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## The Proliferation of Theoretical Paradigms Quandary: How One Novice Researcher Used Eclecticism as a Solution

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## The Proliferation of Theoretical Paradigms Quandary: How One Novice Researcher Used Eclecticism as a Solution

### Abstract

When a doctoral student plans to conduct qualitative education research, the aspect of the dissertation that often becomes problematic is determining which theoretical paradigm(s) might frame the study. In this article, the author discusses how he resolved the quandary through eclecticism. The author begins by describing briefly the purpose of his dissertation study, providing a justification for eclecticism in the selection of theories. He follows with a description of the three theories—poststructural theory, critical race theory, and critical theory—that framed his study and discusses briefly the methodology employed. The author concludes with a discussion of likely objections of his study and with an explanation of why his study was positioned within a critical postmodern paradigm.

### Keywords

Qualitative Research, Poststructural Theory, Critical Race Theory, Critical Theory, Critical Postmodern Theory, and Paradigm Proliferation

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## **The Proliferation of Theoretical Paradigms Quandary: How One Novice Researcher Used Eclecticism as a Solution**

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*When a doctoral student plans to conduct qualitative education research, the aspect of the dissertation that often becomes problematic is determining which theoretical paradigm(s) might frame the study. In this article, the author discusses how he resolved the quandary through eclecticism. The author begins by describing briefly the purpose of his dissertation study, providing a justification for eclecticism in the selection of theories. He follows with a description of the three theories—poststructural theory, critical race theory, and critical theory—that framed his study and discusses briefly the methodology employed. The author concludes with a discussion of likely objections of his study and with an explanation of why his study was positioned within a critical postmodern paradigm. Key Words: Qualitative Research, Poststructural Theory, Critical Race Theory, Critical Theory, Critical Postmodern Theory, and Paradigm Proliferation*

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When a doctoral student plans to conduct qualitative education research, the aspect of the dissertation that often becomes most problematic, that is, after the topic has been decided upon, is determining which theoretical paradigm(s) might frame the study (e.g., positivist, interpretive, critical, poststructural, neopositivist, etc.). A consequence of the growth of social science qualitative research through the “seven moments”<sup>1</sup> (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 2) over the last century has been the proliferation of theoretical paradigms (see Preissle, 2006, for a brief history of qualitative research). This proliferation has led many novice researchers into a theoretical paradigm quandary. Different aspects of this quandary have been debated; for instance, Lather (2006) claimed that paradigm proliferation is a good thing to think with, Dillard (2006) argued for cultural and spiritual considerations in paradigm proliferation, and Donmoyer (2006) questioned the use of Kuhn’s concept *paradigm* in qualitative research and the need for paradigm talk altogether (see also Wright, 2006). Other debates about the quandary have included discussions regarding epistemology (Siegel, 2006), methodology (Ercikan & Roth, 2006), and even the preparation of doctoral students (Pallas, 2001).

Here, I use the concepts *theoretical paradigm* and *theoretical framework* somewhat interchangeably and in a broader sense than Kuhn’s (1996/1962) paradigm (e.g., see Donmoyer, 2006). Specifically, I use the concepts to denote the various theoretical approaches that might frame qualitative research. I understand, however, that

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<sup>1</sup> Denzin and Lincoln (2000) identified seven distinct, yet overlapping and simultaneously operating, moments in qualitative research: the traditional (1900-1950); the modernist or golden age (1950-1970); the blurred genres (1970-1986); the crisis in representation (1986-1990); the postmodern or experimental (1990-1995); the post experimental inquiry (1995-2000); and lastly, the future (2000-) (pp. 2-3).

distinct theories are reconstituted when enacted within different paradigms (e.g., critical feminism is constituted differently than poststructural feminism; see Lather and St. Pierre [2005] in Lather, 2006, p. 37; 2007, pp. 164-165). This understanding is why as I worked through the theoretical paradigm quandary, I heeded Paul and Marfo's (2001) advice. They suggested that as education researchers consider various theoretical paradigms that might frame a study, they should engage in an analysis of the ontological, epistemological, and ethical perspectives (i.e., the philosophical perspectives) that underpin alternative paradigms. Paul and Marfo claimed that without an analysis of this sort, researchers are "likely to find themselves mired in simplistic conceptions and choices of methodological preferences, informed, at best, by the same tradition that has perpetuated the inquiry-as-technique mindset in quantitative research" (pp. 537-538).

