CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF RACISM

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

EDUCATION

DECEMBER 2015

By

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Keywords: racism, perceptions, color-blind, high school students, Catholic education
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all of the professors that have given advice, support, and encouragement during this process: Dr. Cheng, Dr. Ericson, Dr. Neubauer, Dr. Njoroge, and Dr. Clayton. I would also like to thank the wonderful people at St. Joseph who made this possible. The support from the administration was touching and empowering. A very special thanks goes out to the two primary teachers, Mr. V and Mr. H, who showed extreme patience and hospitality as they shared their wisdom, classrooms, and humor in so many ways. I would also like to acknowledge the honesty, sincerity, and thoughtful responses of the students at St. Joseph, in particular those that were willing to openly share their thoughts and feelings on racism in person. Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful wife whose support, patience, and editing was a great help in the rather long process of writing this dissertation.
ABSTRACT

How people perceive the reality of racism depends on many factors, including their own experiences with racism and the belief that the United States is a color-blind, post-racial society. This qualitative case study used Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework to look at the perceptions at Catholic high school students in regards to racism. The data collection included a survey given to all eligible senior students at the school (N = 170 respondents), interviews (N = 9 students), and field observations of a three-week unit on racism. The study found that there was a marked difference in the way students that identified with being a minority perceived racism compared to those that identified with being of the majority. This difference was likely due to their experiences with racism and tendency to talk about racism in different contexts other than the classroom. The research also uncovered evidence for a color-blind mentality amongst many of the white students that included some indications of unconscious biases and claims of “reverse racism.” Finally, the study found that a three-week unit on racism grounded in Catholic social teaching showed signs of being effective in raising students’ awareness of the realities of de facto racism, as well as challenging the color-blind mentality in which they operate. This research expands CRT by applying it to a Catholic school context. It also has the potential to further add to discussions concerning general perceptions of racism in the United States. Finally, in terms of Catholic education, this study can be used to shed light on how racism is addressed in Catholic high schools and curriculum development in regards to racism education.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Racism in the United States existed the minute the first explorer set foot on the continent. It was taken to historic new levels through the slave trade and racial conditioning of white colonists and confronted through national actions such as the Emancipation and the Civil Rights era. Racism has changed forms, morphing from overt actions that are now seen as utterly despicable to more covert practices that continue to spread inequalities based on race through institutional systems and subtle individual actions. The national consciousness about racism has changed as well. Very few would still argue that non-white people are morally or intellectually inferior, or that it is ethically neutral to discriminate based on someone’s race. Instead, one of the most morally repugnant insults is to be called racist, and many people believe that we moved past racism and live in a post-racial society where race does not matter and racism has been vanquished, for the most part, from United States society.

While this post-racial, color-blind perception is popular amongst many people today, it can change and has been challenged over the last few years as evidenced by to seemingly racially motivated acts of lethal violence by police against young black men, often unarmed. These events have sparked months of media attention and even race riots in some cities, and this heightened view of racism has challenged the perception that the United States is a post-racial society. For example, A CNN article from June 2015 found that 74% of Americans felt that racial discrimination against African-Americans is a very or somewhat serious problem, up from 57% just five years prior (Agiesta, 2015). Another CNN/ORC poll found that the percentages of Americans who thought relations between
blacks and whites have worsened during President Obama’s presidency rose from 6% in 2009 to 39% in 2015 (Polling Report, n.d.).

Unfortunately, these changes in perceptions may be fleeting, as another poll showed that “substantial minorities of white Millennials hold racial prejudices against blacks,” as 31% of the respondents still thought that blacks were lazier or less intelligent than white (Clement, 2015). A study on white Millennial’s implicit biases found that while they were less than previous generations, they provided enough evidence for the authors to conclude that “younger cohorts of Whites are no more racially liberal in 2008 than they were in 1988.” (Hutchings, 2009, p. 917). These complex interactions of being able to both be confronted by the reality of racial tensions in the United States and still hold tightly to inherent racial biases are at the heart of the historical and contemporary experience of whites in the United States. This dissertation will take a thorough look at these perceptions of racism in a specific, bounded case study and attempt to add to the discussion of modern racism and its intersection with society in the contemporary United States.

**Definition of racism**

In order to understand racism, it is important to define it. Simplistic definitions of racism often associate it solely with slavery, Jim Crow Laws, lynching, and many other overt acts of dominance by whites on non-white groups (Brown et al., 2003). However, these explicit forms of racism have largely disappeared and are now seen as socially unacceptable, thanks in large part to Civil Rights, and scholars are currently attempting to define the new form that racism has taken in the late 20th and early 21st century (Winant, 1994). This is not an easy task (Omi, 1994), as can be seen by even a cursory study of the
literature, and it is tricky to capture the essence of the varying and nuanced definitions that attempt to encompass the entirety and complexity of contemporary racism. As Winant (1994) points out, because racism lacks permanent content and status, it continually changes in order to replicate hierarchical categories and racial dominance. Thus, it is important to look at overarching themes that arise out of all definitions that can then be used to create a working definition of racism suitable for this dissertation.

Most scholars agree that racism has an individual component, and that individuals have motivations and volitions that can lead to expressed and unexpressed forms of racism (Garcia, 1999). This viewpoint has a long history in social science, which has produced the concept of prejudice (Fiske, 2000; Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010; Henry & Sears, 2002; Jones, 1997). Prejudice, in this view, is a positive or negative attribute assigned to an individual based on pre-conceived notions of the group to which a person belongs (Jones, 1997). Racism, defined as such, has three key distinctions: (1) the assumption that the group characteristics are based on biology, (2) the belief that one’s race is superior to another, and (3) this belief results in the hierarchical domination of one racial group over another (Jones, 1997, p. 11). The strength of this argument leads many to conclude that racism starts with the individual’s beliefs and volitions, which are then perpetuated through institutional and cultural practices (Jones & Carter, 1996; Garcia, 1999).

However, there is ample evidence that a viewpoint of racism that takes into account only individual motivations and actions is deficient, and some argue that it is important to look at other ways that racism manifests itself (Headley, 2006). For example, many scholars find the concept of institutional racism an important, and often
ignored, aspect of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Bobo & Fox, 2003). Institutional racism, which is sometimes referred to as systematic racism, “refers to the existence of institutional policies (e.g., poll taxes, immigration policies) that unfairly restrict the opportunities of particular groups of people…[and] foster ideologies that justify current practices” (Dovidio et al., 2010, p. 10). These practices do not require the support or even awareness of individuals, as the policies and laws set in place are often considered normal and morally acceptable (Dovidio et al., 2010; Perry, 2001). Such policies are embedded in all levels of the social system—economic, political, social, and ideological—that are reproduced and accepted as part of the norm of society (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). This allows the system to allocate benefits to groups (generally white, heterosexual males) along racial lines, a process that rarely occurs in overt practices, but must be inferred from outcomes in inequality in areas such as of education, economics, media, employment, the criminal justice system, and mental or physical health (Botella-Silva, 2004; Dovidio et al., 2010).

A major reason for institutional racism is the historical basis of these practices and policies, and it is important to take these into account when defining racism (Omi, 1994; Smedley, 1999). Racism is deeply influenced by “imperialism’s creation of modern nation-states, capitalism’s construction of an international economy, and the Enlightenment’s articulation of a unified world culture” (Winant, 2001, p. 19). An integral part of racism is the reproduction of “hierarchical social structures based on essentialized racial categories” (Winant, 2001, p. 308). Trask (2008) defined racism as a “historically created system of power in which one racial/ethnic group dominates another racial/ethnic group for the benefit of the dominating group” (quoted in Sonoda, 2008, p. 8).
101). In short, one cannot understand racism without understanding the historical circumstances that gave rise to the current racial conditions (Winant, 1994).

Racism is also closely associated to racial supremacy, which in the United States means white supremacy (Brown et al., 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Wise, 2010). White supremacy is power held by white Americans that allows them access to conscious and unconscious benefits not afforded to other groups (Lewis, 2004). This inordinately places power, resources, and social status into the hands of white Americans that is far and above that of other minority groups (Spring, 2008; Wise, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2010). It also gives so much power to the dominant white group that its interests and perceptions are assumed to be ‘normal’ and other groups’ cultures and habits as abnormal (Gillborn, 2006; Lewis, 2004). White supremacy is so integral to our modern understanding of racism that Katz (2003) believes blacks and other minority groups cannot be racist because they do not have the societal power to put another person or group into a subservient position.

While most people who hold racist beliefs today do not act in obviously racial manners, it is important to note that racism still manifests itself in overt fashions. Overt racism refers to intentional and / or obvious actions and policies designed to harm individuals and groups because of their conceived race (Hall, 2000). These actions may manifest in open discrimination, segregation, harmful language, and even hate crimes. While not nearly as common in the 21st century (Fiske, 2000), these open acts of racism are still present and should be taken into account when defining racism in general (Wise, 2010).
Taking all this information together, I will define racism as individual prejudice and institutional practices grounded in historical actions which continue to perpetuate white dominance over minority groups along racial lines in such a way that benefits whites economically, politically, educationally, socially, and culturally. Though this may not be exhaustive and complete, it is a working definition that helps ground and guide the rest of this study.

**Definition of race**

Another important word to define is race, and the general consensus in the literature is that race is not an objective fact but rather the product of social contexts that change over time (Fredrickson, 2002). Smedley (1999) contends that race, as a concept, has fallen out of favor in scientific circles, since genetic differences do not support any overarching understanding of race in a biological trait. Instead, race exists “as a cultural creation, a product of human invention like fairies, leprechauns, banshees, ghosts, and werewolves” (p. 5).

Historically, it seems that the concept of race emerged because of the need to create a sense of group and to categorize people into subgroups in order to perpetuate a strong social order. These categories can then provide an excuse for domination or subjugation of those outside of the group (Fredrickson, 2002), leading to the conclusion that racial boundaries are “potent social categories around which people organize their identities and behavior” (Lewis, 2003, 6).

This dissertation will recognize the reality of the culturally constructed concept of race that has created real social and physical differences between racial groups. It also recognizes the fluid nature of race, and that while people tend to organize racial groups
based on geography, culture, and physical characteristics, there is also a complex reality that races, especially in the United States, were “created historically to legitimize social inequality between groups with different ancestries, national origins, and histories” (Mukhopadhvav, Henze & Moses, 2013, p. xvi).

**Definition of whiteness**

Along with the word race, a similar challenge is how to approach the word white. Warren (2001) rests the majority of the research of whiteness on two foundations. First, whiteness functions as a cultural and social privilege. Second, being white is so normalized for white subjects that it is invisible to them. Whiteness, then, is a cultural and social privilege that is a socially constructed racial category (Haney-Lopez, 2004), and it carries with it social advantages of being “normal,” which means that all other races are identified within that social location (Crenshaw, 1997). Crenshaw (1997) believes that this social position has both material and legal value, and this advantage is based both on historical and current governmental, institutional, and individual actions.

Because they see themselves as “normal,” most whites do not overtly acknowledge this white privilege, even though they sense they have some vague privileges other racial groups do not. This perspective also allows them to ignore racism as a systematic function that protects the interests of white people and contributes to the silence about whiteness as a race (Crenshaw, 1997). Nakayama and Krizek (1995) similarly recognize this paradox: “The central contradiction at work within the ‘white’ discursive formation is its functional invisibility, yet importance” (p. 297). For them, whiteness has no essential nature, but is rather a rhetorical construction by whites whose experiences and communication patterns are taken as norms.
One of the big commitments of scholars is to bring the concept of whiteness into the open: “The basic premise of this work (white literature) relies on the argument that by ignoring whiteness, whiteness maintains its power and goes unquestioned, uncritiqued, and unchallenged” (Warren, 2001, p. 94). Exposing whiteness brings to light the perspectives of the average white person who functions in this reality on a daily basis and also critiques the mindsets of those in power that shape policies and laws (Brown et al., 2003). For the purposes of this study, addressing this whiteness is important because the majority of the students, administrators, and teachers that work at the school being studied are white and live in this socially constructed space of privilege that they are unlikely to recognize.

**Definition of color-blind mentality**

White privilege, being invisible and largely unrecognized, leads directly to what this dissertation will refer to as the “color-blind” mentality. The color-blind mentality (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Wise, 2010; Blau, 2004; Brown et. al., 2003), also known as the “post-racial” viewpoint (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1999), is summed up by Brown et al. (2003) as follows: color-blind proponents believe that (1) the Civil Rights movement was successful in ending racial inequality; (2) racial inequality still exists because blacks have failed to take advantage of opportunities created by the Civil Rights movement; (3) since most of the United States is color-blind, there is no need for non color-blind policies such as affirmative action. For people that operate in the color-blind mentality, the best way to combat racism is through education because simply educating people about racism should clear up the misconceptions and resolve the problem.
A consequence of holding a color-blind mentality is the belief in the reality of the meritocracy of the United States, the idea that anyone can succeed if they work hard enough (Warren, 2001). This introduces the argument that the problems of people of color and those from unprivileged minority groups are based on their individual choices. In essence, events that happen are natural outgrowths of people’s decisions and allow people who hold a dominant position in society to minimalize the reality of racism, since the only important factors that determine a person’s lot in life are their own personal decisions (Bonilla-Silva, 2010).

Some see being color-blind as a positive trait, because people “judge others as individuals and not on the basis of their social group membership” (Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000, p. 637). In this light, being color-blind has benefits for society, as being color-blind means to “focus on the importance of uniting a nation of individuals under a common set of democratic principles” (p. 648). Unfortunately, being color-blind most often means ignoring the realities of de facto racism and the power differentials that have been created through historical and institutional practices of white privilege (Warren, 2001). Winant (2001) also believes that the color-blind mentality is a major danger because it allows racism to continue unheeded. Keeping color consciousness at the fore is important as awareness of racism is the first step to political and social change: “The old charge that to criticize or even to acknowledge the presence of racism was ipso facto to perpetuate it…is less tenable today” (Winant, 2001, 313). Bonilla-Silva (2010) further argues that to combat white supremacy is to combat both the actions of de facto racism and the color-blind ideology that is present in society. The first can be challenged through education and pointing out the fact that racism and discrimination do exist and
are a real presence in the lives of many in the United States. Bonilla-Silva believes in the necessity of new leadership that can be more open to coalitions of different groups, from white progressives to nationalistic groups.

This dissertation will rely heavily on the concept of a color-blind mentality as an unchallenged and unconscious viewpoint that pervades the subjects of the study. It will assume that both the whiteness of the participants and the pervasiveness of the color-blind mentality throughout much of contemporary society in the United States (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011) will mean that most are in this mindset and, while benefitting from white privilege, do not recognize and even actively reject the claim that they have many social, economic, and political advantages that are based on historical and institutional racism.

Definition of “reverse racism”

One of the offshoots of the colorblind mentality is “reverse racism,” which also called “reverse discrimination.” This is the belief that whites have replaced blacks as the primary victims of discrimination (Norton & Sommers, 2011). This notion of anti-white prejudice most often comes through the framing of whites as the true victims of multiculturalism (Cabrera, 2014), and is often used as a strategy to protect white male entitlement (Chang, 1995).

The concept of “reverse racism” has a long legal history, dating back to the 1970s (Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, 1978) and has been a common theme in the Supreme Court in recent years (Gratz v. Bollinger, 2003; Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003; Ricci v. DeStefano, 2009). These cases and the commonality of the concept of “reverse racism” amongst many white people, particularly white males, are partly due to
the concept that racism is a zero-sum game, which can be distilled down to the idea of “less against you means more against me” (Cabrera, 2014; Norton & Sommers, 2011). In this view, actions meant to improve the welfare of minority groups come at the expense of whites. Finally, it seems that a belief in “reverse racism” tends to blind proponents of the color-blind mentality to the realities of de facto racism and, instead, claims that those individuals are unduly focused on their own perceived marginalization (Cabrera, 2014).

For this study, allusions to “reverse racism,” will be indications of the color-blind mentality. The dissertation will assume that students who purport to be the victim of “reverse racism” do so without recognizing the institutional and systematic reality of racism; in short, someone who claims to be a victim of “reverse racism” does not have a full grasp of de facto racism in all its forms.

**Definition of black – white dichotomy**

As will be seen in the proceeding chapters, racism in the United States is a major component of the fabric of society in the United States. It has a complex, long history that produced and maintained a tiered society based on race that is still present today. This tiered society includes different races, with whites of certain European decent holding most of society’s power, while others groups such as Native Americans, African Americans, Asians, Latinos, Asian Pacific people, and other Europeans holding much less power and at times being victims of active discrimination. Racism in the United States extends to many groups and there is a great deal of scholarship dedicated to each in their own regard to their struggles with racism.

This being said, it is also true that racism against blacks has had a particularly strong influence on the way society has been shaped and continues to currently shape
lives. While I acknowledge the racism present in all the other groups, because of the special horror of black slavery and prejudice that mark the history of the United States, much of the discussion will be centered on black-white relationships. I agree with Perea (1997) that this is a limited and incomplete picture, and that using what he calls a “black-white paradigm” has its limitations because it has the potential to downplay the importance of racism in other racial groups. However, the reality is that much of the research is based on black-white interactions, and the deep history of black racism epitomizes how racism operated and continues to operate in the United States. Though much of this research will have a focus on black-white interactions, I hope that it will be helpful in discussions of students of all races, and “that an understanding of White-against-Black racism may be helpful in understanding the deployment of racism against other non-Whites” (Perea, 1997).

**Purpose of the study**

I became interested in this topic several years ago when one of my colleagues, a religion teacher, sent an email beseeching advice from the faculty for one of his classes. The email explained that the teacher felt that close to half of the students in the classroom denied that racism was a problem, and the minority students, particularly black students, were visibly upset that their experiences were being so disregarded. At the time, I had no words of advice to offer, and I realized that I know very little about racism in contemporary society. I was also surprised that in my eight years of teaching at a Catholic school, with several of them in religion departments, this was the first experience I had with a teacher actually teaching about racism as a social justice issue. I began to have dialogues and ask questions about racism with this teacher, Mr. V, and also with students
I was teaching to get a feel for this sentiment. As the conversations continued I realized that this might be fertile ground for a dissertation.

After some time, I was able to narrow down the project to investigating the perceptions of racism of Catholic high school students, and my specific research questions became:

(1) What are Catholic high school students’ perceptions of racism?
(2) What are Catholic high school students’ experiences with racism?
(3) How does the experience of being in a Catholic school affect Catholic high school students’ perceptions of racism?

Significance of the study

I believe this study has the potential to add to the literature on perceptions of racism held by high school students. As will be seen in the proceeding chapters, while there is research on perceptions of students, there is little information on high school students who have gone through a Catholic education. Though all case studies are bounded by certain constraints (Merriam, 2009), once the contexts of this study are properly laid out, it should be possible to apply these findings to other situations in order to facilitate a better understanding of high school students’ perceptions of racism.

This study is also significant in that it has the potential to add to the discussions of the Catholic schools and how they address the issue of racism. As will be seen later, there has been criticism about the Catholic response to racism in the United States, and this study has the potential to provide some suggestions for better responses in the future. Secondly, the study can also add to the research on the Catholic school affect, looking to see if there is anything special about the Catholic school model that could specifically
address the issue of racism. Finally, the United States bishops recently released a curriculum framework that is being implemented throughout all the Catholic high schools in the country, and there is very little written about racism in the literature. This study is one of the first to offer critiques and suggestions for this document in light of how it approaches the topic of racism.

Outside of the Catholic school context, this dissertation can also add to the discussion about best practices of teaching racism in all schools. As will be seen, the unit on racism, while being taught in a religion class and centered on Catholic social teaching, has a great deal of insight that can be applied to non-religious settings. While there is literature about teaching racism, these are most often about graduate and undergraduate students or high school students in a public school. The unique viewpoint of Catholic social teaching can add a different perspective and nuance to the discussion to the practice of teaching racism.

Finally, I hope that this study has the potential to change lives. For one, it can add to the discussion of how to combat de facto racism through the exposure of racist practices and beliefs in both institutions and individuals. The findings of this study can help show that education can indeed be one part of the complicated web of actions needed to eradicate racism from society. I also believe that the significance of this study can change individual perspectives of racism, partly because it has already changed my own perspective. As I progress through this study, I feel that I am beginning to glimpse how racism is a deep part of my own psyche and of society around me. It gives me hope that education can indeed change individual perspectives on racism, as it has certainly changed mine throughout the course of this research. Hopefully this change, albeit a
small one, can add to an overall shift in perspectives as the United States continues to struggle with the historical and contemporary realities of racism.
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Grounding of racism historically

Racism has deep historical roots in the United States. The age of exploration brought many racially-driven people who believed that the cultures and practices of the indigenous people were less civilized and deficient compared with the European way of life. This racist mindset was further heightened by the fact that there was a large financial incentive to subjugate the native populations as well as a moral one, based on the belief that the native populations were in need of conversion to Christianity (Spring, 2010; Nothwehr & Haynes, 2008). As the Native populations became decimated by disease and as more white settlers wanted more land, the picture of the Native American changed from being a “respectable other” to “a red savage,” who was somehow less human (Spring, 2010).

A similar pattern occurred for black slaves. Initially, there was little distinction between slaves and white indentured workers from other parts of Europe, but as the workers, both black and white, began to strike and revolt in order to improve working conditions, the white owners began to make policies and practices that would highlight white skin over black skin in order to drive a wedge between the two groups and keep unrest at a minimum (Roediger, 1999). There was also financial incentive to keep the slaves longer and restrict even the freedoms of free blacks, and soon blacks also found themselves being viewed as less human than their white counterparts (Spring, 2010).

This shift in national consciousness was perpetuated because of the economic benefit it provided, and soon it hardened into racial lines that produced a tiered society,
with whites of European descent in the highest positions of moral, intellectual, and societal prominence, and other non-white groups such as blacks, Native Americans, Asians, and Latinos were below them on the social ladder (Winant, 2001; Liu, Robles, Leondar-Wright, Brewer & Adamson, 2006). This mindset soon prevailed in how the United States dealt with many new situations, including justifying the subjugation of new territories in the Pacific, producing Jim Crow laws and lynching, begetting immigration laws that excluded anyone that was not white from migrating to the United States, and exclusion of rights from Latinos and Asians particularly in the West (Omi, 1994; Fredrickson, 2002; Perea, 1997).

These distinct, racially tiered lines in the United States were not predestined, but rather kept in place due to the economic, societal, and moral superiority it allocated to white Europeans (Roediger, 1999; Winant, 2001). There were multiple occasions, such as during the formation of the United States as a new country, or with the dawn of the free market and women’s rights, when racism could have been directly addressed and perhaps eradicated, but in each of these situations major forces rose to perpetuate the deep racial structure that was already in place (Roediger, 1999). These forces were still present up to the 1960s, when the national consciousness had to directly confront its racist past through the Civil Rights era, and indeed are still in play today.

This brief historical overview of racism is important for several reasons. For one, it shows that race was socially constructed and that racism was largely dependent on the social and economic benefit that it afforded whites. This, in turn, gives some perspective of why racism continues to perpetuate to this day: there are groups of people who have benefited greatly from the racist practices of the past such as slavery, the stealing of
Native American land, and immigration laws, and that there is little social or economic incentive for them to give up these benefits (Winant, 2001). Second, this history gives some perspective of how deeply racism is imbedded in the national psyche of the United States, the effects of which can still be felt in laws, the judicial system, politics, and the economic gap that exists between races (Brown et al., 2003). It also shows how racial norms can be imbedded in individuals that manifest themselves in unconscious biases, and gives credence to the belief of those who, like Omi (1994), believe that “race will always be at the center of the American experience” (p. 5).

**Grounding racism institutionally**

Racism and white supremacy have not disappeared from the United States though the ways that they manifest have changed forms. After the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, it became much more difficult for outright racist behavior and language to be socially acceptable, and while there are still acts of overt racism that occur all too frequently, most of the racism now present in the United States has taken on more subtle forms (Gillborn, 2006). Jones (1997) identifies three major categories that help explain the current state of modern, or de facto, racism: (1) institutional racism, (2) cultural racism, and (3) individual racism.

**Institutional racism**

Institutional racism, sometimes referred to here as systematic racism, is based on the historical practices that have produced intentional or unconscious practices and policies of institutions in today’s society such as government, businesses, education, health care providers, or the judicial system, that promote one race over the other through their actions (Jones, 1997).
One clear example of institutional racism can be seen in the wealth disparity between racial groups in the United States, and I will use the black-white paradigm to show how this disparity plays out not only for black Americans, but for many different racial groups as well. There is a plethora of research on wealth and black Americans that show they have a major disadvantage compared to whites in similar social and economic situations (Oliver & Shapiro, 1997; Barsky, Bound, Charles, & Lupton, 2002; Altonji & Doraszelski, 2005). For example, Shapiro (2004) estimated that middle class blacks in 1999 received approximately $135,000 dollars less than whites in similar situations, and they had nearly $100,000 dollars less of financial assets. Similarly, Lui et al. (2006) found the median wealth of white Americans in 2001 was $120,900, while for blacks it was merely $17,100. Other studies of wealth in the 1990s found that black men earned 67% of what white working men earned, were more likely to live in segregated communities with low housing prices, and less likely to benefit from current tax laws (Shapiro, 2004; Rusk, 2001). More than half of black families fell under the poverty asset line in 1999 (Shapiro, 2004), were hit harder in welfare reform (Liu et al., 2006), and an estimated nine out of ten blacks will encounter poverty during their working years (Shapiro, 2004). Black American families need more people working and they work longer hours, as studies found black families had to work an equivalent of 12 more weeks than white families to earn the same money (Shapiro, 2004). The literature is clear: there is a very real negative financial impact for being black in the United States, and other studies show similar trends among Hispanics, Native Americans, and other minority groups (Liu et al., 2006; Black, Haviland, Sanders, & Taylor, 2006; Shapiro, 2004).
This wealth disparity can be partly explained through individual actions and prejudices of people, as studies of hiring practices found that blacks are less likely to be hired (Petersen, Saporta, & Seidel, 2005), less likely to get call-backs from interviews (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003), and more likely to be offered low-paying service jobs rather than professional occupations (Petersen, Saporta & Seidel, 2005). However, this does not account for the large disparity in wealth that has seen very little change since the 1950s (Shapiro, 2004), and one must look at the historical practices that have led institutional racism to create an entire society where groups of people have an unfair disadvantage purely because of their race.

Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to give a thorough treatment of the institutional practices that have led to the inequality of wealth in the United States based on race, a brief example of several practices of the federal government will help demonstrate how such institutions and institutional decisions of the past have a direct consequence on the wealth disparities seen today. The first was the Homestead Act of 1862, in which the federal government provided up to 160 acres of land to millions of Americans, and it is estimated that 46 million current descendants have benefitted from this act. However, the vast majority of these benefactors are white, because blacks were excluded from the Act and unable to capitalize on one of the biggest and most influential giveaways in the history of the United States. A similar theme found in the 1940s and 1950s when many white Americans received government benefits to purchase houses, a federal decision that systematically excluded blacks from the opportunity of homeownership (Shapiro, 2004). These two blatantly racist institutional practices by the federal government denied millions of black Americans the chance to own a house,
which Shapiro (2004) claims is “by far the single most important way families accumulate wealth” (p. 3). This lack of wealth accumulation by past generations has an effect on current black Americans, as family inheritances, especially financial resources, are “the primary means of passing class and race advantages and disadvantages from one generation to another” (Shapiro, 2004, p. 61).

The disparity of wealth is but one example of how institutional practices affect the lives of minority groups in the United States. Non-white individuals also face institutional racism in the political system (Kim, 2007; Omi & Winant, 2004; Frymer, 2010). For one, the past and present-day political system allow white politicians to largely ignore minority group’s votes (Kim, 2007; Frymer, 2010). At the same time, because white voters tend to vote for white candidates (Valentino, Hutchings & White, 2002), party leaders have discouraged black and other minority politicians from running in white districts (Highten, 2004). Such institutional practices have resulted in greatly reduced political power for minority groups. Black Americans, for example, have only won 57 of 6,667 House of Representative elections, only four black Americans have served in the U.S. Senate, while non-white groups, such as Asian Americans, are perpetually seen as outsiders (Kim, 2007). This is summed up by Bonilla-Silva (2010), who concluded:

“Because the number of blacks in significant decision making bodies (the U.S. House and Senate, for example) is minuscule, whites still vote largely for white candidates, and blacks do not have enough economic and social resources to use formal political rights as effectively as whites, electoral politics are effectively restricting the political options of blacks in the United States” (p. 103).

Minority groups face similar institutionally perpetuated racism in other forms of the government as well. In their analysis of the Supreme Court, Brown et al. (2003)
concluded that the general rulings of the Court tend to “exonerate whites, blame blacks (by default), and naturalize (render unobjectionable) the broad realities of race-based subordination in the United States” (p. 39). This is done primarily through the Court’s decision to use one definition to reject affirmative action, yet inconsistently use another to uphold policies that create or support racially disparate outcomes in housing, employment, the courts, and schools (Brown et al., 2003). One example of how Supreme Court decisions can affect institutional racism was in 2013, when the Court struck down the Voter Rights Act of 1965, which allowed nine historically racist states the right to change their voting laws without advance federal approval. Directly responding to the act, the state of Texas put into effect a voter identification law and plans for redistricting that critics claimed were discriminatory in nature (Liptak, 2013). While seemingly small and inconsequential, critics argue that this action takes away one of the safeguards from letting institutional practices become laws in local areas that inordinately target minority groups and take away political power (Archer, 2015).

Education is another area where the historical practices and institutional racism has perpetuated social norms and the hierarchical racial structure in the United States. Historically, education has been used as a way to propagate the power differential between racial groups. Spring (2010) contends that education was often used as a means for upholding the racial boundaries of white supremacy in the United States. Perry (2002) echoed this thought and saw education as a way to perpetuate “a white, European American, middle-class, patriarchal culture” (p. 10). For Spring (2010), this was primarily done through what he labeled “deculturalization programs,” which focused on segregation and isolation of minority groups, forced change of language, curriculum
content of the dominant culture, textbooks that reflect the dominant culture, denial of original culture and religion, and the use of teachers from the dominant group. All of these were a means to assimilate the minority groups into the existing racial structure.

For black Americans in the South and Mexican Americans in the West, there was often a conflicting opinion about education. On the one hand, farmers and capitalists wanted to keep these populations uneducated so they could work and be easier to control, while on the other hand, the public officials wanted to use education to Americanize them (Spring, 2010). More sinisterly, education for Native Americans was used as a way to continue the genocide of Native populations, as the United States attempted to eradicate the Native American culture using boarding schools that removed students from their families (Adams, 2005). Schools in California and Mississippi expressly denied Chinese American students into local schools maintained separate facilities until the passing of Civil Rights legislation in 1965 (Spring, 2010). These institutional practices through education helped support and maintain a racist mindset throughout the United States while continuing to uphold the power differential that still reverberates throughout society.

However, the use of education changed drastically in the 1930s and 1940s, both with the rise of progressive thinkers who greatly influenced public education and with the atrocities of WWII that highlighted what extreme racism could beget in the form of Nazi Germany. Burkholder (2011) argues that both of these events greatly influenced educational practices about racism and many began active campaigns to eradicate racism from United States society. These early attempts focused on using scientific knowledge to argue that race was not biological but could be better understood as a cultural
phenomenon. However, this emphasis on tolerance receded in the post-war years while leaving the concept of race intact, and in doing so, Burkholder (2011) contends, culture was used as a foil that recast the dangerous aspects of early, twentieth-century racism into more acceptable, but equally destructive, discourse of cultural diversity that can still be found in education to this day: “[Multiculturalism] continues to haunt antiracist initiatives in American schools by inscribing differences as natural while obscuring the social relations of production and the enduring power of racism in a capitalistic society” (p. 9).

Burkholder (2011) also identifies the Brown decision of 1954 as one of the culminations of a deliberately created color-blind mindset that was further embedded in the educational system during the Cold War years. This happened in part because, as the color-blind ideal became more mainstream, teachers began to fear that addressing race and racism in the class could be a risk to their job. Concurrently, science was shifting toward seeing racism through psychology, which focused on the individual and prejudice. This shift away from a cultural view of racism to an individual view “silenced the subject of race in [midcentury] American classrooms” and instead of teaching about race, it “promoted a colorblind ideal based on the psychological argument that it was better to ignore race and practice racial integration than to dwell on racial inequalities or race relations in America” (Burkholder, 2011, p. 13).

Burkholder (2011) holds that we are currently seeing a resurgence of this color-blind mentality in a post-9/11 era that focuses on asserting the moral superiority of Western democracy, and this is not helpful in addressing racism in education: “The colorblind ideal masks institutionalized racism in America [by treating] racial prejudice as the problem of interpersonal relations, [and] assuming that if people would simply stop
being prejudiced the problems of racial inequality in America would evaporate” (p. 179). Thus, while having the power and sometimes the will to combat racism, public education in the United States, both historically and currently, has had difficulty doing so because it fails to recognize the institutional nature of racism and instead buys into the color-blind ideals that place the onerous of racism on individuals.

*Cultural racism*

This treatment of racism in education is also an example of how institutions that have been in place long enough and/or have enough societal influence, may morph into cultural racism, which Jones (1997) claims is the ability of one group to change the cultural values of the society that will marginalize other groups. At this level, racism incorporates people and rules into cultural norms that categorize people in a hierarchical structure economically, politically, socially, and ideologically. This allows the groups in power to subjugate other groups and benefit from the system by being seen as “normal” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). In many cases this normalization means that the dominant group does not notice this racial structure, just like they do not notice the air they breathe. Thus, in the United States, whites on the whole tend to identify themselves as raceless, and in not challenging this socially and historically constructed “normal” identity, they are complicit in the reproduction of white racial dominance (Perry, 2002). This leads some to claim that the United States has transitioned from a country of racial dominance to racial hegemony; races are kept subordinated not by direct political and legislative action, but indirectly through the institutionalized nature of racism (Winant, 2001).

