

Spring 2022

## Supervisory Allyship for University Custodial Staff

Daniel Colascione

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Colascione, D.(2022). *Supervisory Allyship for University Custodial Staff*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/6662>

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [digres@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:digres@mailbox.sc.edu).

SUPERVISORY ALLYSHIP FOR UNIVERSITY CUSTODIAL STAFF

by

Daniel Colascione

Bachelor of Arts  
Sacred Heart University, 2010

Master of Science  
Lynchburg College, 2012

---

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education in

Curriculum and Instruction

College of Education

University of South Carolina

2022

Accepted by:

Rhonda Jeffries, Major Professor

Suha Tamim, Committee Member

Rebecca Morgan, Committee Member

Xumei Fan, Committee Member

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

© Copyright by Daniel Colascione, 2022  
All Rights Reserved.

## **DEDICATION**

Thank you to the professional colleagues that encouraged me to complete this degree, notably Dr. Kirsten Kennedy, Dr. April Barnes, and Rod Howell. To my parents, Dr. Petroots & Muthea Colascione, thank you for instilling the importance of education, hard work, and mental toughness in me. I would not be where I am today without you both. To my dear friend Erik who supported me through the years and encouraged me to keep going. To my wife Megan and son Gio for the patience and support through the process. If it weren't for Megan's support this study would never have been completed. One semester into the program I didn't think I could do it and I un-registered for the next semester's classes. I walked out of the room and said, "I quit." Megan told me to turn around, get back in there, re-register, and finish what I started. I kept that with me the rest of the way and am so grateful for your tough love in the moment.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study will examine the lived experiences of campus custodians in search of creating an anti-racist workplace. Custodians will have the opportunity to share about their experiences involving racism and will be asked to explain their expectations of leadership in creating an anti-racist workplace. This study seeks to understand the expectations Black staff members have of their departmental and university level leadership to identify ways to narrow the gap between their expectations and the support they receive from those in positions capable of doing so.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication .....	iii
Abstract .....	iv
List of Figures .....	vi
List of Abbreviations .....	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2 Literature Review .....	15
Chapter 3 Methods .....	33
Chapter 4 Findings .....	53
Chapter 5 Conclusions .....	64
References .....	77
Appendix A: Interview Questions .....	84
Appendix B: Focus Group Questions .....	86

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1.1 Methodology timeline .....	56
---------------------------------------	----

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CRT.....Critical Race Theory

PWI.....Predominantly White Institution



## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

On Monday, May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police officers. Four days later, shortly after 5pm on Friday, May 29<sup>th</sup>, I was exposed to the pain, exhaustion, and fear that my Black and Brown colleagues were carrying following another senseless killing of an unarmed Black man. A colleague and good friend of mine posted a long message in a staff text message that impacted me deeply. Three words from that message imprinted on me and drive my burning desire to be better, do better, and speak up; *we are hurting*.

Student affairs departments on college campuses are generally a very open minded, accepting, and welcoming field. A field seemingly “safe” for people of all races to thrive is not immune to racism. Racism is prevalent in Student affairs departments, and it manifests itself in many different ways. While it is crucially important to have representation of different races seen in departmental leadership, it is equally important to make sure the voices of each person are amplified at the same volume and that their words carry the same weight. Ideas, suggestions, and feedback of Black and Brown staff are being disregarded as if their microphones are muted and they are speaking into an empty abyss.

As a straight White male that supervises custodial operations on a college campus, I have witnessed racism in the workplace on multiple occasions. From microaggressions to more blatant or intentional instances, it happens, and it is evident

that a different approach needs to be taken to educate staff to be more aware and cognizant of their actions. A common example that I witnessed takes place in meetings. A Black or Brown staff member offers an idea or solution to a problem and the manager takes issue with the idea or disregards the statement all together. Moments later, a White staff member shares the same idea, and it is met with applause and satisfaction. Whether or not the manager is intentionally disregarding the Black or Brown staff or if they are unconsciously de-valuing their words and ideas, these actions are equally harmful. The more this happens the more the Black or Brown staff member is reminded that their voice is not as important as their White colleagues. This issue is only further magnified when the Black or Brown staff member holds other marginalized identities such as gender and sexual orientation.

The killing of George Floyd and the subsequent social unrest helped to depict tangible action items in my mind of how I can contribute to racial equality. As a supervisor, it has been critically important for me to understand how my privilege shows up at work on any given day. This study aims to understand the ways racism manifests itself in the workplace for custodial staff members and serve as a tool to improve my supervision skills and better support our Black and Brown employees. A department focused allyship and living as anti-racists will have better success in the recruitment, retention, and support of minority staff members. Not being a racist is no longer enough. For change to occur we must take action to live an antiracist life and to outwardly support antiracist policy (Kendi, 2019).

Motivated in my own way to live antiracist, I vowed to take my frustration, hurt, and sadness regarding racial injustice in our country beyond a social media post. Social

media has played a large role in fueling the social unrest as injustices are being recorded, shared, and replayed over and over again (Stone, 2020). I have grown cautious with my actions and choose my words carefully to avoid being another White person virtue signaling. Virtue signaling is when a person shares a point of view publicly in an effort to be recognized or show support with little to no meaning or emphasis behind it (McClay, 2018). I am motivated, inspired and dedicated to contributing more than a social media post.

### **Problem of Practice**

As a White supervisor of custodial operations, consisting of primarily Black staff members, I seek to better understand their lived experiences. Black and Brown professionals of today are reminded by society daily that their lives matter less, voices hold less weight, and have to watch people that look like them consistently mistreated and killed on social media. These professionals are expected to perform at full strength while fighting the challenges of racism in the workplace and carrying the personal trauma society has burdened them with. The problem of practice for this study is uncovering racism experienced by custodial staff members and exploring how supervisors can do a better job supporting Black and Brown staff.

Racism in the United States can be found in all pockets of society including higher education (Alexander, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Chesler et al., 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Takaki 2008). The impact racism has on communities of color is substantial and continuously inhibits the ability for persons of color to achieve social and economic success (Alexander, 2010, Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012;

Takaki, 2008). Racism in the US is taking on a new face that is less overt and more subtle in its attack on these underrepresented populations (Alexander, 2010, Bonilla-Silva, 2010). This new, more understated, racism is often paired with the occasional viral video capturing police brutality, serving as a clear and consistent reminder that the US values Black lives far less than the rest (Alexandrov, 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Subtle racism depicted through microaggressions is particularly dangerous to the working person of color and their inability to defend themselves thereby risking their employment and stability (Chesler et al., 2005). Fostering a healthy supervisor – supervisee relationship that welcomes safe and open conversations around race and racism is a step in the right direction for supporting and encouraging staff of color in higher education (Gunzburger, 2019).

A foundational component to supervision is the relationship two people forge through working together (Mata, 2018). Supervisors can better support staff of color when they understand the expectations supervisees have of them (Chesler et al., 2005, Mata, 2018). This study aims to identify some of the common expectations staff of color have for supervisors as it pertains to supporting their underrepresented identities in the workspace. Supervisors that embrace the concept that racism is rampant, especially in education, can create positive change for supervisees (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). This concept of “everyday” racism is the underlying foundation for the Theoretical Framework of this study (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). The next section explains Critical Race Theory and how it aligns as part of the conceptual framework of this study.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT was created in the spirit of the law by Derrick Bell in the 1970's but has since expanded to other disciplines in education including hierarchy, affirmative action, and curriculum (Delgado & Stefancic 2016). CRT was created in response to the realization that civil rights laws were only passed when they benefited the White majority (Ladson-Billings, 2016). CRT is a multifaceted concept that has been continuously defined as society has evolved over the last 50 years. The following aspects of CRT will be described in this section and will support this study; racism is a common, everyday experience for People of Color, White privilege and a self-serving interest to stay one step ahead make it advantageous for the White majority to not adequately address racism, and how differential racialization impacts each person's individual experiences (Delgado & Stefancic 2016).

CRT clearly states that racism is a chronic, everyday experience for People of Color in the United States and that the White majority for whom society caters to, makes it nearly impossible for People of Color to address because racism is ignored and not acknowledged (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). Racism is so deeply embedded in our society that it goes unnoticed by the White passerby, making it so incredibly important to "unmask" and name the individual occurrences of racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1998). The greatest challenge to overcoming racism is that the White majority needs to both acknowledge that it exists and commit to making change that may result in a loss of social or economic capital (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). This is described by CRT as interest convergence.

Critical Race theorists proposed the concept of “interest convergence,” which highlights that in many civil rights laws, the interest is self-serving for the White majority (Bell et al., 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). This convergence takes place when there is a risk of greater loss. Lawmakers, politicians, and businesspeople advertise their change as being inclusive or minority-centered when really, they are trying to cut losses and save face (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1998). Crenshaw (1995) attributed this to White privilege and the irreparable damage it has caused People of Color in the US.

The racialization of Black Americans throughout our history has also played a devastating role to the perpetuation of racism in the US (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). Over time the story that the media painted regarding Black Americans shifted from a happy, obedient, White serving image to a vicious, dangerous, and out-of-control portrayal that has fueled microaggressions, prejudice, and violence against the Black community (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). Intersectionality and anti-essentialism make this so challenging to conceptualize (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). Intersectionality is the combination of one’s identities that impacts a person’s social capital and their ability to navigate society with or without repercussions for said identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Coupled with intersectionality is anti-essentialism, the belief that no one person is representative of an entire culture and that their identities may be overlapping and conflicting (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). Due to these complexities, there is no one size fits all solution to this massive problem. We must seek to understand the overarching issues that can lead to systemic improvements for the majority of underrepresented populations while also focusing on our individual locus of control to care for minority friends and colleagues and cater assistance to their specific needs.

This study aims to understand the experiences of Black custodial staff at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the South and acknowledges that their experiences involving racism are real, valid, and significant. To create change it is imperative that as the study is conducted, the concepts and principles of CRT are kept in the forefront to avoid causing further damage to participants. The very underpinnings of CRT state that People of Color do experience racism on a regular basis and need their White colleagues to listen, look within themselves and create real change that may not benefit them personally in any way. Through understanding the experiences of Black staff, a tangible list of ways to improve the supervision of Black staff aims to be created. This will be accomplished by answering the research questions described in the next section.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this action research study is to better understand the experiences of Black custodial staff members as it relates to racism in the workplace to improve methods of support and supervision skills of their leadership. This study seeks to understand the expectations Black staff have of supervisors to narrow the gap between expectation and the actual support received. Answering these research questions should provide tangible examples of racism seen in the field of student affairs. This study is being conducted on the basis that racism is prevalent and seeks to understand the ways in which it manifests in the workplace.

Research Questions:

1. How does everyday racism present itself to Black staff members working as custodians at a Primarily White Institution (PWI) in the South?
2. How do Black staff describe their expectations of supervisors related to dismantling oppression?

Accepting that racism occurs on a daily basis, even in the field of student affairs is an important first step in making progress toward a racially just society. This investigation seeks to understand the tangible examples of racism in the workplace. The research questions were specifically chosen to imply that racism does in fact exist and is not in question. Supervisors need to join this conversation with the understanding that their Black employees *do* experience racism, and that the supervisor plays a critical role in being aware of, believing in, and fighting against the spaces where it exists. A stronger understanding of how racism manifests can better equip supervisors to have an open conversation with supervisees about their experiences and how they can be an ally and advocate for them. This concept of supervisory-allyship creates a sense of trust in the relationship to be able to support when acts of racism happen or through societal tragedies such as the murder of George Floyd.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I have selected my own institution for this research study resulting in my position as an insider. Throughout this study, I will collaborate with other insiders to collect and synthesize data. In my role, I serve as a mid-level manager, and I am directly involved in the supervision and oversight of around 70 custodial staff members in Housing Facilities



Operations. I recently transitioned to this unit of Housing after working in a different functional unit since 2012. I bring nine years of professional experience to the study.

I am a heterosexual white male afforded many privileges due to the identities I hold. It is because of these identities that I have chosen this topic and feel it is important that I contribute to exposing, denouncing, and acting against racism in society and in the workplace. It is important that I acknowledge my identities and my own blind spots as I seek to complete this study and contribute to improving this problem in a meaningful way. In creating this study, a pilot study was completed with colleagues that formerly worked at the institution and who are familiar with the working environment. The purpose of the pilot study was to gauge the credibility and trustworthiness of the individual interview and focus group protocols and to ensure I was asking the right questions to ultimately address the research questions.

### **Research Design**

I sought to answer the research questions through practitioner inquiry and investigation-based action research. In action research, the practitioners themselves are the ones to identify the problem they are looking to solve and are conducting the research. Practitioner inquiry allows educators to explore problems in their daily work and puts them in the position to research and make positive change (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015). In this type of research, the researchers are closer to the problem and are more invested in finding the solution. “Their goal is to improve *their* practice and foster *their* professional growth by understanding *their* students, solving problems, or developing new skills. They put their newly emerging theories into practice and carefully

examine the resulting changes” (Efron & Ravid 2013, p. 4). For this reason, action research is seen to be cyclical and not always linear based on the need to continue to assess and adjust along the way (Efron & Ravid 2013). This study focuses on staff members rather than traditional classroom students.