Therefore, as I planned my dissertation study about successful African American male students in school mathematics (Stinson, 2004, see also 2008), I examined many of the numerous theoretical paradigms available to social scientists. In so doing, I attempted to understand not only the methodological implications of each paradigm, but also its philosophical foundations. Throughout my examination, it was imperative that the philosophical underpinnings of the theoretical paradigm(s) match my evolving philosophy of education (cf. Dewey, 1937/1987), pedagogy (cf. Freire, 1970/2000), and knowledge (cf. Foucault, 1969/1972), as well as provide ethical and effective methodological procedures for highlighting the schooling experiences of successful African American male students. In other words, the theoretical framework of my study needed to provide the scholarly language to articulate how I understand the possibilities of education (and my worldview in general) and ethical methodological possibilities to conduct research on/with the "Other" (Crotty, 1998).

After an examination of different theoretical paradigms, I concluded that no single paradigm quite satisfied both requirements, leading me to piece together an eclectic theoretical paradigm to frame my study. In effect, I borrowed theoretical concepts and methodological procedures from different paradigms that I used side by side while conducting my study. Similarly to Koro-Ljungberg (2004), I do not view qualitative research studies that contain elements from more than one theoretical paradigm as an ontological and epistemological failure, but rather as representing "a planned mixture of theoretical and philosophical assumptions, fluxing commonalties, and complicating rhizomatic (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) intersections of theoretical understandings" (p. 618).

In this article, I discuss my intersections of theoretical understandings, outlining the eclectic theoretical framework and subsequent methodology of my dissertation study; a study that resulted in what I believe to be "good" education research (Hostetler, 2005) that produced different knowledge and produced knowledge differently (St. Pierre, 1997b). I begin by describing briefly the purpose of my dissertation study, providing a justification for eclecticism in the selection of theories. I follow with a description of the three theories that framed the study, highlighting specific concepts from each theory that motivated its selection. I then discuss briefly the methodology, outlining the why and how of the procedures used. In other words, this article is a discussion of the theories and methods used during the study; it is not a reporting and analysis of the study's data. I conclude with a discussion of likely objections of the study, and with an explanation of why the study was positioned within a critical postmodern paradigm; a paradigm that, I

believe, provided an ethical theoretical framework. I hope and trust that the discussion might assist other doctoral students in finding *their own* way out of the theoretical paradigm quandary.

### **My Study and Why an Eclecticism**

My dissertation study grew out of my 5-year experience as a White mathematics teacher in a Black high school. This experience afforded me the opportunity to be exposed to many African American male (and female) students who excelled in school mathematics. Through this exposure, I became puzzled by the scarcity of education literature that focused on African American students who achieve and persist in mathematics, given the abundance of literature that has focused on African American students who appear to reject mathematics, and schooling in general (Pilot & Davis, 1999). In other words, where were the success stories of African American students? In particular, where were the success stories of African American male students? It just didn't add up (Ladson-Billings, 1997). Not only did my students demonstrate achievement and persistence in mathematics, but also success in school and academics in general. My desire to understand how the four African American male participants of my study, in particular, might have incorporated a positive mathematics identity (Martin, 2000) within their larger efforts toward success led to a broader examination of their schooling experiences, extending beyond their experiences in the mathematics classroom. Through this broad examination, I wanted to determine how my African American male participants defined success and to what sociocultural factors they attributed their success. Specifically, given that they were achieving in ways that were counter to the literature and prevailing societal discourses, I wanted to understand how sociocultural discourses about male African Americans shaped their perceptions of themselves as mathematics learners and as African American students, and how they negotiated such discourses.

Throughout the study, I drew upon Martin's (2000) multilevel framework for analyzing mathematics socialization and identity among African American students. This framework included an analysis of sociohistorical context, community and school forces, and individual agency. Martin's analysis of agency included an examination of mathematically successful African American students as they responded to community and school forces. After his initial analysis of 35 mathematically successful seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade African American students, Martin claimed, "Students are capable of recognizing and responding to...[community and school] forces in ways that help them resist the negative forces and to take advantage of the positive forces that they encounter" (p. 185). He suggested that a further analysis of mathematically successful African American students could provide insight into how students negotiated these forces and "how these forces can serve as barriers or springboards to success" (p. 125). Taking note of Martin's suggestion, I argued that a study that aimed at exposing the complexities of *how* mathematically successful African American male students resist, oppose, or even reconfigure (i.e., negotiate) negative community and school forces (i.e., discourses), as they embrace those forces that are positive required a "somewhat eclectic" (Sfard, 2003, p. 354) theoretical approach.