A stark example of cultural racism is told by Massingale (2010), who recounts that during Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, the Associated Press published two photos
of people in identical situations, namely trying to survive in the aftermath of one of the worst hurricanes to ever land in the United States. The first showed a black man and carried the caption: “A young man walks through chest-deep flood water after looting a grocery store in New Orleans.” The second was of two white men, and the caption read “Two residents wade through chest-deep water after finding bread and soda in a local grocery store in New Orleans.” The captions captured the cultural message that one was “looting” when the other was “finding.” After a storm of protest the pictures were taken down, but they highlight the cultural and often unconscious view that surrounds race issues in the United States.

Massingale (2010) explains that racism in the United States is a cultural phenomenon, and this means that “racism functions a culture, that is, a set of shared beliefs and assumptions that undergirds the economic, social, and political disparities experienced by different racial groups” (p. 24). This gives rise to the phenomenon of unconscious racism that allows people to absorb the racialized cues of culture and perpetuate them in their attitudes and actions toward minority groups. Racism is a complex entity, a “system of meaning” and “cultural phenomenon” that “significantly forms the identity of the dominant group” (Massingale, 2010, p. 33). As such, it is the underlying foundation on which the social, economic, and political fabric relies, and is largely invisible to the dominant group who benefit from the current power structure (Massingale, 2010).

Effects of institutional and cultural racism

The effects of institutional and cultural racism have very real consequences. As discussed above, institutional racism has had a direct effect on the wealth and political
disparity currently seen in the United States, but there are other consequences as well. In
education, for example, there are major gaps today that can be seen along racial lines as
black, Latino, and Native American students do not fare as well as white and Asian
students in school (Kozol, 1992). A study by the Council of Great City Schools found
that in 2007, only 60% of fourth grade students in largely minority, urban schools were at
a fourth grade reading and math level, and only 55% of eighth grade students were
passing at the eighth grade level. The same report shows that 80% of fourth graders in
minority urban schools score below their respective states in math and reading, and about
85% of eighth graders fit the same criteria (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly,
2010). Nearly half of all black students and Latino students attend high schools in which
graduation is not the norm (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). One study found that only 65% of
black and Latino students graduate with a high school diploma, while another compared
white and black males, finding that only 52% of black males graduated compared with
78% of white males (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010; Holzmann, Jackson & Beaudry,
2012). The black-white gap for graduation rates is 17 percentage points and has remained
virtually unchanged since 1980 (Heckman & LaFountaine, 2010). Black students are
more than twice as likely as white students to obtain a GED, but these GEDs are less
effective in gaining employment than regular high school diplomas (Heckman &
LaFontaine, 2010). In terms of college, approximately 60% of black students attend
college, compared to 73% for white students (Bennet & Lutz, 2009). Black students enter
kindergarten with fewer reading skills than whites, and they have lower test scores in
primary and secondary schools. This gap tends to widen as they progress, meaning blacks
fail to make future progress in schools (Fergusen, 2003). Similar problems face Native American and Latino students (Liu et al., 2006).

Along with these educational consequences of racism, there are also consequences for being a minority in terms of the judicial system, where it is blatantly clear that non-white males are especially over-represented in the country’s prisons and courtrooms. Though only 12.5% of the population, black males were convicted for 27% of rape crimes against females, 55.6% of robberies, and 28.4% of total crimes (United States Department of Justice, 2012). In 2003, one in twenty black males was in a correctional system in the United States (Lopez, 2010). This over-representation is due, in no small part, to institutional racism that is embedded in the criminal justice system. From the street to the prisons, non-white males were more likely to be stopped and searched by police officers than whites (Engel & Calnon, 2004; Lundman, 2003; Gelman, Fagan & Kiss, 2007; Smith & Pertocelli, 2001), more likely to be sentenced, and the sentences they received were longer sentences than those for whites convicted of the same crime (Rehavi & Starr, 2012; Mitchell, Haw, Pfeifer, & Meissner, 2005). These and other studies indicate that there are policies and practices inherent in the criminal justice system that result in gross disparities along racial lines.

Finally, there is ample evidence that having to deal with racism in all forms has a direct impact on a person’s health. For example, there is a strong correlation between experiencing racism and poor mental health outcomes (Paradies, 2006). Non-white groups tend to claim more psychological distress, are more likely to take part in risky behavior such as smoking, and have higher mortality rates (Krieger, Smith, Naishadham, Hartman & Barbeau, 2005; Williams, 2006). Groups that self-report major incidents of
racism have lower physical functioning, poorer mental health, are more prone to smoking, and are more susceptible to cardiovascular disease (Harris et al., 2006). Even just the perception of discrimination has been linked to significant negative effects of both physical and mental health, raises stress response, and is related to the participation in unhealthy behaviors (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009).

*Individual racism*

Institutions and cultures are made up of individuals, and their thoughts and actions do have a major impact on the continuation of the racial structure in the United States. The study of individual racism can be traced to the late 19th and early 20th century when the new discipline of sociology began to address the issue formally. To many of these early sociologists, individual racism was a problem that could be attributed to attitudes and prejudices of individual people, and these “deviations” could be fixed through education and therapy on the individual level (Omi, 1994). In the early years of social science research, racism was not seen as a top priority like that of economics and the rise of capitalism. In fact, social science actually added to the racist identity of the United States by promoting Social Darwinism that helped influence the racial hysteria of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In the 1920s, “modern” social theory on race emerged, which taught that racism is composed mainly of attitudes and prejudices of individuals and that race problems will be solved once the maligned ethnic group is assimilated into the larger society. This simplistic view was challenged in the 1970s, but regained popularity among neoconservatives in the 1980s and 1990s (Omi, 1994).

This focus on the individual soon gave rise to the study of prejudice. Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, and Esses (2010) categorize the study of prejudice in three historical
waves. The first wave of researchers viewed prejudice as an abnormal personality trait that needed to be treated and removed. They saw only a few people as racist, and such individuals could be identified as having a conservative mindset and lower socioeconomic background. The second wave, starting in the 1970s, reversed this viewpoint and said that prejudice was actually a normal part of the human experience of categorization and social organization. Racism, then, was seen as something more intrinsic in the human condition, and researchers began to look for ways people displayed these “quiet” forms of modern racism (Fiske, 2000, p. 301). Again, these viewpoints involved the individual’s conscious and unconscious cognitive beliefs (Fiske, 2000). The third wave, in which we currently reside, recognizes that individuals have conscious and unconscious individual biases that emerge in complex social interactions. This wave is interested in using data from brain research and cognitive-motivational and social theories to help unravel how racism manifests itself both on the individual and social level (Dovidio et al., 2010).

This background presents a more nuanced and complicated picture of individual racism. It recognizes that overt racist actions still exist, and, realistically, many individuals still instigate overt acts of racism. This being said, the vast majority of the United States society tends to be very wary of overt actions, in large part because racism is seen as one of the most egregious social sins, and to be called a “racist” has huge social consequences (Tatum, 2003). This has forced individual acts and thoughts of racism underground, where people may make racist comments or perform racist acts but adamantly deny that they have done so. Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) have documented some of the abstract language and phrases that people, mostly white, use to
hide their racist attitudes and ultimately blame the non-white minority groups for their own problems without acknowledging the structural difficulties that hinder their progress. For example, the students being interviewed might use the phrase, “I’m not racist, but…” before then saying a racist statement. These researchers argue that this is an example of a new “racetalk” that continues to racially divide the United States and continues the reproduction of White supremacy (p. 52).

Other research reveals the fact that while the color-blind mentality purports that most individuals are post-racial in their thinking and actions, in reality many people harbor unconscious biases and racist attitudes. Current sociology and psychology maintain that the brain sorts incoming data into broad categories (Fiske, 2000). These mental shortcuts allow for rapid assessment and recall and are essential for navigating all the information that flows in through the senses. Social interactions are surprisingly complicated interactions, forcing the mind to make sense of vast amounts of data in short periods of time, and it is an advantage to anticipate actions based on past experiences (Hari & Kujala, 2009). Such grouping is natural and it is unusual for stereotypes to be highly discrepant from reality: “The scientific evidence provides more evidence of accuracy than inaccuracy in social stereotypes (Jussim, Cain, Crawford, Harber, & Cohen, 2009, 221).

However, as these mental categories are being constructed, largely through cultural norms, they tend to construct in-group and out-group categorizations (Fiske, 2000), where the individual identifies with others in the in-groups and do not with members of the out-group. This means that the in-group members are treated as “normal” and the differences between them and the individual are minimized, while the out-group
members are more readily noticed and their differences highlighted. Thus, individuals tend to be more forgiving of discrepancies of individuals in the in-group whose actions are seen as “normal,” while any negative actions of one individual in the out-group are noticed more quickly and then associated with that whole group (Fiske, 2000).

For example, in social situations, a person’s face is one of the first and most important sources of information gleaned about that person (Hari & Kujala, 2009). If the face were black, for instance, a white viewer will notice it quicker and may consciously or even unconsciously hold negative biases against the person purely because of the internal categories triggered by the face. This idea is supported by research, which indicates that the more black a person’s physical features are, the more likely people are to produce negative scores on Implicit Bias Tests (Blair, Judd, Sadler & Jenkins, 2002). Similarly, a study of police officers found that participants categorized black faces as more criminal than white faces (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004). Another study found that when primed with images relating to black culture, police and juvenile probation officers were more likely to associate negative traits and assumed greater culpability of black youth, resulting in the endorsement of harsher punishments (Graham & Lowry, 2004). In addition, another study found that people who were shown black faces reacted with greater hostility to being interrupted in a task than those who were being shown white faces (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996). The conclusions drawn by researchers indicate that, because of their internal categorization of in-groups and out-groups, even people who hold egalitarian views have implicit biases against blacks, women, gay people, and other non-traditional and non-power holding groups (Saul, 2013).
These findings imply that those who espouse a color-blind mentality tend to believe racism is mainly the actions of mentally deviant individuals, though in reality racism is most often perpetuated by normal people reacting to social situations based on years of cultural conditioning that produces subtle and often unconscious racist behavior (Phelps et al., 2000). Although this behavior is hidden through language and covert actions (Bonilla-Silva, 2010), this viewpoint has real consequences, as it affects how people vote, hire, and how they feel about policies such as affirmative action (Sears, Van Laar, Carrillo, & Kosterman, 1997; Kim & Tamborini, 2006; Brown et al., 2003).

Modern racism as a whole

Modern racism, then, is a complex combination of individual, institutional, and cultural racism that produces a power differential between groups that many in the dominant position fail to see or define as “racist”. There are several examples of how modern racism makes use of all three aspects to produce real disparities between groups. The first, and one that is treated most in the literature, is that of the justice system. As shown above, there is extensive evidence that the criminal justice system is racist in its outcomes, as many studies have documented the fact that black and Latino young males are by far more likely to be stopped by police, convicted, sentenced, and receive the death penalty than whites (Lundman, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2005; Smith & Pertocelli, 2001).

On the individual level, there is evidence of unconscious bias towards minority groups. For example, one study found that black faces trigger thoughts of crime in white people, while at the same time crime can also trigger thoughts of black people (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie & Davis, 2004). Another laboratory experiment found that both citizens and police officers were more likely to shoot black men when under pressure, which led the
researchers to conclude that people are inherently quicker to disdain based on an unconscious level (Correll, Park, Judd & Wittenbring, 2002). In terms of juries, one study of jurists found that they were more likely to remember aggressive facts about black males (Levinson, 2006), while another found that white jurists had a tendency to convict black males and assign them stricter sentences (Pfiefer, 1991). Studies on the death penalty also indicate the influence of individual biases, as whites that were primed to think about crime in a racial context were more likely to support the death penalty (Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007). Interestingly, whites in the study became more supportive of the death penalty and less open to discussion when arguments were presented saying the system was biased and discriminated against blacks (Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007).

These individual biases are responsible for and work in concert with institutional racism. This side of racism is deeply historical, grounded in laws, societal norms, and past overt forms of racism that continues to affect lives of minority groups. For example, a longitudinal study followed 481 black and white boys from childhood to early adulthood and examined what affected their tendency toward crimes. The researchers found that black males were more likely to be arrested, but this was based in large part on childhood factors seemingly unrelated to crime and often out of their control, such as low academic achievement, poor parent-child communication, peer delinquency, and neighborhood problems. The researchers concluded that the problem of black male arrests was systematic, complicated, and shows how seemingly unrelated institutional racism directly affects individual lives in the criminal justice system (Fite, Wynn & Pardini, 2009). This conclusion is exemplified by Brown et al. (2003)’s succinct synopsis of how institutional racism can affect a young, black male’s life. For one, institutional
factors beyond the young male’s control, such as high unemployment, few effective public social programs, and pressure on families, means that black youths are seen as having fewer resources outside the court, so when they get in trouble with the law they are more likely to be placed in custody rather than released to the community. This, in turn, means they have a worse criminal history record, which leads to harsher judgment in the next encounter with the institution, and also propels them disproportionately into the adult justice system. Young, black males and other minorities are therefore disproportionately targeted by the institution of the criminal justice system, and shows how modern racism can use both individual biases and institutional practices to produce a culture of racism that is difficult to both implicate and fix in a post-racial society that is unable to recognize the complexities of the racial system set in place.

While the criminal justice system is one of the best examples of modern racism, the second example can be seen in education. On the individual level, minority students are treated differently, as white students are viewed as less threatening and less problematic while black students are more likely to be seen as troublemakers and singled out for discipline (Morris, 2006). In the 2009-2010 school year, one in six black students (17%) and one in 14 Latino students (7%) was suspended compared to 1 in 20 white students (5%) in public schools across the United States (Holzman, Jackson & Beaudry, 2012). Similarly, because teachers tend to underestimate the potential of black and other minority students, they are less likely to take challenging classes and be on a college track (Fergusen, 2003).

These problems that arise from the individual level are partly due to historical and institutional practices that have produced largely segregated schools, where black and
other minority students are more likely to be taught in schools with other blacks and minorities (Shapiro, 2004; Wise, 2010). Such schools are treated differently, tend to have older facilities with more problems, higher teacher turnover, crowded classrooms, and receive less money per student than suburban schools with higher percentages of white students (Banfanz & Legters, 2004; Ness, 2004). These minority students are more likely to have health issues that keep them out of school longer, face physical danger, and engage in at-risk behavior (Hoffman, 1996). With so many factors against non-white students, it is no surprise that many researchers see institutional racism in education as stacking the deck against many schools, as “failure in school is a modern-day scarlet letter that practically ensures other lack of success, such as lower employment rates and earnings, troubles with the law, and jail” (Shapiro, 2004, 144).

**Combatting racism**

Shapiro (2004) has several practical suggestions for addressing wealth inequality in the United States, such as implementing a savings account, with the help of the federal government, to encourage low-income families to save for their children. Shapiro (2004) also advocates a flat, 10% tax on all inheritance after death and a tax on large financial gifts to limit the transfer of unearned wealth through select families. In regards to housing, Shapiro suggests reworking the tax codes to have a flat rate deducted from every purchase rather than plans that reward higher income families along with movement toward ending mortgage discrimination based both on race and the location of the property in a minority neighborhood.

Brown et al. (2003) also believe that policies should be created to attack persistent discrimination by strengthening existing anti-discrimination laws, promoting diversity,
and challenging neutral institutional practices that routinely generate inequality. Other practices include monitoring firms and their application processes, and applying race discrimination tests on employers, unions, and employment agencies. Increased oversight and stricter enforcement of anti-racial profiling laws is needed, and collecting data on race-based arrests, incarcerations, and sentencing can help determine where major problems are in the criminal justice system. They recommend a reduction in laws disproportionately targeting minorities, which would help reverse the trend for mandatory sentencing, especially for gang- or drug-related offenses.

Since schools are financed largely through property taxes, affluent neighborhoods can finance better schools. The school financing should be shifted to the state or federal level (Shapiro, 2004). Basically it means “greatly increased educational resources more fairly distributed” (p. 201). Brown et al. (2003) argue that more resources are needed for low-income schools to implement smaller classes, gain better teachers, and have more course offerings. Kivel (2002) believes that reducing barriers preventing teachers of color from the teaching profession will help produce positive role models who are able to counter the traditional white curricula. In addition, a curriculum focusing on critical thinking skills and emphasizing on the colonial actions in the past can help students understand racism in current society, along with finding ways to help combat de facto racism.

Winant (2001) believes that the color-blind mentality is dangerous because it allows racism to continue unheeded; keeping color consciousness at the fore is important as awareness of racism is the first step to political and social change. “The old charge that to criticize or even to acknowledge the presence of racism was ipso facto to perpetuate
it…is less tenable today” (Winant, 2001, 313). Botella-Silva (2001) further argues that to combat white supremacy is to combat both the actions of the new racism and the color-blind ideology that is present in society. The first can be challenged through education and pointing out the fact that racism and discrimination do exist and are a real presence in the lives of many blacks in the United States.

Conclusion

A discussion of the institutional, cultural, and individual nature of modern racism is important for several reasons. For one, it supports the claim that the United States is not a post-racial society, but that racism is still a major factor. Second, it shows how racism manifests itself in certain institutions, such as education and religion, which are two important topics for this dissertation. Finally, the covert nature of modern racism helps explain people’s perceptions of racism and helps explain students’ perceptions when analyzing data from this dissertation.

Grounding of perceptions of racism through Critical Race Theory

Perception is subjective and is a personal lens through which an individual interprets the world. These lenses are products of our overarching philosophies of how the world operates, what our communities and societies teach us, and our own experiences. Our personal perceptions can often be challenged and focused by theoretical lenses, and one such lens that will help shed light on the issue of racism, and in particular perceptions of racism, is that of Critical Race Theory (CRT).

CRT emerged in the mid-1980s from the broader critical theory framework. Critical theory is a research paradigm created in the 1930s that started as both a critique of and a liberation of society from strict ideologies, including the positivist and
constructivist viewpoints they felt perpetuated the status quo (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005). The goal of critical theorists is to not only “give an account of society and behavior,” but to also “realize a society that is based on equality and democracy for all its members” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005, 28). They want nothing more than to transform society (Merriam, 2009).

CRT, which emerged from this rich tradition of critique with the goal of transformation, started in law and eventually expanded into other areas such as education, medicine, and politics. Their main focus is to shed light on the reality of both the historical and institutional nature of racism and challenge the color-blind and race-neutral viewpoint they find is perpetuating racial injustice. As stated by Parker (1998): “A major point of CRT is to place race at the center of analysis with respect to how many White European Americans and institutions in U.S. society assume normative standards of whiteness, which in turn ignores or subjugates African-Americans, American Indians, Chicano-Chicanas, Chinese-Americans, and other marginalized racial groups” (p. 45).

Thus, CRT focuses on the hidden nature of race and racism with the goal of uncovering the continued power differential that gives one group economic, societal, political, and cultural advantage over another (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solorzano, 1997). For example, CRT theorists attempt to describe the realities of racial profiling, the disproportionate number of black males in prisons, housing costs, disproportional wages, poverty, distribution of environmental hazards and risks, test scores, college admissions, and attacking the conservative movement that believes in a color-blind society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In all these cases, CRT theorists set race and racism as part of the underlying structure of society, and their goal is to expose the myriad of ways racism is
consciously and unconsciously perpetuated and rationalized by people who benefit from racist institutions and practices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In short, CRT theorists want to force society to have a substantive discussion about racism (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

CRT scholars often use storytelling as a means of transmitting these ideas in their work (Carter, 2008; Parker, 1998). One common narrative device is to construct counter-stories that oppose the grand narratives told in a white privilege system. For example, historically there has been a grand narrative that the low achievement of students of color is due to biological or cultural deficiencies. This means that students of color do not have the mental capacity of their fellow white students, or that their cultures do not reward hard work or educational achievement (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). This has real affects on how teachers view students, as they are then more likely to shuffle minority students into less challenging educational tracks and assume these students will cause more trouble in class (Morris, 2006; Holzman, Jackson & Beaudry, 2012). The answer, according to this grand narrative, is that students and parents of the minority groups should assimilate into the school culture, which is dominated by white societies’ goals and standards of behavior (Morris, 2006). These powerful stories help perpetuate the racial disparities already found in schools, and it is the role of CRT to disrupt these narratives by telling counter-stories. Such stories are focused on pointing out fallacies present in these larger narratives and to focus on the institutional racism and unconscious biases that are largely responsible for the low student achievements and the skewed disciplinary records of students of color. CRT attempts to expose the root of the problem, rather than stopping conversation by blaming the victims (Solorzano & Yasso, 2002). For
example, CRT theorists believe that race is central to the reason there are higher dropout rates, lower college attendance, and a multitude of other problems that face minority students (Howard, 2003). In addressing these problems, they all contain roughly the same themes, which are summarized by Lawrence, Matsuda, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) as: (1) Racism is endemic in the United States; (2) CRT is skeptical of legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy; (3) Historical context is important; (4) It is important to have the voice of people of color when discussing law and society; (5) CRT is interdisciplinary; and (6) CRT works toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of eliminating oppression of all kinds. For CRT scholars, these themes make CRT uniquely suited to address issues in education and help produce a clearer picture of the influences on student lives, especially those related to inequality, discrimination, and racism (Howard, 2003).

Not only is CRT able to challenge the dominant narrative in society at large, but it also challenges the narrative in methodologies and scholarly work. For example, there is a narrative in education that good grades and high academic standards are white ideals and are not associated with black culture (Akom, 2008). This has led some researchers to claim that black and other minority students shun having high academic achievement because it is seen as acting white (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fryer & Torelli, 2010; Hemmings, 1996). While there is controversy from many researchers about this theory, (Hovart & Lewis, 2003; Cook & Ludwig, 1998), this is also a good example of how CRT theorists can use their critical nature to design their own studies to ask different research questions challenging the dominant narrative of black culture. For example, Tyson, Darity, and Castellino (2005) interviewed high achieving black students in eight different
high schools and concluded that the school’s structure, rather than the black culture, resulted in the stigmatization of high achieving black students. Unlike Fordham and Ogbu (1986), who believed the ideals of the black community contributed to this conflict for students, Tyson et al. (2005) concluded that institutional and structural racism are actually central to black students’ identity and how they perceive themselves. This led the authors to a final critique of the dominant narrative of acting white: “The empirical foundation underlying the burden of acting white is fragile at best” (Tyson et al., 2005, p. 601).

Similarly, CRT challenges the institutional practices that have produced inequity in the educational system. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) claim that school inequity is based on three central propositions: (1) race is a significant factor in determining inequality in the U.S.; (2) U.S. society is based on property rights; and (3) one can understand inequality by looking at the intersection of racism and property rights. Focusing on the last point, Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) claim “the grand narrative of U.S. history is replete with tensions and struggles over property in its various forms” (p 17). They point out that individual rights, civil rights, and social benefits are given largely to property owners, which has important consequences for education. The most obvious result is property taxes, which are one of the main funding mechanisms for public schools. Thus, the more affluent communities with larger tax bases have more resources for their schools. This manifests in higher quality of curriculum, better facilities and equipment, and appropriately certified and prepared teachers. Ladson-Billings and Tate argue that these disparities in education are directly linked to the property rights, which are in turn a result from historical and institutional racism. In their treatment of the
problem, they concluded that CRT is beneficial because it helps give a voice to those who may not otherwise be heard by uncovering racist realities that are all too often ignored. They also concluded with the belief that the voice of people of color is imperative for a complete analysis of the education system, and one of the tragedies is that their voices have been silenced.

Some CRT theorists have actually used CRT in the classrooms, such as Stovall (2006) who used CRT to teach social studies in an urban high school. During the course of the class, the students traveled around the city, took class in conventional and unconventional settings, participated in workshops, and created presentations for their neighborhood about what they learned. Stovall found that “the stories of students of color in high school were legitimized as they engaged with viewpoints that challenged those of the status quo” (p. 231), and students appreciated being able to speak about race without ridicule.

CRT is not only a helpful lens through which one can view the reality of racism in education, but it can also help show how people’s perceptions play a large role in the continued reproduction of discrimination and racism in the United States. One of the most dominant perception is the color-blind perception, which is the idea that we live in a post-race society, racism has been all but eradicated from U.S. society, and that “the idea that white racism is the main obstacle to black success and achievement is now all but obsolete” (McWhoter, 2000, p. x). These thinkers point to the progress that blacks and other minority groups have had in employment, education, life expectancy, and homeownership, along with the immense gains of some minority groups like Asian Americans and Jews. Many of these groups have been so successfully incorporated into
United States society there is little to no difference between them and mainstream Americans (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1999). In fact, race and racism is such a non-issue in the United States that any problems that still face these groups are actually the fault of these groups themselves. Because they often use racism as a crutch, they are unable to address the real issues in these cultures. For example, “the explosive mix [of violent crime among young black males] can be boiled down to absent parents, dropping out of school, and acceptance of criminal behavior that results in jail time” (Williams, 2006, p. 122). This perspective believes that racism is not the problem. Rather, the groups themselves do not take responsibility for their problems and rely on affirmative action and other government programs, thus carrying American society backward and widening racial gaps (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 1999; Malik, 2008).

Many people in the United States share this perspective, which can be seen in a variety of polls. For example, one poll directed at young people from ages 14-24 found that 88% of the respondents perceived practices such as affirmative action based on race are unfair, and 58% of the respondents thought that as they get older, racism will become less of an issue. In addition, 68% believed that focusing on race as an issue prevents society from becoming color-blind (Hales, 2014). Another poll found that 54% of whites surveyed believed that the country had done enough to give equal rights to blacks compared with 36% who did not (Pew Research Center, 2010). These statistics indicates a strong contingency of Americans strives for the color-blind mentality and perceive the United States as already post-race.

However, this color-blind perception tends to run counter to the experiences of many individuals. Several polls have found that individuals of minority groups report
experiencing discrimination more often than whites. A self-reported study found that 57% of Asians and Pacific Islanders, 50% of blacks, and 37% of Hispanics said they were bullied over the last five years, compared to only 13% of whites. These were working adults; of those surveyed, 81% claimed the bullying came from a supervisor and 58% by co-workers (Fox & Stallworth, 2005). Similarly, a Blair-Rockefeller national poll of over 3,400 participants found that 81% of southern black Americans and 80% of non-southern black Americans reported experiencing discrimination in their day-to-day life. When probed further, both groups reported similar instances of poorer service (68%), treated as if someone feared you (58%), treated with less respect (77% southern black Americans and 71% non-southern black Americans), called names (38%), physically attacked or threatened (19%), and racially profiled (44%) (Ford Dowe, 2010). Other surveys found similar discrepancies in the criminal justice system (Weitzer and Tuch, 2005).

Feagin and Sikes (1995) provide more evidence from their interviews of over two thousand middle-class black Americans that documented their many experiences with discrimination. The researchers repeatedly found that black Americans’ perceptions of racism were influenced by the actual experience of discrimination on themselves, relatives, and friends. The researchers found that “a black person’s life is regularly disrupted by the mistreatment suffered personally or by family members,” and this cumulative effect not only shapes the black person’s perspective of life, but also has a negative effect on their mental health and well-being (p. 16). As they point out, one of the problems is that people see each act of discrimination as an isolated event, when in reality
it is just one more action in a litany of big and small situations that continually remind black Americans of their “place” in American society (Feagin & Sikes, 1995, p. 23).

This difference in perceptions, often based on personal experience, means there is a divide in the way different groups interpret different events. In a study by Pew, 71% of blacks thought the response to Hurricane Katrina was discriminatory to black Americans, while only 32% of white Americans thought this was the case (Adams, O’Brien, & Nelson, 2006). In another poll addressing specific federal policies, only 14% of whites said too little attention is given to race while 47% of blacks answered in the affirmative. In the same poll, 56% of whites said too much attention was given to race while only 18% of blacks said the same (Ford Dowe, 2010). A similar, though slightly muted, trend was found in the poll for Millennials. When asked if discrimination against whites has become as big an issue as discrimination against racial minority groups, 48% of whites Millennials answered in the affirmative while only 27% of the people of color answered the same (Hales, 2014). These and many other polls continually show a divide in perceptions of racism in the United States occurring generally between whites and individuals of minority groups.

CRT is an important lens through which to view the perceptions of individuals by recognizing racism. While people may believe and hold the perception that we live in a post-race or color-blind society, the reality is that race and racism are still major components of society in the United States. CRT theorists and other researchers have the ability to look critically at the color-blind belief and reach several conclusions. For one, the color-blind perspective does not give any reason to help minority groups that are clearly less privileged. According to Bonilla-Silva (2010), the color-blind mentality has
“little intellectual, moral, and practical room for whites to support the policies that are needed to accomplish significant change in this country” (p. 162). Instead, a color-blind mentality “provides an almost impenetrable defense of postmodern white supremacy” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, 162). This, in the mind of CRT theorists, is the danger to a color-blind perspective: if we live in a post-race society, then there is no reason to fix any problems regarding racism, leaving any issues resulting from structural and institutional racism unaddressed. These practices are then perpetuated for coming generations of minority groups.

A second conclusion CRT offers is that individual’s perceptions of racism also have consequences in education. Many studies at the college level find that non-white students tend to report perceived racism at higher percentages than white students (Biasco, Goodwin & Vitale, 2001; Marcus et al., 2003; Rankin & Reason; 2005). These reports usually appear in the form of racially driven conflict on campus, pressure to conform to stereotypes, and less equitable treatment by professors and other teaching staff (Ancis, Sedlacck, & Mohr, 2000). Specifically, racist actions included kicking, pushing, racially charged language, and name calling, along with more subtle forms, such as ignoring and having lower expectations for minority students (Boyce & Vogel, 2009; Boyce, Vogel, Cope & Hubbard, 2009; Brackett et al., 2006). Incidents of discrimination and racism tend to happen in less public settings on school campuses, which means they are harder for the general public to witness and also more difficult to control (Brackett et al., 2006). Researchers have found that such racism has a direct effect on students’ schooling because those who experience racism and discrimination were less engaged and interested in school (Scott, 2009; Boomer, 2001). Studies of students in medical
school, engineering programs, and graduate school similarly found that students of color perceived the existence of racism and discrimination during their studies (Bullock & Houston, 1987; Brown, Morning & Watkins, 2005; Beoku-Betts, 2004).

At the high school level, studies have also shown that minority students are more likely to perceive discrimination with respect to teacher treatment, school suspensions, and police treatment compared to white students (Ruck & Wortley, 2002). These perceptions are based partially on experiences with adults including teachers, police, and store employees who often held low expectations for the students and displayed implicit and explicit racism toward them. The perceptions are also based on experiences with other students. For example, Rosenbloom and Way (2004) concluded that black students were more likely to report implicit and explicit experiences of racism from adults, while Asian American students were more likely to claim physical and verbal harassment from their peers. The students’ perceptions of racism were dependent not only on their racial/ethnic backgrounds, but also language and immigration status, indicating that perceptions of race and racism have a variety of factors in a complex web of social interactions.

This complexity means that the perception of racism stretches across a large spectrum among students of color. Sanders (1997) categorized high school students into three groups: those who believed racism was a historical and not a current problem, those who believed racism could be a problem but did not have any direct experience with it themselves or their family members, and those who were highly sensitive to racism. Family socialization was the main reason for this divide, as the students’ beliefs about racism had been passed to them from their parents and other adult mentors. The study
concluded that this higher awareness was part of the motivation for these students to succeed. O’Conner (1997) reported similar results when studying successful black students further, concluding that their success was aided by parents and guardians actively confronting racism in teachers and other occasions and lodging formal complaints.

While these studies point to a positive aspect of high school students having a strong awareness of racism and discrimination, other studies show that perception of racism can have a negative effect on schooling. Lambert, Herman, Bynum, and Ialongo (2009) found that female students reporting greater perception of racism had a decreased belief in their desired academic outcome, which, in turn, were associated with increased depressive symptoms. The study indicates that decreased perceptions of academic control “may be one mechanism linking stereotype threat with lowered academic performance, either directly or via depressive symptoms,” (p. 526) and experiences with racism may have long lasting effects on female African American’s adolescents’ mood.

CRT allows the researcher to assume that these perceptions of racism are symptomatic of the fact that racism is embedded structurally and intrinsically in the system. Because they are inherently critical of the dominant narrative, CRT theorists do not dismiss these perceptions as subjective and useless. Rather, these subjective impressions can be used to form a narrative that can express an experienced reality. Pillow (2003) explains that this shifts the power away from the dominant narrative to the individual being interviewed by situating the subjects as the knowers. This insight is echoed by Stovall (2006) whose time with high school students allowed him to reflect:
“Rarely do we give young people credit for being experts in their lives” (Stovall, 2006, p. 235).

To sum up this section, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that is devoted to uncovering and unmasking the ways that de facto racism still impact individuals, communities of color, and society at large. CRT continually challenges the color-blind mentality and other grand narratives and puts in their place stories that show racism is systematic and embedded in the very fabric of society. This means that racism is found in many institutions, including the Catholic Church, which the next section will explore in greater detail.