In addition to the researchers being closer to the source of inquiry, in action research, the problem itself is considered to be more local. “Action research is a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people with the means to take systematic action to resolve specific problems” (Stringer 2013, p. 8). Action research gives power to the practitioner to take control and play an integral role in improving the practices that impact their students. Practitioners are empowered to take matters into their own hands as the daily problems they face are either not the ones being studied by traditional educational research or the findings are too general to apply to the varying issues of every setting. When you have practitioners invested in exploring problems through action research, they become actively engaged in improving their workplace (Efron and Ravid 2013). In action research, these problems are referred to as problems of practice.

This study follows a qualitative approach to collecting data. Qualitative data will come from individual interviews and a focus group. The qualitative approach accurately represents the problem of practice and properly answers the research questions. Qualitative data will be used to identify specific examples of racism in the workplace. Additionally, qualitative data will be used to identify tangible ways for White leadership to better support Black staff members on a daily basis. I feel the qualitative approach will

be appropriate considering the variety of factors likely contributing to the problem of practice.

### **Individual interviews:**

The individual interviews will be conducted with 3-5 Black staff members that work in Housing Facilities Operations at the host institution. Interviewees will answer a series of questions in hopes of answering the research questions. The semi-structured interview is the middle ground between the highly structured interview and the unstructured or informal interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This type of interview was selected because I want to gather similar information from each participant. Their stories and examples may vary but the semi-structured interview will allow for rapport building, dialogue, and gives the researcher the ability to change course and respond to the situation at hand (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Interview questions will be identified before the interview but will be asked in no particular order which allows for the desired flexibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

### **Focus group:**

The focus group will bring the individual interviewees together for the synthesis of individual interviews. The focus group will serve to accomplish three goals; member checking, to synthesize data collectively and review an action plan aimed at improving my leadership. A focus group is a group interview with multiple people that have knowledge of a particular topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A major benefit of this data collection tool is the ability for the group to co-construct their responses in an interactive way that the semi-structured interviews simply cannot accomplish (Merriam & Tisdell

2015). Another significant benefit of the focus group in this study is that it allows for participants to discuss everyday issues that they normally choose not to (Seale et al., 2003).

### **Significance of the Study**

This action research study aims to provide tangible knowledge that will directly influence the leaders that oversee custodial operations at a PWI in the South. This study will also benefit the participants of the study who will have an opportunity to reflect on their experiences, talk with someone in leadership about challenges they have faced, and be validated and affirmed in the stories and examples of racism shared during the data collection process. Racism is prevalent in our society, and it is important as a White man in a position of leadership to investigate the experiences of the custodial staff team which is a population of over 95% Black staff members.

In action research, the practitioners themselves are the ones who identify the problem they are looking to solve and conduct the research in order to gain a better understanding of their context and the problem of practice (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Based on my positionality, it is important that I as the researcher gain a deep understanding of the way racism is presenting itself to the custodial staff on campus. Based on the action research approach, it is expected that the findings of this study will be relevant to this campus culture. Practitioner inquiry and its results have the potential to be transferable, where aspects of the data may be applicable in similar settings or situations outside of the host site (Efron & Ravid, 2013). This concept of transferability is different from

generalizability which refers to data being applicable to the masses (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

### **Limitations of the Study**

I have identified three limitations through the completion of this study. The first limitation of the study regards the lack of racial diversity among potential participants on the custodial staff team. Being that over 95% of custodial staff and supervisors are Black, when participants tried answering questions regarding how they are treated in comparison to White counterparts, participants struggled to answer these questions. The second limitation I identified is the possible lack of trust between participants and I based on being a White administrator that recently joined the team.

The third limitation refers to the observed challenges and lived experiences of the participants. This study successfully identified the specific examples of racism that the participants experience regularly. I feel that the limitation involves the blurring of the line between the participants Black identity and their custodian identity. Because both identities are underrepresented and underserved, there were several concerning examples shared that were difficult to decipher between the root cause; was this maltreatment tied to the participant's Black identity, custodial staff identity, or both? Some of the challenges related to feeling invisible or unacknowledged in the role may not be specific to only Black custodians. That very well may be an issue custodial staff face broadly. For this reason, I feel this was a limitation of this study even though the data collected is relevant and significant. Had I anticipated this limitation I would have asked different questions during the interview to specifically address the intersection of being a Black

person and a custodian. I see this as a potential opportunity to have a follow up conversation with participants to dive deeper into this topic.

## **CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW**

The problem of practice for this study addresses the significant systemic disadvantages Black staff members face while working at primarily White institutions. Racism, microaggressions, and silencing of Black staff members happen on a daily basis (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). These environments create stress, burnout, and an increased sense of anxiety in Black staff members (Sue et al., 2008). Black staff members are also being taxed to not only educate their White peers on race-related issues but are expected to do so while carrying the burden of regular trauma related to police brutality and the mockery of Black culture in society (Farris, 2018). The purpose of this study is to better equip supervisors combating racism by learning from the lived experiences of Black staff members. The goal of this study is to increase supervisory allyship and advocacy to shine a bright light on the issues Black staff members face. Through this I intend to create tangible actions White peers and supervisors can take to create a more positive working environment.

There is a general lack of awareness surrounding the issues Black staff members face that can be attributed to the inadequate and inaccurate depiction of Black history. The majority of White people in this country are not aware of the systemic disadvantages that make it difficult for Black Americans to thrive in society. A large factor of this problem of practice is related to White privilege and the general unawareness of the issues Black people face (Crenshaw et al., 1995). White staff who claim to be allies

further perpetuate these issues through virtue signaling and being able to turn the issues off in their mind because it does not apply to them personally. Virtue signaling is the act of publicly taking a stand or defending something for recognition or social credit (McClay, 2018). Additionally, systemic racism and prejudice contribute to the daily reminder for Black staff members that they are not on the same playing field as their White counterparts (Elliott & Smith, 2004). There is also a lack of active allyship and advocacy of white peers and supervisors who need to be the ones to speak up, speak out, and stand with the Black staff members on our campus (Kivel, 2017). Too often White leadership fails to acknowledge and contribute to supporting staff members through work-related issues or through personal trauma related to race-related issues portrayed in the media (Kivel, 2017).

### **Research Questions:**

1. How does everyday racism present itself to Black staff members working as custodians at a Primarily White Institution (PWI) in the south?
2. How do Black staff describe their expectations of supervisors related to dismantling oppression?

### **Organization of the chapter**

In this chapter, we will discuss the purpose of the literature review, how CRT applies as the theoretical framework for this study, relevant literature focused on allyship, Whiteness, supervision of Black staff members and the landscape, resources, and the general influence this problem of practice has and how it has been influenced by Higher Education. While there is significant literature focused on addressing and eradicating



these problems from our society, more work remains as White staff members are being called on by Black peers to speak up and take a stand for human rights and the fair treatment of all people in the workplace.

### **Purpose of the Literature Review**

Machi and McEvoy (2016) described the purpose of the literature review process as a key step in beginning research and that proper research cannot be conducted prior to having a clear understanding of the focal topic. Understanding the works of scholars that have come prior allows for conclusions to be drawn as we strive to answer the research questions at hand (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The literature review allows the researcher to demonstrate their knowledge of the topic of study after strategically organizing, explaining, and summarizing research that is applicable and influential to the study (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

The literature reviewed for this study was largely focused on dissertations and previous research of scholars focused on race-related issues. ERIC, EBSCO, and Google Scholar were the search engines and databases used to locate the resources. An alarming observation from some of the studies I came across with a similar focus was that all of the participants in the study were White. As a White man, it is crucial that I am listening to the lived experiences of Black colleagues to inform the change I desire to create. Reviewing the plethora of literature and a variety of ways this topic has been studied helped guide the approach taken for this study. Understanding the theory that will underpin this research is crucial to creating the foundation of knowledge to answer the

research questions. The next section will describe the theoretical framework used to build this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman are credited with spurring the birth of CRT in the 1970s as they were troubled by the slow nature of social progress following the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). The five tenets of CRT as described by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) are: (1) racism is prevalent and permanent, (2) challenging Whiteness as the dominant ideology: Whiteness, (3) the commitment to social justice, (4) the experiences of the oppressed are real and legitimate, and (5) the transdisciplinary perspective of race and racism in history.

According to CRT racism is a constant, ongoing, never-ending cycle of oppression intersecting race and other identities (Bell et al., 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1998; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Following this tenet, the education system as we know it acts as a cover-up for the dominant groups in our society (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Given the need to rebuke these systems, CRT strives for an end to racism, sexism, and poverty, as well as empowering minority groups (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). The final two tenets of CRT address the legitimacy of the experiences of the oppressed and that racism is both a part of history, the present and the future (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002).

CRT presents a strong case that social reform in the US is drastically needed and widely ignored by the advantaged, or in this case white people, in society (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1998;). These components make the case that racism is present in the everyday lives of Black Americans (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Therefore, CRT was selected as the theoretical framework of this study. This study is not an investigation of if racism exists, it seeks to understand how it manifests in the workplace at a PWI in the South.

Crenshaw et al. (1990), highlighted the damage White privilege has wreaked on our society and People of Color by noting, “it has blinded society to the systems of domination that work against so many by retaining an unvarying focus on vestiges of systemic racialized privilege which subordinates those perceived as a particularized few – the Others,” (p.290). They explain that protecting the interest of Whiteness has drastically slowed the development of racial justice and perpetuated systemic racism for decades.

CRT provides an avenue to open the conversation about race to learn about the lived experiences of oppressed people as we try to create change and justice (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) describe the common experience of Black students who see White peers ignore the harsh realities they face on a daily basis because it is unfathomable to a White person that these injustices could possibly be true. White privilege thrives in these settings where White students are able to tune out the truth because it simply does not apply to them (Gair & Mullins, 2001). Not only does the truth behind racism not apply to White students, but the curriculum in K12 education has also watered down the truth behind slavery and the civil rights movement, creating hegemony and a deeper sense of hidden curriculum (Gair & Mullins, 2001). In the next section, I will discuss the historical perspectives at play and how they will play a role in this study.

## **Historical Perspectives**

Racism is not a new problem in America (Williams, 2005). Early evidence suggests Slavery began in the United States between 1500 and 1619 (Ready, 2000; Rose, 1999; Wood, 1998). Over 150 years later, Abraham Lincoln signed the emancipation proclamation that freed all enslaved peoples (Rose, 1999). In the late 1800s, Jim Crow laws were put into effect in the South, creating segregation and strengthened racism against Black Americans (Rose, 1999). Around this same time, the Supreme court ruled on Plessy vs Ferguson which supported racism via separate but equal citizenship for all (Williams, 2005). The Klu Klux Klan actively sought to marginalize, brutalize, and kill Black lives through intimidation, physical violence, voter suppression, and lynching of Black people (Williams, 2005). Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, and countless other Black heroes led the fight for Civil Rights in the 1950s and 1960s, ultimately leading to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, protecting all US citizens against discrimination based on nationality, religion, sex, and race (Jones, 2013). It has been a long and tumultuous road for the US following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and desegregation (Buck, 2010).

Leaders in the field of education including Gloria Ladson-Billings, William F. Tate IV, Edward Taylor, and many others have contributed to the acknowledgment and fight against racism and hegemony in education (Parker, 2019). CRT was created in the 1970s but was brought to the forefront of America's attention in 1991 when Lani Guinier was criticized for her writings by the media (Parker, 2019). Guinier put CRT in the public eye as she advocated for Black rights and was deeply scrutinized (Parker, 2019). Chesler et al., (2006) commented on racism in higher education and claimed, "some observers

have suggested that meaningful change in higher education systems is impossible. At the very least, any serious attempt at challenging racism requires a coherent framework for understanding organizational life,” (p. 417). Institutions of higher learning need to continue to expel racism from their campuses and fight for a more just experience for all.

As it does in all facets of society, racism is prevalent in the workplace (Wingfield, 2007). For both Black men and women, racism is observed on the daily basis but manifests itself differently for men than it does for women (Wingfield, 2007). Wingfield (2007) acknowledged the impact implicit bias plays in everyday racism due to the limited exposure some White people have had in their lives in interaction and developing relationships with Black people. Workplace racism and systemic disadvantages are prevalent in our society. This study seeks to understand the lived experiences in an attempt to dismantle systems of oppression.

In the next section of this chapter, I will explain the connection between this study and social justice. The United States has an ugly history regarding the treatment of Black people. It is time for White people to stand up and speak out for equal justice for all.

### **Connection to Social Justice**

Inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement and the death of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the hundreds of other Black lives senselessly killed, this study is rooted in encouraging positive social change and racial justice for Black people in the workplace. Lebron (2017) described the power and history behind the #BlackLivesMatter movement and how its supporters are fighting for racial justice. It is important to me as a White man in a leadership position to understand the daily

challenges Black staff members face in the workplace, validate those experiences, and educate my White peers to be more aware of racism in the workplace and to fight against it.

It is time for White people to start speaking out about racism. Black people are tired of educating White people on race and carrying the burden of breaking down systems of oppression on their own (Stone, 2020). No real progress will be made until White people acknowledge, accept, and publicly agree with the fight for racial justice (Stone, 2020). White people express discomfort or awkwardness in approaching these conversations but need to lean into the discomfort and learn how to do so for Black coworkers, friends, loved ones, and the millions of Black people they will never meet (Stone, 2020). Morris (2020) expressed similar views by saying, “The fight for equality is so much bigger than individual fears of awkwardness, and this is an opportunity to put your privilege to good use and help enact meaningful change” (para. 4).