## Eclecticism in Theory

Sfard (2003, also see 1998) defended the necessity of having a somewhat eclectic theoretical approach as she attempted to understand the complexities of mathematics teaching and learning. She stated, “Educational theories, like practical solutions, respond badly to being left alone. They can thrive only in the company of other theories” (p. 355). She further argued that controversies within different theoretical frameworks “are very often, if not always, an outcome of differences between underlying metaphors” (p. 355). Rather than viewing educational theories as incompatible, Sfard suggested, they should “be viewed as either *complementary*—that is, concerned with different aspects of the same phenomena—or *incommensurable*—that is, speaking different languages rather than really conflicting with each other” (p. 355).

The theoretical framework of my study, in a manner of speaking, thrived by drawing on complementary and/or incommensurable tenets from poststructural theory (e.g., see St. Pierre, 2000), critical race theory (e.g., see Tate, 1997), and critical (postmodern<sup>2</sup>) theory (e.g., see Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, 2000). While borrowing tenets from these theoretical paradigms, I do not intend to suggest that these paradigms share the same philosophical foundations. I understand that the ontological, epistemological, and ethical considerations of these paradigms are different. For the purpose of my study, however, I followed Sfard’s (2003) suggestion and viewed these differences as complementary and/or incommensurable. I next provide an oversimplified description of each of the theories, highlighting specific concepts from each theory and stating explicitly what each theory contributed to my study.

### Poststructural Theory

Poststructural theory provided the theoretical perspective and language that redefines concepts such as person, discourse, agency, power, and marginalization among many others (St. Pierre, 2000); it adopts an anti- or post-epistemological standpoint, and is fiercely anti-foundationalist and anti-realist (Peters & Burbules, 2004). Gordon (1980) marked the beginning of poststructural theory in the mid-to-late 1970s, characterizing the immediate years after the failed Student and Worker’s Revolt of 1968 in Paris as an unusual, fascinating, and confused period in which “new lines of investigation and critique emerged on the intellectual scene” (p. ix). These new lines of investigation and critique replaced the structuralist critiques with post-structuralist critiques, such as Foucault’s critique of the discursively constituted subject and *pouvoir-savoir* (i.e., power and knowledge) and Derrida’s deconstruction of language and cultural practices (Sarup, 1993).

The critique of the discursively constituted subject redefines the person as a *subject* rather than as an *individual*. The term individual implies that there is an

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<sup>2</sup> Often the words *postmodernism* and *poststructuralism* are used interchangeably in the literature, but there are acknowledged differences in the terms (for a brief discussion see Peters & Burbules, 2004). Here, I intend the term *postmodern* to be an umbrella term for postmodernism and poststructuralism (see, e.g., Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994).

“independent and rational being who is predisposed to be motivated toward social agency and emancipation—what Descartes believed to be the existence of a unified self” (Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996, p. 341). Poststructural theory rejects this notion of an essential, unified self who is always present, because it minimizes the force of social structures on the person. The subject of poststructural theory is subjugated, but not determined, by the social structures and discourses that constitute the person. In other words, the person is a “discursive formation” (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 38), mapping out a “territory...in which structure and agency are not either-or but both-and and, simultaneously, neither-nor” (Lather, 1991, p. 154).

The discourses that constitute the subject are historically and culturally situated and constructed, and include institutions and language, as well as complex signs and practices that order and sustain particular forms of social existence; forms that work to either confirm or deny the life histories and experiences of the people who use them (Leistyna et al., 1996). In effect, the person is a discursively constituted subject who can only explain her or his experiences through the discourses that are made available to her or him (Scott, 1992). Thus, it becomes the available discourses that form the basis of the subject’s knowledge and actions rather than the life experiences in and of themselves. Foucault (1969/1972) claimed that discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49); consequently, “one remains within the dimension of discourse” (p. 76). In other words, for Foucault, “discourses do not merely *reflect* or represent social entities and relationships; they actively construct or *constitute* them” (Walshaw, 2007, p. 19, emphasis in original). He, however, joined power and knowledge through discourse, identifying discourse both as an “effect of power” and as providing “a point of resistance” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 101). This redefining of discourse allows for the understanding of “how knowledge, truth, and subjects are produced in language and cultural practice as well as how they might be reconfigured” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 486).

Although it might appear that this redefining of discourse denies the discursively constituted subject the ability to act, the subject of poststructural theory does possess agency, albeit a re-theorized agency (St. Pierre, 2000). This re-theorized agency of the subject produces at once a restricting effect on the production of knowledge and actions, and an enabling effect on the production of different kinds of knowledge and actions (Butler, 1990/1999). Agency, therefore, within the poststructural frame is “up for grabs, continually reconfigured and renamed as is the subject itself...[and] seems to lie in the subject’s ability to decode and recode its identity within discursive formations and cultural practices” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 504).