**Grounding of the Catholic Church’s relationship to racism**

Using CRT as a theoretical framework is beneficial because it provides the evidence and the framework to assume racism exists and is a major force in all institutions. This includes the Catholic Church and Catholic high schools, both of which are important for this dissertation. The Catholic Church in the United States has had an uneasy relationship with racism, and, in particular, its silence and outright complicity with the institution of slavery. While there is evidence that there has been progress in the U.S. Catholic Church in regards to its stance on racism in the last 50 years, there is also evidence that there remains much room for improvement in this area of social justice.

*The U.S. Catholic Church and slavery*

The Catholic Church in the United States has had a difficult relationship with racism. This should come as little surprise, as the vast hierarchy of the Church in the United States has historically been composed of white males who are prone to be ensnared in the same cultural racism that affects all forms of United States society.
To be fair, there were some famous outspoken critics of slavery from Catholic priests and missionaries in the early part of the slave trade, such as Bartolome de Las Casa, who was a priest, bishop, and past slave owner in the 16th century who renounced slavery in Central and South America and whose letters and influence instigated a papal bull that, while it was mostly ineffective, did call the enslavement of Native peoples unjust and against Catholic teaching. A second such figure was de Las Casa who is now seen as one of the forebears of universal human rights. Many also point out Saint Peter Claver, who was a Jesuit priest in the early 17th century, whose mission was to minister to the needs of slaves in present-day Colombia and actively sought to improve the physical conditions of the African slaves. Finally, Martin de Porres was a popular black Dominican monk who worked tirelessly for the needs and rights of the poor. He was also beatified in the Catholic Church and became the patron saint for mixed races, and his legacy was often pointed to as an example for what a socially minded Catholic could look like (Davis, 1990). Davis (1990) concludes that these men and their subsequent popularity show that early on there was some deep concern in the Catholic Church about the morality of the slave trade and some desire to see it end.

These men did influence the Catholic Church enough that Rome issued statements regarding the enslavement of Native peoples in the 16th and 17th centuries and of the African peoples in the 18th centuries, but for the most part, the Catholic Church was compliant on the matter and allowed slavery to continue as an institution (Maxwell, 1975). It was even complicit in the slave trade itself, as for several centuries many priests, bishops, and even a few popes had a hand in purchasing and using Muslim slaves. In
addition, the Vatican sanctioned penal slavery for prisoners of war, criminals, and children born to priests, since the priests were supposed to be celibate (Maxwell, 1975).

The justification for slavery in the Catholic Church was based on Roman law, which decreed it justified in the case of prisoners of war and criminals (Davis, 1990). Maxwell (1975) runs through the evolution of papal thought on slavery, showing how it moved from initial support of slavery of Native peoples in the Americas to concern over the slave trade due to the great injuries the conquerors were inflicting. These concerns led to some papal decrees on the behalf of Native peoples and slavery, but the popes continued to uphold the right to slavery as long as it complied with Roman law. Popes were mostly silent on the issue of slavery in Africa until the 19th century, when the Pope Pius VII finally agreed to support the international effort to abolish the international slave trade of African slaves (Davis, 1990; Maxwell, 1975).

The slave trade coincided with and was justified by a racial categorization that placed white Europeans at the top of the social ladder and slaves, who were primarily African, at the bottom (Fredrickson, 2002). This racial structure was evident in the Catholic Church as well. For example, the Council of the Indies decreed that no African, Native person, mestizo, or mulatto could become a priest (Davis, 1990). Though this was eventually lifted, the ban shows the ambivalence the Catholic hierarchy felt between the need to minister to all people and the inherent racism found in institutions across the world during this time.

Theologically, Catholics justified their ownership of slaves both Biblically and through Church tradition. Support for slavery can be found in the Old and New Testament, along with some of the early Church Fathers. Nothwehr and Haynes (2008)
contends that from the beginning of the Catholic Church there were eight distinct approaches to slavery: (1) Slavery can be tolerated if slaves and masters live in the same conditions; (2) All masters and slaves share the same human condition and are subject to the same laws of life and death; (3) Slavery is the consequence of original sin; (4) Sin created a hierarchy and it is the master’s responsibility to fulfill God’s will and be caretaker of the slave; (5) Slavery can be beneficial for stupid and vicious people; (6) Slavery can be imposed as a penalty; (7) Masters and slaves are both children of God; and (8) Masters should emancipate their slaves.

There are even statements from popes who promoted slavery as long as it was not “enforced out of human greed and a desire for cheap labor” (Nothwehr and Haynes, 2008, p. 43-4). In fact, Maxwell (1975) contends that papal support of this kind of servitude did not end until Vatican II in 1965. Panzer (1996) uses “servitude” as a euphemism for just slavery, which was based in Roman Law. This law contended that criminals and prisoners of war could be slaves, and that slaves were enslaved were slaves for life. By the 12th century, slaves were mainly Muslims who were captured in war, but soon it included debtors who could not pay their debts, children sold to pay the debts of parents, a person who sold themselves and could share in the price, and the children of slaves. This definition held until the 17th century (Nothwehr & Haynes, 2008). Unjust, or racial slavery, was slavery of conquest in which the freedom, goods, and personhood of the slaves were taken for the economic benefit of the conquerors and was frowned upon by the Catholic hierarchy (Panzer, 1996).

There is some contention in the literature about the role of popes with slavery. Panzer (1996) goes to some lengths to show that popes were consistent in condemning al
forms of racial slavery that were clear violations of human dignity, but Nothwehr and Haynes (2008) point to three examples of popes in the 15th century who clearly condoned slavery. However, Nothwehr and Haynes (2008) do agree with Panzer that after the 1530s, popes were more consistent in their declaration that unjust slavery was wrong.

There were more progressive statements from some of the early popes who were very concerned that the harsh and brutal conditions of slavery were actually driving both Native populations and African slaves away from Christianity. And yet, in his summation of his research on slavery and the Catholic Church, Maxwell (1975) noted that throughout the history of the Catholic Church, there was much more pro-slavery thought and action than not: “It should be noticed how very slender and scarce is the Catholic anti-slavery documentation since 1888 as compared with the very large volume of Catholic pro-slavery documentation right up to the time of the second Vatican Council” (p. 125).

This ambivalence was also found in the Catholic Church in the New World. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Catholics were a small minority and were centered mainly in what would become Maryland, Kentucky, and Louisiana (Davis, 1990). Slavery was a reality for everyone in the New World, as it quickly became integral in the economies of many of the new settlers (Fredrickson, 2002). This was also true of the Catholics, and while there was no universal attitude among Catholics regarding slavery, many owned slaves and/or were economically supported by work done by slaves (Davis, 1990).

This was especially true in the South, where the majority of Catholics settled. Not only did many of the southern Catholic laity own and deal in slaves, but so did the Catholic hierarchy, including priests and bishops. This is especially problematic as
bishops in the Catholic Church are responsible for the doctrine and jurisdiction of their diocese and are a representation of the Catholic Church to the world. The fact that they were so embedded in the slave trade present in the United States, as many bishops in the United States were slave owners while priests and other religious figures also benefitted economically from the practice, shows how deeply the Catholic Church as an institution bought into the hierarchical divide amongst races (Davis, 1990).

When the popes began explicitly speaking out against slavery in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century, primarily because they feared the harsh conditions of slavery were actually driving many of the native populations and African slaves away from slavery (Maxwell, 1975), the U.S. bishops and clergy interpreted these statements as speaking out against the slave trade only, which by that time was not a major factor in the continued practice of slavery in the United States, and not about the ownership of slaves (Zanca, 1997). This type of interpretation was an example of the hallmark of this time period: silence about slavery by U.S. Catholics and the continuation of the status quo. Some Catholics, laity and clergy alike, benefitted directly and indirectly from slavery (Davis, 1990). They advocated humane treatment that allowed religious education, practicing religion, family life, and decent food and shelter, but they did not agitate for an end to slavery (Zanca, 1994).

Catholics also remained silent on slavery because they themselves were a persecuted minority. Catholics comprised just 5% of the population in 1830 and only 14% by 1860. Until the 1930s, the vast majority of Catholics lived in the Maryland-Kentucky area and the rural South (Moore, 2009). They had little political power, and though some owned slaves, they were greatly outnumbered by the Protestant slave
owners, who owned 90% of the slaves (Zanca, 1997). While anti-Catholic sentiment was never particularly strong in the South (Higham, 2002), in part because Catholics were silent on the issue of slavery (Zanca, 1997), there was a major anti-Catholic sentiment in the 1830s when a flood of Catholic immigrants mainly from Ireland started arriving in Northern cities. These Irish in the North were the object of prejudice and discrimination by Nativists, people who were concerned with the influx of Irish and bolstered anti-Catholic sentiment. At the same time, the Irish were worried that black Americans would take away the precious few jobs and resources held by these ethnic Catholics. This conflict soon led to fear and hatred and instigated a trend of separate white and black Catholic churches and parishes in the North. Such separation was encouraged by the leaders of the American Church, who argued that while discrimination was morally wrong, racial segregation was a nuanced solution to the black influx and could be done in a moral and ethical manner (McGreevy, 1998).

A third reason for Catholic silence was that Abolitionists, those that were most vocal about full emancipation for slaves, were equally vocal about being anti-Catholic. They saw the Catholic Church and its slave holdings and silence on the matter as an ally of the slave-holding powers (Zanca, 1994). Catholics saw Abolitionists as challenging legitimate authority and interpreting the Bible in ways they could not accept. Biblical interpretation was an especially important issue, as only the Catholic Church had the authority to interpret scripture, and Abolitionists believed that the Church had continually correctly interpreted key passages as being “in favor of the slave-holder” (Zanca, 1994, p. 36). Most Catholics believed the slaves were not ready for freedom, and sudden emancipation would lead to chaos; they believed in graduated emancipation and
repatriation back to Africa for those willing to leave (Zanca, 1994).

A fourth reason for the silence on issues of slavery and racism was due to U.S. bishops being more concerned with the influx of Catholic immigrants than they were about reaching out to slaves or combatting slavery. Much of the focus of the American Church, therefore, was to address the needs of these immigrants, and not on the plight of the black American. In addition, the main Catholic view contended that slavery was acceptable, and some of the brightest and most vocal voices of the Catholic clergy wrote theological justifications of slavery. “In the years preceding the Civil War, while the nation debated slavery and states’ rights, Catholics in the North and South were, for the most part, absorbed in ecclesiastical matters, not matters of social justice” (Zanca, 1994, p. 33).

Until Emancipation, white Catholics in the United States were generally against the act of subjugating Africans to slavery, but also held that the rights of slaver owners to their private property gave them rights to their slaves. Catholics were just as bigoted and racist as the rest of the population of the time, and tended to assume that blacks were inferior in all ways to whites. White Catholics did seem concerned about the conditions of the slaves, but they were more concerned with not upsetting the social balance than with evoking change (Davis, 1990).

*The U.S. Catholic Church’s response to Emancipation*

The formal ending of slavery was the Emancipation Proclamation, which instantly freed all the slaves from their masters. In the Catholic hierarchy, there was concern among the U.S. bishops, who released a letter showing they were displeased with how quickly emancipation came, signaling the sort of barriers that black Catholics were forced
to face for the rest of the century (Davis, 1990). Though some bishops actively sought to evangelize and help the freed blacks, most of the U.S. bishops and other religious figures did not think it was worth the time and energy because they believed that the freed blacks were inherently inferior morally and intellectually than their white neighbors (Davis, 1990). After the Civil War, the Vatican urged the U.S. Bishops to develop a national plan for the newly freed people, but nothing emerged other than allowing the black Catholics to decide for themselves a best course of action (Zanca, 2009).

The period after the Emancipation until the Civil Rights era is identified with little action about racism by the U.S. bishops and clergy and growing pressure from inside the American Church by black Catholics and outside by Rome, which was beginning to be troubled by the lack of change. This dynamic would play out continually throughout the next century, as this pressure forced the U.S. bishops to meet and address the issues, but little resulted from it (Davis, 1990). This soon led to two forms of Catholicism in the United States: one white and one black (Raboteau, 2009). The black theology centered on equality of all people, regardless of their race, and focused almost exclusively on freedom. Black Catholics saw themselves as part of a long line of martyrs, saints, and prophets and their own suffering became a “racial election, a moral superiority of authentic—and even—heroic Christianity” (Raboteau, 2009, p. 13). While recognizing that the Catholic Church contributed to this continued suffering, black Catholics also wanted to argue that the Catholic Church was the answer to erasing the color line. This led to multiple congresses of lay theologians and interested people continually decrying discrimination in the Church and appealing to U.S. bishops and to Rome for help. Again, this led to little change. In 1904 Rome sent a delegate to the United States to address the
issue of discrimination, to which the U.S. bishops replied that Rome was meddling in a sensitive issue that they knew nothing about (Sanders, 2009). Rome again called on the U.S. Catholic Church to address racism during the 1919 race riots, in which seventy-five black men were lynched among other atrocities, and the U.S. bishops responded with a letter that did little to address the problem. Instead, the U.S. Catholic Church’s continued its lack of clarity and patronization of the black Catholic laity (Davis, 1990).

Black groups and caucuses continued to form in the early part of the 20th century, some of which were taken over by white priests, and black Catholic identity continued to fight for recognition. The main issues of concern were lack of black priests and other religious, inaccessibility to Catholic education, and the continued presence of racism and discrimination by individual priests and other white Catholics (Raboteau, 2009).

The U.S. Catholic Church’s response to the Civil Rights

The Catholic Church’s silence on racism continued through the Civil Rights era. Very few priests and bishops openly supported public demonstrations during the Civil Rights movement, as many Catholics believed it was a social and not a moral problem (Sanders, 2009). The Civil Rights movement also occurred during the Second Vatican Council, so many of the theologians of the time were busy grappling with the changes from the Council rather than focusing on race issues (Nilson, 2007).

It was during this time, however, that the U.S. Catholic Church issued its first formal denunciation of racism. With pressure from Rome and four years after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling of Brown v. Topeka Board of Education, the U.S. bishops issued a paper condemning segregation on doctrinal grounds. However, the paper’s tardiness and lack of specifics meant it had little effect on either the general population or in the
Catholic Church itself (Massingale, 2010). A second paper was released in 1968, also because of outside pressure, this time came from within the Catholic Church in the form of a report made by black priests who met in secret. The report began with the sentence: “The Catholic Church in the United States, primarily a white racist institution, has addressed itself primarily to white society and is definitely a part of that society” (quoted in Sanders, 2009, p. 83). In response, the U.S. bishops released their own letter acknowledging culpability on the part of Catholics and expressing a broader view of racism. However, like the first letter, it received little attention and little changed within the churches to address the issue of racism (Massingale, 2010).

A third and final document released in 1979 treated racism more thoroughly by finally treating it as a cultural problem. Known as Brothers and Sisters to Us, the letter called for more black clergy and bishops, recruiting more lay leaders of color, expanding schools to inner cities, and implementing affirmative action programs that would surpass that of secular institutions. Unfortunately, the report was not well publicized, and like the two before, little actual change was implemented because of it. In fact, in a report commissioned on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1979 letter, researchers found that only 18% of the nation’s bishops had issued statements on racism, most Catholics had not heard a homily on racism in the last three years, there was still a major lack of representation in the church’s leadership in all regards, and the Catholic laity showed diminished support of government policies aimed at reducing racial inequality (Massingale, 2010).

*The U.S. Catholic Church and racism today*
As alluded to by the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1979 *Brothers and Sisters to Us* document, there is still a dearth of writings and statements about racism. This is particularly frustrating for many, who point out that there is a great deal of time and energy spent on other topics such as reproductive issues, but the treatment of racism by the U.S. Catholic Church rarely showed the depth and analysis that are present in these other social issues (Massingale, 2010). This appears to be an endemic problem in the U.S. Church’s hierarchy. For example, Massingale (2000) studied twenty-one published statements from U.S. Catholic bishops from 1990 to 2000. He found, with three notable exceptions, most of the bishops defined racism as the conscious and deliberate actions of the individual, which ignores systematic and institutional racism and places the issue of racism solely on individual actions and prejudices, similar to those definitions put out by those who believe in a color-blind society. This narrow view of racism insinuates that institutions that do show racism are actually intended actions of individual sinners with no historical or cultural context. If this is the case, then the solutions lie in personal acts of individuals, and that social transformation is reliant mostly on pointing out racist behaviors that lead to personal conversion (Massingale, 2010).

The problems with this simplistic and outdated understanding of racism are manifold, and ultimately will not lead to lasting change in the institutional and cultural racism that blanket current society. One of the byproducts of this view is the continued relative silence on the issue of racism. Massingale (2010) explores reasons for this silence, including the embarrassment white Catholics feel of not only failing to act against, but also being complicit in colonization, the institution of slavery, and the zeitgeist of white supremacy in the past. In addition, addressing these issues would force
the U.S. Catholic Church to face the fact that in many ways it is still a “white” church.
Massingale (2000) points to the teachings of a few select bishops who show a much more nuanced grasp of the problem, and proposes that, “U.S. Catholic ethical reflections adopt a more structural and systemic approach to racism, one that views this evil primarily as a cultural phenomenon, a culture of White advantage, privilege, and dominance that has derivative personal, interpersonal, and institutional manifestations” (p. 730).

Perhaps, though, systemic change to a systemic problem will once again come from the black Catholic community. Massingale (2000) believes a large part of the problem is due to the U.S. Catholic Church’s silence about the problem of racism, and its attempts to address the issue do not pay enough attention to the black Catholic influences. One aspect that is particularly overlooked is black Catholic theology’s focus on the historical importance of the black experience, which would emphasize the context and historical significance of racism. Raboteau (2009) believes that the “interlocking relationships among religion, race and slavery are arguably as important a narrative theme of American religious history as Puritanism or pluralism” (p. 10).

Black Catholic theology would also be important because it would challenge the consciences of white Catholics and has the potential to open their eyes to the realities of white privilege that is still present in the Catholic Church (Raboteau, 2009). For Cone (1997), the role of the black Catholic is to see how Jesus of the Gospel can provide hope and freedom for their bondage, both historically through slavery and currently in the form of racist practices and attitudes. Massingale (2010) does not believe that current Catholic theology has the language or the concepts to even discuss the current reality of racism as a sin: racism is a “radical evil” that has been so entrenched in American society and
culture that “the predominant understanding of sin as a voluntary and conscious act can neither address nor redress—and indeed compounds” (p. 120). Black Catholic theology is needed to handle the evolution of racism into an unconscious, cultural force.

Looking back on the U.S. Catholic Church’s response to the issues of slavery and racism over the past 300 years shows that while there were individuals who were willing to address the issues and attempt to solve them, the Catholic Church as a whole was always more content to live with the status quo rather than address the issue of either slavery or racism. Even when the Church made statements about race and the plight of black Catholics, it was due to outside pressure and long after the secular powers had made a decision on the issue. This is still true today, as the U.S. Catholic Church is largely silent on issues of race and racism even when it is an outspoken critic of many societal practices, including abortion, birth control, homosexuality, and illegal drug use (Massingale, 2010).

While this paper has focused mainly on the plight of black Catholics in the United States, there have been concurrent issues with Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Catholics. Latino Catholicism has a deep history in the United States that dates back to the first Hispanic explorers (Matovina, 2011). While many immigrants saw the Catholic Church as a source of safety, the Latino Catholic’s historical experience was that of insensitivity, discrimination, and a focus on assimilation rather than building ethnic parishes, as the Irish and German immigrants were allowed to do (Odem, 2004). Several factors soon changed the way the U.S. Church acted toward Latino Catholics, including a change in perspective about the role of the Catholic Church through Vatican II, vigorous efforts by Latinos concerned with social justice within the Church, and a mass migration
of Latinos out of the Catholic Church and into evangelical churches. This opened up a
new awareness and appreciation for Latino Catholics, though there are still regional areas
that continue to discriminate against Latinos (Odem, 2004). Similar troubles have
haunted Asian Americans’ experiences (Hoang, 2013).

_Catholic schools and racism_

Catholic schools have a direct link with the Catholic Church, mainly because they
operate in a hierarchy that begins and ends with the local bishop. The bishop has total
authority over spiritual matters of their diocese, including all Catholic education, and they
have the power to appoint superintendents, board members, and principals of all Catholic
schools in their jurisdiction (Youniss, 2000). This is a historical model that dates back to
the genesis of the Catholic schools in the late 19th century when the current pope, worried
about the anti-Catholic teachings in Protestant public schools, announced that the laity
were bound to send their children to Catholic schools (West & Woessmann, 2010).

In the beginning, Catholic schools were primarily for the students in their local
diocese. Since these dioceses were often strongholds for immigrant culture along with
religion, the schools reflected these pockets of distinct ethnicities. As a result, Catholic
schools, while highly diverse overall, were not diverse individually and tended to reflect
the local Catholic population, which at the time, was mainly European and white. These
trends still exist in part today, which is one of the reasons that, compared to public
schools and other private institutions, Catholic schools are the most segregated schools in
the United States (Saporito & Shoni, 2006; Frankenberg, Lee & Orfield, 2003).
Currently, this means Latino students and black students are more likely to be found in
Latino and black Catholic schools, while white students are more often found in white
schools. These differences are also geographical in nature, as inner-city schools generally have more ethnic minority students, while suburban schools tend to have more white students (Betts & Fairle, 2000; Fairlie & Resch, 2002).

This trend is the most obvious in the western and southern parts of the nation, even though white students make up a smaller percentage of the population in these areas (Reardon & Yun, 2002). While most of the research in this area focuses on black students, evidence suggests that other minorities such as Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans are found in these segregated schools as well (Aud et al., 2011).

To some researchers the continued segregation of schools, is a worrisome trend (Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003), as studies have found that desegregated schools have significant and positive effect on black students’ reading levels, graduation rates, educational achievement, and higher occupational aspirations and attainment (Schofield & Hausmann, 2004). Others believe that there is room for schools that cater to one particular race. Smith (1992), for example, proposes that all-black male schools could provide young, black males with a proper environment with black role models as teachers to help disentangle these young men from the difficulties they often face in normal publics schools that lead so many to drop out, be placed in lower tracks, and have their identities challenged and eroded by institutional and overt racism. There is some evidence that such models can work (Erbentraut, 2013).

While there is some disagreement about the benefits of having segregated schools, the history of Catholic schools indicates that the segregation of schools is becoming more pronounced. For one, there is some evidence of “white flight”, where white students leave more racially mixed schools to attend schools with a higher percentage of white
students (Reardon & Yun, 2002). This is often the consequence of the natural movement of whites toward the suburban areas, but there is also evidence that this occurs for overtly racist reasons as well, as white parents have reported moving because of a decline in the quality of the school because of the rise in minority students (Fairlie & Resch, 2002). Another reason for the continued segregation among Catholic schools is cost. One study found that 70% of the enrollment gap could be accounted for by parental education and family income (Betts & Fairle, 2000), and the rising cost of tuition means that Catholic schools are increasingly educating students of higher economic status (Riordan, 2000). The rise in tuition and costs is often seen as the major issue for Catholic schools, as it makes it a challenge to serve students of all backgrounds (O’Keefe & Murphy, 2000; Heft, 2011; Riordan, 2000). Riordan (2000) sums up the problem:

“It would appear that Catholic schools are at a critical crossroad. They have established an excellent record by increasing academic achievement, religious and racial diversity, and equality. That is the good news. The bad news is that enrollments have decreased substantially since the early 1980s and the schools also have become more selective in terms of social class” (p. 49).

Not only have these rising costs changed the landscape of Catholic schools, but they have also affected attendance. Enrollment in Catholic schools peaked in the 1960s at around 5.6 million students and 12 percent of the entire student population (Helf, 2011, Youniss & Convey, 2000). However, the convening of Vatican II changed the academic landscape, and by the 2012 and 2013 school year, only 2.0 million students attended Catholic schools (Heft, 2011). This decline in attendance has also forced a decline in the number of Catholic schools, and since 1990, more than 1,300 Catholic schools have closed, mostly in urban areas. While there are new Catholic schools being built, the majority are in the suburbs and away from urban centers where they can reach poor and
minority students (Hamilton, 2008; Heft, 2011). There are several reasons for the decline in attendance of Catholic schools. For one, there was a mass exodus from the religious workers in Catholic schools, particularly of women religious, who had up to this point been working for free. The necessity to pay new teachers for work that had been previously unpaid was a major financial burden on these schools. A second reason is that Vatican II told Catholics to embrace more of the modern world, and this gave many parents the freedom to send their children to public schools (Heft, 2011).

The trend of rising costs and school closures are concerning because research seems to show that students who attend Catholic schools are more successful academically, particularly those in low economic, urban areas (Hoffer, 2000; Hoffer, Greenley, & Coleman, 1985). The “Catholic school effect”, as it is often called, was first introduced to the research in 1982 with a now-famous study by Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore, who found that students in Catholic schools scored higher on standardized tests than their counterparts in public schools. Other researchers began to look into the phenomenon and soon there was mounting evidence that Catholic schools seem to produce higher rates of graduation (Altonji, Elder, & Taber, 2005b; Grogger, Neal, Hanushek, & Schwab, 2000; Evans & Schwab, 1995; Vella, 1999), higher rates of college attendance (Neal, 1997; Grogger, Neal, Hanushek & Schwab, 2000), and higher scores on standardized tests (Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1985; Nguyen, Taylor, & Bradley, 2006). Other studies imply that students who attended Catholic schools were more likely to graduate and attend a 4-year college (Nguyen, Taylor, & Bradley, 2006), were more likely to stay in college longer and earn higher wages (Kim, 2012). There is a strong strain of research indicating that Catholic schools appear to have a significant
positive effect on students, and that this is particularly pronounced for minority students in urban areas (Neal, 1997; Grogger et al., 2000). Unfortunately, because of the cost and closing of urban Catholic schools, the students that are in most need of the Catholic school effect are those who are least likely to attend (Morgan, 2001).

While a great deal of research seems to support the Catholic school effect, there is some concern that questions its premise. A major paper by Altonji, Elder, and Taber (2005a) used a new statistical model to show that the Catholic school effect could not be explained through such factors as religious affiliation and proximity to Catholic schools because of sample selection bias, and this paved the way for new scholarship to call into question the accuracy of the Catholic school effect. Primarily this led to questioning the sample selection, and some of these newer studies showed that the Catholic school effect was due to factors outside the schools’ control (Elder & Jepsen, 2014; Gibbons & Silva, 2011; Albert & García-Serrano, 2010). Several other studies showed that while Catholic school students still scored higher on math tests than their public school counterparts, the gap had decreased over time indicating that Catholic schools had a negative effect on students’ math scores (Elder & Jepson, 2014; Reardon, Cheadle & Robinson, 2009).

Recognizing that further research regarding the Catholic school affect is necessary, currently the majority of the research currently seems to support its reality. However, the cause behind the phenomenon is less studied. Lower drop out rates in Catholic schools compared to public schools is a possible cause for this phenomenon. While there are many reasons why students drop out of school, it seems low rates in Catholic schools are related to the ability of low-achieving students to transfer schools and the various structural differences present in Catholic schools. Lee and Burkam (1992)
found that while public school dropout rates are higher than Catholic schools, the transfer rate for Catholic schools is higher. There was also evidence that the majority of students who transferred from Catholic schools mainly went to public schools and were more likely to be male, black, older, and of the lower socio-economic backgrounds. These transfers were more likely to be in the academic track, score lower in achievement, and did less homework, indicating that many of the transfer students were dropping down rather than dropping out. For the researchers, this made the data for low dropouts in Catholic schools less impressive.

However, student transfers are not the only reason why Catholic schools have such high graduation rates. Lee and Bryk (1989) found that schools with better environments had fewer dropout rates, while Lee and Burkham (2003) concluded that Catholic schools had more positive teacher-student relationships. Both of these studies also determined that the curriculum was important, as Catholic schools tended to focus more on challenging core classes with less tracking and fewer remedial or nonacademic classes. Other studies found that schools where students perceived the discipline to be fair had fewer dropout rates (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999), and parents of Catholic school students tended to have closer connections with the school (Teachman, Pasch, & Carver, 1996). This information shows that lower achieving students do leave Catholic schools for public schools, which tends to skew the statistics. At the same time, there seems to be evidence that the school environment and how the schools operate are important for their continued success.

In summary, Catholic schools, which are greatly influenced by the Catholic hierarchy, tend to be more segregated by race than their public school counterparts. There
is also some research that suggests that they are more effective in their efforts to educate minority students, particularly in urban areas. While there is some indication that Catholic schools seem more effective because they have higher transfer rates than public schools, this is inconclusive, and little research has been done on the mechanism of the Catholic school effect.

The Catholic Bishops’ framework

A final note about Catholic education that has some relevance for this dissertation is that in 2012, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) released a framework for high school curriculum that was designed to bring cohesion and standardize the curriculum across the Catholic high schools in the United States. The framework is basically an outline of the important topics, and “not a tool for direct instruction” as much as its “doctrines and topics designed are not necessarily defined or developed” (USCCB, 2012, p. 1). That job, the bishops believe, should be left to the publishers of books. The framework recommends three years of six core topics (one topic per semester) and one year from which students can choose from five electives.

A brief document analysis of the framework showed that there were only cursory references to discrimination or racism, which means that students will go from a three-week unit on racism to little to no time spent discussing discrimination or racism in any context. The framework deals with discrimination and racism by addressing discrimination as a social sin. Unfortunately, the framework falls into the trap of saying that “personal sin is at the root of social sin” and that “social sin stems from collective personal sins” (USCCB, 2007, p. 41), a stance that has been criticized by Massingale (2010) as being too simplistic and an ineffective way to view the issue of racism. Racism
itself is not explicitly mentioned anywhere in the document, and discrimination is only mentioned in one elective class: “The Catholic Church condemns all unjust discrimination, including anti-Semitism” (USCCB, 2007, p. 52). This indicates that the new curriculum framework follows the traditional response of silence on racism by the United States Catholic Church.
Recapitulation of the research questions

All quantitative and qualitative research is driven by the research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Maxwell, 2012). These questions need to be flexible enough to allow for modification during the collection of data (Maxwell, 2012; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), which leaves room for rich, thick descriptive data (Merriam, 2009) and ultimately allows for hypotheses to emerge (Silverman, 2011). At the same time, these questions need to be appropriately bound to make the study manageable and allow for proper data collection and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). My research was an exploratory case study, which means my questions focused on “what” and “how” (Yin, 2009). In particular: What are Catholic high school students’ perceptions of racism? What are Catholic high school students’ experiences with racism? And, how does the experience of being in a Catholic school affect Catholic high school students’ perceptions of racism?

Theoretical framework

As discussed in the literature review, the theoretical framework used in this thesis is that of Critical Race Theory (CRT). For CRT scholars, the methodology is only important insofar as it gets at the underlying problem of race and racism in society. CRT does not make claims of objectivity, “rather, it sees itself as an approach to scholarship that integrates lived experience with racial realism” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p. vii). Therefore, CRT scholars are willing and able to draw on both quantitative and qualitative research to construct their narratives that uncover discrimination and unequal power differentials. For example, Carter (2008) is drawn to CRT because it allows CRT scholars to question methodological rules that force an interpretation in line with the
dominant narrative. CRT can name and interpret realities other methodologies are incapable of understanding, and it encourages using research for social change, which is something the other methodologies do not necessarily foster. Pillow (2013) believes that race-based epistemologies “offer a larger critique of the epistemological and methodological foundations of social science research” (p. 183). The questions CRT and others raise are “who can be a ‘knower,’ what counts as knowledge, and what the purposes of research and knowledge production are or should/could be” (Pillow, 2003, p. 183). Parker (1998) drives this home by pointing out that the question does not have to be “What can this theory (CRT) do for qualitative studies in education?” but rather “What can qualitative research in education do to illuminate and address the salient features of CRT with respect to race and racism in educational institutions and the larger society?” (p. 46).

**Qualitative research**

In an attempt to add to CRT, this study used a traditional qualitative case study approach. It was qualitative because it was “the process of examining and interpreting data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, 1) and because it studied phenomena in the contexts in which they arise (Silverman, 2011). It was also a case study because it attempted to answer “how” questions by using various research methods to study one specific phenomenon with the goal of developing a hypothesis that can be explored in more detail in subsequent studies (Yin, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This project best falls under the representative or typical case study because it represents a group of individuals that are
assumed to be similar to the larger group of Catholic high school students in the United States as a whole (Yin, 2009).

As a qualitative researcher, I followed the assumption that the world is whole and complex (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), the subjectivity of myself as the research was part of the process, and my reflections, impressions, irritations, and feelings were part of the data (Flick, 2014). The project attempted to take into account the variety of contexts and institutions that shape the subjects’ perceptions (Silverman, 2011). In short, the project assumed that due to the complexity of the world, there are no simple explanations for events (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Being a qualitative study also means that this project viewed the participants through a constructivist lens and focused on how the students perceive and interpret their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Constructivists believe that people construct their own realities based on their experiences and interpretations, and “explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, 3). Qualitative studies using this ontology have general characteristics. For example, these studies are interested in collecting data in a natural setting with the researcher as a key instrument. They also use multiple methods of collecting data and organize their data in order to form patterns and themes. Qualitative studies are also concerned with meaning and attempt to form a holistic account by developing a complex picture of the issue under study (Creswell, 2013).