### **Allyship & Advocacy**

An ally is someone that takes positive action to promote inclusion for the good of all people (Atcheson, 2018). Atcheson (2018) defined allyship as, “a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people. Allyship is continual investment of time in supporting others, holding ourselves accountable when mistakes are made, apologizing and being prepared to rework the approach towards allyship as needs change,” (p. 4). Allies feel closely tied to a purpose or a cause and are moved to take action in support of others (Akbar, 2020). Akbar (2020) described a White ally as someone who, “has to have

a deep, honest, and personal conviction, that they want to partner with another culture to have a sense of association and connection to that culture,” (p. 189). This study aims to understand the experiences of Black staff members to create more committed White ally supervisors in the workplace.

Advocacy is the action one takes to improve, promote, or defend a person or cause. (Ezell, 2001). The different forms of advocacy are administrative, legal, and community (Ezell, 2001). Community advocacy or more commonly known as social justice advocacy, aims to influence law, policy, and demystify stereotypes to create a society that is fair and just for all (Cohen, 2001; Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005). Although it is commonly known that social inequalities exist, many people fail to act against these injustices (Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005). Akbar (2020) described first-person and second-person advocates both as having an investment and desire in a worthy cause but only the first-person advocate being willing to take action. Student affairs is in need of more first-person advocates who can identify injustices and be trusted to take action against them.

### **Definition of Social Justice Advocacy**

Social justice advocacy is the action taken to create a just, accessible, and successful environment for all, and is commonly implemented in the K12 school system by school counselors (Ratts et al., 2007). Counselors use the American Counseling Association’s (ACA) advocacy competencies to serve as a change agent in their schools (Ratts et al., 2007). ACA competencies correlate well to fighting racism in the workplace.

## **Becoming A Racial Justice Ally**

Black Americans are calling on self-proclaimed allies to speak up and take action in pursuit of an anti-racist society (Shakour & Hillyer, 2020). Shakour & Hilyer (2020) explained that allies need to understand that police brutality is only part of the problem, White peers need to speak up against racism in the workplace, identify racism in education, and get engaged political leadership to encourage social change. Lachman (2018) stressed the importance of anti-racist allyship and the role it plays in unearthing and disrupting racism. Allies find ways to take action against racism, supporting underrepresented groups (Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Allies take on the active promotion of social justice and are willing to stand up against inequalities with the goal of nondominant groups one day experiencing the same privileges of White people (Brown & Ostrove, 2013).

One of the foundational studies on social justice and allyship was Broido's (2000) study, *The Development of Social Justice Allies During College: A Phenomenological Investigation*. This study identified three factors that contribute to active allyship: a more clear understanding of social justice issues impacting unrepresented populations, active engagement in the conceptualization and meaning-making process, and the self-confidence to go from knowing when to speak up and actively doing so (Broido, 2000).

Mata's (2018) study evaluated the role of White women in student affairs and their role as allies on college campuses. White women in student affairs have tremendous power and influence when it comes to driving racial discourse on college campuses, possibly more than student or faculty voice (Mata, 2018). Helping White supervisors



actualize their influence in discouraging racism is a key aspect of this study. Allies who come from privileged identities have the greatest influence behind the actions they choose to take (DeTurk, 2011). Allyship is not always about doing the comfortable or popular thing, it is doing the right thing (Thompson, 2003).

There is a deficit in the training of White professionals to be able to identify the racism that is experienced daily amongst Black staff members (Arvold, 2010; Lachman, 2018). Arvold (2010) described that even the most well-intentioned allies perpetuate racism due to their lack of understanding regarding the impact their Whiteness has on Black peers. White people need to go through a process of un-training, or the undoing of our inherent beliefs, in the pursuit of becoming racial justice allies (Arvold, 2010). The lack of knowledge surrounding the issues marginalized populations experience on a daily basis is concerning and one of the major reasons why racism continues to be perpetuated in society (Arvold, 2010; Broido, 2000). The next section will explain Whiteness and how this concept continues to oppress minority populations.

### **Whiteness**

Matias and Mackey (2016) expressed the importance of acknowledging that the majority of teachers in the K-12 system in our country are White females. Our inability to do so perpetuates hegemonic whiteness in our curriculum and society (Matias & Mackey, 2016). Matias and Mackey (2016) described how Whiteness has become so normalized in our society, it goes unnoticed and unbothered. Whiteness is a social construct based on beliefs, behaviors, and actions that result in social advantages (Matias & Mackey, 2016). Furthermore, they expressed the magnitude of understanding and exposing Whiteness by

saying, “racism is the symptom, then enactments of whiteness that uphold white supremacy is the disease; to cure such a disease we cannot simply apply anti-racist approaches without thoroughly understanding the disease itself,” (p.17).

The concept of Color-blind racism, created by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, describes how White people find ways to ignore and invalidate racism experienced on a daily basis by making excuses for racial injustices (2006). Color-blind racists will find any reason other than racism itself as the cause for inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Erskine and Bilimoria (2019) discussed the importance of disrupting the unchallenged concept of Whiteness to have any hope of creating change in favor of social justice in society, encouraging the dismantling of White privilege, and promoting career development and leadership advancement. Bonilla-Silva (2015) noted the shift from overt racism in the 1960s with Jim Crow laws to what is described as “new racism” (p. 1359) that is manifested through Whiteness in today’s society. Racism shifted from violent and physical control of Black Americans to a concept of “smiling discrimination” (p. 1368) that is easily disguised and hard to expose given the explosive nature of claiming a person is a racist (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). White people are not forced to talk about race because of the inherent privilege that comes with being White (Bell, 2000). White is seen as normal whereas everything else is seen as *other* (Bell, 2000).

### **Microaggressions and Racism in the Workplace**

The term microaggressions refer to the subtle, frequent, and thoughtless indignities toward Black people that are typically unintentional and without conscious thought (Sue et al., 2008). When looking deeper at microaggressions, *microinsults* refer to the unintentional actions that result in insulting a person’s race where

*microinvalidations* unintentionally disaffirm the lived experience of Black people (Sue et al., 2008). Microaggressions make the workplace dangerous and harmful to Black Americans and contribute to mental health concerns, emotional distress, depression, and anxiety (Pitcan et al., 2018). A common coping mechanism to combat racism and microaggressions is known as *John Henryism*, exuding superior performance in an effort to prove self-worth and to fight stereotypes (Hudson et al., 2016). Black Americans are forced to work significantly harder than White peers to overcome the daily challenges and disadvantages that come with holding this identity (Hudson et al., 2016). Regardless of effort or merit, Black Americans are severely underrepresented in leadership roles in the US (Hudson et al., 2016).

### **Racial Leadership Gap**

Representation matters (Fan et al., 2019). Understanding the racial leadership gap in our country is an important aspect of understanding the experience of Black staff in the US. While there has been progress over the last 50 years, there is certainly a lot of growth left unseen for Black people in the workplace (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). Civil right laws have been passed, companies are investing in diversity training and inclusive hiring practices, and there are more Black CEOs than ever before, but it is still not enough because Black workers are up against far greater obstacles than any other group of people (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). The observed obstacles include lower pay, fewer opportunities for advancement, and less trust to lead major projects or developments (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). There is a great need to advocate and speak up on behalf of Black co-workers and against racial injustices in working America (Roberts & Mayo, 2019).

A recent study showed that senior Black leadership at Fortune 500 companies were among some of the top achieving professionals in the corporate world (Ferry, 2019). This study evaluated the skills and abilities of top-ranking executives to find that the number of Black CEOs among Fortune 500 companies was strikingly low (Ferry, 2019). When looking at the history of Fortune 500 leadership, there have been only 15 Black CEOs since 1955, with only 4 in the office today, all of which are men (Ferry, 2019). This is a strikingly low number given the talent discovered in this study. Supervisors need to be aware of the racial disparity that exists in the workplace in order to take the appropriate steps to overcome it. My study aims to better equip supervisors to identify and eradicate workplace racism.

### **Supervision**

Student affairs is a relationship-based field focused on student development theory and the investment of people. Creamer and Winston (2002) suggested that one of the greatest contributing factors related to new professionals leaving jobs and the field is related to supervision. Supportive supervision balanced with proper orientation, socialization, and regular support is necessary when developing and growing new professionals (Tull, 2006). Tull (2006) described supervision as one of the most difficult tasks managers are responsible for based on the in-depth knowledge on development and supervision needed to be successful. It is clear that there is a lot at stake when it comes to supervisory relationships and the power a supervisor has in making a positive impact on the experience of their respective supervisees (Tull, 2006).

Racism can be dismantled through supervisory relationships that encourage open communication around race, identity, and inclusion (Farris, 2018). A supervisor that

values someone for who they are aligns with literature on the effective supervision of minority staff (Farris, 2018). Paulk's (2018) exploration into the experiences of supervisors focused on racially responsive supervision, the racial climate of mental health work environments, and the influence that the racial environment played on supervision practices. Paulk discovered that advocating on behalf of their supervisee in relation to racially responsive situations is incredibly important to the supervisor-supervisee relationship (Paulk, 2018).

When faced with racial issues in the workplace, when the supervisor handles the issues with care and competence, there is a positive effect on the supervisory relationship (Burkard et al., 2006). It is important for supervisors to be vocal when addressing multicultural issues in the workplace. Ignoring issues and hoping they will go away with time has a negative impact on supervisees in the workplace (Burkard et al., 2006). Burkard et al., (2006) noted a misconception when deciding the arrangement of supervisor-supervisee pairs such that racial matching is not an effective method of cross-cultural supervision. It was found that when supervisors were equal to or higher in racial identity development, their ability to promote racial justice in the workplace was much higher. Gunzburger's (2019) study evaluated the experiences of Black staff members and their White supervisors. Gunzburger examined the importance of having an upfront conversation where supervisors name race and supervision early, often, and wherever applicable in the relationship. Acknowledging race and racism is just the start of the battle, how and why the supervisor brings up these topics is incredibly important in building trust and rapport with the staff member (Gunzburger, 2019).

Given that supervision plays such an important role in the satisfaction and development of employees, are supervisors receiving adequate training in graduate programs to equip them with the skills to do this effectively? Holmes (2014) noted that about half of the participants in their study of student affairs professionals remember taking a course on supervision. Holmes described a supervision gap where student affairs divisions are expecting incoming professionals to have learned how to supervise during their graduate programs whereas the academic programs feel that supervision is an on-the-job training skill learned outside of the classroom (Holmes, 2014). In addition to a lack of preparation on supervision, there is a lack of focus on Whiteness and White privilege related to professional development opportunities, supervisors, and university leadership (Adams, 2018). Higher education programs and student affairs divisions alike need to focus and develop their graduate students on supervision skills to best prepare them to advocate and promote racial justice through supervision.

### **Battling Racism in Higher Education**

While the common perception of colleges and universities presents as an opportunity for all students to learn and grow their education, higher education challenges and reinforces social injustices (Burrell, 2018). Very few institutions have mandated courses focused on multiculturalism or cultural competency (Adams, 2018). Adams (2018) described a common experience for minority students by saying, “When predominantly white classroom spaces do recognize the unique experiences of students of color, it is often done in a way that forces students of color to be spokespeople for their race/ethnicity. This is a demanding experience, and when it happens repeatedly, can threaten a student’s ability to succeed in the classroom,” (p.4). Adams (2018) shared the

path to reducing the racial inequalities on college campuses with the following suggestions: increasing access through affordability, create more resources to better support underrepresented populations, and focus on increasing minority representation among faculty and staff. In addition to these important factors, the collective university must acknowledge and address Whiteness, foster cultural competence for faculty, staff, and students, and create an environment where racial allyship is normalized, encouraged, and expected.

Plagman-Galvin (2018) completed a study focused on the optimal resources around practitioner's development and multiculturalism. They found The National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE) to be a fantastic resource for growing multicultural awareness, competency development, as well as the ability to help grow the multicultural competence of peers (Plagman-Galvin, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

Following the review of the literature, it is clear that there is a need for this study in the field of higher education. Black staff members experience racism on a daily basis and supervisors are underprepared to address, support, and advocate for their supervisees. There is a grave need for racial justice allies to take action against racism in the support of Black and other marginalized populations. This study contributes to the literature as one of the few studies where Black staff members are asked to share their experiences with everyday racism in an attempt to better inform the training and development of supervisors. This study contributes to the literature because of the focus on informing

White supervision with the voices and experiences of Black staff members experiencing racism in their daily work.



## **CHAPTER 3 – METHODS**

The purpose of this action research study is to better understand the experiences of Black custodial staff members as they relate to instances of racism in the workplace. More specifically, this study seeks to understand the expectations Black staff members have of their departmental and university level leadership to identify ways to narrow the gap between their expectations and the support they receive from those in positions capable of doing so through the use of an investigative action research approach (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019; Efron & Ravid, 2013). This study utilized interviews and a focus group with Black staff members within the University Housing Facilities team to 1) identify the ways racism manifests in the workplace, 2) elevate the voices of the Black staff members and their expectations about the support they need to aid supervisors in reducing the number of instances of racism in their workplace, and 3) propose tangible next steps University leadership can take to improve the workplace environment for Black staff members.

In action research, the practitioners themselves are the ones who identify the problem they are looking to solve and conduct the research in order to gain a better understanding of their context and the problem of practice (Efron & Ravid, 2013). To this end, this research study attempted to answer the following research questions; 1) How does racism present itself to Black staff members working in student affairs at a Primarily White Institution (PWI) of Higher Education in the south? 2) How do Black staff describe their expectations related to anti-racism in the workplace?