Butler (1990/1999) identified the subject’s ability to decode and recode its identity as “subversive repetition” (p. 42). Subversive repetition conveys that even though the subject is subjected to repeating oneself through the available discourses, the discourses themselves are “open to intervention and resignification” (p. 43), allowing the subject to repeat herself or himself in a rebellious manner (or not). As previously stated, discourses are open to intervention and resignification because they are historically and culturally situated and constructed. In other words, there is no origin, or understood in another way, no center to discourses. Derrida (1966/1978) argued that accepting discourse as having no center allows discourse to be open for the “movement of play” (p. 289). He defined play as the “disruption of presence” (p. 292). In this context, play rejects the totalization of humanism with its “dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin

which escapes play” (p. 292). This movement of play provides more freedom for the discursively constituted subject, and this freedom allows for more subversive repetition. Thus, freedom might be reinterpreted as play, given that play becomes generative because subversive repetition resignifies the discourse, and a resignified discourse allows a different repetition, and so on.

Comprehending the concept of subversive repetition requires a rethinking of power in conjunction with the re-theorizing of agency. Power in a poststructural frame is not an object that can be acquired, seized, shared, or slipped away, but is a dynamic and productive event that exists in *relations* (Foucault, 1976/1990). Therefore, rather than speaking of power Foucault spoke of “relations of power” or “power relations” (p. 94) identifying four facets. Power relations are: (a) a multiplicity of force relations that operate and constitute their own organization; (b) a process of struggles and confrontations that transforms, strengthens, or reverses the relations; (c) the points of support or resistance of a system; and (d) the strategies that design and maintain social structures and discourses. Moreover, he believed that power relations are dependent on a “multiplicity of points of resistance,” arguing that “there is no single locus of great refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. ... Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case” (p. 95). In other words, in a Foucauldian conceptualization of power, revolution, or refusal, can be achieved not only by the united actions of “working men from all countries” (Marx & Engels, 1848/1978, p. 500), but also, and more important, by the solitary actions of the discursively constituted subject.

The rethinking of the concepts of agency and power are implicated in the construction and deconstruction of the marginalized subject, a concept borrowed from critical theory. A marginalized subject could be identified as any person on the right side of the following binaries: White/non-White, man/woman, rich/poor, Christian/non-Christian, able/disable, young/old, heterosexual/non-heterosexual, citizen/non-citizen, educated/non-educated, and so on. There is nothing “real” about these binary features. That is, there is no biological or “scientific” explanation for these binaries. But then again, these are very real features, in that they are historically and culturally situated and constructed features located within societal discourses that assist in dividing and differentiating subjects, often leading to unjust social practices.<sup>3</sup> Clearly subjects live at

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<sup>3</sup> The Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in 1998 adopted the organization’s official statement on race that disputed the concept of race as any biological human taxonomy. The board, however, securely positioned race as an influential and powerful social and political construct that “distorts our ideas about human differences and group behaviors, [stating that] ... scientists today find that reliance on such folk beliefs about human differences in research has led to countless errors” (AAA, 1998, ¶ 9). They concluded their statement by asserting,

The “racial” worldview was invented to assign some groups to perpetual low status, while others were permitted access to privilege, power, and wealth. The tragedy in the United States has been that the policies and practices stemming from this worldview succeeded and all too well in constructing unequal populations among Europeans, Native Americans, and peoples of African descent. Given what we know about the capacity of normal humans to achieve and function within any culture, we conclude that present-day inequalities between so-called “racial” groups are not consequences of their biological inheritance but products of historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances. (¶ 12)

intersections of these binaries; therefore, which binary feature is most significant to a person at any given moment depends on the context in which the person is located.

Poststructural theory provides a means for de-constructing these binary oppositions through Derrida's (1974/1997) deconstruction of language and cultural practices. The deconstruction of binaries identifies the first term, that is, the "privileged" term, as being dependent on its identity by the exclusion of the other term, demonstrating that, in reality, primacy belongs to the second term, that is, the subordinate term, instead (Sarup, 1993). The first move in deconstruction then is to overthrow the privileged term with the other term, displacing this term, now the first term, by putting it under erasure,<sup>4</sup> revealing what was always already present (Spivak, 1974/1997). For all intents and purposes, deconstruction acknowledges that the world has been constructed through language and cultural practices; consequently, it can be deconstructed and reconstructed again and again (St. Pierre, 2000).