Though my study is ontologically constructivist, my own ontology more closely aligns with the post-positivist camp, which means I believe that there is an external reality apart from myself (Silverman, 2011). This is different from the constructivists,
who believe that all realities are local and constructed by groups and individuals (Merriam, 2009). While I believe in a reality separate from my experiences, I do agree with the constructivists that it is impossible to know or describe that reality fully because it is always filtered through human lenses, experiences, and feelings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Because of this, I see the value of qualitative methods because those methodologies are able to uncover the knowledge that is constructed through the interactions with others (Maxwell, 2012). I also see value in the ontology of the critical theorists who believe that knowledge is placed in a historical framework and that reality is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values found in society at large (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I agree that our own experiences and backgrounds shape how we view and interact with the world, and society plays a large role in shaping both those experiences and backgrounds (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, as a researcher, I ultimately believe I can make a statement about truth, though it will be an imperfect and socially constructed statement, and I want this statement to hopefully both offset current social values and at the same time promote a more productive value-system for society.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2010), the significance of a study relies on how it contributes to “scholarship, policy, practice, or a better understanding of social issues” (p. 73). The work must convince the reader that they have an interest in the topic, and the research is important in helping them better understand the problem as defined in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). This includes the transferability, or generalization, of the study. Often, generalization of results is linked to quantitative research, which collects random data samples from smaller data sets in order to find
trends and patterns that can be applied to a larger population. The randomness and statistical analysis should, in theory, produce results that are an objective statement about a population as a whole (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research, on the other hand, looks less at large data sets and focuses more on specific situations to gather information that is difficult for quantitative research to tease out (Merriam, 2009). This allows the researcher to ask questions that attempt to uncover the social and cognitive processes that lead to making decisions (Maxwell, 2004). Through interviews, observations, document analysis, and other methods, the qualitative researcher is able to identify causal relationships that allow the researcher to deal with ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, rather than looking strictly for patterns and relationships (Denzin, 2009). Thus, qualitative research is important because it affords the researcher the ability to better understand how people construct their worlds and the meaning that they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Yet, unless the research can be transferred to other situations, it has little significance for the reader. This question of transferability is important for qualitative researchers, and for Denzin (2009) the answer lies in providing sufficient context about the research project. This context then allows data to be compared and transferred between other sites and participants in similar situations. Merriam (2009) believes that we naturally use generalization in our daily lives. For example, if a person gets a speeding ticket in a certain location, they will tend to slow down at that point even though they may have driven past the same place one hundred times before without slowing down. In the same way, qualitative researchers believe that a reader can extract universal and applicable meaning from one particular experience.
The importance of qualitative studies can also be seen through the accumulation of similar results. Each piece of knowledge, even if it is specific to a certain time or place, has the potential to help explain a larger reality (Merriam, 2009). For example, each study about racism and education is bounded by a certain time, geographical location, and to certain participants. Yet the researchers in each of these studies believe that what they learn from their study can inform others about the larger issue of racism in education.

Some of these studies ask the question about how racism is perpetuated. Troyna and Hatcher (1992) interviewed and observed students in three primary schools in England to study how students expressed racism to other students. While there was a lot of variation in the expression of racism, name-calling was the most common and destructive form. For these researchers, qualitative research was important because they were “less concerned with documenting and describing the frequency of racist incidents in school than with digging beneath this ground and uncovering the nutrients on which they feed” (p. 4). Villenas and Deyhle (1999) found that racism was perpetuated by teachers’ low expectations for their Latino students. They felt that this was not unique to their particular situation, but pointed to a larger problem that plagues minority students of all types. Qualitative research, therefore, illuminated the problem and provided a voice to the families who needed change.

Other qualitative studies describe the experience of racism. Rosenbloom and Way’s (2004) research on ethnic minority students’ experience of discrimination in an urban classroom allowed them to conclude that the Asian Americans felt more harassed by their peers while black and Latino students were more likely to report discrimination by adults.
These descriptions allowed the researchers to believe their results could be applied to other situations and help create more understanding about the broader issues of racism as a whole.

Qualitative research also contributes to this larger understanding by providing models and theories on which future research can explore and build. Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) built upon one such model by using their interviews of African American undergraduates from three different colleges to explore microaggressions, which are “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (p. 60). In the study, black students reported cases of microaggressions by professors, other students, and places of business, and the researchers felt that the richness of description that accompanied these reports were as important as student experiences. They also felt that their work, though it was confined to a certain location with specific subjects, contributed to the broader discussion about the experience of students in similar locations and situations.

Finally, case studies, a specific type of qualitative research, can help reflect emerging patterns in society and “provide detailed and very specific information about a number of cultural situations and events, and then explore and expand on the issues raised by those events” (Tator, Henry, & Mattis, 1998, p. 3). CRT theorists often use qualitative research methods as it helps explain why and how racism is a major problem in U.S. society, and it is a good medium to tell stories about people of color and their experience. For example, DeCuir and Dixson (2004) used CRT to study three black students’ experiences in an affluent private high school to “challenge the privileged discourses that are often found at elite, predominantly White, independent schools” (p.
They felt that “using a CRT framework to analyze Barbara’s and Malcolm’s counter-stories illustrates the ways in which the subtleties of race and racism can be illuminated.” (p. 29). Like other qualitative researchers, they were not afraid to generalize these ideas to a more general setting: “Through uncovering covert racist practices and the policies that support them, educators, students, families, and communities are able to devise strategies to counteract, resist, and/or forestall those practices’ and policies’ effects” (p. 30).

These examples of qualitative research show that information particular to a specific context can be applied to more universal truths and knowledge. They also help paint a more nuanced and deeper picture of the issue of racism in education by providing “sufficient thick descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation” and “sufficient contextual information about the fieldwork sites” so that readers can find meaning and context that apply to their own experiences (Shenton, 2004, p. 69 – 70). This dissertation attempts to do the same.

**Bounding the study**

The methodology for exploring these questions was an exploratory case study bounded by physical space, time, and participants (Merriam, 2009). The physical space was a Catholic high school. The time was a three-week unit of racism for field observations and several weeks following for interviews. The participants were 18-year old high school senior students.

**Site**

The high school in the study, St. Joseph Catholic High School, is a four-year college preparatory school. It is one of three Catholic high schools in the city and one of
seven in the greater metropolitan area. It is a co-ed facility, and based on information obtained from the principal’s office, in the 2015-2016 school year the school enrolled over 900 students, 516 (57%) male and 386 (43%) female. The school has a strong sports program, focuses on community service, and 70% of the students identified as being Catholic. The school included students from several racial backgrounds, and the demographics were 67% white, 11% African American, 10% Asian, 9% Latino, 1% Native American / Alaskan, and 1% Pacific Islander. This compares to the public school system, which in 2013 enrolled 55% white, 6% multi-racial, 13% African American, 11% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 15% Latino students. Overall, the students in my site were more white than the average public school and contained fewer African American, Asian, and Latino students. This is a common trend for Catholic schools, as they tend to be whiter and serve fewer minority students on the average than public schools (Reardon & Yun, 2002). However, a brief analysis of the nine public high schools in the area, using their demographic data, found that in reality St. Joseph is more in the middle, with some of the public schools being heavily populated by minority students, while others are predominantly white (see Appendix A). The demographics of the school’s faculty were different than its student population. In 2015, the faculty was 55% female, 45% male, and 76% Catholic. The faculty was composed of 85% white, 7.5% Latino, and 7.5% Asian teachers.

Time

The study took place in the spring of the 2015 school year during a three-week unit on social justice in the senior religion class, which all seniors are required to take in order to graduate. As of this year, the religion teachers have been able to construct their
curriculum based on department-wide standards. According to the school’s course schedules, freshman year examines the basics of Catholicism, which includes the Sacraments, basic Christology, and some moral theology. Sophomore year focuses on Scripture, where students study the Old and New Testament of the Bible. Junior year is split into a study of the seven Sacraments for a semester and a theological treatment of morality for the second semester. Senior year has two different options, where students can either take world religion and social justice or Christian relationships and social justice (“Course Offerings”, 2013).

My study took place during this senior year social justice section, whose goal is to raise students’ awareness regarding social issues in the world so that they can use the fundamentals of Catholic social teaching to analyze various economic and social injustices. (“Course offerings,” 2013). The topics included discrimination, local and world poverty, hunger and oppression, and life issues. The majority of the data was collected during this time period, as I observed one class and conducted the survey at the end of the unit. I waited until the unit was completed to interview the students, and these took place in the four weeks following the unit. The entire data collection was completed by June of 2015, when the students graduated.

Participants

The participants in this study included all 18-year old seniors from the class of 2015 that were enrolled in a social justice religion class at St. Joseph. These were sorted from the non-18 year olds through the survey, where I asked for the month and year of birth from the respondents. Similarly, all those interviewed were also 18-years old, a fact I established at the onset of the interview. This particular class, according to data
obtained from the principal’s office, had an average GPA of 3.47, and the school average for the ACT test for the 2013-2014 school year was 24.1 compared to the state average of 21.5. The school boasts a 100% graduation rate, with 97% of the class of 2015 enrolling in a college. These participants were second semester seniors enrolled in their senior social justice class through the religion department. I chose to survey, interview, and observe seniors for several reasons. First, these students had the benefit of looking back on three and a half years of being in high school and had more experience to draw upon for their responses. This also allowed them to be more comfortable sharing their thoughts and forthright in taking the surveys and interviews seriously. As will be discussed in greater detail in the analysis, these students showed a great deal of maturity in the class discussions, which indicate that they took the surveys seriously and adds to the validity of the data. Finally, I taught many of these seniors the previous year and felt comfortable with them, both in the observation and interviews.

Methods of data collection

Survey

One of the main characteristics of qualitative studies is the acknowledgement of the complexity of the phenomenon being studied and “objects are not reduced to single variables; rather, they are represented in their entirety in their everyday context” (Flick, 2014, 15). One way to show and understand that complexity is through surveys. In quantitative studies, surveys are designed to extract generalizable answers from a data set to describe the frequencies of a target population. The individual is often sacrificed for the aggregated response (Fowler, 2009; Jansen, 2010; Cohen et al., 2005). Qualitative research, on the other hand, emphasizes intense interaction between individuals in a given
life situation, where in-depth surveys can help elicit information about those individuals (Amaratunga, Baldry, Sarshar & Newton, 2002). In particular, researchers in case studies are primarily devoted to understanding the dynamics of a single setting and are open to “a range of research methods and techniques” which can include in-depth surveys (Amaratunga et al., 2002, 26). Qualitative surveys can also be used to collect demographic information about the subjects (Merriam, 2009) or to study the diversity of the population (Jansen, 2010). Authenticity is often more important than sample size, and qualitative surveys are frequently used in conjunction with interviews to produce ‘authentic’ understandings of answers (Silverman, 2011).

My survey was given to students after they finished a three-week unit on racism (see Appendix B). Each of the religion teachers gave the survey as a homework assignment, which the students handed in the next day. I was able to obtain 170 usable surveys from the students. The survey was designed to collect background data of the students, their stated experiences of racism in and outside of school, and their general perceptions about racism as a whole. Although data produced by these surveys is cursory and descriptive, it is intended to produce a general description of the thoughts of the class as a whole.

I constructed the survey based on the literature, where there are several suggestions about the best way to build and implement surveys. One aspect is the type of questions. My survey included both closed-answer and open-ended questions. Closed-answer questions have answers that the respondent must choose from, which make them more straightforward and easier to code (Cohen et al., 2005). The main form of closed-answer questions was a ranking system that allows for a relative degree or preference for
an answer (Cohen et al., 2005). This allowed me to measure on a spectrum that gave the participant a certain amount of freedom to express their preference and feel less bounded by the response. However, there are some potential problems with spectrum questions. For example, one student’s definition of “strongly disagree” or “strongly agree” may not have the same intensity as another student. In addition, most people tend not to be extremist, meaning they may tend to shift their views toward the middle and skew the data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005). Despite these potential problems, I feel that these ranking questions were able to yield some general information about these students’ perceptions of racism.

I also included open-ended questions, which are generally used for the clarification of ideas (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998). Open-ended questions are useful for surveys of smaller numbers, as they are able to yield more nuanced data. However, it is also difficult to make comparisons across respondents with open-ended questions, and it may be that not all respondents will answer with equal articulation (Cohen et al., 2005). Despite these drawbacks, I found these open-ended questions to be quite useful in obtaining more detailed information. As will be seen in the analysis section of the dissertation, I was able to elicit strong evidence concerning “reverse racism,” which I interpreted to be a symptom of students residing in a color-blind mentality. These would not have emerged in the closed-answer section of the survey. The open-ended questions were also an important means to show student growth and give evidence for the effectiveness of the unit. Finally, these questions allowed for more nuance and sensitivity in both the analysis and conclusions I drew from the data (Cohen et al., 2005).
The literature has many suggestions on constructing surveys which I was able to follow. For example, Cohen et al. (2005) recommend keeping the survey short, avoiding leading and complex questions, limiting open-ended questions, and trying to minimize ambiguity. They also suggest setting the tone by starting with non-threatening questions, placing the more difficult or emotionally charged questions toward the middle, and finishing the survey with the most high-interest and open-ended questions. The layout should be generous with the space and use clear and concise instructions. The introduction should assure anonymity and thank the subjects for their participation. In choosing questions, many researchers suggest using or modifying questions from previous studies and surveys (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Fink & Kosecoff, 1998; Fowler, 2009). I was able to pilot the survey first with friends and family and later with a group of students similar in demographics (Cohen et al., 2005). This allowed me to gather important feedback on the wording of questions and how they come across to the reader.

The survey was designed to yield descriptive information in order to produce a more general principle about this particular population (Cohen et al., 2005). It was also a means of finding patterns in categories to explain the diversity and context surrounding the population (Jansen, 2010). In order to do this, the survey was centered on the research questions and broken down into sections that try to answer these questions.

The first research question was about Catholic high school perceptions of racism, and in order to answer this in a descriptive manner, I specifically asked questions that centered on whether the students saw the world as color-blind (Botella-Silva, 2010).
Questions regarding this perception are common in many other surveys, which I was able to re-word for my purposes. Below are some examples:

- White people have privileges and advantages that minorities do not (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000)
- Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000)
- Racism is a problem here at St. Joseph (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000)
- I believe there is racism in the Catholic Church

The first research question is also concerned with what is known as unconscious or implicit racism in individuals, which can be determined by implicit tests based on reaction time and tests or via survey questions (Fiske, 2000; Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann & Banaji, 2009; Graham & Lowerey, 2004; McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981; Neville, Lilly, Lee, Duran & Brown, 2000). Having little access to the implicit test equipment, this exploratory project attempted to tease out implicit or unconscious racist tendencies through survey questions. These kinds of questions are also common in the literature, and I was able to re-word some of these for my own purposes. I also created a few to match this particular setting and population as well:

- White people in the United States are discriminated against because of the color of their skin (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000)
- Racial and ethnic minorities in the United States have certain advantages because of the color of their skin (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000)
I think we talk too much about racism (Ponterotto, Burkard, Rieger, Grieger, D'Onofrio, Dubuisson, & Sax, 1995)

All students receive the same attention by teachers regardless of their race (Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996)

I think clubs like AASU and LSU are important for our school

I think there should be assemblies that focus on Black culture

I think there should be assemblies that focus on Latino/Hispanic culture

I think there should be assemblies and clubs that focus on White culture

There is a link between a person’s experience of racism and how they perceive racism (Lillie-Blanton, Brodie, Rowland, Altman, & McIntosh, 2000; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). For example, Ancis, Sedlacek and Mohr (2000) found that college students who reported experience with racism perceived greater racial-ethnic tensions compared to white students who had less direct exposure to racially charged situations. This indicates that how students perceive the presence of racism is highly dependent on where they have experienced racist activity or actions. These next questions were designed to explore students’ experience of racism.

I have experienced racism because of my race (Krieger, Smith, Naishadham, Hartman, & Barbeau, 2005)

I have experienced racism in any form while at St. Joseph because of my race (Krieger, Smith, Naishadham, Hartman, & Barbeau, 2005)

I have heard racist comments from teachers and staff here at St. Joseph

I have seen students treat other students unfairly because of their race

I believe St. Joseph fosters a sense of respect for people of all races and cultures
All students are disciplined the same, regardless of their race

If you have any specific examples, please explain them below:

The second research question was geared more directly at how these students feel their Catholic education addressed the issue of racism. I was unable to find any studies with these kinds of questions, so I created the relevant questions that were used in the survey. My main focus centers on whether students were exposed to the topic of racism in their classes, extra-curricular events, or religious activities such as campus ministry or retreats.

I believe that Social Justice is an important component of my Catholic education

Compared to public and other private schools, I believe that Catholic schools have a special responsibility to combat racism

I believe Catholic schools in general do a good job combatting racism

I think we should talk about racism more in my classes

I think Catholic schools do a good job educating students about racism

I think there should be more minority students here at St. Joseph

I think that there should be more minority teachers at St. Joseph

I feel my experience with racism does not match what is taught about racism here at St. Joseph

Below is a list of places you may have talked about racism while in Catholic school. Indicate how often the topic of racism came up

In class

With friends

In clubs
At retreats
In assemblies
With a teacher or counselor
Outside of school

I think we should talk about racism more in my classes

I also included two short answer questions at the end of the unit to give the students and opportunity to explain their reaction to the unit and their overall thoughts of racism and social justice:

Please briefly reflect on your experience with learning about racism in social justice this year.

If you feel so moved, please reflect on anything regarding racism below:

**Interviews**

Qualitative researchers are “intrigued by the complexity of social interactions expressed in daily life and by the meanings that the participants themselves attribute to those interactions” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2). One of the most effective means of gathering information about this complexity is through interviews, which are helpful in obtaining data about feelings, thoughts, and past experiences that the researcher cannot observe first-hand (Merriam, 2009). Interviews allow for responses that are more in-depth and complicated than surveys because they have more access to interviewees’ personal viewpoints, impressions, interpretations, experiences, and opinions (Silverman, 2011)

I was careful to follow some tips to both potential problems and maximize data collection are found in the literature. For example, Silverman (2011) believes the key to
interviews is active listening, which includes asking questions, making sounds (mm-hmm’s) to show attentiveness to the interviewee, reformulating questions, agreements, and remaining silent. Merriam (2009) believes that at the heart of good interviews are good questions. She suggests having fewer questions rather than more, and using open-ended questions, which “unhooks you from the interview guide and enables you to really listen to what your participant has to share” (p. 104, emphasis theirs). Some examples would be hypothetical questions, devil’s advocate questions, ideal position questions, and interpretive questions. On the other hand, Merriam cautions against asking multiple questions, leading questions, and yes-or-no questions. Both Merriam (2009) and Silverman (2011) tout the importance of asking follow-up questions to obtain rich information that may not have been said in first response.

I recorded the interviews with proper equipment (Janesick, 2004), and did all of the transcribing myself (Merriam, 2009). In order to facilitate effective questioning during an interview, I also included an interview guide (see Appendix C), which is “nothing more than a list of questions you intend to ask in an interview” (Merriam, 2009, 102). My guide had topical and general questions that were presented in no particular order (Merriam, 2009). One purpose for this guide is to help ensure internal validity of the study and making sure the information collected corresponds with the research questions (Creswell, 2003; Silverman, 2011). While these guides are important, I followed the advice of Seidman (2012) who cautions against following them too closely but to allow for freedom in the questioning process and to go with the flow of the conversation. This was to allow rich and meaningful information to emerge through probing and follow-up questions that are not necessarily found in the guide itself.
In terms of the subjects for the interviews, I was able to obtain students from the recommendation of Mr. V, one of the religion teachers, and my own previous experience with them as students. Thus, I chose both by convenience and purposeful selection in order to show the “heterogeneity in the population” (Maxwell, 2004, 88) and to help produce a wide spectrum of responses based on participants’ views and experiences. I wanted to interview students I taught previously because there was already trust built up between us, which allowed for the students to open up to sensitive questions (Seidman, 2012; Silverman, 2011). This was aided by the fact that I was an insider at this school (Merriam, 2009), and while this may present some other problems, such as falling purely into a social encounter between interviewer and interviewee (Silverman, 2011), it does overcome the hurdle of gaining the participant’s trust (Seidman, 2012).

I interviewed nine students in total, and I wanted to make sure I included a suitable cross section in the interviews. As St. Joseph predominantly enrolls white, male students, I chose the majority of the students from this demographic. I also wanted to include a variety of diverse voices, and attempted to interview students from each of the major racial groups found at the school. I ended up interviewing three white males, Evan, Michael, and Josh; one white female, Rachel; one black / Latino female, Lacy; two Asian females, Taylor and Grace; one Latina female, Lupe; and one Latino male; Alfonso (see Table 1 on page 102). I interviewed each student for 45 minutes to an hour in one of the classrooms in the school, and each person received a $5 gift card to Starbucks for their participation.

Observations and reflexive journal
One of the main purposes of qualitative research is to “understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue” (Creswell, 2012, 48). Case studies are, according to Yin (2009), “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 16). One of the ways to record this context is through observations (Merriam, 2009).

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), observation begins with sitting back and taking in a situation, noting something of interest, and then taking notes on that situation. The researcher then uses preconceived concepts to interpret those actions and/or words and records them in a journal. These observations should not only include information from the sources, whether they are interviews or written text, but should also include one’s own ideas on the relevance of what is occurring (Silverman, 2011). Merriam (2009) suggests being aware of six elements when observing: the physical setting, the participants, activities and interactions, conversation, subtle facts, and the researcher’s own behavior. Silverman (2011) provides several questions to ask when observing: What are the people doing / what are they trying to accomplish? How exactly are they doing this? How do people characterize and understand what is going on? What assumptions are they making? What did I see here / what did I learn / why did I include these people?

Observations are useful for several reasons. For one, people often say one thing and then do something else (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), so it is helpful to witness how people act in a more natural setting. Observations are also useful in gathering information about subjects who have difficulty sharing in an interview (Merriam, 2009). Sometimes, when under pressure in an unnatural setting like an interview, people tend to either be
extra careful about what they say or have difficulty expressing their thoughts. However, in a classroom setting, this may not be the case, and information that does not come out in the interview may be elicited during class discussion.

I observed a thirty-student class taught by Mr. H that met every other day for a span of three weeks. I chose Mr. H’s class for two main reasons. One was that he taught the most seniors, and the second reason was because that particular class period fit in with my own schedule. During the observations I sat in an unused desk in the back-left corner of the room. I rarely spoke, though Mr. H did ask me a few questions during discussions, and I took notes on my laptop. These notes included observations on how attentive the students were during the particular lessons, a running commentary of the discussions, and notes of the materials Mr. H used. I also took care to add my own thoughts as they arose, some of which were incorporated into the analysis section below. These are all practices recommended by the literature (Merriam, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I also followed the advice of Merriam (2009), who suggested finishing the field journal entries quickly after the observation, and on more than one occasion I found myself sitting in the empty classroom after all the students had left in order to finish up my thoughts.

I found the reflexive journal to be a valuable source of information. For one, it provided a great deal of context for the students’ responses in the surveys and interviews. Secondly, it allowed me to find patterns of behavior that I did not catch in the moment that they happened. For example, as will be discussed in more detail in the analysis, on several occasions one white male said some statements that indicated he was struggling with a color-blind mentality. I did not notice this at the time, as I was completely in the
flow of the conversation as a whole, and did not make anything of it. However, after looking back at the frequency and consistency of his remarks this pattern emerged, and I would not have been able to see this trend without the benefit of revisiting the reflexive journal.

These observations helped put the rest of the data in context and also allowed me to observe some of the nuances of student behavior that the surveys and interviews were unable to catch. This is in line with the literature, as often observations have the ability to capture some of the subtleties that people have difficulty putting into words (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition, these observations were used in concert with the other qualitative methods of survey and interviews to allow for a “holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated” (Merriam, 2009, p. 136).

There are some drawbacks to observations. The observer’s presence may change the behavior of the subjects, producing erroneous data about participants’ perceptions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005). I did cause some disturbance on the first day, partially because I taught the vast majority of these students the previous two years, and it was evident that students were surprised to see me in the classroom. My presence was further noted when Mr. H announced to the class as a whole that I would be present for the next three weeks. However, after the first few minutes the novelty wore off and it seemed that my presence had little effect on the dynamics of the class in general. For one, I was physically distant and out of eyesight from most of the students, and most seemed to forget that I was even in there. Second, about halfway through the unit another adult came in to observe Mr. H and the students acted no differently, indicating that such guests were fairly common over the year. Finally, one of the students I interviewed, Lacy,
was a part of the class and throughout our interview she made no comment on any effect I had, even though we talked about the class dynamics in some detail.

Another potential drawback is that all observations are filtered through the observer’s interpretive lens (Silverman, 2011), so that the researcher could give meaning to an action that was not necessarily present in the participant (Cobin & Strauss, 2008). There is no doubt that my interpretations went into the analysis of this data, and the meaning I assigned may not have been truly present in the students’ actions or recorded words. However, the literature implies that this potential problem can be reduced through the use of triangulation and multiple data sources (Cohen et al., 2005; Merriam, 2009), and I also was careful to record my reflections, impressions, irritations, and feelings, which all become data in its own right (Flick, 2014).

Validity

Validity in qualitative research is similar to asking if the data is trustworthy and reliable (Merriam, 2009). Cohen et al. (2005) believe qualitative validity is addressed through “the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation, and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher” (p. 105). In order for a study to be valid, it has to take into account the natural setting, the context of the situation, and the role of the researcher. For case studies, Yin (2009) identifies four tests to judge the quality of case studies: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

In order to ensure construct validity, the researcher should use multiple sources of evidence, establish chains of evidence, and have key informants review a draft report (Yin, 2009). This is also known as triangulation (Silverman, 2011). For my purposes, the
survey, interviews, and observations were used in concert with each other to make sure that data from different sources match and there are no discrepancies within stated claims (Cohen et al., 2005).

Internal validity means that the explanations are sustained by the data (Cohen et al. 2005), which can be ensured by pattern matching, explanation building, and addressing rival explanations (Yin, 2009). I focused on this during the analysis stage by providing support and evidence for any explanations and conclusions I derived. Finally, I continued to conduct research during the analysis of the data which helped me find and address rival explanations for the conclusions and hypotheses I drew from the data (Merriam, 2009).

External validity means that the qualitative data can be transferred and compared to other cases (Cohen et al., 2005). In other words, the researcher is able to generalize the data (Silverman, 2011). This generalization is not necessarily the same as quantitative results, which can be applied to the general public as a whole (Creswell, 2012), but rather the qualitative researcher derives a general hypothesis that can then be applied to other situations (Merriam, 2009). The strength of the hypothesis and its transferability to other studies helps determine the external validity of the study, and this was addressed in the analysis and discussion section of the dissertation.

Finally, reliability is based on proper data collection and analysis techniques (Yin, 2009). One way to ensure this is through content validity, which indicates that the instrument collects the data that it was meant to measure (Cohen et al., 2005). In my study, I wanted my survey to collect more descriptive data and the interviews to collect richer and thicker data. Reliability also means that the results are consistent with the data
collected, and there is plenty of self-reflection from the researcher (Merriam, 2009). These were done through my observation journal and careful documentation of all the data that was collected and analyzed.

I also followed other advice from the literature to help ensure validity. For example, I attempted to minimize threats to validity at the design stage by choosing an appropriate time scale, along with using appropriate instruments and samples (Cohen et al., 2005). I was also careful to remain reflexive and cognizant of my role in the research (Flick, 2014). Finally, I used some of the questions posed by McMillan and Schumacher (2006) to keep the research on track and the data valid and reliable: Are the research questions stated in a way that can be addressed? Was sufficient data collected? Could anything about the sampling, instrumentation, or procedures distort the findings? Were there multiple methods of data collecting? Does the suggested action follow logically from the findings? Will the findings result in a change of practice?

**Ethical considerations**

Validity and reliability depend in large part on the ethics of the investigator (Merriam, 2009). In order to ensure this data is collected ethically, I have used this methodology section to justify why this research is important, explain how I will incorporate participants, and document the methodology procedures (Flick, 2014). While these procedural steps can be taken to help ensure an ethical study, most of the literature on qualitative research indicates that ethics is more about how the subjects themselves are treated and how the research project can affect them. For example, Merriam (2009) raises the question of the effect of interviews on subjects. It is possible that the subjects may share more than they are comfortable sharing, become embarrassed or ashamed, and/or
do not like how their ideas are interpreted. These and other concerns needed to be addressed before and during the research process, and Silverman (2011) helpfully identifies three major areas: consent, confidentiality, and trust.

According to Cohen et al. (2005), informed consent is one of the bedrocks of ethical research. It arises from “the subject’s right to freedom and self-determination” (p. 51). Consent means that the participants have a right to know they are being researched, the right to be informed about the nature of the research, and the right to withdraw at any time (Silverman, 2011). The consent should be voluntary, given by someone who is competent, and the person should be adequately informed (Flick, 2014). In this study, I addressed informed consent primarily by presenting the students with a letter providing a brief overview of the research project (see Appendix D), how the data will be used, the students’ role in the data collection, and explaining that they are free to choose not to participate. It was made clear that there are no consequences for declining to participate in the research, but if they were willing to take part, they were to indicate this by signing the form, which I collected and stored in a safe location.

Confidentiality means that the researcher is obligated to protect the participants’ identity, including the place and location of the research (Silverman, 2011). This is often assured through anonymity, where “information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity” (Cohen et al., 2005, 61). In this study, students’ names were kept confidential in all forms of the data that was presented, and I was the only one who had access to anything that can be traced back to the students. The surveys were confidential, and the interviews were presented as pseudonyms. I also kept the school confidential by omitting any identifying information.
Trust is dependent on treating the other person with respect and dignity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This involves respecting the values and decisions of all the participants (Flick, 2014), letting the voices of the participants be heard without judgment (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and listening to one’s own moral compass when conducting research (Cohen et al., 2005). Much of my trust was based on the fact that I knew many of these students and worked with them in the past. I also wanted to establish trust by requiring students to act in a respectful and dignified manner when discussing information, even if they disagreed with the ideas of others.

There are some suggestions in the literature for how to conduct an ethical study that I followed. One was letting the participants know immediately that they could end their participation in the study at any time (Cohen et al., 2005). To ensure anonymity, I stored the data in a safe place so no one can access it (Flick, 2014). Other ways I attempted to ensure anonymity was through the deletion of identifiers, using crude categories in reporting sensitive information, and deliberately putting misinformation in the report when necessary to protect important data (Cohen et al., 2005). Creswell (2005) makes the point that every step of the research project should be infused with ethics, and I feel this was the case for my research.
CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This portion of the dissertation will be an analysis of the data collected through the survey, interviews, and field observations. Most of this section follows a tradition style of qualitative research, which is the “process of examining and interpreting data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, 1). The purpose of data analysis is to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009), which means all analysis will revolve around uncovering the experiences and perceptions of Catholic high school students to see how a Catholic high school education influences these perceptions. This analysis will attempt to fill the gap of knowledge on Catholic High school students’ perceptions of racism through the collection and interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009).

The main goal of this chapter will be to identify various themes and properties that emerge in order to make inferences and hypotheses (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Silverton, 2011). The chapter will start with the field notes of the class, which will give some background on the unit on racism, followed by a short analysis of the students’ definitions that will help provide context. The second portion will be an integrated analysis that will draw upon the closed-answer survey questions, short answer survey portion, and interviews to present several major themes that arose from the data itself.

Background on the survey

As mentioned in the methodology section, the survey was given to the entire senior class at St. Joseph as a homework assignment through their religion classes. I used only those surveys of students that were over 18 years of age, which led to a total of 170
survey results. Among the 170 respondents, 92 (56%) were male and 78 (44%) were female. In terms of race, 41 (24%) of the 169 respondents claimed they were racial minorities, while 128 (76%) did not. The students also had the chance to identify a racial background, with 116 (68%) identifying as being white, 22 (13%) as mixed, 11 (6%) as African American, 9 (5%) as Latino / Hispanic, 5 (3%) as Asian, 3 (2%) as Pacific Islander, 2 (1%) as Middle Easterner, 1 (1%) as Native American, and 1 (1%) as Other. Of the 134 students that marked they were not a minority student, only 15 (11%) marked they were something other than white, and of those only 3 (2%) did not mention that part of their racial background was white. Thus, it is fair to say that students that considered themselves part of the majority also considered themselves to be all or at least part white. For their schooling, 99 (58%) of the 170 respondents attended Catholic elementary schools, 64 (38%) attended Catholic middle schools, and 152 (92%) attended all four years at St. Joseph.

The fundamental premise of a survey in general is to produce data that can describe the target population as a whole (Fowler, 2009). For qualitative research, surveys can also be used to identify diversity within a population (Jansen, 2010). Qualitative surveys are frequently used in conjunction with interviews and other forms of data collection to produce ‘authentic’ understandings of answers (Silverman, 2011). All of these aspects of qualitative surveys were utilized in this analysis of the forty-one (41) closed-ended questions in the survey. The survey also included three open-ended questions, one concerning experience with racism, another a reflection about racism and social justice, and a final space that allowed for students to comment on any further thoughts they had about their experience with racism or the unit. These were analyzed by
looking for contextual themes that fit in with the emergent themes from the survey questions. These short answers were a valuable portion of the data, as they allowed for students to express in their own words how they viewed racism and this dissertation relies heavily on them for the themes that emerged.

I was also interested in the differences between the responses of students that identified with being a minority on the survey and those that did not identify with being a minority. I compared responses to the closed-answer questions using a chi-square test to see if there were any significant differences in responses between minority and non-minority students. These were recorded and will be addressed specifically in the analysis section that follows.

