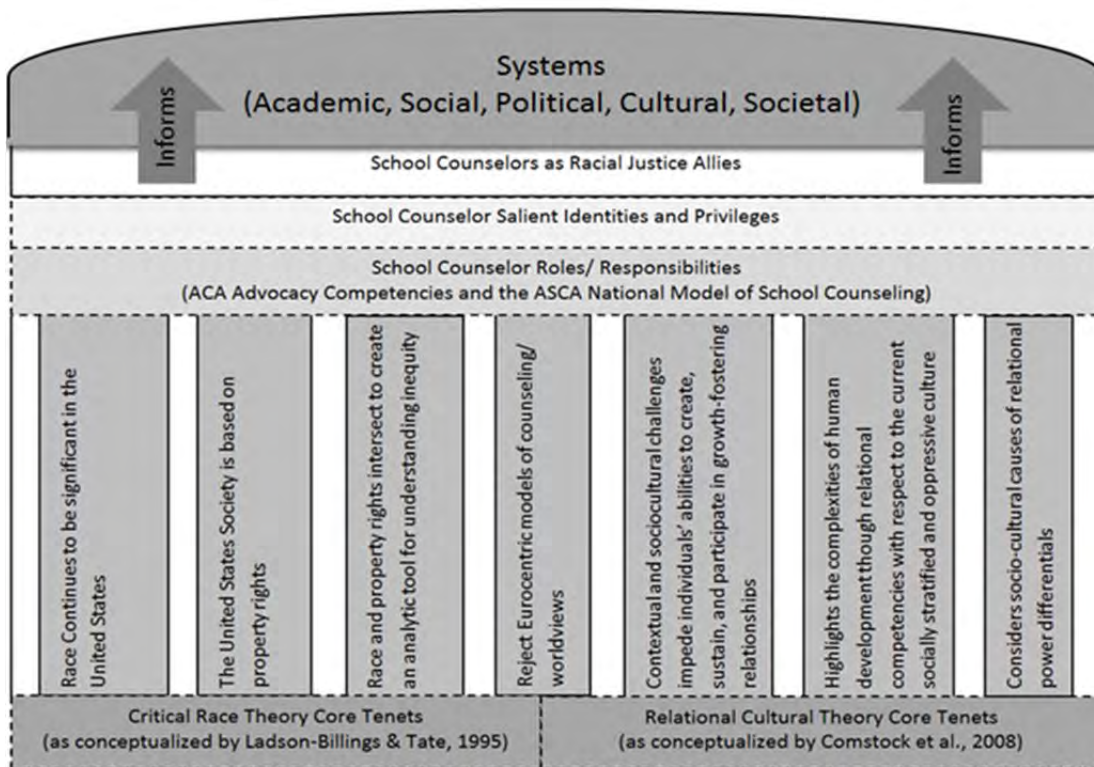


Figure 1. Visual representation of theoretical considerations for White school counselors.

While RCT (Jordan, 2010) addresses relational components school counselors face when working with students of color, it does not comprehensively consider how race, specifically, influences the work White school counselors complete with students of color (Figure 1). Therefore, it may be helpful to integrate CRT with RCT in order to analyze the implications that race and relationships have on the work done by White

school counselors and their students of color (Jordan, 2010; Taylor et al., 2009). CRT and RCT have some tenets which set them apart from one another, but they also overlap (Jordan, 2010; Taylor et al., 2009). For instance, both question the usefulness of traditional (Eurocentric) theoretical frameworks. As stated by Delgado (1995), “Most critical race theorists consider the majoritarian mindset – the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdom, and shared cultural understandings of persons in in the dominant group – to be a principled obstacle to racial reform” (p. 17).

CRT considers the historical context regarding how Whites acquired land (from American Indians) and labor (from slavery of Africans and immigrant laborers) (Taylor, 2009). Upon this foundation political, legal, and educational systems evolved in which White people have certain unalienable rights to property and capital, which are incongruent with that of individuals of color (Taylor, 2009, p. 63). Subsequently, RCT also addresses the issue of social implications of this historical truth (Jordan, 2010). RCT challenges systemic, societal, and cultural traditions which create barriers to individuals’ abilities to produce, maintain, and engage in growth-fostering relationships (Comstock et al., 2008).