Earlier, when I stated that different binary features lead to injustices, I did not intend to suggest that the injustices that different marginalized subjects experience are equivalent; I understand that they are different. There is, however, a commonality in these binary identity labels, in that marginalized racial, ethnic, and cultural groups are often oppressed within social structures and discourses that have been designed and maintained by people who recognize only "one universal subject of history—the white, Anglo, heterosexual male of bourgeois privilege" (P. McLaren as cited in Torres, 1998, p. 178). The maintenance of this universally acclaimed subject results in hegemony. Hegemony, a concept that has its origin in critical theory, is the manner in which imposed ideology warrants the reproduction of social and institutional practices and discourses that enable dominant groups to not only maintain their positions of power and privilege, but also have consensual support from the "Others" (Leistyna et al., 1996).

Some Others, however, do not give this consensual support; rather, they develop a "double-consciousness"<sup>5</sup> (Du Bois, 1903/1989, p. 3). Double-consciousness, a concept I position within critical race theory, allows those that have been marginalized to "see and understand positions of inclusion and exclusion, margins and mainstreams...[and] applies not only to African Americans, but to any people who are constructed outside of the dominant paradigm" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 260). I believe that those who are constructed outside of the dominant discourses and have developed, consciously (or not), a double-consciousness are capable of subversively repeating their discursively constituted selves, continuously opening up new space for play. Butler (1990/1999)

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<sup>4</sup> Spivak (1997) explained Derrida's (1974/1997) *sous rature* (under erasure) as learning "to use and erase our language at the same time" (p. xviii). In other words, under erasure is a strategy of using the only available language while not subscribing to its premise or operating according to the vocabulary of the very thing that it defines (Spivak, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Du Bois (1903/1989) introduced the concept *double-consciousness* in the following passage.

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 3)

offered a similar argument regarding the construct of gender; likewise, Foucault (1976/1990) offered an argument regarding the construct of sexuality.

Through employing poststructural theory, my research study began with the acknowledgment of research participants (characterized as discursive subjects, not as individuals) who negotiated societal discourses regarding male African Americans through a conscious (or not) developed doubled-consciousness. This acknowledgment, I believe, freed the stories of the participants from being essentialized to the often told Horatio Alger Jr. story, *Oh, look how these young Black boys overcame society's racial injustices and became successful, pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps*, to stories that more respectfully and accurately explained how these young men achieved success, *Oh, look how these young Black men negotiated society's racial injustices and became successful through subversively repeating their constituted "raced" selves*.

### Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) provided a different theoretical analysis of how the discourses of race and racism operate within U.S. social structures, an analysis that keeps race in the foreground. CRT borrows theories and methodologies from liberalism, law and society, feminism, Marxism, and poststructuralism (Tate, 1997); therefore, in part, it acted as a bridge in the study between the often dichotomized theories of poststructural theory and critical theory (cf. Hill, McLaren, Cole, & Rikowski, 2002).

Four central principles define CRT (Ladson-Billings, 1998). First, and most important, CRT asserts that the notion of racism is "normal, not aberrant, in American society," resulting in appearing both normal and natural to people in U.S. culture (R. Delgado as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). Bell (1992) presented this principle, writing: "Black people will never gain full equality in this country. ...This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it, not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance" (p. 12). Second, and equally as important, CRT allows and finds value in the storytelling of the individual experience. Specifically, CRT values the "counter-story," stories of "raced" people whose experiences are often not told; stories that expose, analyze, and challenge the majoritarian stories of racial privilege (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Third, CRT maintains a critique on liberalism and argues for radical solutions. And fourth, CRT claims, "Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 12). There are no common or agreed upon doctrines or methodologies of CRT; however, CRT scholars are united in two common goals: to understand the construction and perpetuation of the hegemonic White ideology of the United States, and to radically disrupt the bond between law and racial power (Ladson-Billings).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) discussed CRT within an education frame by connecting race with the property ownership of Whiteness. Building from the work of Harris, they correlated four functions of the legal rights of property ownership provided in U.S. law to the ownership of Whiteness in U.S. schools: (a) rights of disposition, is when White students are rewarded because they conform to the (White) ideology of schools; (b) rights to use and enjoy, is when White students are provided entrée into the cultural, political, and social structures of schools and society; (c) rights to reputation and status property, is when cultural symbols are used to privilege Whiteness over the Other

(e.g., suburban school and urban school); and (d) the rights to exclude, is when Whiteness provides the authority to exclude the Other (e.g., academic tracking and Advanced Placement programs). Ladson-Billings and Tate claimed that these four functions of ownership of Whiteness in schools create socially and structurally unjust education inequities.

Through employing the analytical process of foregrounding race as a permanent and endemic component of U.S. society and culture (and schooling), my research study began with the acknowledgment of unjust schooling experiences for the study's participants based on the power relations of racism. Therefore, the study was not about exploring the causes or effects of racism (i.e., White supremacy) on the schooling experiences of the study's participants, but rather how they, through counter-storytelling, demonstrated resistance toward the hegemonic power relations of racism as an act of ultimate defiance.