Background information on interviews

Along with the survey, I also conducted interviews of nine different individuals. It was a purposeful selection based on Mr. V’s recommendations and my own personal experience with the students. Prior to the study I asked Mr. V for his opinion on students that he felt would be good to interview about their perceptions of racism. He gave me a list and from it I chose nine students, all of whom I myself had taught, and asked them for permission to be a part of the study. I had developed a good rapport with all these students from our shared past experiences, and I felt this was important because of the sensitive and personal nature of the subject (Merriam, 2009). All of the students were seniors and over 18 years of age at the time of the interview, and all had been at St. Joseph for all four years of their high school career. Six of the interviews were single interviews, while two of the interview sessions contained two students each; I interviewed Taylor and Grace at the same time as well as Josh and Michael, mainly
because of scheduling difficulties of the students. Five of the students identified as minority students: two female Asian students (Taylor and Grace), one female mixed black / Latino female (Lacy), one Latina female student (Lupe), and one Latino male student (Alfonso). The other four interviewees included three white male students (Josh, Michael, and Evan) and one white female student (Rachel). Below is a table with the background information of each of the interviewees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Racial Background</th>
<th>Years at St. Joseph</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacy</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lupe</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Alfonso</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<td>Josh</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Rachel</td>
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The interviews themselves were semi-structured interviews based on a set of interview questions with the freedom to pursue certain topics if the conversation proceeded in that direction. The interview guide can be found in Appendix C. All the conversations were recorded and transcribed. I then used these transcriptions to find major themes that are described below. These themes are broadly broken into three major
sections: experience with racism, the color-blind mentality, and an analysis of the unit itself. Each section attempts to merge the data from the surveys, field notes, and interviews to produce a triangulated picture of each theme that will then be used to answer the research questions in the discussion section of this dissertation.

Mr. H’s philosophy and structure of the unit

This portion of the analysis of the field observations will mainly showcase Mr. H’s philosophy of teaching and the way he structured the unit on racism. I will briefly follow this with some of my thoughts of the unit before moving into an analysis of students’ responses in the surveys and interviews, but I will refer back to the structure of the unit throughout this analysis section to help answer the research questions.

I was able to piece together Mr. H’s philosophy on teaching racism through student discussions during class and personal conversations with Mr. H outside of class. First and foremost, Mr. H places racism within the wider umbrella of social justice, and several times he explicitly told the students that racism is just another form of oppression and subjugation that had to be addressed using social justice as the framework. For Mr. H, social justice is about a critique of power. Racism, then, is the product of systems of power that produce injustice for people of color.

This definition of social justice as a critique of power has certain implications for Mr. H. For one, it means that racism is a human problem and that no one is inherently free from being racist. Thus, he believes that if blacks were somehow in positions of power over whites for three hundred years, “we would be having this discussion with their descendants about racism against white people.” Mr. H seems skeptical that racism will ever be fixed, saying, in effect, that there will always be an imbalance of power
based on race. For him, the best one can hope for is having shared and transparent power with the ability to put the spotlight on issues of racial injustice.

Mr. H presented most of his philosophy about racism during one formal lecture on the second day of the unit, though more emerged through class discussions in following classes. What came out of this lecture was that Mr. H believes that racism is alive and well today and though race relations have definitely improved since the Civil Rights era, the problem is still not solved. A second important theme that emerged was that Mr. H believes that the students’ generation, which he called “Millennials,” was the “most color-blind generation.” By this he means that they did not judge people based on their skin color as much as previous generations. Mr. H sees this as both good and bad: good because they do not judge as harshly, but bad because they are less likely to think of racism as a problem. For Mr. H, racism should be considered in the same context as gay and gender issues in that they are all concerned with power abuse and discrimination. Finally, Mr. H seems to want to split racism into two camps: individual racism that is based primarily on discriminatory actions and words, and what he called “systematic racism,” which is perpetrated through institutional practices. Thus, though people of color can be racist, their words and action would be considered discrimination and not systematic racism.

As the unit progressed, it became obvious that the main objective was for students to realize racism is a real and present issue in their lives. There was little focus on theory; rather, Mr. H used concrete examples of racism both in articles and other forms of media such as movies, newspaper headlines, tweets, and sound recordings to bring the reality of
racism to the students. After each of these multi-media experiences he opened the class up for discussion.

Mr. H structured his class by starting with the students’ previous knowledge of racism and proceeding to slowly bring the reality of racism closer in time and geography to the students’ lived experience. The following is a brief description of the general progression of the unit, while a more complete outline can be found in Appendix E. Mr. H started with a movie about the Civil Rights era and an article on the Tuskegee syphilis study to give some of the historical background and examples of overt, historical racism. He followed with a movie clip of Oprah Winfrey going to Georgia in the 1980s and the challenges she faced doing her show in the last all-white county in United States. The next class period focused on current examples of racism in the form of Stop and Frisk policies of New York City and the “Jena 6” case in Louisiana, along with a vast array of current newspaper headlines about racism and some racist tweets people made to famous athletes and public people. He finished with what turned out to be one of the most impactful moments of the class by showing the students an article about discriminatory housing practices in one of the suburbs of the city where the school is located and showing a newspaper story of one of their classmates, a young black man who was wrongly accused of stealing from a local store. Overall, Mr. H philosophy on teaching this unit was to tap into the students’ prior knowledge that racism was an issue in the past, show the students that racism is still a problem in the present, and finally place racism into the community that they live.

Along with the structure of the unit, another important aspect of the class was that it relied heavily on student input and class discussions. As was mentioned before, there
was only one formal lecture / discussion, and all other transfers of knowledge and theory were through purposeful class discussions with the assumption that students would add their own thoughts or questions. Throughout the unit it was obvious these discussions were possible because of the open and respectful environment that Mr. H had fostered over the year. Having been together for seven months already, the students were well prepared for a discussion-based class, as was evident by the fact that Mr. H had only to show a video and say, “What stood out to you?” and a lively conversation would ensue. There was some tension during a few of the discussions, and some of the comments in the survey and the interviews showed that some students were not always happy with what others said or how they said it, but overall the feeling in the room was one of respect and many of the students felt safe to share their thoughts.

Another way that Mr. H attempted to imprint the reality of racism was through something that he called a hermeneutical exercise. Hermeneutics are ways of looking at the world that attempts to understand how people see the world in their own eyes. In this particular exercise, the students closed their eyes and imagined themselves in the life of someone else, attempting to see the world as someone else would see and experiencing it as someone else would experience it. In a guided meditation, Mr. H had the students imagine they were in a racially flipped school where all the teachers and administration in school were black, people would roll up windows and clutch their purses as the students walked by, students had to buy black Band-Aids, and everyone they saw in magazines and on TV was black. He ended the exercise by having the students imagine they had to repeat this cycle every day for the rest of their lives.
These hermeneutical experiences seemed to have an impact on the students, and in the class discussion that followed one student said they felt very isolated, another that they had never noticed the Band-Aid before, and another that they could not imagine dealing with this every day. This exercise was referenced in later class periods periodically and even mentioned in several of the short answers about the class. For example, one student believed it was a good way for her peers to understand what she and other students of color have to experience: “I was thankful that we touched on racism but I wish we could have talked about it more to inform my peers on racism and teach those hermeneutics.” Another student found the exercise helpful in bringing out the reality of modern racism: “I have learned that people experience racism in their everyday life and I have tried the hermeneutic exercise of putting myself through a day of someone who experiences discrimination.”

Mr. H also used movie clips and voice recordings to bring out some of the nuances of modern racism. One such movie clip, featuring a doll experiment that demonstrated prejudices in children, was used to introduce the idea of unconscious racism. This discussion seemed to strike a nerve in many of the students. Some agreed with it completely, mentioning that they witnessed such socialization in their small siblings and others concluded that unconscious racism is very subtle and hard to pinpoint. However, the topic also brought out some of the only open conflict in the class when one student said there is no such thing as unconscious discrimination because racism is always intentional. He wanted to use another word for it, as he was offended to be called racist in any form. In many ways this discussion encapsulated how the unit on racism affected students. Some were open and started to see how racism was a part of everything
around them, while others struggled with this concept. It also highlighted the fear, bordering on dread, which some white students expressed about being labeled a racist. This tension between wanting to be open and say what they thought while at the same time feeling the need to hold back and be sensitive to other races was expressed at length by the three white males in the interview section, as will be seen later in this section.

*Brief thoughts on the unit*

The first thought about the class is that the students were, for the large majority of the time, respectful and engaged. They treated the topic seriously and there was strong evidence that many of them were taking the information in and processing it as it was presented. There were times when students tended to check out and the engagement waned, but this was mainly during some of the longer movie clips. Students were much more engaged during the discussions, most often when their classmates were speaking. It was evident in the observations that the students both learned a great deal from these discussions and were more likely to pay attention when their classmates had things to share.

It was clear that the discussions were an important part of the class, yet it was also interesting to note that these discussions were difficult to have on some level. After I finished the field observations of the class on racism, I sat in two more classes where Mr. H transitioned into the next topic of gender issues. As I watched, it seemed that the students were more willing to share during these discussions and that the energy was different than they were in previous classes. People seemed to be less hesitant and more inclined to speak their mind. This change indicated to me that racism is an especially difficult topic to talk about, and this was supported by data from the short answer
responses of the survey. For example, one student commented on the awkwardness of the discussions at times: “The conversations held in class were very solid, though participation felt different than before. It was awkward for some people to share. These people were actually the majority. I know I felt this way at times.” Another commented on the emotions that discussions of racism raised: “Sometimes what we learn did cause a feeling of anger or uncomfortability, but this is good because it can lead to positive change in lifestyle.”

Finally, as will be discussed in more detail later, students were genuinely engaged with the topic and showed surprise and disgust at the fact that racism was still such a big issue. The class helped present modern, de facto racism as a reality and the students responded with interest. There seemed to be genuine learning that occurred. However, one area that I felt needed more attention was in the way racism was defined, and the next section will briefly look at students’ perceptions of racism in relation to their formal definitions.

**Analysis of students’ definitions**

There was a section in the survey where students were asked to write their definition of racism, of which 167 (98%) of the 170 students completed. To analyze this data, I categorized these definitions based primarily on the content of the definitions and also how they related to the research questions. See table F1 in Appendix F. For example, the most common pattern was that students associated racism with discrimination, as 59 (35%) of the 167 definitions directly mentioned the word. However, I also formed a category for how reverse racism could be incorporated with these definitions, which was not directly referenced in the definitions themselves but was a topic of interest based on
my research questions. In both cases, the main focus of this analysis was on exploring these categories to get a general feel for how students in a Catholic high school perceive the definition of racism to be, which, in turn, will be used in later sections to help more fully answer the research questions.

There are several notable characteristics for these definitions. The first is that by far the most common definition equated racism with discrimination. Of the 167 responses, 59 (35%) directly used the word discrimination in the definition. For example, one student wrote that racism is “discrimination based on the color someone's skin or ethnicity.” The second category, equating racism to hatred only had 17 (10%) responses, making discrimination the main vehicle for defining racism. This result is similar to other studies of high school students’ definitions (see Scott, 2009; Cook, 2010).

This ties in with the fact that nearly all the definitions were concerned with individual racism, and only six (4%) took into account institutional and systematic racism. Most, instead, relied on individual actions or prejudices. For example, “Negatively judging or treating minorities” is an example of a definition that seems to assume racism is propagated through individual thoughts and actions, while “An institutional and systemic prejudice against someone because of their race” is an example of a definition that takes into account the institutional and systematic nature of racism. This tendency toward making racism an individual trait is considered problematic by some in the literature (Headly, 2006; Doane, 2006; Winant & Omi, 2004). Doane (2006), for example, sees the ascendency of the individual definition of racism as solidifying the color-blind identity already present in the United States. This allows people to assert they are not racist because they are able to compare themselves to white supremacists. Such a
viewpoint also lead people to believe that the answer to the problems of racism is through educating people to be more tolerant of each other. However, this is not enough:

“From the structural racism perspective, individual prejudice and discrimination are but symptoms of larger structural problems, racial inequality is a pervasive aspect of everyday life and the normal functioning of institutions, and the ultimate solution to racial oppression involves far-reaching changes in social institutions” (Doane, 2006, p. 267-8).

Another theme that arose out of the definitions was the concept of race, or a similar term. Though nearly all scholars will agree that race is a socially constructed concept (see Winant & Omi, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2010), it still holds that most definitions of racism in the literature include some concept of race in its definition (see the introduction of this dissertation for examples). Most of the surveys followed this pattern as well. I collected definitions that did not include any reference to race, skin color, minority, ethnicity, or culture, all of which signified some understanding of race by the students, and found that there were only 10 (6%) of the 167 definitions that did not have any reference to race. Some examples of these include: “Discrimination of any social group;” “Injustice against people who are ‘different’;” and “Purposely and intentionally isolating or scrutinizing a specific group.” On the other hand, 75 (45%) of the definitions included the word “race”, while the majority of the rest of the definitions used “culture” and “ethnicity”. A notable few of the students tied the idea of race with physical characteristics, in particular skin color, as was done by 26 (16%) definitions.

Nearly all the definitions conveyed the idea that racism is a negative attribute. For example, “Judging someone based on their skin color; not liking someone for their skin color;” was originally non-negative until the student purposely added the second part to convey that racism has a negative aspect to it. Such negativity was also inherent in many
of the definitions: “Racism is the unfair treatment to any person due to their race.”
However, there were 11 (6%) definitions that did not necessarily have this negative
connotation entwined with the ideas of what racism is. Most of these definitions were
based on the idea that racism is treating people differently, not specifying if that
treatment was positive or negative. For example: “Being treated differently in any way
for your race” and “Treating a certain minority differently.”

These last two are good examples of definitions that allow room for claims of
“reverse racism.” This is primarily because the vagueness of these definitions did not
allow them to address the institutional nature of racism. For example, one of the most
generic and common definitions was, “The discrimination of a race that is not your own.”
This definition allows for groups that are in the majority to claim discrimination against
them based on their race without taking into account historical factors and power
differentials present amongst races. Other definitions do seem to take this power
difference into account, but still leave wiggle room for “reverse racism” to sneak in. For
example, the definition “Injustice against people who are different” would most often be
applied to more powerless people, such as students of color. And yet, one could easily
imagine a context in which students from a minority group would outnumber white
students, and this definition would call any injustice that happened in that situation as
“racism.” While this seems to be justified, many scholars (Katz, 2003; Brown et al.,
2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2010) believe that racism should include some form of racial
supremacy, which in the United States means white supremacy. This means that most of
the definitions given by students either purposely or accidently give life to the concept of
“reverse racism.”
Indeed, only a few of the definitions put forward by the students were worded in such a way that would be difficult to include “reverse racism”. For example, 21 (13%) of the definitions included the idea of racism having ethnic or minority tendencies, such as “Racism is the discrimination of ethnic minorities,” and only two (1%) included both the idea of a power differential and minority components. For example, “Racism is the attitude / belief that there is a superior racial group and other racial groups are lower than them. In other words, racism takes away the unalienable and naturalistic rights of certain ethnic groups by its belief;” and “Racism = power + prejudice (therefore only someone who has power from the existing power structures set in place can be racist, minorities can only be prejudiced because no power).” These definitions acknowledge that there are groups that are incapable of being racist, as the definition narrows to those that are in the socially, politically, and economically dominant group.

While most definitions are merely complicit with the concept of “reverse racism,” some were explicit, as the students appear to want to intentionally include “reverse racism” in their definition. For example, one definition mentioned the fact that the minority race can be racist toward the majority race: “Racism is the direct or indirect degradation of a race. This could be a by minority or majority race to a minority or majority race.” Another seemed to include the possibility of “reverse racism” while still acknowledging the damaging aspects of racism: “Forceful discrimination toward minority; special treatment.” The terms “special treatment”, if meant for something like Affirmative Action, seems to say that even if races are treated positively, such as in the case of Affirmative Action, that could be counted as racism.

Doane (2006) sees the emphasis on “reverse racism” as greatly beneficial for
white Americans, as it allows them to “neutralize minority claims for racial justice and for dismantling racial advantages in a fight for ‘equal treatment’” (Doane, 2006, p. 269). This gives political power to white Americans who are then able to counter claims of white racism with that of “black racism” and other groups of color, since it follows that anyone can be a racist. This can be fixed, in part, by viewing racism through as an institutional problem: “If racism is viewed as rooted in institutional structures… [then] white racism would logically be viewed as the most significant social problem and the onus of change is placed squarely on the shoulders of white Americans” (p. 268).

The definitions from the interviews were similar to the definitions in the surveys in that they were based primarily on the individual and were centered on discrimination and prejudice. Five of the definitions in the interviews were based on discrimination, as exemplified by Lupe’s statement: “My definition would be discrimination of human beings based on ethnic background.” Evan’s definition was slightly different as he focused on the idea that racism was undermining someone based solely on his or her skin color, while Michael’s was the most general with “any bias that might have a negative connotation or impact on someone’s life.” Alfonso believed that racism is “hurting someone else because they are a different ethnicity,” and was based mostly on fear of the unknown about other people. Later in the interview, however, Alfonso mentioned institutional racism as a form of racism that is taught: “What I feel has been kind of ingrained into this institutional racism [at St. Joseph] is that people that aren’t white are different, you know. That being white is the norm and if you are not, then you are not the norm.”
Along with Alfonso’s discussion of institutional racism, the lone exception to these simple and individual treatments of racism was Rachel, whose definition was “a system of oppression...basically anything that is used to keep another group of people from power.” She went on to explain that there is an individual aspect of racism, what she called the “classic definition of racism,” which was words and actions such as racial slurs. However, she also thought there is more subtle, systematic racism that manifests in things like the idea of beauty: “When we’re looking at beauty, typically it’s white, European beauty; I mean people of color are not considered that classical definition of beauty because they are a different color than white.”

When asked directly about it, Rachel claimed that this outlook on racism came from her family, friends, and from her interest in the feminist movement: “And really becoming a feminist junior year... seeing other matters of social justice being brought into light like that really helped me to see that those problems [are similar].” This insight was echoed by Mr. H, who structured his unit on racism inside the general unit of social justice, which is a critique of power through giving a voice to the oppressed. For both Rachel and Mr. H, it seems that when a person starts to understand and work for justice in one area they are also able to recognize and work for justice in other areas as well.

While Rachel and Alfonso had the most in-depth definitions, Evan referred back to his definition the most during the interview. In one situation, he used his definition of racism to justify some of the comments he made in class, arguing they were not racist based on his definition:

“Now I made a comment in AP Gov about the Westboro Baptist church and we were having this discussion and everyone was like they are horrible people and all these common things people would say. I brought up how our country is made for a multitude of passions and we may disagree with those people but we have to
Looking at his interview as a whole it appears that one of the reasons that Evan was so careful with his definition was due to the fact that he was worried about being called racist. This fear meant that he had to be very explicit on what he meant by racism to show that what he said was not racist in nature. Like the example above, Evan was careful to argue that such controversial statements, which others might construe as racist, were not racist based on his definition of racism. This shows the importance of addressing the definition of racism in the unit itself, as it can generate discussion about the subtle nature of modern racism along with giving students the chance to discuss what is meant when something is racist.

To sum up the definitions found in the surveys and interviews, the vast majority of the definitions on racism focused on race, culture, and ethnicity and explicitly used the idea of discrimination in their explanations. Most of the definitions described actions and beliefs of individuals and were silent or ignorant of institutional and systematic racism. At the same time, nearly all the definitions viewed racism in a negative light, with the exception of those that believed racism was merely treating someone differently. Finally, most of the definitions also left room open for the idea of reverse racism, with only a small number specifically mentioning minorities or people of color in their definitions and the systematic nature of de facto racism.

Major themes that arose from the surveys and interviews
This next section is an analysis of the major themes that arose from the surveys and interviews. These themes are systematically placed in broad categories of racism and experience, color-blind mentality, and students’ reactions to the unit.

*Theme #1: Experience with racism*

As mentioned above, on the survey there were several survey questions that had significant differences in responses between students that identified with being a minority and students that did not. Several of these were in regards to students’ experience with racism. For example, for the survey statement, “I have experienced racism because of my race,” of the 39 minority respondents, 12 (31%) claimed to have experienced racism often or very often, 12 (33%) marked sometimes, and 14 (33%) marked rarely or never, compared to 2 (1.6%), 20 (16%) and 107 (83%) of the 129 majority respondents respectively. This difference is statistically significant (p<.001). These results indicate that that students of color were much more likely to perceive that they have experienced racism due to their race. See table F2 in Appendix F.

I also broke down each of the answers to this question by the individual race. Of the 9 Latino respondents, 3 (33%) marked rarely or never, 4 (44%) marked sometimes, and 2 (22%) marked often. Of the 16 African American students, 2 (13%) marked rarely or never (13%), 7 (44%) marked sometimes, and 7 (44%) marked often. The other groups to mark often were Asian, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander, and White, each of which had one respondent. Asians were the most likely to mark never or rarely, as 5 (83%) of the 6 respondents marked rarely. These results were statistically significant (p<.01) and show that that students that identified with being Latino and African American were the most likely to experience racism. See table F3 in Appendix F.
Another survey statement that attempted to get at students’ experience with racism was the statement “I have experienced racism in any form while at St. Joseph because of my race.” Of the 39 minority students, 8 (20%) marked often or very often, 14 (36%) marked sometimes, and 17 (44%) marked rarely or never, compared to 4 (3%), 10 (8%), and 115 (90%) of the 129 majority students. This difference is statistically significant (p < .001). See table F4 in Appendix F.

Overall, these results indicate that students that identify with being a minority were much more likely to claim they have experienced racism, both in general and specifically at St. Joseph, than those of the majority race. In particular, it shows that over half (56%) of these minority students claimed to have experienced racism at least sometimes while at St. Joseph. This is something of a problem as studies of perceptions of the experience of racism have shown that people who report experiencing racism also show signs of operating in higher stress, which can then lead to feelings of fear, anger, anxiety, and denial (Harris et al., 2006; Gee, Spencer, Chen & Takeuchi, 2007). Thus, the perception of having experienced racism has a direct impact on how students operate in and view the world around them.

There are several things to note from this data. The first is that students that identify with being a minority are much more likely to claim to have experienced racism on a consistent basis. The other finding is that African American and Latino students were more likely to have said they experience racism, while Asians were the least likely. One possible reason may be tied in with the fact that African Americans and Latino students have active clubs like AASU and LSU that, according to survey data, tend to address racism in their meetings. Thus, these students may have had the opportunity to
discuss racism more and were able to identify it better than their other minority peers. They also may be more aware of and sensitive about racial issues due to having experienced racism in multiple forms throughout their lives.

One way to better understand why Latino and African American students claimed to have experienced racism more often is to obtain concrete examples, and there was a section on the survey where the students could describe direct experiences with racism. Of the 170 surveys, 52 (31%) of the total students wrote in a response, meaning more than two-thirds left it blank. Of those 52 respondents, 4 (6%) were students saying they had not actually experienced racism while 33 (63%) others were from white students, many of whom were claiming what could be interpreted as some form of “reverse racism.” Only 19 (37%) of these short answers were from minority students, and of those only 4 (8%) were from students that claimed to have experienced racism often, while only 8 (15%) of the respondents claimed to have experienced racism sometimes. Thus, while I was hoping to get some insight into how those that claim to experience racism do in fact experience racism, this section was more helpful in uncovering a strain of misunderstanding in white students about the definition of racism in terms of a power differential and a color-blind mentality that was often shaded with hints of unconscious biases.

That being said, of those students that identified with being a minority that did answer this short answer question, 11 (58%) of the 19 responses described their experience of racism through language, such as racist jokes or the use of the N-word. For example, “There is a lot of racism in a lot of jokes that people say;” and “Jokes that people make about my race. Like I eat chicken and watermelon because I am black.”
Other experiences recorded included 2 (11%) from black female respondents who reported being followed in a store by white employees: “I have often been followed around by employees when I enter a retail establishment;” and “I was shopping around a certain store and this lady began to follow me around wherever I would go. There was many white people shopping but they followed me.” Another 2 (11%) of the 19 responses mentioned racism done to their families in the past, though they themselves had experienced little racism personally: “I have not experienced racism because I grew up in [this state] and the color of my skin is light. But my family has experienced racism. Especially my father in the work area and other places.”

The Latino students that wrote in responses focused on how people were treated like second-class citizens, and several mentioned poor behavior to janitors. For example, “A couple of years ago I witnessed a group of students being rude to a Latino janitor because of his English. They mocked him because of his accent.” Another example also talked about Latino stereotypes: “A couple of weeks ago it was testing week and I heard upperclassmen making fun of the ‘special Hispanic’ boxes saying it must be to see if they want to be a maid or landscaper,” while another mentioned “I heard some kids making fun of some Hispanics and their family sneaking across the borderer.” Two students, a white and an Asian, mentioned both students and teachers using the word “Chink” to describe Asian students. Several students mentioned stereotypes and sports: “Most of the kids think the black students are just here for sports, and not to get a good education;” and “When college coaches would come by they would say ‘Someone’s smart! You must have gotten that from you mom.’” Finally, one Asian student mentioned the feeling of
not being a part of the white culture: “Not necessarily ‘racism’ I suppose, but at times feeling isolated when I'm in a room of all white kids.”

Of the white students that answered this question and addressed racism toward minorities, nearly all referenced language, as 29 (88%) of the 33 respondents focused primarily on racist jokes and the use of the N-word as the primary acts of racism. Four (12%) of the other responses by white students centered on teacher behavior. For example, one talked about expectations: “People expecting less or having negative expectations due to stereotypes.” Another talked about attention and respect: “I feel that students of other skin color either receive less attention / respect from faculty or far more attention / respect because of their race.” Two others detailed more explicit teacher behavior: “A teacher sent out an African American student and as he left she talked like he was talking which was offensive to even me,” and “In one of my religion classes (junior year) a student was treated unfairly in my opinion because of her race.” Interestingly, these two comments also clarified themselves at the end. For example, the first ended by saying, “However, this teacher is, quite a character and I don't believe it was purposeful or intended to be racist,” and the second ended with, “She was yelled at more often than other people but she also talked a lot in class out of turn so there's that.” It is likely that these clarifying statements were made because of the stigma that most white students felt about being called racist, and these students were very hesitant to use that label even in situations that showed clear signs of racist behavior.

Several themes emerged from the short answer section. For one, it seems to be difficult to get students that identify with being a minority to explicitly write examples of racism in a short answer section of a survey. This could be for several reasons. The first
is that these students may interpret that question to mean individual acts against them such as using the N-word or telling racist jokes, and that many may not have explicitly experienced these to their person. A second reason could be that though they recognize they are victims of racism, these students may not have either the language or ability to explain these acts as racism. One implication of this is that interviews might be a better way to elicit details on experiences of racism, as the student and the interviewer together could explore what it means to be a racist experience to elicit a richer and more detailed picture. A second, related conclusion is that this shows the difficulty in addressing modern racism in general. As is evidenced by the definitions collected in this survey, people view racism in overt acts of discrimination those who operate inside a color-blind mentality would expect these kinds of actions of someone who says they experience racism. Yet, de facto racism is much more subtle and complex, which makes it difficult for minority students to explain in a simple, one sentence response to those that do not understand the nuances of modern racism or believe racism is present.

I also attempted to gather information about student’s experience of racism at St. Joseph through several of the survey statements. One was the statement: “I have heard racist comments from teachers and staff here at St. Joseph.” Here, there was a difference in the manner that minority students answered compared to majority students. Of the 39 minority responses, 33 (85%) marked never or rarely, 3 (8%) marked sometimes, and 3 (8%) marked often or very often, compared to 116 (90%), 13 (10%), and 0 (0%) for the 129 majority students. This difference was statistically significant (p<.01). See table F5 in Appendix F.
This was drastically different for the survey statement “I have seen students treat other students unfairly because of their race.” Here, Of the 39 minority student responses, only 14 (36%) marked rarely or never, 13 (33%) marked sometimes, and 12 (31%) marked often or very often, compared to 76 (59%), 38 (29%), and 15 (12%) of the 129 majority students. This difference was also statistically significant ($p = 0.01$). See table F6 in Appendix F.

Finally, the statement “Racism is a problem at St. Joseph” was an attempt to get at students’ direct perception of the reality of racism at St. Joseph. Overall, of the 169 responses, 54 (32%) of all the students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while 77 (46%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. There was no statistically significant difference between the responses for students that identified as a minority compared to those that identified with being a majority.

These three survey questions tell a basic story about these students’ perceptions of racism at St. Joseph. First, about a third of the students perceived that racism is a problem, while a little under half of the students do not. It appears that most of the experiences with racism were not based on student-and-teacher exchanges but rather student-to-student interactions. The data also indicates that there was a split in the perceptions of racism, as those that identify with being a minority student were more likely to perceive having personally experienced, or perhaps witnessed, some form of racism while at St. Joseph. This split also manifested itself in the interviews.

The first thing to note was that the three white male students, Evan, Josh, and Michael, all believed that racism was pretty much a non-issue at St. Joseph. Evan explicitly referred back to his definition of racism saying an action was only racist if it
purposely undermined people because of their race: “I would say there is no racism at this particular Catholic institution that I have experienced.” Evan went on to contrast St. Joseph to a public school, where he said students were more willing to use the N-word and divide things into racial categories. He believed this does not happen at St. Joseph, because “You don’t say certain things when you are more educated on the backgrounds of certain racial aspects.”

The main racial tension that Evan felt was the tension that is present in the classroom when people are discussing matters of race. Primarily, Evan expressed frustration about not being able to have an open conversation about race: “[When talking about racism,] you really have to think about what you have to say before you say it just so you don’t intentionally, you know, make someone upset or undermine them or make them feel uncomfortable in that classroom.” He mentioned having to “tiptoe” and “jump” around topics of racism, and that he felt the same pressure when discussing gender issues with a strong feminist in the room. This feeling of being constrained was not a positive experience for Evan: “For me I would say that was a negative thing, because at that point I cannot speak my mind without feeling free to do so.”

Josh and Michael, the other two white males that were interviewed, had a similar perspective on racism at St. Joseph. For one thing, they felt that St. Joseph was a diverse school, a “melting pot with multiple different ethnicities” as Michael put it. This diversity was something of the shock to both of them when they first came, as Josh recalled:

“When I came to school it was a totally different experience for me because I only had a couple of African American students in my classes in middle school…so that when I came here it was like whoa, I got caught off guard. Took me a couple of months.”
In their minds, this diversity works well together. For Michael, “I feel like the culture is really down to earth and I feel like for the most part, while we have different cultures, I don’t know they don’t clash at all and work together.” Josh agreed, pointing out that he sees distinct groups at other schools, where different ethnicities will not talk or interact with others, but at St. Joseph “everybody can be friends with everybody.” They acknowledged that there are distinct groups that do occur at St. Joseph, such as black students sitting together at lunch, but they did not think these are racially driven groupings. Josh explained, “I do notice that [there are groupings at lunch], but I think that to say they are sitting together because they are black is an overstatement, because I think they are sitting together because they are genuinely friends.”

One of the reasons they believed racism was a non-issue was because, as Josh said, “I think racism come from a socioeconomic standing,” and St. Joseph, having students from higher socio-economic standings, meant that they are more welcoming and accepting of differences. The application process helped in this, which, Michael said, “Weeds out the kids who do want to be here and don’t and so usually the kids that do want to go to these private schools are very focused and driven in their education.”

However, both Josh and Michael were quick to point out this is merely their perspective. As Josh remarked, “I can walk down the hallway and think everybody is so welcome and everybody can do anything around here, but I can’t see it from the other side so I can’t tell if—if I said something on accident or something that I didn’t think was inappropriate or I didn’t think would offend them.” Michael, too, said, “Being a Caucasian male it is hard to take that perspective, knowing that the racial tension isn’t
always directed towards me, but I would say that for me St. Joseph has been very open to new cultures and very inclusive.”

Like Evan, both Josh and Michael felt that the main tension of race was the fact that it was extremely difficult to talk about the topic without upsetting people. As Josh explained, “This is one thing I have noticed about St. Joseph, is that it is almost impossible to talk about racism, because every time it gets brought up I feel like someone is going to call me racist.” Similar to Evan, Josh also felt he had to be guarded in what he said about racism: “I try to say something about it I find myself choking on my words because I am afraid I am going to misspeak or offend someone.” Michael agreed:

“Especially being white it’s hard to speak on the matter, because people feel like—and maybe it’s true—people accuse you of not being a credible source, and you never really experience what other ethnicities experience, which is true, but it also makes it harder to talk about it and really have a discussion about it.”

They expressed belief that this tension is placed on them both by teachers and students, and that it is mainly the way people think about racism that is the problem. They both believe that the focus should be less on the negative aspects of racism and more on solutions. As Michael said,

“It’s good to focus on history and the negative aspects of what happened, but I feel like when we do that, and we do that too much the students get fixated on the negative things, which again should be remembered for the purpose of reoccurring, but I feel like we should add more solutions. We need to remember the past, acknowledge that past, and then look to the future in order to improve it rather than be fixated on all the negative connotations of what we’ve done.”

Both believed that focusing too much on the negative aspects actually holds back race relations between students. According to Josh, “We keep acknowledging the differences and highlighting those and keeping them above all, then you are almost creating a bigger gap, making things more difficult.” The solution is to focus more on
love: “I think what has to be done has to be more about people, the people, the love we have for each other and find a common ground where everybody can love everybody and we can acknowledge the great aspects that every culture has.”