Throughout the rest of this chapter, I provide a detailed account of the research design (practitioner inquiry) and the methods of analysis (qualitative) used to answer the research questions (Dana & Yonedol-Hoppey, 2019). I describe the context of the study as well as a detailed understanding of my participants and my positionality to understand how and why I seek to improve the supervision and leadership of custodial staff members. I then share an overview of the methodology that was used to conduct the semi-structured interviews and focus group, as well as why this methodology was chosen to study this topic. This chapter concludes with an explanation of the research procedure used and how the data was analyzed through a priori and emergent coding, theming, and analysis.

### **Context, Participants, and Researcher Positionality**

The institution selected for this research study is a large public flagship institution in the Southeast United States with over 35,000 students on its main campus. The division of Student Affairs and Academic Support at the host institution employs over 250 full-time and graduate staff members under six initiatives: Enrollment, Academic Success, Involvement and Leadership, Wellness & Fitness, Residential Learning, and Career Preparation. Participants of this study are employed within Facilities Operations Custodial staff, part of University Housing that falls under the Residential Learning initiative. At the time the participants were selected for this study, 95% of the total staff members identified themselves as Black. 4 participants were selected to participate in an individual interview as well as a focus group.

## **Selection of Participants**

The number of participants will be 4 which allows for an in-depth and rich description of the lived experiences of the participants and represents an effective group size for collaborative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To be eligible to participate in this study, participants needed to 1) identify as Black, 2) have been employed by the University for a minimum of 1 year, and 3) serve as a custodial staff member or part of the team that leads the custodial staff. Potential participants had the opportunity to learn about the study and engage in one to one dialogue prior to signing up to participate. It was important that participants understood the purpose of the study and felt comfortable being honest given I was new to the organization and serve in a leadership capacity.

## **Researchers Positionality**

It is important to understand my positionality as the researcher and the identities I hold based on the tremendous privilege I carry as a heterosexual, White, able-bodied male (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I very recently transitioned to a new unit within Housing Facilities as the Associate Director of Facilities Operations where I serve in an upper-middle management position, directly supervising a team of 6 professional staff members and about 80 custodial staff members. Leadership is the most important aspect of my position. It is critical as a supervisor to understand the people I am supervising and provide them with as much support and understanding as I can.

Disrupting hegemony and giving voice to the silenced, underserved, and otherwise ignored custodial staff I oversee brings CRT to life as we seek to foster and create an anti-racist workplace environment (Ladson-Billings, 2019). As mentioned in the section before, around 95% of the custodial staff team is Black. Completing this study

puts me in the position to validate each person's lived experiences, provide a space to unearth and create awareness of historically racist roadblocks standing in each person's way of progressing personally and professionally, and to show that I am here to advocate for them (Ladson-Billings, 2019). I aim to interrupt the way things have been done prior to my transition to better empower, listen, and encourage my staff daily (Stovall, 2016). I aspire to continue progressing in my career as a student affairs practitioner which creates a strong connection between my passion for supervision and this study. My first true steps toward becoming a critically aware White person occurred at an Allies Institute I participated in while in graduate school in 2011. This four-day training institute exposed & educated participants on a variety of marginalized identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. I truly saw my privilege and identities on display and have been working to learn, grow, and find ways to make a positive impact in the lives of others.

I have a tremendous opportunity to use my privilege and influence in the workplace to not only denounce racism, but to create new knowledge for supervisors to be able to best support, mentor, and grow Black staff members in the field of student affairs. As I aim to move up, it is critically important for me to understand the experiences of staff at all levels, especially the ones perceived as "at the bottom" and to call on the valuable information they hold as front-line workers (Magolda & Delman, 2016). The social unrest that took place in the US following the death of George Floyd inspired this study. I personally feel a responsibility to contribute more than a social media post to this critically important issue.

A pilot study was created to workshop the individual interview questions. I felt it was important to host a pilot study due to my positionality as a White male. I recognized that there are power constructs at play given these two privileged identities. A small group of close colleagues who were no longer eligible to participate in the study due to no longer working at the institution were selected to assist with the pilot study. The pilot study group met three times to receive the questions as if they were participants and to share feedback to ensure the questions are relevant, unharmed, and provided the best opportunity to receive meaningful data. I shared very openly with the pilot study group that it was critical for participants to understand the theoretical framework of the study. CRT and Inquiry as Stance were selected and were the most applicable because this study starts off by acknowledging that racism exists in the workplace and the study is understanding where and how it exists.

As a student affairs professional seeking positions of departmental and university leadership, it is important for me as a White male to better understand the impact and influence of my actions on the underrepresented staff that I lead. Due to my positionality, it is important that I create space for interview questions to be carefully designed and commented on by colleagues that share similar identities as participants of the study, prior to conducting the study. I am engaging in this work to help and remain diligent to cause no additional harm by conducting this study.

Custodial staff members are often seen as being at the bottom of the social caste system in society and this study aims to amplify their truth and provide insight for me as the researcher and their supervisor to better advocate and support for their needs (Magolda & Delman, 2016). As the theoretical framework of this study, CRT disrupts the

cycles and systems that keep underrepresented populations at bay (Ladson-Billings, 2019). The next section of this chapter will describe the design of the research study including the methodology selected and its ties to CRT. I also review applicable constructs and how this study is defined as practitioner inquiry (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019).

### **Research Design**

In order to uncover and illuminate the traditionally oppressed and silenced voices of Black Americans in the workplace, this study employs an investigative action research approach (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019; Efron & Ravid, 2013). This approach is grounded in the theoretical framework known as Inquiry as Stance, a theory that proposes that practitioners have the ability to make significant change and improvements for those around them by questioning, challenging, and creating knowledge to improve their lives and the lives they serve (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015). Given their ability to reflect both the theory of Inquiry as Stance as well as Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000), I selected methods commonly associated with Practitioner Inquiry (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019) and Action Research (Efron & Ravid, 2013) for this study. These theories and methods are the key elements of the methodological framework for this study thus allowing the study to unfold as a cyclical, collaborative, and empowering investigation into the lived experiences of the participants in this study, including myself.

### **Critical Race Theory**

As a means of examining race and racism in the everyday lives of minoritized populations, CRT challenges the narratives that silence the oppressed (Ladson-Billings &

Tate, 2006). This study aimed to take a collaborative approach with the participants to mutually create action items for me as the researcher to make a legitimate and sustainable change (Ladson-Billings, 2019). The co-creation of these outcomes calls for a methodological framework that encourages the internal investigation and challenge that this study will foster which is why Inquiry As Stance serves as a well-suited methodological framework for this study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015).

The nature of this study is deeply rooted in social justice advocacy with its aim to identify the racialized experiences of Black custodial staff members as I strive to be an anti-racist in my daily life and in my work. Learning from the experiences of people I lead and creating learning lessons from my own missteps and blind spots captures the essence of the methods I have selected for this study, practitioner inquiry, and action research. I intend to take steps toward creating a community of inquiry that encourages previously silenced and ignored staff to speak up, challenge hegemonic practices, and disrupt racism in the workplace (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015).

### **Inquiry As Stance**

Inquiry As Stance was selected as the methodological framework for this study as it promotes equity, engagement, and agency in educational research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015). This study looks to challenge prevailing assumptions where I as the practitioner engage with combating racism in the workplace (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015).

Inquiry As Stance and CRT pair nicely for this study and was selected with the concept of disruption in mind. CRT looks to disrupt and dismantle racist policy and systems that keep minoritized populations from thriving in society and Inquiry As Stance

encourages educators to take a deep look at their own organizations to promote the necessary change from within (Cochran-Lytle & Smith, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009). This type of local research is known as Practitioner Inquiry.

### **Practitioner Inquiry**

Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2019) describe practitioner inquiry as a process that, “engages teachers in the design, data collection, and interpretation of data around a question,” (p.4). Practitioner inquiry is described as a type of research where educators work to understand common problems in their work (Dana & Yonedol-Hoppey, 2019). Some of the benefits of this type of research include knowledge that is created through local and familiar inquiry, the educators become collaborators in solving their own problems, and the high likelihood of tangible change taking place due to the knowledge that the researcher creates (Dana & Yendol-Hoppy, (2019). Under the umbrella of practitioner research, action research is a practice where educators collaborate and aim to solve common school practices closely tied to their work (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015). According to Efron and Ravid (2013), “Action research is usually defined as an inquiry conducted by educators in their own settings in order to advance their practice and improve their students’ learning,” (p.2).

As the researcher, it is important for me to gain a deeper insight into the issues and experiences that take place around me (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Some of the many benefits of this type of research include deep professional growth as a result of reflection, self-evaluation, and taking responsibility for improving their practice (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Dissimilar from most traditional research, action research is a very inward-focused practice aimed at improving the researcher’s practice, conducted by insiders



studying themselves and their practices, and the findings are applied directly to their practice (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Another key component of action research is its cyclical nature. In an action research study, the researcher takes action towards a problem, reflects on the findings, makes adjustments, and then takes further action to measure the changes and improvements (Dick, 2002).

### **Action Research**

Action research is a cyclical process aimed at posing a problem, collecting & analyzing data, and then implementing changes (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Action research puts educational researchers in a position to challenge their own assumptions, collect local data, and make progress relating to issues of social justice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015). In action research, the practitioners themselves are the ones to identify the problem they are looking to solve and are conducting the research (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019; Efron & Ravid, 2013). In this type of research, the researchers are closer to the problem and are more invested in finding the solution. The goal of action research is to improve the researchers' practice through gaining a better understanding of their students and learning how to contribute to an existing problem (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019; Efron & Ravid, 2013).

In addition to the researchers being closer to the source of inquiry, in action research, the problem itself is considered to be more local. Action research is a means for people to more clearly understand their situations and to formulate effective solutions to problems they face (Stringer, 2013). Action research gives power to the practitioner to take control and play an integral role in improving the practices that impact their students. Practitioners are empowered to take matters into their own hands as the daily

problems they face are either not the ones being studied by traditional educational research or the findings are too general to apply to the varying issues of every classroom.

When practitioners are invested in exploring problems through action research, they become actively engaged in improving their schools (Efron & Ravid 2013). Being new to this unit, I am in the fortunate position of being able to view things with a critical eye and ask questions to better understand why things are done a certain way. Through this research study, I learned the first-hand accounts of custodial staff and how they are treated by students, staff, and faculty at all levels. Engaging in dialogue and participating in the excavation of these thoughts, experiences, and challenges is the essence of practitioner inquiry.

### **Data Collection Measures, Instruments, and Tools**

Asking historically oppressed people to talk about their racialized experiences can be a highly emotional and draining experience. Carefully selecting data collection tools to do this as delicately as possible will be very important to the success of the study and my ability to continue fostering meaningful relationships with the staff members I now oversee. As mentioned earlier, a pilot study was created to workshop the questions asked as I intend to cause no additional harm to my participants. My colleagues face tremendous challenges in their lives by no choice of their own and it is important that I acknowledge this and make known that this study aims to only create opportunities for improvement.

Qualitative data will be generated through the use of individual interviews and a culminating focus group that brings all participants together to synthesize the individual interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The collection and analysis of qualitative data best

suits the problem of practice as the experiences of Black professionals are brought to life to answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative data will be used to understand how racism is present in the workplace and to understand the expectations Black staff have of their workplace being anti-racist. Qualitative inquiry is best suited for solving this problem of practice due to the sensitive but critical nature of this problem of practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Through the understanding of their lived experiences, we aim to learn where leadership can improve to achieve supervisory allyship with Black staff members working in the division of student affairs. This study will be completed in two parts. The first is a one to one semi-structured interview with each participant. Following the interviews all of the participants will come together for a focus group.

### **Semi-structured interview**

The semi-structured interview is the middle ground between the highly structured interview and the unstructured or informal interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This type of interview was selected because I wanted to gather similar information from each participant. Their stories and examples may vary but the semi-structured interview will allow for rapport building, dialogue, and gives the researcher the ability to change course and respond to the situation at hand (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Interview questions will be identified before the interview but will be asked in no particular order which allows for the desired flexibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Interviews will be held in a conference room on campus that is not affiliated with University Housing. I felt it was important for the participants to meet in a location not affiliated with our work to allow the participant to feel safe during the interview.

Due to the nature of the problem of practice, I felt that the semi-structured interview would be the best fit for this study. A research interview is described as a process where a researcher and participant share in a conversation, guided by questions that target a specific research study (DeMarrais, 2004). In highly structured interviews, the researcher asks a list of pre-determined questions to the participants and does not stray from that list regardless of the participant's response (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Given the topic of racism in the workplace, a highly structured interview would not allow for the dialogue and ability to ask follow-up questions. A semi-structured interview allows for more fluidity during the interview for interviewers to ask follow-up questions and go further into depth as they see fit (Kallio et al., 2016). I did not feel that a structured interview was appropriate for this study due. I felt that the lack of flexibility to pivot during the interview could come across as cold to the participant. I also felt that the unstructured interview was not the appropriate selection based on its purpose which is to gather information to create questions for later interviews (Merriam & Tidsell, 2015).

In this study, we sought to understand lived experiences of the participants and want the interview to be more conversational. Because the data we seek to attain cannot be observed, the semi-structured interview is highly valuable and the most appropriate tool regarding this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I felt that this type of interview would allow the necessary flexibility to ask follow-up questions or ask the participant to go further into depth as needed.