Practicing White school counselors and counselor educators who oversee preparing White school counselors in counselor education programs may find that an integration of CRT and RCT offer an appropriate theoretical lens through which they can conceptualize White professional school counselors’ work as racial justice allies with students of color (Jordan, 2010 & Taylor et al., 2009). Furthermore, they may find that by recognizing the core tenets of CRT and RCT White professional school counselors and preparing school counselors are better able to analyze their points of privilege and

the role of power differentials in their work with students of color (Jordan, 2010; Taylor et al., 2009). Additionally, it may provide a framework for the way they view the socio-political structures they must navigate with students of color if they are to aspire to be an ally to this client group. Finally, White school counselors and counselor educators who train White school counselors-in-training may find CRT and RCT refreshing alternatives to traditional, Eurocentric, theoretical models of school counseling when searching for ways to make meaning of the interactions between White school counselors and students of color in school settings (Jordan, 2010 & Taylor et al., 2009).

### **Case Vignette**

In this case vignette, RCT and CRT tenets (Jordan, 2010 & Taylor et al., 2009) are applied in efforts to implement ACA's advocacy competencies (Lewis et al., 2002) and standards set by the ASCA Nation Model of school counseling (ASCA, 2012) by a White school counselor (referenced by the pseudonym, "Lea") as she aims to develop as an ally to a student of color in the first few months of the school year. The student of color with whom Lea works is referenced by the pseudonym "Ruby". Lea is a 27-year old, straight, White, woman who graduated from her school counseling master's program three years ago; she is beginning her first year of working as a school counselor.

Since finishing her master's program, Lea was employed as a special education teacher before accepting her current position as a professional middle school counselor. Additionally, Lea is in the midst of her first year of a counselor education doctoral program. Lea's doctoral program engages a social justice umbrella to focus all courses on the importance of attending to the needs of students who are marginalized, which

offers a perspective for counselor educators regarding the impact graduate studies may have on an emerging school counselor's racial and ally identities. Although Lea's master's course of study included a multicultural course, Lea's current doctoral program has heightened her awareness of issues related to social justice, particularly with respect to students of color at the predominantly White school in which she works. Ruby is a 13-year old girl who racially/ethnically identifies as Black. Ruby is also a special education student who attends the school where Lea works due to the school's special program for students with emotional/ behavioral disorders.

Lea's current doctoral program has given her a clear understanding of counseling theory and how to consider appropriate theory for practice. Specifically, Lea maintains the ability to consider CRT tenets which undergird her assumption that: race continues to have implications in the United States; the United States is built upon property rights; and that race and property rights intersect to create an analytic tool for understanding inequity (Taylor et al., 2009). Furthermore, Lea understands and utilizes RCT theoretical tenets which presume contextual and sociocultural challenges impede individuals' ability to create, sustain, and participate in growth-fostering relationships (Jordan, 2010). She also adopts the RCT assumptions which highlight the complexities of human development through relational competencies with respect to the current socially stratified and oppressive culture and considers socio-cultural causes of relational power differentials (Jordan, 2010). Overall, Lea understands that there are limits to Eurocentric worldviews and models of counseling. By adopting CRT and RCT tenets (Jordan, 2010 & Taylor et al., 2009), Lea aims to engage ACA's advocacy competencies (Lewis et al.,

2003) and standards set by the ASCA National Model (2012) in efforts to develop a comprehensive school counseling program at her school.

Because of her education around theory, professional competencies, and standards, Lea is aware that Ruby is marginalized at school due to her race and disability. Lea has established a relationship with Ruby through her implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program (ASCA, 2012). For example, when Lea delivers core curriculum counseling lessons in the classroom, she makes a special effort to strike up conversation with Ruby to develop rapport. Consequently, Ruby has initiated individual time with Lea 'just to check in'. Also, Lea has invited Ruby to join a small group focused on high school preparation and friendship development and works systemically to help teachers at Ruby's school develop culturally responsive teaching practices.

Since Ruby is attending the current school due to her disability, she does not have existing relationships with any teachers or students, making her interactions with Lea quite meaningful. Additionally, Ruby was in the racial majority at her last school and, therefore, faces an increased sense of disconnection to many of her peers and teachers at her current school who are predominantly White. Ruby's transition to her new school has been "rocky," with Ruby demonstrating physical and verbal outbursts in class, which teachers often categorize as disruptive and disrespectful. In efforts to avoid administrative intervention, Lea reaches out to Ruby to create a plan with her in order to reduce her outbursts. Through this student-counselor relationship, Ruby and Lea collaboratively arrange a plan for Ruby to remove herself from class with a 'chill-out'

pass when she feels overwhelmed or uncomfortable in efforts to avoid demonstrating inappropriate classroom behavior.