Rachel, the one white female that was interviewed, had a different take on racism in St. Joseph. First of all, she did not see St. Joseph as very diverse, calling it a “super white community.” Rachel also believed that racism was present: “I think it’s not as obvious, it’s more the systematic racism that we experience here.” This racism was hard for white people to acknowledge, even herself, because they did not experience it, which leads to a big problem in Rachel’s eyes, the problem of being color-blind:

“One of the things that bothers me the most is the saying that you’re color-blind, that you don’t see color. Which is really problematic because if you can’t see color you cannot acknowledge that other people have experienced racism...[In fact,] by saying your colorblind...deep down it means you see them as white.”

Rachel also recognized that white people could not experience racism and they feel attacked for bringing it up. This is because “racism is a system of oppression and white people have never been oppressed,” and they are afraid of being called a racist. However, for Rachel this should not be the bad thing that many see it as:

“Of course it’s not good to be called racist, you don’t want that but people are so upset over it, and I think they should be, but I don’t think people see it as an opportunity to learn from their mistakes. People just are like I’m being attacked so I need to retaliate so they can’t learn from that.”

To Lacy, a student whose background included African American and Latino among others, racism is more of an experienced reality. This reality mainly manifests itself in the need to conform to the white culture that dominates St. Joseph. She found the whiteness pervasive: “But here it is like all around, every aspect. Like the teachers and the principals and religious leaders are white and the librarians are white and everybody
else around it white and so it is hard.” This was hard on several levels, one being that since other white students lived and operated in this culture of whiteness, they did not experience or tend to acknowledge its racial overtones: “People are like everything is fine so why would you think that it is racist?”

One of the main problems of this predominantly white culture is that it forces students to conform. According to Lacy, when black students first get to St. Joseph, they act as they normally do, but they quickly get pushback for their behavior:

“They (the students) will start acting normal and then people are like, what are you doing? And teachers will say you’re too loud or that you are doing this wrong or whatever then that they have to act a certain way because that is how Catholic schools act.”

At St. Joseph she found that “everything was very structured, a lot of confinement: don’t act out, don’t sing, don’t rap, don’t be loud, don’t dance a certain way…” She recalled getting in more trouble than her white peers in her Catholic elementary school for her actions, because she and her other black friends “were louder, expressed singing differently, danced with more expression; we just had more energy and that got us in trouble.” She learned from these experiences and recognized that she had to conform to a white, Catholic school culture if she did not want to stand out either to other students or to teachers and administration. To Lacy, this act of conforming was an act of racism, and that is difficult:

“So like it’s hard because you are totally comfortable in your own skin, you are totally comfortable with your own culture and you get to you know a certain place where you are expected to conform and it is hard because (starts to cry) it changes your whole mindset and it is kind of brainwashing and sometimes you will do things without even knowing it. Lots and lots of things without realizing that you are doing it…Even I think or say things that are against my own race, because that is what I have been in.”
Lacy went on to describe an episode where she made a thoughtless remark to her father, who she saw as someone who has to battle this conformity every day, and was shocked and upset when she realized part of her was buying into the conforming mindset:

“My dad and I were talking and he was ‘I am conformed because I am always with white people [and] everywhere I go I am almost always the only black person around.’ And it just came out and I was like ‘maybe you are not being in the right place.’ And he was like, ‘You see?’ And I was, like, oh my god I totally didn’t mean that.”

For Lacy, this pressure to conform also came from teachers, who have a great deal of power over students: “Because, you know, teachers teach you, they are mentors, they punish you, they have a lot of authority without realizing it,” and that “without teachers knowing this they will be racist. They may tend to think one race may need more help or something.” Lacy was not sure if black students were punished more than white students, but she was explicit that they conform to the unwritten codes of behavior:

“I know that a lot of my friends who are black or even Latino they just know how to act so they don’t even get into those kinds of situations any more…they act differently than they do when they are in a more diverse background where it is okay, because that is just how you express yourself, but once you are in a Catholic school they see it is more dangerous…people who come from public schools can no longer act like that.”

Lacy, like the white male students interviewed, acknowledged the fact that racism was difficult to talk about, but for her it is because white students have difficulty understanding her perspective or experience: “Instead of listening they’ll keep talking and [I’ll be] like why don’t we look back at history, or when you went into a restaurant how many people looked like you and how many people didn’t?” She mentioned being upset by some of the responses to questions in class, mainly attributing what the white students said to ignorance. While she did not go into detail about these questions, looking back over the field notes there were two different statements from a white male that could
have been interpreted by Lacy as racist in nature. The first involved Lacy herself when she was volunteering information about a study that concluded poor white students do better in school than black students. Directly following her comments, a white male asked if this could be because the white parents were more educated. In a different class discussion where students were exploring why a white club would be offensive, the same white male student asked, “Then shouldn’t black people stop using the N-word?” Both of these statements could have been construed by Lacy as insensitive at the least and offensive at the worst. The first statement was an attempt to explain away de facto racism in a non-racist manner while at the same time keeping alive a stereotype that blacks are ignorant and uneducated. The second was an attempt to hijack the conversation away from being about racism and black culture to a discussion of whites as victims because they have to watch their language. It is clear how Lacy, an active member in both of these conversations, would feel like the other student was not listening and making statements out of ignorance.

McIntosh (1998) both recognized and critiqued this ability of white students to downplay and ignore the experiences of people of color due to their race. A white female herself who was afforded many of these same privileges, McIntosh drew attention to the fact that students like Lacy could not act in certain ways, such as dressing poorly, talking loudly, or even swearing without drawing attention or having it attributed to their race. Tatum (2003) also acknowledged the underlying assumptions about proper behavior in a white culture and used it to help shape her definition of racism, which included an element of conforming to a system of power based on advantages for people with white skin. Grace and Taylor, the two female Asian American students interviewed, also felt
this pressure to conform. Grace said, “I feel that people that have different backgrounds and cultures try and fit in. They also try to hide their—not hide, but not embrace—their cultures as much as they should.” Taylor, in the same interview, said “I think everyone just wants to fit in, and sometimes when you see that the majority is white you think that is the way to fit in.” However, unlike black students and Latino students who had a strong presence on campus both in terms of numbers and club recognition, according to Grace and Taylor the Asian population is “lost in between”.

For Lupe, a student who identified with being Latino, the emphasis was more on how she fit in personally:

“I feel white and American and so it is hard because my family and friends see me as white and my Spanish is definitely different and I stand out when I go to Mexico. It is hard because people see me as different and it is hard because I never quite fit in either there or here and in school.”

This being the case, Lupe was open about her passion for topics of race, even while admitting it can be hard for other students: “I feel bad about talking about [racism] because people don’t feel as passionate about it and I don’t want people getting mad and really defensive, even if I try to explain it to them what I feel.” She elaborated later:

“I feel like some students just don’t know how to deal with [talking about racism] because they are uncomfortable and very emotional about it and I think they get scared. I know that I definitely cry in class when I talk just because it is a touchy subject for me and I think that makes it hard for others to deal with that, they don’t really want to be involved so they just sit back.”

Alfonso, the male Latino student I interviewed, also had some views of racism that were different from his white male peers. Like Rachel, he did not think St. Joseph was very diverse, especially compared with other schools he attended. Similar to Lacy, Taylor, and Grace, Alfonso also felt a sense of whiteness that permeated from the school. He labeled this institutional racism:
“What I feel has been kind of ingrained into this institutional racism [at St. Joseph] is that people that aren’t white are different, you know. That being white is the norm and if you are not, then you are not the norm.”

He was quick to say that it was probably not intentional or even very noticeable, “I would not necessarily say the second I walked into St. Joseph I feel that, but it is something you kind of get after a while, something you kind of realize.”

He explained this more fully later:

“The main reason too I wanted to do this [interview]…I feel that when talking about race and stuff like that, a lot of people, a lot of people don’t believe in white privilege. And I don’t know it is kind of hard to explain it to them, but it is definitely present in the sense that if you are white you are normal and if you are not you are not normal. Not necessarily in a bad way, but…I would think of it like white is the baseline and if you are not white you already have something against you that does not make you baseline.”

Taken as a whole, the interviews produced several major trends about how students perceive racism specifically at St. Joseph. For one, the white males did not see racism as a problem, though Josh and Michael were quick to say that though they did not experience racism themselves that did not mean it was not present. On the other hand, the students who were not white males felt that racism was present and a reality at the school. This mainly came through the fact that the majority of the school’s population, including students, teachers, and administration, are white, and that this had ramifications in terms of having to conform to standards that the white students were not fully aware.

None of the minority students mentioned any actions of overt racism and instead focused on having to deal with the ignorance and even disregard by white students about the reality of the minority student’s experiences with racism. These experiences included the historical context of having had family members deal with both overt and covert racism, such as Lacy’s father, along with themselves having to modify their behaviors
and language to conform with the standards placed on them by being at a predominantly white school. This leads to the second major theme that emerged from the data: that of the color-blind mentality that emerged both in the surveys and the interviews.

**Theme #2: Color-blind mentality**

As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, the color-blind mentality is the belief that historical racism has no effect on the current lives of people of color. This belief is coupled with the narrative of meritocracy, which is the idea that one’s success or failure is mainly due to effort and choices made by the individual (Warren, 2001). A color-blind mentality sees race as unimportant in how contemporary lives are shaped, and that everyone has equal opportunities in education, work, politics, and every-day society (Brown et al., 2003). The color-blind mentality is a critical component of de facto racism and tends to minimize any suggestions of racism by referring to personal actions and choices to explain negative outcomes of people of color. The surveys and interviews helped paint a picture of how this mentality manifests itself at St. Joseph.

The first aspect to note is that students did not tend to deny that racism is a problem. In the first survey statement, “Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today,” students overwhelmingly answered in the negative, as 158 (94%) of the 168 respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. There was no statistically significant difference between students that identified with being a minority and those that did not, and the results show that nearly all the students perceived racism as an issue in contemporary society.

A companion survey question, “White people have privileges that minorities do not,” found that the vast majority of the students agreed or strongly agreed with the
statement, as 146 (86%) of the 169 respondents responded in the affirmative. This means that, along with acknowledging that racism is a problem in contemporary society, most of the students perceived that whites do have special privileges based on their race. Taken together, these indicate that a large majority of the students reject the fundamental assumption of the color-blind mentality that racism is no longer a problem.

This being said, there was evidence from the short answer section of the survey that the picture was more complicated and that many students did actually operate in a color-blind mindset. One student commented that racism was not an issue and that learning about it actually made a non-problem a problem: “I think it is very interesting to learn about racism and it is very helpful to learn about racism. But I think sometimes the education aggravates racism.” Yet, even here the class seems to have had an effect, as the commenter went on to say: “But after learning, I will be more aware of racism in my life, and think if I am discriminated or not in certain situations.” This indicates that though the student is struggling with seeing racism as a problem, the class had enough impact to convince them to look deeper into the issue.

Similarly, another student’s response tried to show that racism is not special to minority groups, but that whites suffer as well:

“Although I disagree with racism I will say that there isn't just racism towards black, Latino, Asian etc. but there is also racism towards white. I am not arrogantly saying that white people experience racism more than others. Yet, there is racism from all people and it will forever be an issue and Catholic schools should push to teach about it.”

This comment was an attempt to downplay de facto racism by ignoring institutional and historical legacies of racism. The student intuitively recognized the conflict of their statement with the reality of racism, showing the internal conflict inherent in a color-
blind mentality, and they were also appreciative of having had the chance to learn about it in class.

This internal conflict was present even in statements that were more skeptical of the reality of de facto racism. One student, for example, followed a classic color-blind model of denying that racism was an issue outright and following it up by a statement to make it seem like they are not being racist:

“It has given me a different perspective although I mostly disagree. I think it is important for people to have voice. It is hard to take some grievances seriously when people come across as hypocritical because they endorse one thing, but support something contradicable.”

The student also showed their entrenchment in a color-blind mentality while admitting that their views had been challenged during the class.

More succinct statements uncovered other common themes of those caught in a color-blind perspective. One, for example, put the blame on the victims of racism:

“Racism is a problem but don't think it is the sole cause of the plights of blacks in this country.” Another tried to shift the attention toward the troubles whites have to bear: “I believe if an African American/Latino etc. are killed by a white person/cop/etc., the white person is held more accountable than if it happened the other way.” Others attempted to sanitize the conversation about racism by spreading it out to multiple cultures downplaying the significance of de facto racism “We need to learn more about it and not just focus on one race but all races including whites;” and “If we have assemblies for anyone we should have assemblies for all cultures because we are all equal and only having black assemblies makes them better than the others.” Finally, some were outright about their skepticism of de facto racism: “I sometimes feel as if racism is blown way out of proportion,” and “I feel as though racism is getting better [and] I think that black
people use it to their advantage for hating white people because they're so caught up in the past.”

Taken as a whole, the data from two closed-answer questions mentioned above and from selected short answers shows a conflict in perspectives. On the one hand, the vast majority of students believed that racism is still a problem and that whites have special privileges, while on the other hand there were many caught up in a color-blind mentality that downplays or even denies the lived experiences of people of color. There are several possible reasons for the presence of these inconsistent responses. The first is that these students are living in a specific time in the history of the United States when race relations have been at the fore of many news stories. Students have been saturated with stories about racial tension for the past few years, starting with the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012 to the shooting of Michael Brown in 2014 that led to the Ferguson unrest, which occurred only a few months before the students took this survey. It is quite possible that these students’ perspectives are a microcosm of the larger shift in the perception of race in the United States, which has been challenged by these racially driven events. There is some evidence that this shift is happening on a large scale, as a CNN article from June 2015 showed that 74% of Americans felt that racial discrimination against African-Americans is a very or somewhat serious problem, up from 57% saying so just five years prior (Agiesta, 2015). Another CNN/ORC found that the percentages of Americans who thought relations between blacks and whites have gotten worse during President Obama’s presidency rose from 6% in 2009 to 39% in 2015 (Polling Report, 2015). These polls indicate a shift in the national consciousness about
the reality of race relations in the United States, and it is possible that the students in the class are displaying this shift in their responses to the reality of racism.

A second possibility is that many of the students answer these questions in such a way as to avoid being seen as racist, as this has become a major social taboo in our culture: “The word racist holds a lot of emotional power. For many White people, to be called racist is the ultimate insult” (Tatum, 2003, p. 128, emphasis theirs). There was evidence of this during the field observations, as several times white students specifically commented they were worried about being called racist. One said outright “If I am called a racist I am offended. I’m not being purposely hurtful.” Other researchers have observed this fear of being labeled racist. Bonilla-Silva (2010) found that white respondents would change their language and have more difficulty expressing themselves about race, while Trawalter and Richeson (2008) found that white college students would behave more anxiously than their black interaction partners in interpersonal interactions with people of other races, especially during race-related conversations. Finally, Sobieral, Berry and Connors (2013) found that politically conservative individuals were very worried about being labeled a racist, primarily from fear of the social stigmatization that came from being labeled as such and the powerlessness they felt in defending themselves. The interviews also uncovered this fear as each of the white males stated that they had to be careful of what they said and how they said it for fear of being called racist. This would give some indication that students may recognize that it would appear to be racist to answer that racism is not a problem or that white people do not have special privileges. Thus, those closed-answer questions may have been too blunt; if students answered in the negative it would have been too easy to call that response racist. This means that while
students may believe that racism really is a problem and white’s do have special
privileges, it may be that part of the reason they answer that way could be based on not
wanting to be seen as racist.

However, as mentioned above, it is likely that most of the students do recognize
that racism is a problem and that white’s do have special privileges. Evidence from this
comes through the fact that there were strong indications that students’ perceptions about
racism changed over the course of the unit. This conclusion if founded on the data
gleaned from the comments at the end of the section, where many students stated how
their views had changed over the course of the semester. For example, one student wrote:
“I think having my social justice class has really changed my opinion about how much
racism is present today. I think if all students took social justice class, people would
experience racism less often.” Another said, “I have learned that racism is a huge issue
within our society. I learned that it is easy to not see it because I as a majority do not
experience it. I’ve learned that the discrimination that exists is not official but rather
silent.” This indicates that a number of the students gained new knowledge about racism,
and that this change in perception is itself an indication that they do believe that racism is
a problem and that white’s have some special privileges.

What is most likely is some combination of the above explanations, and that
students are able to both state that racism is a problem and yet operate in a color-blind
mentality. Evidence for this comes from the student’s definitions, where nearly all the
students focused on individual beliefs of actions with virtually no recognition of the
systematic and institutional nature of modern racism. This coincides with the tendency to
see racism as relying on some form of intention. Evan’s definition, and his subsequent
treatment of what constitutes a racist comment or action, relied heavily on this aspect: “I treat [my friend] differently because he is black, but I would not call that racist…[because] I think racism at its core is to undermine, and I never undermine him but I do and say things differently when he is around.” Similarly, when I observed the class, one student in particular was highly skeptical of unconscious racism, because, as he explained, “Racism to me means intentional. I think we should use some other word other than subconscious racism.”

The reliance of these definitions on intention and individual actions is a key component of the color-blind mindset as it allows students the ability to recognize racism in overt racist beliefs and actions such as name calling and derogatory language, while still avoiding their own personal feelings of discomfort and unconscious bias they may harbor themselves (Doane, 2006). Uncovering these unconscious biases is a tricky undertaking, and many studies use experimental designs to tease out these implicit biases. For example, Implicit Association Tests (IAT) rely on the cognitive dissonance between participant’s associations with positive words with images of black and white people. The idea is that when shown a series of pictures, people respond quicker to images they prefer that are associated with good words, while slower responses indicate a negative unconscious bias (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). For example, using the IAT, researchers found that white college students showed a discernable preference for white Americans and a relatively negative evaluation of black Americans (Dasgupta et al., 2000). These tests have been used to measure similar biases in white judges, police officers, and juries, and while there is some controversy over their validity, the evidence compiled so far seems to indicate they are accurate in parsing out implicit biases in
individuals (Rachlinski, Johnson, Wistrich & Guthrie, 2009; Ziegert & Hanges, 2005; Greenwald et al., 2009).

Other experimental designs include one study where researchers mailed 5000 fake job resumes with different names to companies and found that white sounding names received fifty percent more callbacks than black sounding names (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Another found that jury members remembered more aggressive facts when the main actors were black or Hawaiian compared to when they were white, concluding that implicit biases had an effect on judgment (Levinson, 2006). Finally, participants who had recently seen black faces reacted with greater hostility when the researchers allowed their computers to crash, allowing the researchers to draw the conclusion that social behavior can be triggered by unconscious racial stimulus (Bargh et al., 1996).

These studies indicate that many people harbor unconscious racist tendencies, and while it was beyond this study to measure the implicit biases of the white students directly, there was some indication it was present. This was found by comparing the responses of white students between two closed-ended survey questions. For the question, “I think there should be assemblies that focus on black culture,” of the 129 majority respondents, 73 (56%) of the 129 white respondents agreed or strongly agreed, 41 (32%) had no opinion, and 15 (12%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. This is compared to 52 (43%), 45 (33%), and 31 (24%) of the 129 white respondents to the closed-ended survey question “I think there should be assemblies on Latino/Hispanic culture.” This difference was statistically significant ($p<.01$). See table F8 in Appendix F.
What these results uncover is a shift in responses away from agreement toward disagreement in regards to the different assemblies, as white students were more likely to show opposition to having assemblies that highlight Latino culture than they were for assemblies about black culture. This could be an indication of the white students’ unconscious biases, as since white students are sensitive to being called a racist, they would be careful when answering about black assemblies, and these responses would produce the results seen above. However, these students may believe it is less of a social stigma and less racist to oppose assemblies of Latinos and would answer more in line with their unconscious tendencies. This would mean that the lower acceptance of the Latino assemblies would be an indication of students’ unconscious tendencies once the fear of being labeled racist has been removed.

Several implications arise from these survey statements. One is that there is evidence that when white, majority students are less worried about being labeled a racist they tend to respond in a more racist manner. This also implies that the students harbor unconscious racist tendencies that may arise when the students are less guarded. A second implication is that students are likely to associate racism with white-and-black relations. This means that students are less likely to recognize racism towards other groups such as Native Americans, Latinos, and Asians because they have been conditioned to think of racism as only a black / white problem. Evidence for this conclusion comes from the interviews, where Josh and Michael, two of the white males I interviewed, expressly remarked on the lack of exposure they had to racism being more than a black / white dichotomy: “I think racism for me has been perceived as white male
versus black male, and this year I’ve gained more perspective of Native American racism and racism toward the Asian culture.”

A similar pattern emerged when comparing responses of white students with the statements “I think there should be more minority students here at St. Joseph,” and “I think there should be more minority teachers here at St. Joseph.” Here white, majority students were less likely to agree or strongly agree for having more teachers than students, as 68 (53%) of 127 responses replied in the affirmative compared to 59 (46%) of 128 white responses. More telling, only 6 (5%) of the majority students disagreed or strongly disagreed to wanting more minority teachers, compared to 20 (16%) of the minority students who answered in the affirmative. See table F9 and F10 in appendix F.

This data can be interpreted in a similar vein to that of the assemblies, where students are more likely to answer in a racist manner when they are less likely to be worried about being labeled a racist. A second possible reason is that white students at St. Joseph have more exposure to minority students than they do minority teachers, as at St. Joseph 16% of the student population is composed of minority students compared to only 3% minority faculty members (K. Hessuz, personal communication, September 29, 2015). There is evidence that such exposure is important. For example, one study found that white participants exhibited less automatic prejudice in the presence of a black experimenter (Lowery, Hardin, & Sinclair, 2001). This implies that students who are taught by minority teachers would likely show less unconscious racial biases when answering this question. The same study also found that the participants demonstrated less automatic prejudice when they there instructed to avoid prejudice. As will be
discussed in later sections about the racism unit itself, this is an indication that teaching about racism is important in reducing the unconscious biases in white students.

While both of these comparisons do not have the capability to produce proof of unconscious biases, they are able to show some evidence that it exists in some students. Another theme that arose from the short answer section was “reverse racism.” As defined in the introduction section of this dissertation, “reverse racism” is the belief in anti-white prejudice and often manifests in the form of white individuals downplaying the realities of modern racism by focusing on their own perceived marginalization (Cabrera, 2014). This idea of the white person as the victim is an outcome of the color-blind mentality: If we live in post-race society with no racism present, to give special treatment to minority groups is to discriminate against whites.

As discussed in detail earlier, “reverse racism” was a theme found in student’s definitions of racism. It was also found in white student’s explanations of their experiences with racism. For example, one student stated, “When I was a freshman, I went to a basketball camp at Oak Grove High; there I was a minority. Due to the color of my skin I was picked on and was not treated as everyone else.” Another said, “Not at St. Joseph, but on certain sports teams I have been a part of, I have in fact been a minority and not received certain gifts that other players have from coaches, and they said it was because I wasn't a part of the family as them.” Other white students claimed that minority students received deferential treatment in the classroom: “Often, staff are likely to punish minorities less severely because of fear of reaction than whites,” and another, “Oftentimes black people are allowed to say certain things/act certain ways because of their race, but if I were to say it that way it would be ‘racist’ and I would likely be in
trouble.” Finally, several others commented on discrimination against whites in the college application process: “The only thing that may come close is in college applications. I feel like colleges are harder for white people to get into because they strive for diversity, not that it is a bad thing, but I believe race should not be a factor in education.” Again: “I do see racism targeted towards other students especially, w/college acceptance notification b/c of the white kids ‘disadvantage’ yet I do not think this should be discussed in the way that it is b/c minorities are at a disadvantage.”

Lupe and Alfonso, the two Latino students I interviewed, also addressed “reverse racism” and Affirmative Action, though their conclusions differed from those above. Lupe mentioned a previous class where white students were saying students with an ethnic background with decent grades were able to get in colleges over white students with good grades, which they claimed was not fair. Lupe saw this as a shallow reading of affirmative action, and that “everybody has their own story…[and] someone with a different color skin may have gone through a harsh thing with definite discrimination that a person with white skin would not have experienced.” She summed it up by saying, “I thought that by saying it was ‘reverse racism’ is not really knowing what racism is and have never experienced it in that way.” Alfonso agreed and was adamant that being for Affirmative Action was not “reverse racism.” He was also worried that white people would use the privileges given through Affirmative Action as another way to muffle the voices of minorities:

“I wouldn’t say Affirmative Action is an excuse to be racist in any way. I almost feel like that it’s used to say, ‘Oh, you are mad about racism, you have advantages, you can’t be mad at racism.’ No matter what compensation you get you are still being racist against a person. It’s not like, ‘Oh, I am going to hit you but you are getting a candy bar.’ That’s not how it works; you’re still getting hit.”
Along with implications of unconscious bias and reverse racism, the data also uncovered more positive themes as well. For example, there was some indication of awareness, unconscious or conscious, of white privilege. This evidence comes from the series of questions regarding assemblies for different groups. For the first statement, “I think there should be assemblies that focus on black culture,” of the 169 total responses, 18 (10%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, 47 (28%) marked no opinion, and 104 (62%) agreed or strongly agreed, compared to 40 (24%), 55 (33%), and 73 (44%) of the 169 responses for the statement “I think there should be assemblies that focus on Latino cultures,” and 43 (27%), 76 (45%), and 47 (28%) of the responses for the statement “I think there should be assemblies that focus on white cultures.” This difference was statistically significant \( p < .001 \). See table F11 in Appendix F. What these questions show is a decrease in agreement for having assemblies celebrating white culture, which indicates that most students recognize that to celebrate an assembly for white culture is not an appropriate way to address racial issues. This may be in part because students recognize the fact that these assemblies are a part of societies way of compensating for the historical injustices to these minority groups, but it might also be an indication that students recognize the undercurrent of white privilege found at the school, and that these assemblies are a small attempt to address this issue.

On a similarly positive note, the fact that a large majority of the students, 135 (80%) of 170 respondents, either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement “I think clubs like AASU and LSU are important for our school.” This indicates that these clubs have a strong presence on campus. This is due, in part, to the willingness of St. Joseph to set time aside for them. St. Joseph is on a block schedule, and every other day has a chunk of
time set aside for assemblies, mass, or extended class periods. This time is also used for AASU and LSU, so students are able to attend these clubs during school time. These are the only clubs allowed to do this, as all other culturally based clubs such as Polish club and the Italian club meet during lunch or after school. Senior students that actively participate in these clubs are also able to wear a cord for graduation. This means these clubs are especially visible to the whole student body and the attention has likely helped foster acceptance of these clubs and the perceptions that they are important for many students of color.

To sum up this section, the data collected at St. Joseph indicate that many Catholic high school students operate in a color-blind mentality, and evidence for this came in the form of unconscious biases, in particular to assemblies and the desire to see more minority students and teachers, and also through definitions and examples that showcased students’ belief in the reality of “reverse racism.” At the same time, these same students were able to recognize that racism and white supremacy are still major contemporary problems in the United States and that certain events and clubs are important aspects of St. Joseph. Thus, at the end of a three-week unit on racism students were struggling with their previously held beliefs of a color-blind society and a new awareness of the reality of de facto racism. As will be seen, these intellectual and emotional conflicts surfaced in the short answer section. The next section of this analysis will deal with this theme along with student responses to the unit on racism in order to see what can be learned from a three-week unit on racism in a Catholic high school.

*Analysis of the racism unit*
This dissertation focused on a three-week unit of racism at St. Joseph High School. There were two primary teachers of the unit, Mr. H and Mr. V. I also observed one of Mr. H’s classes for three weeks, documenting student’s reactions and watching how the unit was constructed and implemented. Overall, the student response to the racism unit was very positive, and though I have some critiques of Mr. H’s class that I observed, I feel that this unit was highly effective in creating important cognitive dissonance in students between the color-blind view many of them reside in and the reality of de facto racism.

While a complete treatment about the effectiveness of the unit is beyond the scope of this dissertation, there is some indication that the unit was successful in several areas. For one, there is evidence in the surveys that students did form a better appreciation for social justice as a whole and for the racism in particular. For example, when asked, 117 (69%) of 169 of the students responded that social justice is an important part of their education and 112 (66%) of 170 respondents marked that they believe Catholic schools have a special calling combat racism. This indicates that students acknowledge, on some level, the specialness of Catholic social teaching in regards to racism and the responsibility of Catholic schools to address it. This also means that students expect Catholic schools to make special efforts to address issues like racism and that students would be correspondingly disappointed if they did not see that being the case.

While many of the student’s answers indicated that they believed that Catholic schools have a special responsibility to combat racism, several survey questions showed that fewer of them believed this was in fact the case. For example, barely half, 87 (51%) of 169 respondents felt Catholic schools did a good job combatting racism while even
less, 76 (45%) of 169 respondents, felt Catholic schools do a good job educating students about racism. This indicates that while many students perceive a need for Catholic schools to address racism, fewer believe that Catholic schools adequately do so.

While this could be interpreted as an indication of the failing of this unit, evidence from both the survey and the interviews actually shows the contrary. For one, the surveys revealed that that while the students were exposed to the topic of racism in other classes while at St. Joseph, they still felt the quality found in the three-week unit on racism was important in challenging the views of modern racism. Students indicated that they learned about racism in other classes, as 133 (78%) of the 170 students noted that racism came up at least sometimes, and those interviewed said it was taught in history, English, and foreign language, and other religion classes. Yet, even though they were exposed to it in all these different areas, 159 (81%) of the 170 students agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to learn about racism more, with only 11 students (7%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Thus, though students were exposed to racism in several different classes at St. Joseph, when they were finished with the three-week unit of racism in their class on social justice they still wanted to talk more about raci

Another rich source of data was that of the short answer section, where students were able to comment on their thoughts of the unit in context of social justice. It was evident from these responses that the large majority of students were complimentary of the unit and expressed how much they learned: “I think racism is both a fascinating and important topic, and learning about these issues has made me a better person;” and
“Learning about racism in social justice has been benefitting me a lot lately, and it has been great putting myself in the shoes of other minorities who continue to experience inequality from those who are racist.” Even those that disagreed with the content often expressed gratitude for the opportunity to discuss racism in the class: “It has given me a different perspective although I mostly disagree. I think it is important for people to have voice.”

Among the themes that arose from the short answer section as a whole, the ones that will be addressed were that the unit was instrumental for many students in showing them the reality of de facto racism and challenging their color-blind mindset, the emotional response the students had to the topic, their desire to learn more about racism, and their critical responses to the lack of exposure to such a treatment of racism in their past education.

The first main theme that arose from the short answer responses was that this unit was the first time many of the students became aware of racism as a major problem in contemporary United State society. As one students said, “Learning about racism itself has been much less surprising or interesting as learning about how racism is still very present in today's world.” This was a theme echoed by many, and it is an indication that one of the most powerful and effective parts of the unit was the fact that it made students aware of the reality of racism in their own lives. For example, one black student wrote, “This unit was very interesting because it really showed how much racism there really is in the world. I already knew that there was racism being that I am black and I experience it, but I didn't know how bad it really is.” Another discussed how this new knowledge affected them: “My experience with racism this year has shown that I was somewhat
blind to many racist activities of our countries past. Things that should have been big were kept quiet, which is wrong.”

Many of the students expressed surprise by this new knowledge and were affected by what they learned, and one of the most commonly used phrase was “eye-opening:”

“Learning about racism in social justice this year has been extremely eye opening. Before learning about racism in social justice this year I knew racism was still a problem, but I had no idea how bad it really still is.” Yet another said, “My eyes have been opened to racism in social justice. I always knew racism still exists, but I guess I never really thought about as much as I have been recently. It is crazy how prevalent it still is.” As can be seen, most of the students expressed surprise that racism was still and issue: “I learned a lot about racism this year in class. I did not really think it was as big of an issue nowadays and it really opened my eyes…we need to work towards stopping it.”

Many students also voiced outrage that racism was still a problem, as one student simply put it: “It is sad how it is still relevant. We should have moved past it by now.” However, many also expressed gratitude that they were finally being taught about racism as it really is:

“Social justice has done wonders in teaching me about racism. Before social justice I saw racism in the world and knew it was a problem but I had never realized the extent of the institutionalized racism. I appreciate that the idea of racism is taught in such an objective way.”

Overall, the students were appreciative that they were able to learn about racism and many of them expressed the need to learn about racism more: “I think that the more we educate student about racism and talk about it in class, the better;” “I think racism is bred from ignorance and a lack of knowledge. Racism needs to be talked about more in public schools and we as a country needs to work on solving this problem;” and “I think
racism needs to be taught more at St. Joseph to know it still exists so that it can be
lessened. I think this year in social justice is the only time I have every actually learned
about racism.”

That last quote shows another theme that arose from the short answer section:
students’ perceptions of a critical lack of exposure to the topic of racism in their
education. This theme kept coming up in several ways. For one, many students, like the
quote above, commented on the fact that this was the first time they felt they were really
taught about racism: “This is the only time I have ever really openly discussed racism in
school at St. Joseph.” Another gave a small analysis of why they thought this was the
case, explaining that they felt like teachers try to avoid talking about racism and other
difficult topics:

“I have learned about racism, but at St. Joseph, I have realized that teachers try to
avoid controversial subjects like racism, sexism, drugs, and death. Even though
these issues are a big part of my culture, I have done a fine job about educating
myself outside of school, but I think it should be a conversation to be had during
class.”

These and other quotes show that students do not believe that they learned enough
about racism during their education in Catholic schools. A few of these quotes also
indicate that they felt like none of the classes at St. Joseph taught them anything of
significance about racism either. However, a more common theme seems to be that the
social justice class was able to give them a glimpse of what a major problem racism is,
and in doing so made them realize not only how much more they have to learn about the
subject but also how lightly and superficially racism was treated in their other classes. As
one student wrote: “This year I have learned more about controversial issues than I have
in any other year at St. Joseph. Racism in my other classes has been almost ignored.”
All the students who were interviewed expressed a positive experience with the racism unit in the class. Lacy, one of the minority females interviewed, pointed out that this was the first time racism was specifically focused on in a class: “I talked about racism before but in actual curriculum and having homework on it, like an essay we did, I never had a class or a unit specifically on racism.” Even though she had a deep background with the topic of racism, Lacy was still able to learn a lot from the unit, and she also appreciated the fact that it got her peers thinking about the topic.