### **Critical Theory**

Critical theory provided the philosophical foundation for engaging in my research study. In the most general sense, critical theory maintains sociopolitical critiques on social practices and ideology that mask “systematically distorted accounts of reality which attempt to conceal and legitimate asymmetrical power relations” (Bottomore, 2001, p. 209). Included in these critiques is an examination of how social interests, conflicts, and contradictions are expressed in thought and produced and reproduced in systems of domination (Bottomore). Critical theorists contend that an examination of these systems of domination will bring about an awakening of consciousness and awareness of social injustices, motivating self-empowerment and social transformation. The concepts of self-empowerment and social transformation are reoccurring themes found in Freire's scholarship (e.g., see 1994, 1998, 2000a, 2000b). It is his popularization of the concept of *conscientização* (defined as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality”; Freire, 1970/2000b, p. 35) that provided the purpose for my study.

In a survey of critical theory, Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) infused critical theory with notions from postmodern theory, identifying seven basic assumptions that most critical (postmodern?) theorists researchers accept: (a) all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations, which are historically and culturally situated and constructed; (b) facts or “truth” can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; (c) the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption; (d) language is central to the formation of subjectivity; (e) certain groups in any society are privileged over others and the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable (i.e., hegemony); (f) oppression has many faces, focusing on only one form of oppression at the expense of others often eludes the interconnections among them; and finally, (g) mainstream research practices are often implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression. The goal of critical (or emancipatory) research is to blur the distinctions between research, learning, and action by providing the

researcher and the participants opportunities to collectively engage in the struggle toward social justice (Lather, 1986, 1991). The methodology used encourages reciprocity, turning participants into co-researchers, while providing the means for researcher and participants' *self*-empowerment (Lather, 1986, 1991).

Building from a foundation of critical theory, my research study began as a "joint search" (Freire, 1969/2000a, p. 45), a search between researcher and participants who were jointly attempting to trouble the discourse of the "achievement gap"<sup>6</sup> between Black students and their White counterparts by telling the "other side of the story." This attempt aimed to self-empower the participants and me (the researcher) with deeper understandings of the participants' successes in school, academics, and mathematics in hopes of motivating *conscientização*. I was engaged in this joint search because I have an allegiance to equity and social justice in U.S. public schools, and specifically in the mathematics classroom.

Taken as a whole, in the preceding discussion, as I interwove words, concepts, and ideas from various philosophers and theorists, it was apparent that, even as I presented the descriptions under three distinct headings (i.e., poststructural theory, critical race theory, and critical theory), the overall discussion was intended to be continuous rather than discrete. In other words, even as I currently understand the different philosophical underpinnings of each theory, traces of words, concepts, and ideas from one theory are found within the description of another. These traces, I believe, blur the theoretical paradigm lines, illustrating that each theory refutes delimiting descriptions. I now turn to a brief discussion regarding the specifics of the methodological procedures of my study.

### **Eclecticism in Methodology**

With the understanding that the theoretical framework and methodology of a study are "inextricably linked" (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993, p. 116), throughout the study I maintained a constant state of crosscheck between my eclectic theoretical framework and various methodological procedures. LeCompte et al. claimed, "Research designs are improved radically—in applicability and generalizability, in credibility and validity, and in precision and reliability—by explicit attention to the influence of theory throughout the design and implementation process" (p. 137). Therefore, as I searched for, and took note of, consistencies and inconsistencies, convergences, and divergences between and within various theoretical paradigms and methodological procedures, I also critically examined the compatibility of various methodological procedures with my evolving philosophy of education, pedagogy, and knowledge. In other words, I replicated the action I took during the process of selecting theoretical paradigms. As suggested by Paul and Marfo (2001), my ontological, epistemological, and ethical beliefs not only drove the development of the eclectic theoretical framework of the study, but the selection of methodological procedures as well.

Because I acknowledged my participants as self-empowered and transformative discursively constituted subjects who could, and did, negotiate the negative power relations of race and racism in their pursuit of school, academic, and mathematics

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<sup>6</sup> See Hilliard (2003) for a critical discussion of how the "gap" is erroneously framed, and how it might be reframed.

success, the research methodology I employed was, by and large, participative inquiry (Reason, 1994). Participative inquiry acknowledges both participants and researcher as active subjects. This form of inquiry emphasizes the systematic testing of theory in live-action contexts, resulting in changed lived experiences for all those engaged in the inquiry; the fundamental importance of experiential knowing, acknowledging that people can learn to be, and learn from being, self-reflexive about their world and their lived experiences; and an extended epistemology, suggesting that experiential knowing arises through engagement with others (Reason). In particular, I characterized the methodology as a version of participatory action research (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). Participatory action research explicitly explores the relationship between persons and the social, through a collaborative process aimed towards assisting people to liberate themselves from unjust discourses and power relations. It is a recursive process that aims to assist people in investigating “reality” in order to change it, in order to reinvestigate it, in order to rechange it, and so on (Kemmis & Wilkinson).