Through the plan, Ruby and Lea develop a regular relationship, punctuated by Ruby using her 'chill-out' pass several times per week in order to de-escalate her mood. At first Ruby simply makes her way to the counselor's office and sits silently, listens to music, or draws in order to regulate her mood. From an RCT perspective, Lea is aware that Black students may have controlling images stemming from internalized racism (Jordan, 2010) which may contribute to a student feeling hesitant to discuss race openly. Therefore, Lea consistently invites Ruby to discuss her frustrations and ensures Ruby that she is there to serve as her counselor and advocate. Lea also verbalizes awareness that Ruby's current school can be a 'different' and 'difficult' place to be. Eventually Ruby becomes increasingly verbal about her frustrations and feelings of isolation. Ruby even comments to Lea that the counselor's office is the only place in the school she feels like she can be herself. Lea explores the degree to which Ruby's experiences have resulted in controlling images of internalized racism and/ or resilience to oppression, in addition to potential connections and disconnections Ruby experienced related to her race – particularly at her current school (Jordan, 2010).

Ruby identifies that she felt very popular and accepted at her old school because the other students were 'like her'. When Lea asks Ruby to clarify what she means, Ruby indicates that students at all of her old schools were Black, like her, but at her current school everyone seems 'fake' and that all the popular kids are White. Lea introduces the idea of growth-fostering relationships and mutual empathy using developmentally appropriate language, assessing the degree to which Ruby has experienced these

connections in other relationships. Ruby indicates that while she does not feel comfortable with her White peers at her new school, she is also struggling to connect with the other Black students as well. Lea validates this concern and invites Ruby to join a small group at the school which is designed for students who are attending an alternative high school to the school's natural feeder pattern so that Ruby would have the opportunity to meet other students who are attending a school out of their 'home' district. Ruby accepts this invitation and enjoys participating in the group and planning for high school.

Over the course of several months, Lea and Ruby both grow in their connection with each other. Ruby forms a connection with additional peers and with Lea - a White adult at school whom she trusts, which is a new experience for her. Lea, through her relational proximity to Ruby, is able to more clearly understand specific ways the school norms have created an isolating experience for Ruby, a student of color (Jordan, 2010). Subsequently, Lea and Ruby work together to schedule meetings with Ruby's teachers so that teachers can get to know Ruby on a more personal level, which allows Ruby to feel more comfortable in class. Lea also works systemically to gain administrative support to create a tutorial for teachers to increase their cultural competence, particularly as it relates to instruction. Lea includes Ruby as she develops this teacher-education program and Ruby eagerly shares her impressions. These interactions help to chip away at the adult-child and White-Black power differentials that exist between Lea and Ruby. Ruby's visits to the school counselor's office become less frequent, but when she does come to see Lea, Ruby typically simply wants to 'say hi'. Ruby indicates that she is excited to move on to high school at the end of her eighth grade year, but



indicates that she has found her place and feels an increased sense of belonging at her current school.

### **Recommendations for White School Counselors and Counselor Educators**

Counselor educators may utilize the presented vignette as a means to anchor class conversation around race, privilege, and advocacy in school counselor preparation programs. Since the case vignette featured was inspired by a true account of an emerging school counselor, it offers counselor educators a way to share a view of the possible ways in which race may intersect the work preparing school counselors will do with diverse groups of students. Although all preparing school counselors will ultimately function professionally in a variety of settings, like Lea in the previous case vignette, all White school counselors are uniquely situated to work with diverse populations and they are often the first point of contact a student has to identify any number of additional resources. White school counselors, school counseling students, and counselor educators therefore, must remain mindful of the complex sociopolitical backdrop that American schools and culture create for the work they carried out by school counselors. Subsequently, the power differentials between White school counselors and students of color can potentially create barriers to students of color accessing a variety of supports. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for White school counselors to strive to better comprehend whiteness as a construct and work to facilitate alliances with the students of color with whom they interact. There are a number of strategies White school counselors and school counseling students may find helpful when working to become racial justice allies with students of color.

Utilizing a critical race (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) theoretical lens may aid White school counselors in effectively conceptualizing their ally identity. This theoretical framework may also be helpful for counselor educators who aim to facilitate ally identity development in their White school counseling students. Because CRT comes from a long tradition of resistance to the unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial, and gender lines in the United States (U.S.) (and around the world), its powerful tenets are ones which White school counselors, school counseling students, and counselor educators may earnestly ponder (Taylor et al., 2009). Specifically, White school counselors, school counseling students, and counselor educators may use CRT tenets to help them understand the interplay of racial politics, legal proceedings, and the broader conversation about race and racism in the United States – particularly as it relates to power and privilege in schooling. In particular, adopting the critical race theoretical tenets highlighted by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) will provide a helpful lens through which White school counselors, school counseling students, and counselor educators can analyze work done in educational settings. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) indicated three core propositions: “(1) race continues to be significant in the U.S.; (2) U.S. society is based on property rights rather than human rights; and (3) the intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool for understanding inequity” (p. 47).