### **Focus groups**

A focus group is a group interview with multiple people that have knowledge of a particular topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A major benefit of this data collection tool is

the ability for the group to co-construct their responses in an interactive way that the semi-structured interviews simply cannot accomplish (Merriam & Tisdell 2015). Another significant benefit of the focus group in this study is that it allows for participants to discuss everyday issues that they normally choose not to (Seale et al., 2003). Given the nature of their work, custodial staff very rarely have opportunities to engage in dialogue with one another outside of small talk they may have in passing. I felt it was important to engage in a deeper discussion regarding challenges that they face in and outside of work to allow for the co-creation of tangible changes that should come from this study.

Following the completion of the individual interviews, participants will be part of a focus group. The focus group will serve to accomplish three goals; member checking, to synthesize data collectively and review an action plan aimed at improving my leadership. Member checking is a means of obtaining qualitative integrity where participants have the opportunity to hear the synthesized data in the words of the researcher and then given an opportunity to provide feedback (Candela, 2019). This will also serve as an opportunity for dialogue and deeper discussion should a participant be reminded of additional relevant examples. Similar to the individual interviews, the focus group will take place at a neutral location on campus to promote a safe and comfortable environment for participants to engage with the topic.

### **Research Procedure**

This qualitative study utilized Stinger's action research interacting spiral (Mertler, 2019). Each of the four stages were implemented to better understand how custodial staff members interact with and respond to racism in the workplace and their expectations of leadership in creating an anti-racist workplace. The planning stage

involved the series of steps that were taken to prepare for the study. The acting stage put the planning stage in motion and involved the data collection for this study, completed through semi-structured interviews. Following the acting stage came the development stage. In the development stage, an action plan was created for the purpose of reviewing with the participants in focus group format in the reflection stage (Mertler, 2019).

### **Planning Stage**

The planning stage of this study included a listening tour of conversations with key leaders on campus with the intention of building trust around the study and seeking guidance from Black educators who could help limit unintended harm caused by the study. I talked with the Chief Equity Officer and Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the College of education, the Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and a faculty member from the Department of Anthropology. Each person has been selected to provide insight and guidance in creating and implementing the study. Simultaneously, I began having conversations with departmental leadership to inform the chain of command of the study. Following the listening tour and departmental conversations, a literature review was conducted to become more familiar with the relevant literature and practices that would be applicable to this study.

The next step taken during the planning stage was to begin creating the pilot study. I connected with three Black colleagues who recently left the institution who I had worked with closely and had been in dialogue with regarding racism in our country and the workplace. I explained the Problem of Practice and my research questions to each person and offered them the opportunity to participate in the pilot. During the pilot study, all 3 participants will come together via a virtual meeting. During this time, I read

through all of the interview questions first and then we will reviewed each, one by one. Following the review of the interview questions, the group worked together to create appropriate focus group questions.

Following the pilot study, I began to identify the participants that would be eligible to participate in the study. Due to a high turnover rate, it was anticipated that less than half of the staff would have been employed for longer than 1 year. I chose to focus on the staff members I had worked with in my previous position in hopes of having deep, open, and honest conversations with my participants. As participants were identified, they received information explaining the steps of the study. This information was emailed to them as well as printed and read to them to ensure it was fully understood.

### **Acting Stage**

The acting stage included the individual interviews that were conducted. Each interview was expected to last about one hour but was given up to two hours if needed. A day, time, and the location was be shared with each of the participants. At the time of the individual interviews, participants did not know the identity of other participants. Upon the arrival of the participant, each person was read a waiver and was asked to sign. Once the waiver was signed, a brief set of instructions was read before beginning the interview, informing the participant that the study would be recorded and that their anonymity would be protected using a pseudonym. Once the participant agreed to their pseudonym, the semi-structured interview began. Following the completion of each of the individual interviews, I informed the participants of the timeline moving forward, including the dates of the last interview and the date of the focus group. Priori & emergent coding were used to identify themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

## **Developing Plan**

Using the data collected during the individual interviews, I created an action plan to improve my practices as a supervisor related to supervising Black staff members. The plan includes tangible steps I can take in my daily interactions with my staff, advocacy for the team when their viewpoints are not considered, and long term changes that need to be made to improve the working conditions and lifestyle of the people who keep this campus running.

## **Reflecting Stage**

The focus group convened around 10 days following the last individual interview. Once all of the participants arrived, I will read the instructions to the group and talked through the expectations of the group, following the focus group. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the fact that participants are also co-workers, it was important to have a conversation about leaving the conversations in the room and respecting each person's truth and confidentiality. Once the participants agreed to these terms, the focus group began.

I began the focus group by sharing a recount of major themes and topics that emerged from the individual interviews for the purpose of making sure the stories and experiences are actively represented through a process called member checking (Candela, 2019). Participants were given the opportunity to clarify or add to what they had shared in the interview if they feel it necessary. Once this first step was complete, we continued reviewing the synthesis of data looking at their experiences with racism and their expectations of leadership. The participants were given the opportunity to share additional stories they may have recalled after the interview or details they were not



comfortable sharing at first. This allowed for triangulation to occur where participants were sharing consistent information from their interview to the focus group. Once this was complete, I reviewed my personal action plan that would inform and improve my leadership. Participants were given the chance to provide feedback and talk through ideas on how to put this into action. Following the completion of the focus group, I took additional time to reflect, ideate, and synthesize the information. I revised the action plan based on the feedback received and shared it with my supervisor.

### **Methodology Timeline**

The timeline below outlines the chronological steps taken from the planning stage to the reflection stage. Throughout the course of the timeline represented below, observation and journaling were used to aid in the triangulation of data. Triangulation was also accomplished through recounting stories and making sure the words of the participants were accurately represented in the data. Participants were consistent in the stories they shared in their semi-structured interviews and in the focus group.

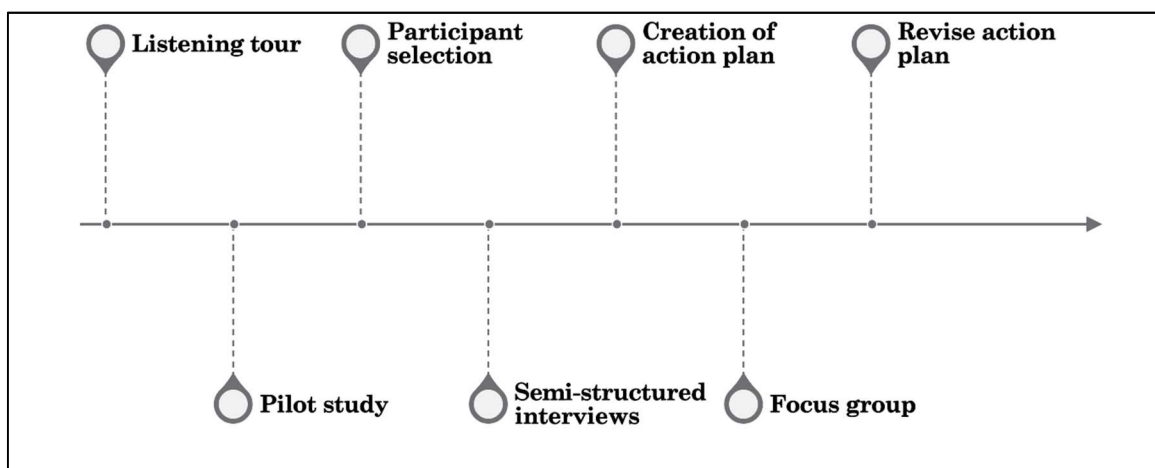


Figure 1.1  
Methodology Timeline

**Participant descriptions:**

**Sally Smith**– Sally is a 55-year-old woman who has been working at this institution since 2014. Sally has worked in an office setting, retail, the restaurant industry, and owned her own cleaning company before taking a position as a parking attendant at the same university. After a month at the parking garage, Sally saw a custodial manager position open and applied. Sally worked in that position for close to 7 years before recently being promoted to one of two assistant director positions. Sally is married, has a dog, and lives about twenty minutes from campus.

**Teresa Talbot** – Teresa is a 48-year-old woman who has worked at this institution and in her current, full-time custodial staff position for 18 years. Teresa worked in fast food for several years and had always heard of people getting jobs at the university and decided to apply. Teresa has loved working at this institution and identifies as a true people person who loves to help others. While working in fast food, Teresa was often asked to be a greeter because of her infectious personality and warm, welcoming personality. Teresa has three kids, one of which is also a custodial staff member on campus.

**Bill Barker** – Bill is a 29-year-old man who has worked at this institution for ten years. After graduating high school, Bill worked at McDonalds for a few years before moving to his current position as a full-time custodial staff member. Bill has moved around campus and has worked in several buildings on campus. Bill grew up in the surrounding area and his mom and aunt also work on the custodial staff team. Bill is not married and lives at home with his mom and family.

**Jackie Johns** – Jackie is a 37-year-old woman who has been in this department for three years and is working as a “temp” staff member. In this position, Jackie is paid hourly but has no paid leave or benefits. Jackie had been working in the warehouse setting but moved to campus facilities around 5 years ago. After two years working for campus facilities, Jackie applied for a position thinking it was within campus facilities but was with housing. The hiring manager called her, offered her the position three years ago, and Jackie is hoping to move to a full-time position withing housing, soon. Jackie has a husband of twelve years, five kids, and lives about forty minutes from campus.

### **Treatment, Processing, and Analysis of Data**

This qualitative analysis will draw on the lived experiences of Black staff members to determine ways of improving supervision efforts and decreasing racism in the workplace. Both the first and second research questions were answered through the analysis of the individual semi-structured interview data as well as the focus group data.

The data collected during this study was coded using both a priori & emergent codes. Priori coding refers to predetermined and inductive categories of data established by the researcher before data collection begins (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I used emergent coding for this study which stems from data that is collected during the study that was not previously identified through the a priori codes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

### **Summary**

In summary, this study was completed in two phases. The first phase included semi-structured interviews and the synthesis of data. The second phase included the focus group and another round of data synthesis. Rooted in the idea of a racially just society, this investigative study provides university leadership with a better understanding of how

Black staff members experience racism in the workplace. The study evaluates the stories and experiences of Black staff members through individual interviews and focus groups. Identifying tangible ways to improve the workplace environment for Black staff has never been more critical and timelier.

Each piece of the puzzle was carefully reviewed, analyzed, and synthesized to provide the most accurate recommendations to improve the workplace environment for Black staff. I learned of undocumented issues Black staff face as well as unwritten rules, myths, or discrepancies that leadership can be clearer about in the future. Capturing the expectations Black staff have of an anti-racist workplace in an effort to improve leadership skills was the most critical component of this study. Through all of these efforts, I aim to model the way for other administrators to take action and find ways to live as an anti-racist, create positive change, and be open to accepting that our behaviors of the past may not reflect or support the environments we need to create to allow staff of all backgrounds to thrive.

## **CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS**

The purpose of this action research study is to better understand the experiences of Black custodial staff members as it relates to racism in the workplace to improve methods of support and supervision skills of their leadership. This study seeks to understand the expectations Black staff have of supervisors to narrow the gap between expectation and the actual support received. The problem of practice for this study is uncovering racism experienced by custodial staff members and exploring how supervisors can do a better job supporting Black and Brown staff.

I decided to approach this action research study as an investigation due to my limited experience in the facilities profession and my identity as a White man. I began this study with the understanding that racism exists, is prevalent, and impacts Black staff members daily. This study aims to understand how it manifests itself on a college campus and within residence halls. I have selected methods commonly associated with Practitioner Inquiry (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019) and Action Research (Efron & Ravid, 2013) for this study. These theories and methods are the key elements of the methodological framework for this study thus allowing the study to unfold as a cyclical, collaborative, and empowering investigation into the lived experiences of the participants in this study, including myself. The theoretical framework for this study is Critical Race Theory (CRT). The very underpinnings of CRT state that People of Color do experience racism on a regular basis and need their White colleagues to listen, look within themselves and create real change that may not benefit them personally in any way.

Through understanding the experiences of Black staff, a tangible list of ways to improve the supervision of Black staff aims to be created. This study aims to answer the two following research questions.

Research Questions:

1. How does everyday racism present itself to Black staff members working as custodians at a Primarily White Institution (PWI) in the South?
2. How do Black staff describe their expectations of supervisors related to dismantling oppression?

This chapter will serve as an in-depth analysis of the data collected in this study from the semi-structured interviews and focus group. More importantly, this chapter will tell the stories of four dedicated, hardworking, custodial staff members that show up to work each day fighting to overcome barriers, make a living, and seek to be heard and understood. Through a deep analysis of the data as it relates to the two research questions, each person's story and experiences with racism in the workplace will be told. Lastly, I will share any remaining themes from the data collection process.

### **Data Presentation**

Throughout each of the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked questions about their identity as a Black person and how it is impacted by working here, their experiences with racism ranging from micro-aggressions to more severe instances of racism, and their expectations of supervisors or those in leadership related to dismantling oppression. Each of the four interviews were very different from one another but shared

some of the same sentiments, struggles, and challenges and their peers. The following section will review the major themes through the firsthand words of the participants.