Participant selection for the study was conducted through a purposive sampling (Silverman, 2000) of five African American men between 20 and 25 years of age. The criteria for sampling included having attended Keeling High School<sup>7</sup> (a pseudonym, as are all proper names throughout) from their 9th to 12th grade, having completed at least one mathematics course with me (I taught at Keeling High through the 1995-1996 to 1999-2000 academic years), and having demonstrated achievement and persistence in high school mathematics.<sup>8</sup> I invited 16 of my past African American male students (out of approximately 90 who were eligible) by electronic and U.S. postal mail to participate in the study. Six of the 16 students contacted responded to my inquiry, 5 agreed to participate, and 4 completed the study. At the time of the study, the four young men were either completing their undergraduate degree or in graduate school. Professionally, they were a teacher, and future preacher, doctor, and lawyer. (See Stinson, 2004, chap. 5 for a detailed description.)

Data collection included a combination of written artifacts and interviews. Each participant completed a demographic and schooling survey instrument, wrote a brief autobiography and mathematics autobiography, and completed four interviews. The first interview was an individual face-to-face, semistructured, traditional question-and-answer interview (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). In this interview, I attempted to obtain descriptions of the lived worlds of the participants with respect to their interpretations of the meaning of their schooling and mathematics experiences (Kvale, 1996). The fourth

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<sup>7</sup> Keeling High was an “urban high school located in a suburban community” (according to a description found on the school’s Web site), 10 miles from a large city in the South; it was situated in a 95% African American community where the mean home value was \$220,000. Keeling High had approximately 1,300 students, with 99% of the students being identified by race or ethnicity as Black by the school system. Although the student population was homogenous racially, it was very diverse socioeconomically, ranging from the working poor to the middle upper class (44% of the students were eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches). The school provided an embedded mathematics and science magnet program (25% of the students were enrolled in the program) for Newberry County, a large (over 70,000 students) and well-funded school system (i.e., school facilities were modern and well maintained).

<sup>8</sup> The descriptor “demonstrated achievement and persistence in high school mathematics” was met if a participant achieved one or more of the following criteria his junior or senior year of high school: (a) completed an Advanced Placement calculus or statistics course with a grade of C (70%) or better; (b) completed a joint-enrollment calculus or statistics course with a grade of C (70%) or better; or (c) scored in the 4th quartile (top 25 %) of the mathematics portion of the Scholastic Achievement Test.

interview was also a face-to-face interview, but used a narrative approach, asking the participants to summarize their schooling and mathematics experiences, which required me to be a good listener and the interviewees (i.e., the participants) to be storytellers rather than respondents (Hollway & Jefferson). The second and third interviews, like the first, were semistructured, but conducted over the telephone. Prior to each of these interviews, however, the participants were asked to read, reflect on, and respond to three manuscripts (six manuscripts total<sup>9</sup>) that discussed specific theoretical perspectives regarding African American children's schooling experiences (see Stinson, 2006, for a discussion of the various theoretical perspectives read by the participants).

In making decisions about which theoretical perspectives to have the participants read, I attempted to expose them to literature that discussed the prevailing theoretical perspectives that, I believe, were present in their schooling experiences. The purpose of engaging the participants in reading the historical and current literature was not to have them confirm or disconfirm the applicability or usefulness of the various theoretical perspectives presented, but to provide language for them to express their (and their friends') schooling and life experiences in light of the theories presented. In other words, it provided the participants and me with a common vocabulary for our conversations throughout the study. For instance, rather than me trying to interpret from the participants' interview responses whether they had engaged in "raceless persona" behaviors (e.g., see Fordham 1988, 1996), the participants were able to explicitly speak about what they believed were raceless persona behaviors, and whether they had engaged in such behaviors. For all intents and purposes, the engagement with the literature acted as a catalyst, motivating deeper reflections about their schooling experiences.