Additionally, White school counselors, school counseling students, and counselor educators may find it helpful to consider integrating relational components (such as RCT) into their theoretical framework in order to raise their own consciousness, as well as that of the students of color with whom they interact (Jordan, 2010). Specifically,

adopting the primary RCT assumptions into school counseling practice may prove helpful because: (a) individuals innately seek relationships through the life span and they grow as a result of involvement in relationships; (b) advancement towards shared realities rather than individualism represents mature functioning; (c) engagement in complex and fluid relational systems indicates psychological growth; (d) elements of mutuality are essential to growth- fostering relationships; (e) honest engagement requires authenticity in growth-fostering relationships; (f) individual growth is a by-product of contributing to the development of a growth-fostering relationship; and (g) development is represented by an increase in relational competence across the lifespan (Jordan, 2010).

White school counselors and school who wish to become racial justice allies must look critically at their ally identity development. For example, they may consider how they collect, analyze, make meaning of, and apply information around social justice and diversity issues to increase their ally competence (Broido, 2000). White school counselors and preparing school counselors who are working towards being aspiring racial justice allies can work from a model of ally development to frame their progress, strengths, and growing edges in order to make effective choices in their ally thought processes and behaviors. For example, use of Edwards (2006) aspiring ally identity development model may support aspiring allies in delineating their ally identity in and among three dynamic stages: aspiring ally for self-interest, aspiring ally for altruism, and ally for social justice.

Closely related to their ally identity work, White school counselors attend to their racial identity; including the consideration of how it may impact the work they do with

clients of color. Additionally, it may be beneficial for counselor educators to support White school counselors-in training to explore their racial identity. In particular, White school counselors and school counseling students may find it helpful to seek ways to: (a) begin to raise their own critical consciousness around issues of race; (b) accept accountability for their roles in maintaining the status quo; (c) empower themselves and others to challenge systems of oppression; and (d) seek social justice (Brown & Perry, 2011). Likewise, since these steps are important precursors to becoming effective counselors, counselor educators and counselor education programs may find them useful to integrate these elements into curriculum and/or goals (Brown & Perry, 2011). White school counselors may also find that honing their advocacy skills by utilizing the ACA's advocacy competencies (2003) to frame their work may improve their racial justice ally behavior and identity (ASCA, 2012).

### **Future Research**

Further research is greatly needed to address how the aforementioned recommendations impact the racial justice ally identity of White school counselors as it relates to their work with students of color. Current literature underscores the importance of school counselors in addressing inequities that exists in schools (Cox & Lee, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahan, 2010) and increasingly maintains the ideology that the field of school counseling requires a shift from traditional methods of counseling (focused on interpersonal or intrapersonal concerns) to social justice counseling (focused on external forces such as oppression, discrimination, prejudice, sexism, socioeconomic factors, etc. as they impact clients) (Goodman, Liang, Helms, Latta, Sparks, & Weintraub, 2004; Lee, 1998). Yet,

contemporary scholarship does little to address how school counselors can bring attention to inequities and emerge from traditional methods of school counseling as racial justice allies. Therefore, further qualitative research aimed at describing the essence of how White school counselors experience aspiring racial justice ally identity will help to explain the ways in which White school counselors operate as racial justice allies. Additionally, future research which explores or quantifies the ways in which White school counselors utilize theory, advocacy competencies, and leadership skills in order to actualize themselves as racial justice allies would help to conceptualize the process of becoming racial justice allies for practicing and preparing school counselors.

### **Conclusion**

White school counselors who seek to become aspiring racial justice allies with students of color may integrate relationally-focused counseling practice and exploration of White identity and whiteness as a construct in combination with advocacy in order to increase the effectiveness of their interventions with students of color. To enhance and support these efforts, White school counselors may find that by adopting the model explained in this manuscript they are better able to analyze their points of privilege and the role of power due to the utilization of CRT and RCT tenets (Jordan, 2010 & Taylor et al., 2009). Furthermore, this model offers a framework for conceptualizing the way White school counselors, preparing school counselors, and counselor educators can navigate socio-political structures with students of color and emerge as allies to the students of color with whom they work.

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