Evan, one of the white males, also had good things to say about the unit: “It was always a positive conversation and it was always a good conversation of the classroom.” He, however, focused more on the tension felt about the topic. This tension, he said, was not only felt by him when he tried to speak his mind, but it was also felt by his black friends because other students would look to them to see their reactions.

“I know Richard has told me, especially in Mr. H’s class on racism, that when reading stories on housing in Lakeland and Bridgeview and how its racist, Richard feels awkward and it’s almost counterproductive because he’s one of the only black kids in class and people turn to see his reaction. And anytime there’s the N-word or some racial slur I know firsthand there’s kids in the classroom that feel awkward. And not that the kids in the classroom are trying to undermine him (Richard), there’s just not that comfort level yet.”

Michael and Josh, the other two white males who were interviewed, agreed that the unit was a positive learning experience. Josh said, “Every time I have a conversation of racism in my classes I learn something new, or gain a different perspective.” Both Michael and Josh were appreciative that their classes taught them racism was not just a black and white issue, but that other ethnicities, particularly Native Americans, Asians, and Latinos, have experienced suffering because of racism. Like Evan, they also recognized the difficulty in discussing racism in the classroom, as Michael succinctly
said, “It’s hard because there is so much tension.” Josh concurred: “I think that half of the problem of racism at this point isn’t that people are racist, it’s the tension that goes along with talking about it.”

Lacy also recognized some of the awkwardness and discomfort about talking about race. For her, though, it was more about trying to not upset those around her any more than she has to. She does this by not getting upset herself:

“When we (black students) say risky things it does make people mad. I was talking to [another black student] the other day about how in the classroom I would never show that I was mad. I might be mad, but I can’t show it because it is not my place and people wouldn’t understand…I don’t think people realize how much this means to others.”

Another theme that emerged was that the topic brings out deep emotion. In nearly all of the interviews the students got emotional at one time or another. Lacy and Lupe actually cried at one point when discussing their personal stories, while Josh and Michael became agitated explaining how difficult it was to express themselves. Evan became angry at one point, and Alfonso became animated and passionate. Similarly, there were emotionally charged responses from the short section. For example, some students mentioned anger: “To be honest learning more things about racism got me very angry. I mean this is 2015 for goodness sake we need to really stop being close minded and look beyond this point.” Another was that of disgust: “I am disgusted by how horrible people treat each other; race should not be a problem now days and I don't get why people cannot accept each other.” Finally, one of the most common emotions felt was that of frustration: “It's very frustrating for me to talk about racism and it hurts me to know that people are judged because they have more melanin than I do;“ and “I have been enlightened a lot about how much racism still exists and it makes me really frustrated and
I feel moved to do something.” As seen by this last quote, this frustration also led to the
desire to fix the problem: “I feel very frustrated about learning about how much racism
still exists and how bad it is. It really upset me and makes me want to do something to
change it but I don't know what I can do.”

Racism, it appears, is especially difficult to talk about and several of the
interviewees agreed that it was more difficult than similar sensitive topics. Lacy and Josh
both said it was easier to talk about gender issues than racism. Lacy: “I think people were
definitely saying riskier things about girls than race, I think people are afraid to speak
up.” Josh: “I feel like it is easier for me at this school to talk about gender equality than
racism because… I can’t even talk without being accused of being racist.” This is
collaborated by the literature, as many articles also mention the fact that racism seems to
be a particularly difficult subject for students to discuss. For example, Cochran-Smith
(2000) discussed the problem of minority students having to play “educator” to the white
students, and that this had a tendency to shut down their contributions to the class. Marx
and Pennington (2003) concluded that white guilt could be a deterrent in student
responses, while Scheid and Vasko (2014) found that white insecurities and strong
emotions could be a hindrance in a classroom. Finally, Donadey (2002) cautioned that
white resistance could be a problem with discussions, mainly because the students she
taught did not want to complicate their worldview.

At the same time, while nearly all the students talked about feeling some tension
or awkwardness around the subject, it seems there was little conflict or disagreement
during the actual classes. For example, when asked about it, Grace, one of the Asian
females, said, “I feel like in our class this year it wasn’t as awkward or people didn’t feel
like they needed to not talk.” Taylor echoed this thought and believed it was because her class was so homogeneous: “I don’t think my class is that diverse, so talking about it was more of a one-sided opinion…that racism is present. But there weren’t any people to express another reality of it.” Alfonso expressed similar sentiments, but he saw this as due to white people in the class feeling slightly attacked, which made them quieter during class: “I mean I feel like a lot of people just shut off a little bit…people that are white shut off a little bit during that course because they are being attacked almost. But other than that I would say the class was pretty good.”

Regardless, all of the students agreed that it is important to discuss racism and that Catholic schools have a special calling to do so. Alfonso said, “I agree that racism should be talked about, definitely in religion classes.” Lupe and Evan thought that being a Catholic school was an important part of the racism unit. For Lupe, being Catholic laid the framework for why racism is wrong: “I feel that at a Catholic school we are taught that we are all created in the likeness of God and we should be treated that way.” Evan felt Catholic schools have a responsibility to teach about racism: “…as a Catholic I feel I should always be conscious of those maybe suppressed and whatnot so I always feel like it does add to how the [Catholic] institution has to be more conscious about racial issues.” Josh thought that while it’s important to teach about racism in public schools, Catholic schools are “sending kids all over the country and if they can carry on that mentality and knowledge [about racism] with them for the rest of their lives, that is going to be spread around the country and that will be a huge, huge thing.”

*Themes that emerged about the unit*
One of the main takeaways from the short answer section of the survey and the interviews was that the three week unit on racism seemed effective in getting students to acknowledge the reality of de facto racism. There was also evidence that it challenged many of their currently held views that coincided with a color-blind mentality. This section will look at the ways in which this unit was successful, including the use of current events as a vehicle for learning about de facto racism, using a discussion-based class as a way to elicit student response and propagate productive conversation about racism, and the importance of a dynamic teacher in presenting the information and facilitating the active discussions between students.

To start with, the short answers indicated that one of the most effective means of teaching about racism was through the use of current events to show students the reality and scope of de facto racism. One response from a student in the short-answer section of the survey showed how important this exposure to news stories were to both challenge their previously held beliefs of racism and also to raise important questions about their own role in it:

“We have been presented many different cases from recent years. Many of these cases have demonstrated racism in [this city], even at St. Joseph. Racism is not a distant problem. It is alive and well. I have been guilty of it myself, as well have many of my peers. It is important to discuss racism and unpack our beliefs. This permits us to delve deeper into the underlying motivations/causes of such injustices.”

In the class periods that I observed, Mr. H primarily presented these current events in two ways. One was to assign a news article as homework to both read and write a reflection that was to be turned in. The other was to show headlines during class discussions to help accentuate the points he was trying to make. It was apparent that these were able to stimulate good discussion, and often when Mr. H opened up the class with
the question, “What did you think about the article?” it produced some of the best commentary and insight found in the field notes. For example one of the liveliest conversations of the unit took place when the students discussed an article on color-blindness. The free-flowing discussion that followed touched on questioning the need for black history month, systematic racism, whether racism is based on nature or nurture, and how racism is tied directly to power. It was apparent, both in the field observations and the short answer sections, that being exposed to these contemporary accounts of de facto racism was an important piece of the students education of racism, as shown by the comments of one student in their survey:

“I was actually very interested and I learned so much about racism this year. I learned how when people have power it leads to injustice, and how it is sad how the articles gave me facts about African-Americans and the rents. Most of the managers said it was full, showed them the worst apartment, raised the price just because they were black! So sad and disturbed me because it was right here in our home city and state.”

Another important aspect of each of the classes was the fact that they were discussion-based with an emphasis on letting student voices being heard. This came out not only in the short-answer section of the survey, but there was also some indication of its importance in the closed section. For one, there is evidence that this unit gave students, especially white students, a space to discuss racism. One set of questions on the survey asked students to rank how often they discussed racism in different situations such as the classroom, with friends, outside of school, in clubs, and with a teacher or counselor. The most popular answer overall was in the classroom, where 78% of all students marked that they talked about it there at least sometimes. See table F12 in Appendix F. However, there was a difference between how minority and non-minority students answered the question for outside of school, in clubs, and with friends. Outside
of school, of the 39 minority responses, 7 (18%) responded rarely or never, 11 (28%) marked sometimes, and 21 (54%) marked often or very often, compared to 38 (30%), 54 (43%), and 35 (28%) of the 127 majority students. This difference is statistically significant ($p = 0.02$). In clubs, of the 40 minority responses, 16 (40%) responded rarely or never, 8 (20%) marked sometimes, and 16 (40%) marked often or very often, compared to 100 (66%), 35 (21%), and 33 (13%) of the 127 majority students. This difference is statistically significant ($p < .01$). With friends, of the 40 minority responses, 11 (28%) responded rarely or never, 14 (35%) marked sometimes, and 15 (38%) marked often or very often, compared to 65 (52%), 44 (35%), and 17 (13%) of the 126 majority students. This difference is statistically significant ($p = 0.01$). See tables F13, F14, and F15 respectively in Appendix F. In all three of these cases, the students that identified with being a minority were more likely to answer often or very often compared to the majority students. What this indicates is that white students do not have nearly as many chances to talk about racism in a meaningful way, making this unit that much more valuable for them as an avenue for discussion.

The field notes also relayed the value of the discussion-based class. Mr. H used discussions as his main vehicle for presenting material on racism. Nearly every presentation was centered on student responses, and even the lone formal lecture was more of a conversation with key ideas running throughout. The value of these discussions was readily apparent in the field notes. For one, student participation and engagement were at the highest during the discussions, and it was also when students exhibited the most emotion about the topic. During my observations I would periodically check to see student engagement and the energy of the room was always at the highest when there was
an active discussion with multiple students and Mr. H actively involved. Another important aspect of the discussions was that they allowed the voices of students of color to be heard speaking about their own experiences and thoughts. This theme came up several times in the short answer section, as several white students stated that they wished they heard more from their fellow minority students: “The only thing I would have liked is more time to hear my classmates opinions on the issues covered, good or bad;” and “I wish I had more people who were a part of a minority in my class so that I could learn about their experiences and opinions.”

This desire to share during discussions also came from students of color, one of whom commented that she would have liked more chances for her own story to come out: “I was thankful that we touched on racism but I wish we could have talked about it more to inform my peers on racism and teach those hermeneutics.” However, such conversations are not easy to have and often did not occur. In the classes I observed, of the seven minority students present during discussions only Lacy, whom I interviewed, spoke up consistently about her experiences. Lacy addressed this during her interview, saying that the conversations on racism were harder for everyone to have than other difficult topics like gender, and that this was especially felt by her fellow black students in the class: “I think people are afraid to speak up…and [my two fellow black students] just don’t say anything because we don’t want to have to worry about people knowing what we have to go through every day because it makes people uncomfortable.” Later on, she clarified this by saying this awkwardness was due in part to not wanting to “intimidate” the white students as they can easily become defensive and worried about
being called a racist. This sentiment was echoed by a white student’s comment, who also noticed the lack of voice from students of color during the conversations:

“I have noticed that minorities don't speak up as much as white students do and I think that is unfortunate considering they are the ones with more first hand-experience—I think their unwillingness to share goes to show that racism is still very prevalent and needs to be talked about more! I think we just scratched the surface.”

Yet, despite this tension and the difficulty of sharing, these discussions were acknowledged by many as being a very important part of their new knowledge about racism. Lacy, for example, was explicit in this regard, stating,

“I feel that everyone should address the issue, but I think specifically places like St. Joseph that has so many white students need to talk about it. We need to talk about racism; not talking about racism isn’t going to help; ignoring it isn’t going to help.”

Others echoed this sentiment, and the discussions were often specifically stated as one of the reasons the students had such a positive experience during the unit: “Social justice class has been a class I look forward to and I enjoy the class discussions.” A final aspect of the discussions was that they opened the students up to the fact that racism is a huge problem that cannot be fully addressed even in a three-week long unit. As one student commented, “Learning about racism in this social justice class has been interesting and eye opening because different perspectives are discussed. I do however believe that we don't discuss it enough.”

These rich and purposeful discussions did not happen in a vacuum, and a final theme that emerged about the effectiveness of the unit was that of the importance of a dynamic teacher who creates a safe place for these discussions to take place. Racism is a complex and emotional topic for most people, both for those that have directly experienced racism and those that are worried about being labeled a racist for what they
say. This often makes the conversations somewhat difficult and often awkward. One short-answer statement captured some of this essence: “The conversations held in class were very solid, though participation felt different than before and it was awkward for most people to share. I know I felt this way at times.” Such conversations hinge on having a safe classroom environment that students feel safe to share honestly with each other. After watching several classes, I commented in my field notes about the level of comfort Mr. H was able to facilitate in his classroom:

“Mr. H does a good job of cultivating an environment safe for sharing ideas, and this is crucial for this topic, both for the minority students and also for the white. The minority students so they don’t feel attacked in yet another way for their minority status, and the whites so they can feel comfortable making non-PC statements and questions that they are actually thinking. I also like how the minority students are there to also add weight to Mr. H’s words by their own thoughts and examples.”

This safe environment was crucial for the discussion-based model Mr. H operated within, and throughout the unit it was obvious these discussions were possible because of the purposeful work that Mr. H put into fostering a place for such open dialogue. By the time this unit took place the students had been together for nearly seven months and were used to Mr. H’s expectations for how to participate in these discussions. Though never directly stated, these expectations seemed to be that everyone had a chance to share, what was shared was valuable, and that students were to respect the speaker even if they did not agree with what was being said. Even when some tension arose, overall the feeling in the room was one where it was obvious that many of the students felt safe enough to share their thoughts.

It was also important that the students felt the teacher was telling the truth about racism, even if that truth was hard for students to take. This was especially true of
comments about Mr. V, where students said such things as, “Mr. V is a social justice beacon of light in a dark abyss,” and “Mr. V has taught me so much about injustice in our world. I feel like I have a much better view and have a better sense of the injustice in our society.” For these students, it was important that they felt they were being told the truth, no matter how hard it was to hear it. Even if they did not explicitly state the teacher by name, in acknowledging how much they learned and were moved by the topic, students were acknowledging the importance of the teacher in the presentation and modeling that took place during the unit. It was apparent from the comments that this was an important experience to many of these students, and would have some lasting impact: “I believe that social justice is a necessary class for everyone at St. Joseph to take and its teachings are essential for us all learn and reflect on.”

To sum up this section, the unit appeared to be effective in both challenging and changing students’ perspectives about the reality and scope of modern racism through the presentation of current events, the use of class-wide discussions, and the effectiveness and charisma of the teacher. The next section will explore some of these topics more thoroughly along with presenting some new thoughts and critiques that I had on the unit.

*Thoughts and critiques of the unit*

The first thought about the unit is that the both field observations and comments in the short-answer section showed that the unit actively challenged students’ color-blind mindsets, particularly those of white students. This was often observed during class discussions, as white students would often raise some interesting and somewhat telling questions. Most of these questions brought up in class were sincere attempts of the students to understand more about racism, but the fact that there were several students
who revealed a color-blind bias through their comments and questions. For example, one student asked whether black people should be able to use the N-word, since it was seen as racist for white people to do so in all situations. Another asked whether or not there could be racism between races. In still another situation, during a discussion on an article about a noose that was found hanging on a college campus, one student asked whether that act was a crime or not. Each of these questions reflects that many of these students, while attempting to gain a better understanding of racism, were still struggling with their own identity toward racism. Most of the comments and questions seemed to be attempts to downplay the significance of race and ease the inner tension in the students themselves.

This came out through the comments in the surveys as well, as many of the students still questioned the reality of racism and showed their entrenchment in the color-blind mentality. Several of these comments showed the cognitive dissonance of being presented with the reality of racism in contemporary society and still having a color-blind mindset. One tried to have it both ways: “Racism is a problem but don't think it is the sole cause of the plights of blacks in this country.” In a similar fashion, another student acknowledged the benefit of having discussions about racism, but then tried to undermine what was presented by downplaying the message of people who were speaking: “It has given me a different perspective although I mostly disagree. I think it is important for people to have voice. It is hard to take some grievances seriously when people come across as hypocritical.”

Another ignored the issue of racism altogether, trying to point out that it was actually “reverse racism” that was the problem: “I believe if an African American/Latino etc. are killed by a white person/cop/etc., the white person is held more accountable than
if it happened the other way.” Finally, one put forward a statement that strongly reflects some of the tenants of the color-blind mentality: the acknowledgement that racism was a problem of the past, the argument that it is no longer a problem of the present, and the evolution of the problem into what is now a form of “reverse racism:”

“Like I said in my notes I do think there is still racism that happens today and we need to be conscious about it and try to make it diminish. However, I feel America is overcompensating for the past. I do not think African Americans or Native Americans should get privileges for what happened in the past. My generation should not be awarded grants and privileges based on something that happened in history. If it happened one year ago that would be different but I don’t think that my generation is affected by it. We shouldn’t be hiring people because we need be diverse. However, we also shouldn’t discriminate because one is diverse. The person for the job should get it regardless of their race and that is that!!”

To illustrate how complex this dissonance can be, the same person wrote in a later section:

“I have learned quite a bit about racism in social justice. I think that for the most part the majority of unjust acts are caused by discrimination, racism, and pure evil. I would most definitely say that we learn a lot about racism but it is a good thing and it really fits with social justice.”

While some students were unaware that these questions were generated from a color-blind standpoint and saw nothing wrong with them, the questions rubbed other students the wrong way. For example, in her interview, Lacy said, “Some of the questions people were asking were really upsetting, and their responses to questions were just really clarified that they don’t know…some people just don’t know.” For Lacy and others, these questions were just ways to not acknowledge the problems of racism, and were almost a form of purposeful ignorance so the students would not feel guilty about having racist stances.
Even with this tension, the students were respectful and engaged. They treated the topic seriously and there was good evidence that many of them were taking the information in and processing it as it was presented. There were times when students tended to check out and not be engaged, but this was mainly during some of the longer movie clips. Students were much more engaged during the discussions, most often when their classmates were speaking. It was evident in the observations that the students both learned a great deal from these discussions and were more likely to pay attention when their classmates had things to share.

Such engagement was an indication that the students were actively learning about racism, and this was evident from responses in the short answer section: “Learning about racism in social justice has made me more conscious of race outside of class, and I learned that white privilege affects me every day.” Many talked about how they had a new appreciation for the relevance of racism: “Personally, because of learning more about racism in social justice this year I am a lot more aware of how relevant it is in today's society. I didn't really think that racism was as common before taking this course.” Finally, there were several that mentioned the fact that this new-found relevance was important enough to share: “I found this to be an extremely important topic, and I feel that people my age should be educated about racism and how it is still relevant.”

Another sign of the impact of the unit was in the overall positivity of many of the remarks. For example, “I think that it was a good experience for everyone involved…it was very powerful.” Similarly, others talked about how much they enjoyed the class: “I have enjoyed this class tremendously because of the diverse amounts of culture and information I have learned.” Most of this appreciation was due to the fact that they felt
they were learning something of value: “My eyes have been opened to much more racial injustices that I knew occurred and I'm enjoying this experience because I feel it's enlightening me and making me more aware.” Finally, several students implied that this was one of the most important classes they had taken at St. Joseph: “I have learned more in my social justice than any other class;” and “Overall I have learned more in my social justice than any other class and will remember things I learn for a long time simply because it's relevant and always a current issue.”

Looking back on the class I observed, I felt that it was taught masterfully and that the comments students made both in class on the survey indicate it and the other classes quite effective in introducing students to the reality of modern racism. However, as with all things, I do have some critiques based on my research and observations. One critique is the lack of focus on a hard definition of racism. In some ways this is understandable, as even in the literature it is difficult to find a common definition of racism agreed by everyone. However, this lack of attention led to some students’ confusion during discussions and allowed for students to question some of the teachings about modern racism. For example, one of the students brought up that for him racism was intentional, which meant that there is no such thing as unconscious racism. While a discussion of the definition of racism may not have convinced this student that there is no such thing as unconscious racism, it would have brought out some of the nuances ad subtlety of institutional racism. I also saw the potential for white students and those in the dominant standing to use their definitions to soften feelings of guilt around racism. There was definitely a stigma felt by students about being called a racist, and by making their definitions limited and focused on overt actions, they were able to avoid this label.
Finally, the fuzziness of the definitions also allowed for students to employ the idea of “reverse racism” as a way to sidestep their own role in racism and mitigate their own feelings of guilt.

Along similar lines, I also wonder about the benefit of addressing students’ unconscious biases more directly. Just as looking at the definition of racism can help students realize the more subtle and nuanced form de facto racism takes in contemporary society, a look at unconscious biases could have brought the reality of racism into their own individual lives. In particular, it could help students realize that they are themselves are vehicles through which racism is being perpetuated, even though they are not consciously aware of it, and there could potentially be some benefit in students realizing that, along with societal changes, individuals also need to change their own thinking and actions toward minority groups.

This being said, I can see the benefit of Mr. H’s approach, which was to tread lightly on the topic of unconscious racism and not implicate any students by insinuating they were racist. One of the problems is that this could potential lead to some feeling defensive and / or guilty. This, in turn, could have cut down on class participation and resulted in students checking out and not taking in any of what Mr. H was trying to present. There is evidence in the literature that white students who feel guilty and get upset may check out or become argumentative when confronted with their unconscious biases (Donadey, 2002; Tatum, 2003). It is likely this would have happened in this class as well, as there was definite pushback from white students when the topic of unconscious biases came up. It may be that in such a short, three-week period it was more effective to not address student’s unconscious racism but to focus on educating them
about the reality and scope of the problem as a society, as the literature indicates that it can take a long time for white students to come to grips with their own individual biases (Tatum, 2002).

A final thought about the class was that there was little emphasis placed on finding solutions for the problem of racism. In discussions with Mr. H after the unit was over, he said he liked to save this for the very end of the year, and that he wanted the students to know that problems such as racism are difficult to tackle and take a great deal of time and effort by many people. Tatum (2003) highly recommends that part of any course that teaches about racism should leave students hopeful about individual and societal-wide possibilities for change.

Student’s desire for solutions came through in several different places. For one, during the field observations there was a discussion about nature verses nurture where the students began to ask exactly how people became racist so that they could also come up with a way to fix the problem. Many of the responses to the short answer also showed the frustration and disbelief that racism was still a part of society and wanted to know what could be done to fix it: “Racism has been and evil growth deep within our society, it is a cancer and holds back society;” “I am disgusted by how horrible people treat each other. I don't get why people cannot accept each other. There is no room for racism and discrimination;” and “Racism needs to be talked about more in public schools and we as a country needs to work on solving this problem.”

Final thoughts on the analysis chapter

To summarize this chapter, the main themes that arose from the field notes, surveys, and interviews about the unit in general were that students responded positively
and there was evidence that the unit was effective in changing students’ perceptions about the reality of racism along with challenging some of their views of a color-blind society. There were several reasons for these results such as having a safe environment that encouraged a discussion-based class along with the importance of a dynamic teacher. Though I had some minor critiques, the overall sense of the unit was that it was successful in helping students perceive racism on a deeper and more nuanced level.

As a final comment, both the short-answer section of the survey and the interviews show a great deal of thoughtfulness and richness in the comments of the students. It was obvious that many of them were touched in some way, mostly positively, during the unit and expressed this often with strong emotion and seeming sincerity. As a researcher this indicates that the responses were valid in that the students appeared to be saying what the really felt. It also indicates that the way these teachers approach the teaching of racism was effective in generating critical thinking and considered responses.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The discussion section of this dissertation will start by directly answering the three research questions driving this study: (1) What are Catholic high school students’ perceptions of racism? (2) What are Catholic high school students’ experiences of racism?” And (3) How does being in a Catholic high school influence Catholic high school students’ perceptions of racism? Once these questions are fully answered, there will be a brief discussion of the study’s limitations, followed by the implications of this research, which will give the reader an idea of what the results mean and why anyone should care about these findings. The dissertation will then be wrapped up by exploring possible future research based on the findings of this dissertation.

Addressing the research questions

Research Question: What are Catholic high school students’ experiences with racism?

There are several major conclusions for this research question. The first is that students at St. Joseph who identify with being a minority, in particular black and Latino students, are much more likely to have experienced racism in the past, both in general and at St. Joseph. The second is that few of the white students that identify with being of the majority said that they had experienced racism, and those who did mainly did so through claims of “reverse racism.” At the same time, over half of the students agreed or strongly agreed that racism was a problem at St. Joseph (no statistically significant difference between majority and minority students), and that student-on-student interactions were the main source of racism based on overt acts such as racist comments, jokes, or name calling. Students of color were also likely to convey the perception of not
feeling “normal” in a mostly white school. This included feeling pressure to conform to the rules and expectations of the unwritten, white culture.

While these conclusions are straightforward and predictable based on research of racism and perspectives done in the past (Feagin & Sikes, 1995; Adams, Tormala, & O’Brien, 2006), there are some interesting nuances that emerged from the data. It is important to note that the literature agrees with the trend of students of color, particularly black and Latino students, claiming to experience racism more frequently than other races. Many different polls, as explained in more detail in the literature review, show that blacks and Latinos consistently self-report higher incidences of experiencing racism through discrimination in daily life (Ford Dowe, 2010), interactions with police (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005), and bullying (Fox & Stallworth, 2005).

However, while students of color claimed to have experienced racism more than their peers, it was difficult to elicit examples of this racism in short answer form on the survey. This lack of response was consistent with student behavior in the classroom, as field observations, comments on the short answer section, and the interviews all noted that students of color were not inclined to speak about their experiences with racism or share their thoughts in class discussions.

There are several possibilities for this reticence. First, it may have been difficult for students of color to share because of the culture of the school and the classroom where the unit on racism took place. For example, in the interviews, all of the students that identified with being a minority mentioned that they felt like they had to conform to the overwhelmingly white culture of the school, some more than others. It is reasonable to assume this conformity extended into the classroom, and having to share about their
experiences with racism was, in some ways, a challenge to the whiteness of their school that could leave the students of color open to criticism or disbelief (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2014). This kind of reaction is not uncommon, and Essed (1991) points out, “It is in the interest of the dominant group to mitigate racism because acknowledgment questions racial privileges and calls for responsibility to act” (p. 274). Essed (1991) stressed that members of the dominant group are often quick to deny the experiences of minorities and claim they are overly sensitive, and racism itself is not really a problem. This attitude, even if not spoken outright, has a dampening effect on minority students’ desire to speak and can greatly hamper two-way conversations.

A second possible reason for the silence of minority students, particularly the black students, is the feeling of being singled out by the other students who were often looking at them for their reaction. Cochran-Smith’s (2003) findings were similar, and her research found that in the early part of her career discussions were framed to benefit the white students by letting them learn about racism through other people’s stories. The students of color in her classes stated that they became tired of having to play “educator” to their peers and that they were not getting as much from the class as they were hoping (p. 189). Katz (2003) also found that black students were expected to be teachers instead of sharers, and causing them to feel like they were speaking for their whole race. Katz (2003) bypassed this issue by teaching about racism only in white-on-white workshops, and while that is not a possibility in most schools, it provides a cautionary note about discussions of racism in mixed classrooms.

Finally, the interviewees were clear that when they did speak, students of color risked upsetting other white students by becoming emotional about the topic and by
saying things that would imply that others may be complicit in racism. This was most evident in the interviews, with three of the students of color stating this as one of the major reasons they curtailed their own participation in class. It appears this worry is justified, as empirical experiments looking at physical indications of stress found that white students exhibited signs of higher anxiety when speaking about race-related issues in a mixed-race setting (Trawalter & Richeson, 2008). The combination of fear, feeling singled out, and having to challenge the dominant culture when speaking make it difficult for students of color to speak out about their experiences of racism and helps explain their reticence in the classrooms.

The surveys were equally quiet on students’ experiences of racism. As discussed in the analysis section, most of the responses to the short-answer questions about student’s experiences of racism were by white students, even though minority students were much more likely to claim on the closed section of the survey that they had experienced racism both in general and at St. Joseph. Along with the reasons discussed above, this lack of response might be due to the difficulty describing the subtle experiences of modern racism as these experiences are often based on institutional practices rather than overt actions (Dovidio, 2001). Also, students of color may not be aware of the systematic racism they face, which would explain some of the lack of responses. Those that did recognize the institutional nature of racism may have also realized how difficult it is to describe this reality to white students who do not have to experience it (Essed, 1991).

Those students of color that did describe their experiences focused almost exclusively on seemingly inconsequential acts such as racist jokes, the use of the N-word,
and inappropriate teacher behavior toward students who were of a different race. It would be easy for someone who is not living through these experiences to disregard these examples of racism merely as students being over-sensitive or that they just need to work a little harder to fit in (Essed, 1991). However, Feagin and Sikes (1995) found that the cumulative effect of even minor events such as these produce a continual reminder to members of minority groups of their subordinate place in society. It also helps explain why students in this study have trouble producing concrete examples of racism in their own lives but still strongly agree that they have experienced racism both in their non-school life and at St. Joseph High.

This misunderstanding about the nature of de facto racism was apparent throughout the data collection process. Most of the students did not exhibit a nuanced understanding of racism, either in their definitions or descriptions of their experiences, and this made it hard for many of them to identify when and where racism occurs. A large number of the responses in the short answer section of the survey inferred that many of the students had not realized racism was still present in their city until reading the article about unequal opportunities in housing. This lack of awareness of the hidden power of de facto racism has consequences for education, as students have been trained to recognize overt acts of racism in a historical context such as Jim Crow laws, slavery, lynching, and other high profile and obvious acts of racism and discrimination. However, these are treated as past actions that the country no longer tolerates and insinuates that we have moved on from them as a country and a society.

This leads to one of the benefits of teaching such a unit: it allows students the opportunity to recognize racism in its many forms and also gives them a place to discuss
and listen to experiences of their fellow students. There are some difficulties in such discussions, particularly for minority students, but the overall positive response to the unit and the many comments stating that they would like to learn more about de facto racism indicate that these discussions are beneficial as a whole. As one student commented: “I think sometimes the education aggravates racism, because before the class I would not think about it very much. But after learning, I will be more aware of racism in my life, and think if I am discriminated against or not in certain situations.” Such recognition of racism in their personal worlds can also help students challenge their color-blind mentality further and help move them further develop their own understanding and acceptance of racism.

To sum up the results in regards to the research question about students’ experience with racism, there is a definite difference between how students of color, particularly black and Latino students, experience racism and the rest of the student body. However, it is difficult for students to articulate these experiences for a variety of reasons, and this led to a lack of sharing by minority students during class. As will be seen in the next section, these experiences, and lack thereof, have a major impact on students’ perception of racism and on the unit itself.

*Research Question: What are Catholic high school students’ perceptions of racism?*

Catholic high school students overwhelmingly admit that racism is not only a historical but also a contemporary problem, and whites in the United States have special privileges that members of minority groups do not. They also have a rudimentary understanding of the definition of racism based on individual actions such as discrimination, and students use this definition to justify a color-blind mentality. At the
same time, there are signs of a more nuanced understanding as students as some comments show recognition of the institutional and systematic nature of racism. Students tend to perceive racist acts as overt deeds such as name-calling and racist jokes, while acknowledging the racist nature in institutional practices such as housing discrimination and hiring practices. Finally, the data revealed that the three-week unit on racism was a catalyst for challenging many of the students’ preconceived notions of racism, and by the end of the unit, many students showed progress toward a more nuanced understanding of de facto racism while still exhibiting an entrenchment in the color-blind mentality.

The research also produced some suggestions for why students hold these perspectives. First, it was evident that these perceptions were highly influenced by students’ experiences with racism, and while it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to show a statistical correlation between experience and perception, the data does present enough evidence to qualitatively draw this conclusion. Mr. H attempted to tap into the idea that perspective is heavily dependent on experience with his hermeneutical exercises. These exercises were designed to have students imagine vicariously experiencing de facto racism through a guided meditation. After imagining themselves living a day as a student of color, many white students responded in a positive manner that indicated a new understanding of what students of color may experience on a daily basis. This indicates that such virtual experiences are a valid way to shift the perspective of students that do not have direct experience of modern institutional and overt racism.

A second reason students held these perspectives is tied in with their simple, non-nuanced definitions of racism, which were similar to definitions found in other research of high school and college students (Cook, 2010; Scott, 2009). These definitions were
formed through years of exposure to the topic of racism in other classes, the media, and their upbringing. These definitions appeared to be more important to some students than others. For example, in his interview Evan used his definition to explicitly decide whether an action was racist or not. Alfonso, on the other hand, gave a simple definition outright, but later clarified with insightful thoughts about institutional and systematic racism. Similarly, in the surveys, several students gave simplistic definitions of racism while later in the comments mentioned that they had a new awareness of the institutional nature of de facto racism. As seen in the analysis section, these definitions are an indication that students do not understand the subtle nature of modern racism; however, later comments show that, at least in some students, there was growth toward a deeper understanding of the subtle nature of de facto racism. Lastly, these definitions were largely unaddressed by the class, which is one potential area for rich discussion and a deepening in understanding of modern racism.