### **Theme 1 – Feeling invisible**

The theoretical framework of this study, CRT, clearly states that racism is a chronic, everyday experience for People of Color in the United States and that the White majority for whom society caters to, makes it nearly impossible for People of Color to address because racism is ignored and not acknowledged (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). All four participants expressed in their own way that life as a Black person is extremely difficult and that they often feel “less than” while at work while in the company of primarily White students and staff members. When asked about how working at this institution impacts her identity as a Black woman, Sally shared:

It feels like they want you as a worker, not as a person. They still had that old-school mentality that you're still second-class citizen with the workload, the pay. There's no gratitude, there's no thank you, or no, we appreciate you. It's just, okay, this is what we want you to do and do it. (Smith, S. (2021, July 26). Personal interview [Personal interview].

Sally later shared a story about two of her staff members that showed up late for work one day. Sally was called into her White supervisor's office to speak with her supervisor and the supervisor's boss. Sally was questioned and interrogated about why the two staff members showed up late as if it was Sally's fault. Sally was talked down to and described it by saying, “they talk to me like I didn't matter,” (Smith, S. 2021, July 26). Personal interview [Personal interview]). Sally grew increasingly upset while sharing this story, explaining that all she wanted was to be treated fairly.

A common experience that all four participants talked about was the sentiment of being forgotten, ignored, or not acknowledged by coworkers, students, and visitors.

Jackie Johns explained this in depth by saying:

A lot of people when they have issues when it comes to race, their go to thing is to usually just step away. So, a lot of people aren't outright doing racist things or saying racist things they're just keeping their distance, you know like, I don't really mess with you so, we don't speak, you can't. There's not a lot you can do about it, but you just can't. You can't change that person's mentality, the way a person thinks and the way a person sees things, and so you just kind of take it for what it is sometimes. (Johns, J. (2021, July 29). Personal interview [Personal interview]).

Jackie was trying to think about tangible examples of racism she has experienced when she shared this thought. In Jackie's eyes, when a person chooses not to acknowledge a "hello" or "good morning," it tells her all she needs to know about that person. Jackie described this as an unwritten mutual understanding that she'll stick to doing her thing and let that person do their thing.

I don't want to say it's something we're used to, which we are, but it's just, you always have your select students that, like, they don't want to get on the elevator, or pass you in the hall and not look up or you're speaking they don't speak back and you just kind of be like okay well there goes another one of those but you don't have as many as you think, most of them are really nice, they really are, but some of them are just, it's just obvious sometimes. (Johns, J. (2021, July 29). Personal interview [Personal interview]).



Teresa had shared the same experience as Jackie with colleagues in the housing department. A large role of the custodial staff members' day is taking trash out from all parts of the building. Teresa shared frustrations regarding a common interaction between her and office staff when making rounds to pull trash:

All these people sitting at these desks. And you can speak to them, and they look you right in your face and not speak. That's the worst thing in the world when you speak to somebody and they look you in your face and don't speak, but then a white man come behind you and he speaks to that same person, and they have a smile around their neck. How does that work? And you want me to come pull your trash but you can't speak to me? Come on. (Talbot, T. (2021, July 28).

Personal interview [Personal interview].

Recounting this experience was painful and upsetting for Teresa. Teresa explained that housing leadership often refer to working in housing as a “family,” but Teresa felt that the family is for the White people and the Black custodial staff are only around to pick up after the White staff. While being ignored or not acknowledged is a common occurrence for these participants, there were several tangible examples of racism they experienced over their time ranging from microaggressions to more severe instances of racism.

## **Theme 2 – Tangible Examples of Everyday Racism**

CRT clearly states that racism is a chronic, everyday experience for People of Color in the United States and that the White majority for whom society caters to, makes it nearly impossible for People of Color to address because racism is ignored and not acknowledged (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). When asked about how it felt to be called

the N-word while on his lunch break one day, participant Bill Barker shared, “When you black you basically grow up with racism so it's not nothing really new,” (Barker, B. (2021, July 28). Personal interview [Personal interview]. All four participants shared this sentiment and painfully recounted examples of racism they personally experienced.

During the interviews, I asked questions related to the participant's experiences related to microaggressions as well as their experiences with more severe instances of racism which provide direct answers to research question one. Some of the participants were hesitant to share at first given my relationship as their direct or indirect supervisor and not wanting me to think less of them. Some of the participants struggled to think of specific examples, saying there were so many things going through their mind and never being asked to talk about it before. Sally recounted a painful example with a person in leadership in the department that took place in the main housing office:

It was with one of the directors. I was at the main housing office. I said, hi my name is Sally, nice to meet you. They say their name, we shook their hands. He turns and walks down the hallway and I turn around. I look and he's wiping hand on his pants. Black doesn't come off on you. I can shake your hand and my color is not going to come off on you. Oh, I don't have any type of disease to give you. So, in that instance. I felt less than a person. But in my mind, I said there's more than one way to skin a cat. So I didn't shake his hand anymore. I touched him on his back. How do you get that off? Might not be the correct way to handle it. But in my mind. Let me show you how I still can touch you, and you still feel some type of way. I'm going to make you speak to me. I'm going to make you acknowledge me one way or another, and he still didn't. No matter what I

did, he still didn't, so that, that, let me know that racism is all through campus is this all through. (Smith, S. (2021, July 26). Personal interview [Personal interview]).

Sally shared this example when I asked her to tell me about any microaggressions she had experienced in the workplace. When asked the same question, Teresa shared an encounter she had in the lobby of the building she works in. Teresa shared:

I was in my building cleaning my lobby, and it seemed like this mom wanted to go to the restroom, but she saw me by the restroom. She didn't want to go, but it took her child to come down and tell her it was all right to come near me. It's like she was scared of me. I wanted to tell that student, baby I want to tell you mom's scared of me and I ain't did nothin. (Talbot, T. (2021, July 28). Personal interview [Personal interview]).

Teresa told this story and was almost laughing in what seemed like disbelief or shock that this happened in the lobby she worked. In a follow up question, I asked Teresa how this interaction made her feel and she instantly started crying and said, "Yeah, for me, that hurts. That hurt me. I'm getting emotional because it's serious, and for me as a black woman, I have to be careful," (Talbot, T. (2021, July 28). Personal interview [Personal interview]).

In my interview with Bill, he shared some experiences related to microaggressions while working in an all-women's residence hall. Bill shared that he notices when students clutch their purse when he gets on the elevator, stand further away from him, walk faster or slower than him even when heading in the same direction to avoid interacting with him, or just generally just ignore his presence on the hall. Bill

didn't seem to be bothered by this, claiming, "Usually, I tend to stay to myself to a point where I don't. I ignore all things that have nothing to do with me really, really go get it done kind of person and so on," (Barker, B. (2021, July 28). Personal interview [Personal interview]. All the participants detailed frequent experiences where they were asked clean the "n-word" off of countless white-boards on their hallways, heard White students signing rap music and yelling the "n-word" loudly in their rooms, as well as finding symbols of hate such as a noose or pictures of monkeys taped on the door of the custodial office.

### **Theme 3 – Expect Nothing, Appreciate Everything**

Racism is so deeply embedded in our society that it goes unnoticed by the White passerby, making it so incredibly important to "unmask" and name the individual occurrences of racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1998). The greatest challenge to overcoming racism is that the White majority needs to both acknowledge that it exists and commit to making change that may result in a loss of social or economic capital (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). In an attempt to answer the second research question, I asked several questions related to the participant's expectations of supervisors.

Sally was the first interview that I conducted, and her response struck me. When asked, "What are your expectations of your supervisor related to dismantling oppression in the workplace," Sally said:

I expect nothing, because when you put that expectation on one person and then you get let down, you're gonna blame that person and that's not fair on that person because it's so much that needs to be rerouted, regrouped, revamped from top to bottom, bottom to top. And if you put that on one person and that person gets to

where they need to be and the door slams, you're going to blame that person. I don't want to blame anybody for something that's been set in stone for ages. So if he or she doesn't have an ally or many allies, they're going to run to so many brick walls that they're going to get discouraged and stop. So you don't want to put that on a person. So I expect nothing, and appreciate everything. (Smith, S. (2021, July 26). Personal interview [Personal interview]).

I understood Sally's point about not putting this burden on one person, but the point that struck me was that she expected no sort of support or advocacy from leadership regarding racism in the workplace. Sally continues with this train of thought and explains further when I asked, "What is your expectation of leadership regarding the acknowledgement of or support during racially sensitive issues in the media, ie the murder of George Floyd or Breonna Taylor?" and she says:

So, here's the thing again, because we've been through so much we don't expect anything. When it comes to being treated fairly, black folks, we don't expect to be treated fairly, whatsoever. So again, I expect nothing but appreciate everything that people do. Because, don't get me wrong, we're not in this fight by ourselves. There's plenty of good people, white people, in the fight with us. But the people at the top is not in it with us. So, if Sally and Margie are standing side by side, Sally black, Margie white, and we're standing side by side. I appreciate what Margie is doing. Because Margie doesn't get what I get, until you walk in our shoes, you don't understand what we're going through, so we don't expect anything from anybody. Because again, Margie can walk away and go back to

doing what she wants at any time, because Margie is White. (Smith, S. (2021, July 26). Personal interview [Personal interview].

Bill had a different take on these questions. Bill felt that leadership can make significant impact through rewarding good employees with growth opportunities and promotions. Bill felt that it wasn't necessary for supervisors to acknowledge racial issues in the media or in society because we have a job to do, and it doesn't need to be spoken on. When asked the same question about dismantling oppression in the workplace, Teresa responded, "I don't feel anyone can do anything about it, not on this campus. We'll do what we need to work together because we need that check. Ain't nobody on this campus could make it better," (Talbot, T. (2021, July 28). Personal interview [Personal interview]. Jackie's response to these questions let me to believe she had been on the receiving end of poor treatment in the past that was witnessed by a White supervisor who did nothing to correct the behavior in the moment. Jackie felt that a supervisor's responsibility is to take immediate action and show support for the Black staff member by correcting the behavior in the moment. Jackie summed this up by saying, "Don't tell me you'll go talk to that person later, they disrespected me in front of the group, why can't they be held accountable in front of the group?"

In my final question to the participants related to their expectations of supervisors I asked, "What do you think supervisors of black staff members need to know to better support their supervisees?" All four of the participants shared about wanting to be heard, seen, and treated fairly. All four participants shared about being tired of fighting this same fight day in and day out. Sally summed up this thought well when she said this following statement regarding White people being aware of or acknowledging the issues

Black people face, “I just want their eyes to be opened, it's like their eyes are wide shut. They're opened but they're closed when it comes to us.” (Smith, S. (2021, July 26).  
Personal interview [Personal interview]. Hearing and analyzing this data come with great responsibility and necessary action. In the final chapter I will share my interpretation of the data, reflections, as well as the implementation plan that I will put in motion following this action research study.

## CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSIONS

The findings of any action research study should inform the practitioner-researchers practice going forward. Based on the key findings discussed in chapter 4, this chapter will explore my reflections on action research, racism in the workplace as experienced by custodial staff members at a PWI in the South and describe the implementation plan for the changes I will enact in my continuing practice. The problem of practice for this study is uncovering racism experienced by custodial staff members and exploring how supervisors can do a better job supporting Black and Brown staff. The purpose of this action research study is to better understand the experiences of Black custodial staff members as it relates to racism in the workplace to improve methods of support and supervision skills of their leadership. This investigation seeks to understand the tangible examples of racism in the workplace.

The research questions were specifically chosen to imply that racism does in fact exist and is not in question. Supervisors need to join this conversation with the understanding that their Black employees *do* experience racism, and that the supervisor plays a critical role in being aware of, believing in, and fighting against the spaces where it exists. A better understanding of how racism manifests can better equip supervisors to have an open conversation with supervisees about their experiences and how they can be an ally and advocate for them. This study is not an investigation of if racism exists, it seeks to understand how it manifests in the workplace at a PWI in the South.



The previous chapter detailed the major findings from this action research study. The first major finding was that the participants often feel invisible, unacknowledged, and unappreciated. The participants shared several specific stories where their presence was disregarded, and they were made to feel less than their White counterparts. The second major finding was the many different examples of racism that are experienced in the workplace. Examples ranged from microaggressions to more severe instances of racism that were experienced by all the participants on a regular basis. The final major finding surrounds the participant's expectations of supervisors related to racism in the workplace. Each of the participants shared in the sentiments that they expected nothing and appreciate everything regarding leadership sticking up for them and for the larger custodial staff team. The participants each had additional thoughts on their expectations of supervisors, focusing on different aspects of their experience or the role.

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will review the implications of the study to include connections to the problem of practice and literature review, transferability of the findings to other settings, as well as any additional contexts this study may influence. This chapter will also reflect on the methodology of the study and detail the implementation plan following this study.

### **Implications**

Following the review of the interviews and focus group data there were three key findings that emerged from this study. The first key finding is that participants often feel invisible, not acknowledged and forgotten. Whether it is not being considered in discussions or decision making, ignored in social settings, or disregarded when offering ideas or suggestions, the participants felt that custodial staff are invisible. The second key

finding confirmed the theoretical framework's underlying principal that Black people experience racism daily. The second key finding defines the specific ways that the participants experience racism in their daily work. The third key finding was related to the expectations the participants have of their supervisors related to dismantling oppression and combating racism in the workplace.

The implications that are drawn from these key findings impact my daily work as the leader of the custodial staff team. It is critical to help the custodial staff be seen and feel heard. Creating opportunities for other staff and students to get to know these staff members and see the value they bring to the student experience will help bring them to the foreground of the residential setting. Educating housing partners on the ways custodial staff experience racism in their daily work and calling-in those who are contributors to these examples of racism or oppression in our own department. Lastly, continuing to show up for this team and put advocacy into action may create hope and lead a shift in the expectation that leadership cares about the team. Black staff members need to see sustained action towards creating an anti-racist workplace rather than expecting no action from leadership.

The problem of practice for this study is uncovering racism experienced by custodial staff members and exploring how supervisors can do a better job supporting Black and Brown staff. The first key finding from this study explains that the participants feel as though they are among a forgotten group of people that work at the university, often unacknowledged or considered. This information provides a tangible opportunity to create spaces for our staff to intentionally interact with other units within housing. The daily work schedule of the custodial staff doesn't allow for much socializing outside of

the small teams they are a part of. Although two or three different units within housing may work in the same building daily, it is possible for each group to stick to their silo and only interact when necessary. Encouraging and promoting the development of relationships, collaboration, and unity between residence life and custodial staff, the two most forward-facing units in housing, should create more opportunities where custodial staff are acknowledged, included in building initiatives, and truly considered as part of the community.

Key finding two is directly tied to the problem of practice as the specific examples of racism experienced in the workplace are defined in chapter 4. Addressing this concern will require collaboration with the departmental diversity committee to raise awareness of these lived experiences as well as provide continued educational opportunities for staff members. Many of the examples shared by the participants detailed encounters with other staff members in housing in units outside of facilities.

The last key finding related to the expectations custodial staff have of their leadership ties to the latter part of the problem of practice focused on supervisors doing a better job supporting Black and Brown staff. Each of these key findings helps contribute to the information needed to make positive change for a severely underrepresented group on campus. These findings impact my every interaction with my staff.

As the data collection and analysis process has taken place, we are preparing for 7,000 students to return to campus, our busiest time of the year. These findings have changed my perspective in the ways I create opportunities for my staff to interact with other units. Immediately following the interviews and learning about how the participants felt invisible, I decided to pilot an idea that stemmed from the interviews by setting up

meetings with residence life and the custodial team to meet and greet before opening. We took an hour out of our busy schedule to do some community building and for each team to explain more about their roles and to be able to ask questions. The simple notion of being invited to something like this was monumental. While some were hesitant at first because it was out of their comfort zone, most really enjoyed the experience and were thankful it happened. The students and our custodial staff ended up dancing, singing, and creating a team chant for one of the buildings on campus. These types of opportunities that need to continue happening to create that new layer of support and inclusion for the custodial team. Increased education for other housing staff members and sustained advocacy will all contribute to positive change.

An additional consideration that needs to be mentioned is the pay for custodial staff. Our society perpetuates systemic racism through the educational pay gap (Thomas, 2021). Pay was brought up during the focus group when we were discussing an idea where other staff in housing can work with custodial staff for a day to see first-hand how difficult their work really is. One participant shared that while they thought it was a good idea, anyone can come clean for day on their big salary but really won't know what it's like to try to survive on \$10.00 an hour. That comment struck me and is another important takeaway for me in my role. While I have very little ability to make a significant increase for the custodial staff salaries, it is a necessary change that needs to be made if we truly want to show our team, we appreciate their work and value them as human beings.

As I continue to reflect on the key findings of this study, I feel that the experiences of the participants in this study are not limited to just this campus. Whether it

is a janitor in a high school, custodial staff member in an office setting, or other college custodians, I feel that in most situations, these cleaning professionals have likely experienced a work setting where they are not acknowledged by coworkers and that they experience racism in the workplace daily.

Moving forward, I am interested in diving deeper into the intersectionality of the custodial staff position and Black staff members. Some of the challenges related to feeling invisible or not advocated for experienced by the Black custodial staff members are very possibly also experienced by White custodial staff members. The difference is that the Black custodial staff members are also experiencing the daily instances of racism. I am also interested in learning the experiences of custodial staff in other settings to gain a better understanding of the true transferability of the study. Lastly, and most significantly, I plan to have more in depth conversations with the custodial staff on this campus that did not participate in the study. I am interested to hear additional perspectives and give more staff the opportunity to talk about these issues they are typically never asked about.

### **Reflection on Methodology**

In order to uncover and illuminate the traditionally oppressed and silenced voices of Black Americans in the workplace, this study used an investigative action research approach (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019; Efron & Ravid, 2013). This approach is grounded in the theoretical framework known as Inquiry as Stance, a theory that proposes that practitioners can make significant change and improvements for those around them by questioning, challenging, and creating

knowledge to improve their lives and the lives they serve (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015).

I have identified three limitations through the completion of this study. The first limitation of the study regards the lack of racial diversity among potential participants on the custodial staff team. Being that over 95% of custodial staff and supervisors are Black, when participants tried answering questions regarding how they are treated in comparison to White counterparts, participants struggled to answer these questions.

The second limitation refers to the observed challenges and lived experiences of the participants. This study successfully identified the specific examples of racism that the participants experience regularly. I feel that the limitation involves the blurring of the line between the participants Black identity and their custodian identity. Because both identities are underrepresented and underserved, there were several concerning examples shared that were difficult to decipher between the root cause; was this maltreatment tied to the participant's Black identity, custodial staff identity, or both? Some of the challenges related to feeling invisible or unacknowledged in the role may not be specific to only Black custodians. That very well may be an issue custodial staff face broadly. For this reason, I feel this was a limitation of this study even though the data collected is relevant and significant. Had I anticipated this limitation I would have asked different questions during the interview to specifically address the intersection of being a Black person and a custodian. I see this as a potential opportunity to have a follow up conversation with participants to dive deeper into this topic.

The third limitation of this study involves the power dynamic of being the director and indirect supervisor of the participants. Participants may not have felt that they could be fully honest in their responses for fear of retaliation. While we changed the location from their typical workday and made clear the goals and purpose of the interview, the power dynamic I hold as their supervisor remains in place. For these reasons there may be additional stories, examples, and perspectives that were not captured in this study.

As I consider future research on this topic, I would consider expanding outside of just custodial staff members to diversify the participant pool. I am curious how the results may differ when including staff who work in different departments and functional areas throughout the university. Being that I am new to facilities and have spent most of my career in residence life, I am certain that a participant pool that works on a team of primarily White staff members would lead to far different results. I did not anticipate the lack of diversity among custodians playing a role in this study, specifically regarding questions about how White and Black counterparts are treated differently. While custodians may interact with White colleagues, it is difficult to know how they are treated when only seeing them in passing or working together sparingly. Had this limitation been anticipated, I would have changed some of the interview questions to have been better prepared for this reality.

When considering the methodology and design of the study, there are some changes I would make for future studies. As mentioned, I would change the interview questions to be better prepared for the lack of racial diversity among custodial staff members and to address the intersectionality between participants' Black and custodial

staff identities. I feel that a second study focused solely on the latter would provide a further understanding of the challenges each of these two marginalized identities face.

Action research gives power to the practitioner to take control and play an integral role in improving the practices that impact their students. Practitioners are empowered to take matters into their own hands as the daily problems they face are either not the ones being studied by traditional educational research, or the findings are too general to apply to the varying issues of every classroom. In the next section of this chapter, I will detail the implementation plan I intend to put into action because of the findings of this study. The implementation plan will review the clarification of the problem following data analysis, a discussion of the next cycle of action research on this topic, as well as tangible changes I intend to implement in my daily work as a result of this study.

### **Implementation plan**

Following the completion of this action research study there are tangible takeaways and next steps that I have identified for my daily work and future research. This study was designed to create a cyclical, collaborative, and empowering investigation into the lived experiences of the participants in this study, including myself. The key findings and new knowledge identified through the completion of this study will help guide my daily work as I lead this custodial team for the years to come. The problem of practice for this study is uncovering racism experienced by custodial staff members and exploring how supervisors can do a better job supporting Black and Brown staff.

The first step of my implementation plan is to continue creating space to have these conversations with our custodial staff. Following the interviews, the participants have shared that while they still have low expectations of much changing, the ability for



them to vent and get to talk freely about these topics was therapeutic. Some of the participants encouraged and pleaded that I continue making my way around campus to allow more people the opportunity to share their story. This aligns well with the cyclical nature of action research to allow me to make continued changes to the custodial experience, gathering feedback and suggestions, and assessing change over time to the custodial experience. It is my goal to make sure that my staff feel seen, heard, and acknowledged daily by myself and my leadership team. This is very much in our control and addresses the first key finding of this study where the participants shared they feel invisible. In addition to the actions the custodial leadership team can take regarding helping our staff feel seen and heard, it is important that we reiterate the processes and procedures in place for reporting workplace instances of racism or discrimination through our Office of Equal Opportunity Programs. These resources are in place to protect employees and students from discrimination and it's imperative that our staff are familiar with the process.

The second step of my implementation plan is to seek opportunities for collaboration and positive exposure for the custodial staff. Through an in-depth analysis of the data which made clear that custodial staff feel invisible on a campus of 35,000 people, this is an important daily initiative that must remain at the forefront of my work. I see this as a brand-new problem of practice for a future intervention-based study with the goal to improve the lived experience of our campus custodians. This new problem of practice will seek to put changes into effect over a period with the purpose of assessing its effectiveness. In this study I would include all custodial staff rather than a small sampling of the population as I did in this study. This intervention would also explore

educational initiatives for housing staff and residential students to raise awareness of the specific ways custodial staff experience racism on this campus.

The third initiative of my implementation plan will involve a professional development curriculum meant to give back to the custodial staff. Many of the staff have not completed high school but have dreams of obtaining their General Education Development (GED). Every other unit in housing allows for staff to participate in professional development opportunities. It is time to invest in our custodial staff and help them seek opportunities related to their daily work but also their personal development as well. This curriculum will include resume development, mock interviews, and other initiatives that will be developed through conversations with the staff. Creating these development opportunities reinforces the concept that leadership is invested in and care about the custodial staff.

Some additional action items I plan to include in my daily work following this study include finding new ways to acknowledge and recognize the hard work of our staff, find ways to collaborate with other units in housing, specifically residence life, and to continue to acknowledge critical incidents in the media, in our city, and or on our campus, rather than ignoring these issues that instill fear in our Black staff daily. Lastly and most importantly, I look forward to showing up to work each day and serving these custodians. I want my team to know they have someone in their corner that will advocate for them, stand behind them, and celebrate their successes and accomplishments along the way.

Completing this action research study has changed my life. I have had the opportunity to take a deep look into the lives of four vulnerable professionals that opened

their hearts and minds for the purposes of this study and for this I am eternally grateful. I feel a sense of responsibility to use this information for good and to continue fighting for this underrepresented and underserved group of fantastic people. The final section of this chapter will reflect on the goals of action research and how this work has furthered professionalizing my work through the design and enactment of practitioner research.

### **Conclusions**

As I prepare my final reflections on this action research study, I am overwhelmed with gratitude and appreciation for the participants willingness to participate in this study. According to Herr and Anderson (2015), the goals of Action Research are: 1) The generation of new knowledge; 2) The achievement of action-oriented outcomes; 3) The education of both the researcher and the participants; 4) Results that are relevant to the local setting; and 5) Sound and appropriate research methodology (p. 67).

The key findings of this study provide tremendous insight to the experience of custodial staff members on this campus and the tangible ways that racism penetrates their workday on a regular basis. While some of the challenges of this study are specific to this campus, the key findings of this study are important to keep in mind for leaders working with similar populations on their campuses. The participants of this study had the opportunity to share their experiences, challenges, frustrations, and hardships with someone in leadership and were affirmed and heard. Aligned with the theoretical framework of this study, this intentional interruption of hegemony sends a clear message that the participant's voice matters and is valued by leadership.

As this study progressed, there were several ideas and initiatives that stemmed from the conversations and stories with the participants. The way I approach every

conversation with my staff members has changed since beginning the data collection portion of this study. I have already put some of these changes into effect and am noticing significant improvements with residence life acknowledging, recognizing, and appreciating the work of our staff. I have seen the impact this has had on student staff members learning the names of their custodial staff members, embracing them in their community, and showing their students the importance of doing so. Having worked in this department for ten years and having strong relationships in our department and on campus, I am empowered and excited to continue to lead by example and do what is right by this custodial team. I look forward to continuing to work through this problem of practice as I seek to understand the experiences of more of my staff and how I can continue building an anti-racist workplace.