At the same time, it is also important to acknowledge the remarkable difficulty of defining racism, as seen in the introduction of this dissertation, and teaching a more nuanced definition of it. For one, students may not have the background necessary to form such in-depth definitions. For example, in their study of college students, Scheid and Vasko (2014) found deficiencies in students’ education about the history of racism in America, even to the point where they did not learn about lynching. Such a lack of historical knowledge greatly hampers students’ ability to see the historical nature of modern racism and to place more emphasis on individual words and actions.

A second reason for this difficulty in defining and teaching about racism is due in part to the unconscious racial biases harbored by students, along with their immersion in
a color-blind society. This, coupled with the fear many students felt of being labeled a racist, may lead students to deny any forms of racism in which they themselves may have been implicitly involved. These deep-seeded feelings are difficult to address in a three-week unit and have the potential to unleash deep emotions and resistance, particularly from white students, which may have hampered the learning process in the class. These reactions were common in the literature (Tatum, 2003; Katz, 2003; Donadey, 2002), and appear to be a major impediment for many white students.

Finally, it is clear that many of the students’ perspectives were challenged during the three-week unit and that progress had been made to broadening their definition and understanding of racism. This process was evidenced by the responses in the surveys and interviews and also in the emotions expressed both in the class and student responses. These emotions ranged from anger, frustration and sadness that racism was still an issue, to gratitude that they had finally been shown the truth about de facto racism. This was also a common thread in the literature, as many researchers experienced similar ranges of emotion, which shows the power of an effectively taught unit that challenges students’ preconceived notions of racism (Schied & Vasco, 2014; Katz, 2003; Tatum, 2006).

To sum up the research question about Catholic high school students’ perceptions of racism, it appears that most students acknowledge that racism is a problem, but their understanding about the nature of racism was simplistic and non-nuanced. These perspectives were closely tied to their own experience with racism and, when challenged, often led to an emotional response and some indications of a deeper grasp of the institutional nature of de facto racism.
Research question: How does being in a Catholic high school influence Catholic high school students’ perceptions of racism?

Based on my research, it appears that Catholic high schools have the potential to influence high school students’ perceptions of racism through the environment they cultivate, teaching about racism in the context of social justice, and in the larger context of Catholic education as a whole.

In addressing the environment that Catholic schools provide, it is important to take into account that Catholic schools in general, and St. Joseph in particular, enroll academically strong students with few disciplinary problems who often come from a middle to high socio-economic background. While there is a strong presence of minority students at St. Joseph, the majority of the students are white. Thus, the students operate in a white-dominated school culture and are expected to comply with all the written and unwritten rules that are associated within that framework.

For white students, the color-blind mentality that operates unconsciously throughout the United States remains mostly unchallenged in the Catholic school setting. This helps explain many of the responses in the surveys and interviews that have been described above. For the students of color, this environment leads to a feeling of never really being “normal” when at school and the pressure to conform (Tatum, 2003). This results in students of color tending to clump together in unstructured times such as passing periods or lunch. It is also a reason that clubs such as the Latino Student Union (LSU) and African American Student Union (AASU) boast large memberships and have active roles in many students’ school life.
The data from this dissertation indicates that these clubs are important places for students of color to discuss racism outside of the classroom, and similar research has shown such clubs can promote positive development and resilience in minority youth (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012). Though more research needs to be done in this area, it appears from this research that these clubs are an important place for students of color to feel a part of a safe group of like-minded people. They are also a good way to raise the awareness of the diversity already found in the student body. This can be done through organizing assemblies and other special events that bring attention to certain cultures. Thus, Catholic schools have the potential to influence students’ perceptions of racism by providing safe spaces for students of color that can also be used as a platform to spread awareness of their concerns.

Along with specific spaces for minority students to gather together, Catholic schools can also provide a school-wide environment of safety and respect. This appears to be the case at St. Joseph. While many of the minority students (56%) claimed to have experienced racism at St. Joseph, most minority and majority students (62%) perceived St. Joseph as a place that fosters respect for people of all races and cultures. This is important, because part of the special nature of Catholic schools is their community (see Convey, 2012), and that community is built on relationships between its members. If there are tensions between these members, such as the perception of having experienced racism by others, then the community as a whole suffers. One of the ways that Catholic schools in general, and St. Joseph in particular, can address the problem of de facto racism is by building and maintaining a positive culture and atmosphere that helps
dissipate the feelings of having to conform and also challenge student-on-student racist behavior.

A second answer to the research question concerns the racism unit. Summing up the analysis section, the three-week unit on racism appeared to have a positive effect by exposing and challenging students’ color-blind perceptions and giving them a fuller appreciation for the pervasiveness and impact of de facto racism. Some of the factors that attributed to the effectiveness of the unit were that the unit was heavily discussion-centered, exposed students to current issues of racism through the use of media, provided a safe environment, and allowed students the opportunity to speak. These were found to be effective techniques used by others in the literature as well (Tatum, 2003; Donadey, 2002; Santas, 2000).

This unit is important because it helps address what appears to be a deficiency in the treatment of de facto racism in students’ prior education. Throughout their schooling students are taught that racism is a depravity and utterly reprehensible, which, along with the fact that being called a racist is a major stigma in society, makes the students want to distance themselves from seeing racism in the world around them and also within their own actions. Cherry et al. (2014) recommend addressing this problem by “raising doubt and uncertainty” in order to “confuse” students throughout the unit through the material and teaching practices. They found that this helped to break the students from the color-blind framework they lived in by making it difficult to continue to apply learned stereotypes to others: “Pedagogically speaking, the students’ change in generalized perceptions of the racial and ethnic make-up of geographic locales highlights
the importance of the need to ‘confuse’ students’ stereotypical generalizations by introducing substantive material that helps to dismantle racial stereotypes” (p. 78).

Raising doubt and worry can also be the catalyst for student resistance: “Cognitive dissonance (the destabilizing experience of having one’s core beliefs questioned) can result in two main responses: one can wrestle with it, learning and growing in the process, or one can repeatedly deny and resist it” (Donadey, 2002, p. 96). This is a common theme in the literature (Tatum, 2003; Katz, 2003; Kernahan & Davis, 2007), and appeared to be one of the concerns of Mr. H in the field observations. He was careful not to raise too much white guilt on the subject, which others in the literature warn can produce feelings of anger and denial that result in the white students withdrawing from the conversation (DiMascio, 2015; Tatum, 2003).

Mr. H’s approach seemed to work, as students continued to share throughout the unit, and the main comments about student resistance was from the tension people felt when speaking about racism and the awkwardness the discussions had at times. It is also possible that the white guilt was alleviated, in part, by being addressed in the broader context of social justice. Mr. H continually referred to racism as a human problem, one of power differential, and that to battle injustice was to battle racism. Putting a broader context on the subject may have had some impact on how students received the subject, and gave them a way to help mitigate feelings of defensiveness and guilt that may have arisen.

Finally, it is important to look at Catholic education as a whole. The first thing to note is that the Catholic hierarchy, in particular the United States bishops who have ultimate control of Catholic schools, have done very little to address racism and what
they have done has been minimal and largely ignored (Massingale, 2010). Similarly, the new framework for religious education that the bishops have recently released does little to emphasize racism beyond mere examples of injustices needing to be addressed. This framework gives teachers little guidance or incentive to develop a unit on racism like the one observed in this study.

This being said, philosophically there is room for addressing racism through Catholic schools’ devotion to Catholic social teaching, as this teaching calls all Catholic individuals and institutions to address injustices in the world, including racism (Thompson, 2015). More specifically, religion classes, which are mandatory for students to take, are explicitly asked to address racism, albeit in a cursory manner. The bishops framework also has space, albeit brief and cursory, for teachers to address racism. Thus, it appears that there is space in the Catholic framework within the curriculum where discerning individuals can and should teach about the problem of racism.

From my research, it became clear that students felt Catholic schools should teach about racism because they felt Catholic schools have a special calling to do so, they recognized how deficient their past education was on racism, and they were convinced that racism is still a prevalent issue in society. This was echoed by their desire to learn more about racism and complemented by the fact that while fewer students thought that Catholic schools were successful in teaching about racism, there was some optimism that Catholic schools could do a good job in addressing racism. Thus, on the one hand, Catholic schools in general are like the Catholic Church, which also has a poor record in its attempts to explicitly or implicitly address racism. On the other hand, the data implies
that a thoughtful and well-implemented treatment of racism could affect and deepen student awareness and understanding of the issue.

To sum up this research question, it appears that there is space in Catholic schools to have a positive effect on racism. This space is mainly found in the philosophy of Catholic social teaching, the curriculum of the mandatory religion classes, and the environment fostered by the Catholic school community. There is some indication there is a positive effect on students that attend St. Joseph in regards and their perception of racism as an issue and their responsibility to respond to the problem. However, this is a tentative and inconclusive finding, and while it shows the potential for a universal Catholic school effect on racism, more research is needed before such a statement could be made.

**Limitations**

The first limitation of this study is generalization; this is a qualitative case study based on the students in one school. One has to be cautious when extending the results to other schools. In particular, the school studied in this dissertation was a Catholic school, with high-achieving students that are mostly white, and it might be difficult to compare these demographics school-to-school. However, all studies must be bounded in order to produce meaningful data, and while the specific bounding of this study may have affected the overall generalization of the data, it is reasonable to expect that schools with similar student populations and/or environments could benefit from this research (Merriam, 2009).

A second limitation is the self-reporting nature of the data. The interviews and surveys in particular were reliant on self-reported student opinions, which are subject to
potential deception or the desire to answer in a way that makes them look good (Jansen, 2010). This was likely a factor in this survey, as there is a major societal stigma against being labeled a racist (Tatum, 2003), and students may have answered in such a way as to avoid either being seen by others or themselves as having racist tendencies. However, these validity issues can be mitigated in part through triangulation (Merriam, 2009) and establishing different sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). This was done mainly through interviews and field observations, and while there may be some inaccuracies from the surveys due to student self-reporting, there is little evidence this played a major factor in the overall analysis thanks to the data triangulation.

Another limitation is the possibility of the evaluator effect (Patton, 1999), which may have had some impact on students’ responses. I taught all these students and there may have been some pressure for them to answer interview questions and react in class in a way that would please me. Similarly, there may have been some effect on the interviews in terms of my position of power, being a teacher of these students, and the difference in ethnicity, as I am a white male and the majority of the students interviewed identified with being an ethnic minority or female. While I acknowledge the possibility of these effects, careful observation of both the class and interview subjects seemed to indicate students were not responding in this manner. Similarly, when the data was analyzed and triangulated along with the survey information, there seemed to be little discrepancy that would suggest this effect had any impact on the results of the dissertation.

Methodologically speaking, there were several limitations that had to deal with time. The first was a timing issue in terms of when the interviews took place compared to
when the unit took place. Due to miscommunication, the students from Mr. V’s class had
taken the class a few months prior to the interviews, and some had difficulty
remembering specifics about the class. The second issue of timing was that these
interviews were conducted late in the students’ senior year, and many of them were busy
with school and other extra-curricular activities. As a result, it was hard for some to carve
out some time for interviews, and several were shorter than I would have liked. It is
possible that this led to a lack of depth from the interviewed students. These limitations
being noted, I feel that the students’ answers were thoughtful and sincere and that these
issues of timing did not have any major impact on the data.

**Implications**

This dissertation uses Critical Race Theory (CRT) as its theoretical model and has
some theoretical implications based on its outcomes. CRT attempts to place race at the
center of the analysis of assumed norms in United States society, and its goal is to
challenge the color-blind mentality and other social structures that perpetuate de facto
racism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). There is evidence that the color-blind mentality was
indeed held by many of the students at St. Joseph, and this dissertation forwards CRT as a
theoretical model by putting it to use in a case study of a Catholic school, which is unique
to the literature. Similarly, CRT is expanded by this dissertation by exploring how racism
and the color-blind mentality can be challenged through a religion classroom set in a
Catholic high school. This is also unique to the literature. Finally, the findings helped
support CRT’s basic tenant that racism is a modern problem and present in institutional
practices and systems across the nation.
Along with extending the theoretical framework of CRT, this work also extends the literature in the field of perceptions of racism by showing that experience affects perception, the color-blind mentality continues to pervade through the Millennial generation, effective teaching strategies can implement a self-reported change in perceptions, and students have a strong desire to learn about racism and other social justice issues.

There are also implications for Catholic education on several different levels. For Catholic school officials of all levels, this dissertation upholds the basic tenants of CRT are correct and that there is a historical and institutional aspect to racism that is very much a part of Catholic schools in general and at St. Joseph in particular. This needs to be recognized on all levels and voice given to faculty, staff, board members, administration, and students of color to help address these issues. This can be done in a myriad of ways, some of which are discussed below.

On the broadest educational level, it is important to revisit the bishop’s framework treatment of racism as a part of Catholic social teaching. The brief document analysis I conducted showed that though racism was a part of the structure that religion teachers were supposed to teach, it was relegated to being mainly used as cursory examples of social justice issues with little discussion about its contemporary status nor its institutional or systematic nature. This is problematic, as seen by the wealth of research produced by Critical Race Theorists and other researchers, and is indicative of how the Catholic Church in the United States has traditionally treated racism (Massingale, 2010; Davis, 1990). This dissertation recommends a restructuring of this framework, particularly for the senior year, when Catholic social teaching is most fully
treated, to take into account the most current understanding of modern racism. This will not only help with the goal espoused by Catholic social teaching of uncovering and eliminating racial oppression (Howard, 2003).

At the administration level of Catholic schools, this research has several implications. For one, it suggests that racism should be a main issue of concern for school culture and maintaining a safe and Catholic community. This can be done through the support of clubs such as AASU and LSU and other activities that help nurture and raise the profile of minority students. The administration could also set up meetings with panels of minority students to hear their thoughts of making these students feel welcome and a part of the Catholic school community. Since diversity is an important part of addressing the issue of racism (Gurin et al., 2002), one recommendation is to enroll more students of color and hire more minority faculty members. Finally, administrators can allow religion teachers the time in their curriculum to teach the unit on racism, regardless of the focus that it is given in the bishop’s framework.

Many Catholic schools require community service, and one suggestion would be to include some form of racism education in this area. This could include setting up service projects with organizations that actively combat racism, or giving students the chance to do service projects with other schools that are more ethnically diverse with the express purpose of cross-racial interactions. These activities could be followed with debriefing discussions that focus on the institutional nature of racism. Finally, the school could allow students to take the initiative and perform independent service projects that specifically focus on racism.
For religion teachers, this dissertation suggests that it is important to carve out time and space in the curriculum for a unit that emphasizes racism as a main issue in Catholic social teaching. In the implementation of the unit, this research suggests that a discussion-based class in a safe, supportive environment that focuses on racism in current events, and allows students to express themselves and listen to others results in a positive experience of racism that challenges the color-blind mentality and raises student interest in de facto racism. It also suggests that teachers should look into the possibility of incorporating a treatment of the definition of racism, addressing the unconscious biases of students, and focusing on tangible solutions to the problem of racism as a part of the unit. Finally, in line with other research, this dissertation shows that it takes a great deal of cognitive effort and time to challenge students’ perspectives on racism (Tatum, 2003; Donadey, 2002; Katz, 2003; Reid & Foels, 2010).

The research also implies that this model for teaching about racism could easily be converted to non-Catholic high schools. The unit I observed was structured around social justice ideals in general, and while there were references to Catholic social teaching, this unit could easily be modified to focus purely on the subject in a secular manner, as evidenced by some examples in the literature (Epstein & Gist, 2015; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2014). The positive responses and calls for more discussion about racism in the surveys indicate that the students themselves felt this was an important topic that all schools should address.

Finally, one of the biggest findings and implications of this study is that Catholic high school students want to learn about racism, and once they are presented with the reality of racism in a safe and yet challenging context, they develop a strong desire to
learn more about it. The study also found that Catholic high school students can be
honest, sincere, articulate, emotional, thoughtful, and grateful when expressing their
thoughts about de facto racism, and while such a unit is challenging for everyone
involved, it can also be a rewarding and important experience with positive outcomes for
the students, the teachers, and the community at large.

**Future Research**

There are also opportunities to build on the work done here in terms of future
research. One example would be a longitudinal research project assessing the impact of
the unit over several years to see how students’ perspectives change over time. This
would have a dual purpose of obtaining a richer and more complete picture of the impact
of the unit on students’ perspectives and, at the same time, demonstrating how the
perspectives change based on the current events of the time. Since the proposed future
research would take place during a time of some racial tension and social upheaval, it
would be interesting to try and capture some of this through the perspective of Catholic
high school students.

In terms of St. Joseph, it would also be worthwhile to develop a more complete
picture of students’ perceptions of racism by investigating more fully the impact that
student clubs, such LSU and AASU, have on students’ perspectives of racism. This was
one of the themes that arose from the analysis of the data and further research into these
clubs might yield some pertinent information about how students experience and deal
with racism, as well as show a fuller picture surrounding students’ perceptions of how
Catholic schools deal with racism.
In terms of the unit, while it seems likely that the students’ perceptions do in fact change, the degree and impact of that change is unknown. In this regard, a quantitative pre- and post study of the unit and interviews would yield some information about this change. It would also be useful to attempt some form of longitudinal study and follow up with the students at a later date, again through surveys and interviews, to assess the long-term impact of this unit on these students and their perceptions.

It would also be interesting to set up a similar study that could gather data from more Catholic schools about students’ perceptions of racism to generalize the conclusions and broaden the picture to include schools of varying diversity and backgrounds. Similar to the public school system, the Catholic school system, while more homogeneous, continues to have differences across schools, primarily based on the student populations they serve. Such a study would take a closer look at how those differences are linked to students’ perceptions of racism, while at the same time produce a larger view of Catholic schools in general.

In a similar fashion, it might be appropriate to test if there is a Catholic effect in a more quantitative manner by distributing a similar survey to public schools and comparing responses to see if there are statistically significant differences in the way students perceive racism. Student responses could also be compared based on racial composition of schools and potentially socio-economic levels as well. Such a comparison between public and Catholic school students’ perceptions would also provide some indication if the model of teaching about racism done at this school would be effective in a public school setting.
Another study designed to generalize knowledge about how Catholic schools treat the issue of racism could come in the form of sending surveys to Catholic schools across the United States asking questions about different religion departments, and how religion teachers treated racism before and after adopting the bishop’s framework. The results could both answer questions about to what degree Catholic schools treat racism and yield information that assesses how the framework changed teaching practices in general.

Finally, it might also be worthwhile to perform a study that would observe more teachers in their natural element to find best teaching practices in addressing the problem of racism. While there is a fair amount of research about teaching racism in undergraduate classes and graduate classes and some about teaching in high school classes (Katz, 2003; Marx & Pennington, 2003; Doane, 2006; Sensoy & DiAngel, 2014; Stoval, 2006), I believe this dissertation shows that it could be beneficial to analyze different teachers in a Catholic school setting, particularly during religion classes, to see how best to fit teachings of racism with Catholic social teaching and the new bishop’s framework. It would also be a way to gather methods of instruction that could be applied to many different kinds of schools, Catholic or non-Catholic, which could lead to addressing racism more directly through classroom instruction.
### APPENDIX A

**TABLE OF DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

*Racial demographic information of local public high schools vs. St. Joseph*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Pacific Islander</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Multiple Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rockwell</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graceland</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherwood</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teddy</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roosevelt</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Joseph</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: [The city] Public Schools, 2013*

Specific information comparing St. Joseph to other public schools was obtained from the school records itself and through conversations with the principal. In terms of graduation, St. Joseph boasts 100% graduation, compared to 62 percent graduation for the city’s public schools (Hammond, 2013). These statistics were taken from different sources, which may mean that their definitions may be slightly different for how students answer the questions. For example, the statistics from St. Joseph in the “Other” category include 15 percent of students who claimed multiple race, which can include Hispanic, Black, and White races. Thus, this information should be used to for general comparisons and not for statistical accuracy.
This survey is meant to see how Catholic High School students view racism. There is no right or wrong answer, and you can skip any questions or stop the survey at any time. While there is no direct benefit you will receive from this survey, it does have the potential to help me and other researchers understand a little more about students’ perceptions of racism.

The results from this survey will be kept confidential, and there will be no way for anyone to trace the answers back to you. Once done, I will destroy these paper copies to ensure complete anonymity.

Your participation in this project is strictly voluntary and greatly appreciated. You may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time with no penalty to you at all.

I am also looking for subjects who would be interested in being interviewed. The process would last about 45 min to an hour and those that participate would receive a $5 Starbucks gift card. See Mr. Patla if you are interested.

Thank you very much for your participation, and please answer all questions that you feel comfortable with fully and honestly.

**Background information:**

What is the month and year of your birthdate? __________________________

What is your gender?

[ ] Male [ ] Female

Which of these BEST describes your ethnic/racial background?

[ ] Asian [ ] Latino / Hispanic [ ] Native American
[ ] Middle Eastern [ ] Pacific Islander [ ] African American
[ ] White [ ] Other (describe): ________________________________
[ ] Mixed (describe): ___________________________________________

Do you consider yourself a racial minority?

[ ] Yes [ ] No
Did you attend a Catholic elementary school?
[ ] Yes [ ] No

Di you attend a Catholic middle school?
[ ] Yes [ ] No

How many years have you been at St. Joseph?
[ ] 1 year [ ] 2 years [ ] 3 years [ ] 4 years

Racism in the world
How would you define racism?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Mark the box that most accurately represents your view.

1. Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today
[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

2. White people have privileges and advantages that minorities do not
[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

3. White people in the United States are discriminated against because of the color of their skin
[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

4. Racial and ethnic minorities in the United States have certain advantages because of the color of their skin
[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

5. I believe there is racism in the Catholic Church
[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree
Personal Experiences with Racism

6. I have experienced racism because of my race
   [ ] Never    [ ] Rarely    [ ] Sometimes    [ ] Often    [ ] Very often

7. I have heard racist comments from teachers and staff here at St. Joseph
   [ ] Never    [ ] Rarely    [ ] Sometimes    [ ] Often    [ ] Very often

8. I have seen students treat other students unfairly because of their race
   [ ] Never    [ ] Rarely    [ ] Sometimes    [ ] Often    [ ] Very often

9. I have experienced racism in any form while at St. Joseph because of my race
   [ ] Never    [ ] Rarely    [ ] Sometimes    [ ] Often    [ ] Very often

10. Racism is a problem at St. Joseph
    [ ] Strongly disagree    [ ] Disagree    [ ] No opinion    [ ] Agree    [ ] Strongly agree

If you have any specific examples of experiencing racism, explain them below:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Racism and Catholic Schools

11. I believe that Social Justice is an important component of my Catholic education
    [ ] Strongly disagree    [ ] Disagree    [ ] No opinion    [ ] Agree    [ ] Strongly agree
12. Compared to public and other private schools, I believe that Catholic schools have a special responsibility to combat racism

[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

13. I believe Catholic schools in general do a good job combatting racism

[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

14. I think we should talk about racism more in my classes

[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

15. I think we talk about racism too much at St. Joseph

[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

16. I think Catholic schools do a good job educating students about racism

[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

17. I believe St. Joseph fosters a sense of respect for people of all races and cultures

[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

18. All students receive the same attention by teachers regardless of their race

[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

19. All students are disciplined the same, regardless of their race

[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

20. I think there should be more minority students here at St. Joseph

[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

21. I think that there should be more minority teachers at St. Joseph

[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

22. I feel my experience with racism does not match what is taught about racism here at St. Joseph

[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree
23. I think clubs like AASU and LSU are important for our school
[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

24. I think there should be assemblies that focus on Black culture
[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

25. I think there should be assemblies that focus on Latino/Hispanic culture
[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

26. I think there should be assemblies and clubs that focus on White culture
[ ] Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] No opinion [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly agree

Indicate below how often at St. Joseph you have learned about racism and/or discussed racism as a problem:

27. In class
[ ] Never [ ] Rarely [ ] Sometimes [ ] Often [ ] Very often

28. With friends
[ ] Never [ ] Rarely [ ] Sometimes [ ] Often [ ] Very often

29. In clubs
[ ] Never [ ] Rarely [ ] Sometimes [ ] Often [ ] Very often

30. At retreats
[ ] Never [ ] Rarely [ ] Sometimes [ ] Often [ ] Very often

31. In assemblies
[ ] Never [ ] Rarely [ ] Sometimes [ ] Often [ ] Very often

32. With a teacher or counselor
[ ] Never [ ] Rarely [ ] Sometimes [ ] Often [ ] Very often

33. Outside of school
Indicate below how often you have learned about the following issues in your religion classes:

34. Homosexuality
[ ] Never  [ ] Rarely  [ ] Sometimes  [ ] Often  [ ] Very often

35. Abortion
[ ] Never  [ ] Rarely  [ ] Sometimes  [ ] Often  [ ] Very often

36. Racism
[ ] Never  [ ] Rarely  [ ] Sometimes  [ ] Often  [ ] Very often

37. Drugs
[ ] Never  [ ] Rarely  [ ] Sometimes  [ ] Often  [ ] Very often

38. Divorce / Marriage
[ ] Never  [ ] Rarely  [ ] Sometimes  [ ] Often  [ ] Very often

39. Atheism
[ ] Never  [ ] Rarely  [ ] Sometimes  [ ] Often  [ ] Very often

40. Euthanasia
[ ] Never  [ ] Rarely  [ ] Sometimes  [ ] Often  [ ] Very often

41. Sex / sexuality
[ ] Never  [ ] Rarely  [ ] Sometimes  [ ] Often  [ ] Very often

Short Answer

Please briefly reflect on your experience with learning about racism in social justice this year.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
If you feel so moved, please reflect on anything regarding racism below:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank you very much for participating in this survey! If you have any questions or concerns please see Mr. Patla, Mr. V, or Mr. H.
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE

What is your definition of racism?

Many people seem to consider racism a bad thing. Do you agree?

Have you ever encountered racism personally?

Do you know someone who is racist?

Have you ever talked about racism with someone? Why or why not?

Do you feel uncomfortable talking about racism? Why or why not?

There are many stories about racism in the news these days. Do you believe that racism is still a major problem? Why or why not?

Why do you think people are racist?

Would you consider yourself a racist? Why or why not?

What do you think can be done to fix the problems of racism?

How long have you been in Catholic schools?

Have you witnessed racism in Catholic schools?

Have you learned about or discussed racism in any of your classes?

Should racism be addressed more in Catholic schools? Explain.
University of Hawai'i

Consent to Participate in Research Project:

*Catholic High School Students’ Perception of Racism*

My name is Nathan Patla. I am a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in Educational Foundations. As part of the requirements for earning my graduate degree, I am doing a research. The purpose of my project is to evaluate the perceptions of high school students about racism. I am asking you to participate because of your willingness to be surveyed and possibly interviewed about this topic.

**Activities and Time Commitment:** If you participate in this project, you will take a 20-minute survey in class. If you agree to be interviewed, I will meet with you for an interview at a location and time convenient for you. The interview will consist of 10-15 open ended questions. It will take 45 minutes to an hour. Interview questions will include questions like, “What is your definition of racism?” “Do you feel uncomfortable talking about racism?” “Why do you think people are racist?” Only you and I will be present during the interview. I will audio-record the interview so that I can later transcribe the interview and analyze the responses. You will be one of about 10 people whom I will interview for this study.

**Benefits and Risks:** There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in this interview. The results of this project might help me, other teachers, and researchers learn more about high school students' views on racism. I believe there is little risk to you in participating in this research project. You may become stressed or uncomfortable answering any of the interview questions or discussing topics with me during the interview. If you do become stressed or uncomfortable, you can skip the question or take a break. You can also stop the interview or withdraw from the project altogether at any time.

**Privacy and Confidentiality:** I will keep all information, including all audio recordings, in a safe place. Only my University of Hawaii advisor and I will have access to the information. Other agencies that have legal permission have the right to review research records. The University of Hawaii Human Studies Program has the right to review research records for this study. After I write a copy of the interviews, I will erase or destroy the audio-recordings, and they will not be used for any means other than this research. When I report the results of my research project, I will not use your name. I will not use any other personal identifying information that can identify you. I will use pseudonyms (fake names) and report my findings in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.
Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. If you stop being in the study, there will be no penalty or loss to you. I recognize that I am the researcher in this project and, at the same time, a teacher in your school. I will ensure that your participation or non-participation in my research project does not impact your grades or any teacher-to-student relationship at St. Joseph High School.

You will receive a $5 gift certificate to Starbucks for your time and effort in participating in this research project.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign and date this signature page and return it to:

Nathan Patla, Principal Investigator

Signature:

I have read and understand the information provided to me about being in the research project, Catholic High School Students’ Perceptions of Racism.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this research project.

Printed name: ______________________________

Signature: _________________________________

Date: ______________________________

If you do not want to have your interview audio-recorded, check the following box: □

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.
APPENDIX E
OUTLINE OF THE UNIT

Day 1: Video: Freedom Summer (historical, Civil Rights, South)
       HW: The syphilis article (historical, South)

Day 2: Notes: Historical, setting stage
       Video: Oprah in White Town (historical, more modern, South)
       HW: Colorblind article (more modern / philosophical, broader USA)

Day 3: Video: Morgan Freeman clip (modern, broader USA)
       Hermeneutical exercise: What it feels like
       Movie: Doll experiment (nature vs nurture, subconscious racism,)
       HW: Noose article (Modern, South)

Day 4: Video: Stop and Frisk (Modern, not the South)
       Current Events: Obama caricatured, racist tweets, tweets about Sherman of Seahawks (Modern, broader USA)

Day 5: Video: 60 minutes about Cold Cases from Civil Rights (Current, tie-in with historical, broader USA)
       Current Housing Practices in student’s city (Current, local)
       Current Events: Newspaper headlines (Current, all of USA)
       Audio clip: Black doctor (Current, broader USA)

Day 6: Current events: Lots of headlines (Current, some local, USA)
       Move into gender issues

Note: This outline is general and does not accurately reflect the time-frame, as there were days that were used for tests and other tasks that were not important for this dissertation. However, this gives an idea of the flow and content of the three-week unit.
### APPENDIX F

**TABLES FROM ANALYSIS**

**Table F1**

*Categories of student’s definitions (N = 167)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>“Discrimination based on the color someone's skin or ethnicity.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hate</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Hate toward a person due to color of their skin.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treating someone differently</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Treating people differently because of their race.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfair / Injustice</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Unfair/unequal treatment based on the color of one's own skin.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior / Inferior</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“The opinion that one race is superior to the rest and/or that one is inferior than the rest.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Judging someone or acting against them according to race.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“A prejudice, not grounded in facts, that is directed at numbers of a certain ethnic group.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treating as less</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Treating other races as below or undeserving compared to a certain race.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Ignorant thoughts or actions against another race.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppression</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Racism is a human construct that systematically oppresses people based on their cultural differences.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bias</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“A bias against or dislike of a person or group of people based solely on their race.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotype</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Stereotyping, discriminating, unequal treatment of a race.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belittle</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Being against a certain race and belittling the problems of a certain race.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mocking</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Demeaning or putting down someone of another race than you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Demeaning or putting down someone of another race than you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Something that harms people in an unforgettable way based on the color their skin.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Having a derogatory opinion towards a race.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking away rights</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Minorities actively being abused or deprived of their natural born rights.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dignity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Removing an individual's dignity because of their ethnic or racial background.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Racism = power + prejudice (therefore only someone who has power from the existing power structures set in place can be racist, minorities can only be prejudiced because no power).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“The intolerance of other races”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table F2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I have experienced racism because of my race</th>
<th>Minority students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-minority students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>$p = 1.840 \times 10^{-10}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table F3
Comparing minority student respondents to the statement “I have experienced racism because of my race” by race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black %</th>
<th>Latino %</th>
<th>Asian %</th>
<th>Pacific Islander %</th>
<th>Middle Eastern %</th>
<th>White %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Never</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rarely</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sometimes</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Often</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Often</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table F4
I have experienced racism in any form while at St. Joseph because of my race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total students %</th>
<th>Minority students %</th>
<th>Non-minority students %</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Never</strong></td>
<td>92</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rarely</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sometimes</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Often</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Often</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table F5

I have heard racist comments from teachers and staff here at St. Joseph

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Total students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Minority students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-minority students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p = 0.00526</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table F6

I have seen students treat other students unfair because of their race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Total students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Minority students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-minority students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p = 0.0131</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table F7

White people have privileges that minorities do not

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Minority Students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-minority Students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p = 0.002866</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

209
Table F8  
Comparing non-minority (majority) students responses to statements about black and Latino assemblies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black Assemblies</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Latino Assemblies</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p = 0.00391</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table F9  
I think there should be more minority students at St. Joseph

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minority Students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-minority Students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p = 0.000458</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table F10  
**Survey Question: I think there should be more minority teachers at St. Joseph**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minority Students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-minority Students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>( p = 0.00604 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table F11  
**Comparing all student responses to: “I think there should be assemblies that focus on black, Latino/Hispanic, and white cultures”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black Assemblies</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Latino Assemblies</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Whites Assemblies</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>( p = 1.52E-09 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Opinion</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table F12
*Where racism is discussed (responses for sometimes, often, or very often)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>% of all responses</th>
<th>% of minority students</th>
<th>% of non-minority students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In class</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside of school</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With friends</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In assemblies</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With teacher / counselor</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At retreats</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In clubs</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table F13
*Where is racism discussed: outside of school*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Minority students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-minority students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p = 0.02271</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minority students</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Non-minority students</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Minority students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Non-minority students</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Often</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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