Motivated in my own way to live anti-racist, I vowed to take my frustration, hurt, and sadness regarding racial injustice in our country beyond a social media post. Social media has played a large role in fueling the social unrest as injustices are being recorded, shared, and replayed repeatedly. This action research study has contributed to growing my own understanding of the ways I can tangibly advocate for and serve a severely underrepresented population on campus and in society. I can confidently say that I have grown and learned tremendously having conducted this study and will continue to do this work as I look to find ways to contribute beyond a solidarity post on social media.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, J. M. (2017). *Taking responsibility: How white student affairs professionals engage with students on whiteness and privilege* (Order No. 10264612). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1884280116). Retrieved from <https://login.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/docview/1884280116?accountid=13965>
- Akbar, M. (2020). *Beyond Ally: The Pursuit of Racial Justice*. Publish Your Purpose Press.
- Alexander, M. (2020). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. The New Press.
- Alexandrov, N. (2015, May 4). *A bloody history of police brutality in Baltimore*. The Root. [http://www.theroot.com/articles/history/2015/05/a\\_bloody\\_history\\_of\\_police\\_brutality\\_in\\_baltimore.html](http://www.theroot.com/articles/history/2015/05/a_bloody_history_of_police_brutality_in_baltimore.html)
- Altbach, P. G., & Lomotey, K., & Smith, W. A., (Eds.). (2012). *Racial Crisis in American Higher Education, The: Continuing Challenges for the Twenty-first Century*. SUNY Press.
- Arvold, N. C. (2010). *Doing our own work, a journey into whiteness: White women's struggles to become authentic racial justice allies* (Order No. 3427033). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (787893777). Retrieved from <https://login.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/docview/787893777?accountid=13965>
- Atcheson, S. (2018) *Allyship – The Key to Unlocking The Power of Diversity*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shereeatcheson/2018/11/30/allyship-the-key-to-unlocking-the-power-of-diversity/#218a392e49c6>
- Bell, D. (1999). *Wanted: A white leader able to free whites of racism*. UC Davis L. Rev., 33, 527.
- Bell, P. D., Kennedy, R., Lawrence III, C., Irons, P., Jordon, E. C., McNeil, & Ogletree, C. (1980). *Race, Racism, and American Law*. Penguin.

- Berry, M. F. (1995). *Black Resistance/White Law: A History of Constitutional Racism in America*. Penguin.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2015). The structure of racism in color-blind, “post-racial” America. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 59(11), 1358-1376.
- Bosco, J. E. (2019). *Critical efforts against white supremacy: Reflections of white women on anti-racism work within four-year colleges* (Order No. 22615005). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2316522588). Retrieved from <https://login.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/docview/2316522588?accountid=13965>
- Brown, K. T., & Ostrove, J. M. (2013). What does it mean to be an ally?: The perception of allies from the perspective of People of Color. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43(11), 2211-2222.
- Buck, S. (2010). *Acting white: The ironic legacy of desegregation*. Yale University Press.
- Burkard, A. W., Johnson, A. J., Madson, M. B., Pruitt, N., Contreras-Tadych, D. A., Kozlowski, J. M., ... & Knox, S. (2006). Supervisor Cultural Responsiveness and Unresponsiveness in Cross-Cultural Supervision. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 53(3), 288.
- Burress, P. (2018). *Fourth wave student development: Constructing student affairs-driven spaces that deliver knowledge and tools for effecting social change* (Order No. 10792682). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2051806123). Retrieved from <https://login.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/docview/2051806123?accountid=13965>
- Candela, A. G. (2019). Exploring the function of member checking. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(3), 619-628.
- Chesler, M., Lewis, A. E., & Crowfoot, J. E. (2005). *Challenging racism in higher education: Promoting justice*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2015). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation*. Teachers College Press.
- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2020). *Intersectionality*. John Wiley & Sons.

- Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (1995). *Critical race theory*. The Key Writings that formed the Movement. New York.
- Dana, N. F., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2019). *The reflective educator's guide to classroom research: Learning to teach and teaching to learn through practitioner inquiry*. Corwin.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (Eds.). (2000). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge*. Temple University Press
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2007). *Critical race theory and criminal justice*. *Humanity & Society*, 31(2-3), 133-145.
- DeMarrais, K. (2004). Qualitative interview studies: Learning through experience. *Foundations for research: Methods of inquiry in education and the social sciences*, 1(1), 51-68.
- DeTurk, S. (2011). Allies in action: The communicative experiences of people who challenge social injustice on behalf of others. *Communication Quarterly*, 59(5), 569-590
- Dick, B. (2002). *Postgraduate programs using action research*. The learning organization.
- Efron, S., Efron, E., & Ravid, R. (2013). *Action research: A practical guide*. Guilford,
- Elliott, J. R., & Smith, R. A. (2004). Race, gender, and workplace power. *American sociological review*, 69(3), 365-386.
- Ezell, M. (2001). *Advocacy in the human services*. Brooks/Cole.
- Fan, Y., Shepherd, L. J., Slavich, E., Waters, D., Stone, M., Abel, R., & Johnston, E. L. (2019). *Gender and cultural bias in student evaluations: Why representation matters*. *PloS one*, 14(2), e0209749.
- Farris, V. E. (2018). *"I Wish They Would...": The Role White Student Affairs Professionals Can Play in Disrupting Systemic Racism in the Supervision of People of Color in Higher Education* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania)
- Ferry, K. (2019). *The Black P&L Leader: Insights and Lessons from Senior Black P&L Leaders in Corporate America* (Tech. Rep.). Korn Ferry.

- Gair, M., & Mullins, G. (2001). *Hiding in plain sight. The hidden curriculum in higher education*, 21-41.  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=zBijANICUDQC&lpg=PA21&ots=hPZOrRaQc6&lr&pg=PA23#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- Gunzburger, J. S. (2017). *"Get it together, damn it!": Racism in student affairs supervision* (Order No. 10592332). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1895498418). Retrieved from  
<https://login.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/docview/1895498418?accountid=13965>
- Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2014). *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty*. Sage publications.
- Holmes, A. C. (2014). *Experiences of supervision skill development among new professionals in student affairs* (Order No. 3641027). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1627190333). Retrieved from  
<https://login.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/docview/1627190333?accountid=13965>
- Jones, W. P. (2013). *The March on Washington: Jobs, freedom, and the forgotten history of civil rights*. WW Norton & Company.
- Hudson, D. L., Neighbors, H. W., Geronimus, A. T., & Jackson, J. S. (2016). Racial discrimination, John Henryism, and depression among African Americans. *Journal of Black psychology*, 42(3), 221-243.
- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 72(12), 2954-2965.
- Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. One world.
- Kivel, P. (2017). *Uprooting racism-: How white people can work for racial justice*. New Society Publishers.
- Lachman, M. W. (2018). *A problematic yet necessary effort: White women in student affairs and anti-racist allyship*. Retrieved from  
<https://media.proquest.com/media/pq/classic/doc/4325901917/fmt/ai/rep/NPDF?s=PJIVCuLTzbHP EEHQWILTNTBZFdU%3D>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). Critical race theory in education. *The Routledge international handbook of critical education*, 110-122.



- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (2006). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Critical race theory in education: All God's children got a song*, 11, 30.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International journal of qualitative studies in education*, 11(1), 7-24.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2019). Just what is critical race theory, and what's it doing in a nice field like education?. In *Race is... race isn't* (pp. 7-30). Routledge.
- Lebron, C. J. (2017). *The making of Black Lives Matter: A brief history of an idea*. Oxford University Press.
- Machi, L. A., & McEvoy, B. T. (2016). *The literature review: Six steps to success (3rd ed.)*. Corwin.
- Magolda, P., & Delman, L. (2016). *Campus custodians in the corporate university: Castes, crossing borders, and critical consciousness*. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 47(3), 246-263.
- Mata, C. J. (2018). *White women in student affairs: Navigating race in a complex work environment* (Order No. 10978393). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2134044147). Retrieved from <https://login.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/docview/2134044147?accountid=13965>
- Matias, C. E., & Mackey, J. (2016). Breakin' down whiteness in antiracist teaching: Introducing critical whiteness pedagogy. *The Urban Review*, 48(1), 32-50.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Mertler, C. A. (2019). *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators*. Sage Publications.
- McClay, B. D. (2018). Virtue Signaling. *The Hedgehog Review*, 20(2), 141-144.
- Morris, N. (2020, May 1). *White people – this is why it's vital you speak out against racism, even if you're scared*. Metro. <https://metro.co.uk/2020/06/01/white-people-why-vital-speak-racism-even-scared-12786718/>
- Nilsson, J. E., & Schmidt, C. K. (2005). Social justice advocacy among graduate students in counseling: An initial exploration. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(3), 267-279.

- Parker, L. (2019). *Race is... race isn't: Critical race theory and qualitative studies in education*. Routledge.
- Paulk, S. J. (2018). *Exploring the role of context on racially responsive supervision: The racial identity social interaction model* (Order No. 10748916). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2030531835). Retrieved from <https://login.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/docview/2030531835?accountid=13965>
- Plagman-Galvin, J. (2018). *Exploring the multicultural competence, will, and multicultural work of student affairs educators in higher education* (Order No. 10788995). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2061079213). Retrieved from <https://login.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/docview/2061079213?accountid=13965>
- Pitcan, M., Park-Taylor, J., & Hayslett, J. (2018). Black men and racial microaggressions at work. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 66(4), 300-314.
- Ratts, M. J., DeKruyf, L., & Chen-Hayes, S. F. (2007). The ACA advocacy competencies: A social justice advocacy framework for professional school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, 11(2), 2156759X0701100203.
- Ready, M. (2000). How Did American Slavery Begin. *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, 25(2), 107-107.
- Roberts, L. M., & Mayo, A. (2019). *Toward a racially just workplace*. Harvard Business Review.
- Rose, W. L. N. (Ed.). (1999). *A documentary history of slavery in North America*. University of Georgia Press.
- Seale, C., Gobo, G., Gubrium, J. F., & Silverman, D. (Eds.). (2003). *Qualitative research practice*. Sage.
- Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 8(1), 23-44.
- Steele, D. C. (2011). *Social justice advocacy and counselor education: A study of counselor educators' and counseling interns' perceptions of social justice advocacy training* (Order No. 3455081). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (867271749). Retrieved from <https://login.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/docview/867271749?accountid=13965>

- Stone, D. (2020, July 7). *Black people are tired of explaining racism, but why are white people still not speaking out?* Open Democracy.  
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/black-people-are-tired-explaining-racism-why-are-white-people-still-not-speaking-out/>
- Stovall, D. O. (2016). *Born out of struggle: Critical race theory, school creation, and the politics of interruption*. SUNY press.
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., & Holder, A. (2008). Racial microaggressions in the life experience of Black Americans. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 39(3), 329.
- Takaki, R. (2012). *A different mirror: A history of multicultural America* (Revised edition).eBookIt. com.
- Thomas, D. S., & Mikel, M. (2021). *Understanding and Interrupting Systemic Racism: A 'Race Equality Receipt's a mechanism to promote transformational conversations and stimulate actions to redress race inequality*. In *Doing Equity and Diversity for Success in Higher Education* (pp. 325-343). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Tull, A. (2006). Synergistic supervision, job satisfaction, and intention to turnover of new professionals in student affairs. *Journal of college student development*, 47(4), 465-480.
- Thompson, A. (2003). Tiffany, friend of People of Color: White investments in antiracism. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(1), 7-29.
- Williams, R. A. (2005). *Like a loaded weapon: The Rehnquist court, Indian rights, and the legal history of racism in America*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Wingfield, A. H. (2007). The modern mammy and the angry Black man: African American professionals' experiences with gendered racism in the workplace. *Race, Gender & Class*, 196-212.
- Winston Jr, R. B., & Creamer, D. G. (2002). *Improving staffing practices*. Net Results.
- Wood, B. (1998). *The Origins of American Slavery: Freedom and Bondage in the English Colonies*. Macmillan.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following list of questions was used as an outline for the semi-structured interview questions. Where appropriate, the interviewees were asked to expand upon their answers.

1. Welcome
  - a. Review informed consent
  - b. Review format of the interview
2. Definitions
  - a. Microaggression: a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority
  - b. Oppression: prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or control.
3. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?
4. Tell me a little bit about yourself. Where did you grow up?
5. Tell me about your personal passions or areas of interest.
6. Can you tell me about your working career and what led you to this position?
7. How has your identity as a Black staff member been impacted by working here?

8. Tell me about any examples of microaggressions you have experienced in the workplace.
9. Navigating the workplace can be stressful and challenging. Tell me about any unwritten workplace rules that negatively impact you more than White counterparts.
10. Earlier I asked about microaggressions, tell me about any examples of explicit or more severe instances of racism you have experienced in the workplace.
11. What kind of conversations have you had with your supervisor regarding your experiences with racism in the workplace?
12. What are your expectations of your supervisor related to dismantling oppression?
13. What is your expectation of leadership regarding the acknowledgement of or support during racially sensitive issues in the media ie. The murder of George Floyd or Breonna Taylor?
14. What do supervisors of Black staff members need to know to better support their supervisees?
15. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences with racism in the workplace?

## APPENDIX B

### FOCUS GROUP QUESTION

The following list of questions was used as an outline for the focus group questions.

Where appropriate, the interviewees were asked to expand upon their answers. The first portion of the focus group recapped major themes from the interviews and allowed participants to reflect openly.

1. All four participants acknowledged being accustomed to or being used to racism having grown up Black; tell me about how that makes you feel?
2. Some of you acknowledged feeling as a second-class citizen in the workplace, tell me about your experiences related to feeling this way.
3. Some of you discussed the discrepancies between the way White and Black people are treated when expressing emotions. Can you tell me more about this?
4. Were there any specific examples of microaggressions that came to mind following our interview that you wanted to share today?
5. Some of you mentioned feeling like you don't have a voice to advocate for yourself or others related to race in the workplace; can anyone expand on this thought?
6. In addition to microaggressions and the severe instances of racism mentioned in your individual interviews, it was also mentioned that a common experience is

being ignored or not acknowledged as a person. Please tell me more about this experience from your perspective.

7. How does everyday racism present itself to Black staff members working in student affairs at a Primarily White Institution (PWI) in the south?
8. How do Black staff describe their expectations of supervisors related to dismantling oppression?
9. What are tangible action steps I can take in my role to foster an anti-racist workplace?