In addition to the data collection procedures noted, I made several other attempts to bring the participants into the study in hopes of transforming them into active co-researchers. For example, I sent detailed letters via electronic mail approximately twice a month updating the participants as to the progress of the study, and had numerous telephone conversations with the participants throughout the study as well (some of these conversations were related to the study and some were not). The participants also read the data analysis portion of the study, engaging them in "member checking" (Glesne, 1999, p. 32). These multiple interviews, coupled with the written artifacts and continuous participant contact throughout the study, acted as a form of triangulation, providing a number of data sources, which contributed to the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne)

In total, the data collection procedures spanned a 6-month time period, requiring approximately 30 to 40 hours of each participant's time (e.g., completing demographic survey, writing biographies, reading manuscripts, participating in interview and telephone conversations, responding to emails, etc.). Throughout the data collection procedures (and analyzing and writing up the data), I monitored, not exorcised, my researcher subjectivity, in hopes of developing what Peshkin (1988) called an illuminating,

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<sup>9</sup> The six manuscripts were: Ogbu's (1978b) book chapter, "Black-White Differences in School Performance: A Critique of Current Explanations"; Majors, Tyler, Peden, and Hall's (1994) book chapter, "Cool Pose: A Symbolic Mechanism for Masculine Role Enactment and Coping by Black Males"; Steele's (1997) essay, "A Threat in the Air: How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance"; Ogbu's (1992) essay, "Understanding Cultural Diversity and Learning"; Fordham's (1988) essay, "Racelessness as a Factor in Black Students' School Success: Pragmatic Strategy or Pyrrhic Victory?"; and Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) essay, "Black Students' School Success: Coping with the 'Burden of 'Acting White'" (for a review of these theoretical perspectives see Stinson, 2006).

empowering, and personal understanding and awareness of subjectivity that attuned me to where self and study were intertwined. I used this understanding and awareness to build accepting and trusting rapport with the participants (Glesne, 1999). A positive rapport with participants, together with awareness of subjectivity, led to an intersubjectivity with the participants that assisted in shaping and enriching the study (Glesne). This intersubjectivity, coupled with triangulation and member checking, I believe, strengthened the overall validity and reliability of the study's findings.

Given that the bulk of the data collected was interview data; the data analysis methodology employed for the study was interview analysis. And even though I noted the fundamental indeterminacy of doing and interpreting interviews (Scheurich, 1995), I employed Kvale's (1996) ad hoc method for analyzing interview data. First, during the analysis process, data were entered into a computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data program and coded using a data scheme of 25 codes that aligned to the study's research questions. (The "coding" of data is inconsistent with a poststructural methodology; it, nevertheless, satisfied the expectations of my doctoral advisory committee and is consistent with a critical methodology.) Once data were coded, individual "data stories" were written for each participant, reducing data to succinct formulations and probing for temporal and social meanings. The data stories were then merged, expanding data reporting as a speculative, critical postmodern analysis was applied to the new collective data set.

The data reporting in the dissertation study was presented not as singular case studies, but as a collective collage, which is somewhat consistent with both poststructural and critical methodologies. Presenting the data in this manner, I believe, refused essentializing the participants' lived experiences; in that, it juxtaposed the similarities and differences, the consistencies and inconsistencies, and the contradictions across and within the participants' counterstories of success. In other words, through analyzing and representing the data as a collective collage, I was taking theory to the field, using theory as a means to honor the data (St. Pierre, 1997a). St. Pierre (2004) contended, "The thrill of qualitative research is taking theory to the field and putting it to work as we talk with and observe people as they go about their daily lives" (p. 345). Through putting an eclectic array of theoretical concepts and methodological procedures to work in the field, using different concepts and procedures side by side, made possible, I believe, a data analysis and representation that revealed the complexities of *how* mathematically successful African American male students negotiated sociocultural discourses without essentializing their individual and collective counterstories into monolithic sameness.

### **Summary of Theoretical Concepts and Methodological Procedures**

Theoretically, poststructural theory made available a different language to *re-*define terms such as person, agency, discourse, and power, as well as the theoretical concepts *subversive repetition* and *deconstruction*. CRT offered a means of foregrounding race and racism throughout the study, as well as the theoretical concepts *counter-storytelling* and *double-consciousness*. Critical theory put forward the ideological foundation of sociopolitical critique, self-empowerment, and social transformation, as well as the theoretical concepts *marginalized subjects* and *hegemony*. In short, Foucault's (1969/1972) discursive formation and Butler's (1990/1999)

subversive repetition provided the Du Boisian (1989/1903) doubled-conscious subject being framed; Bell's (1992) ultimate defiance of racism provided the matting; and lastly, Freire's (1970/2000b) *conscientização* provided the frame.

Methodologically, the study began with the goal of doing research *with* rather than *on* the study's participants. Participative inquiry, with its emphasis on testing theory, experiential knowing, and engagement with others, aligned with this goal and the eclectic theoretical framework. In general, poststructural theory offered an analytical means of honoring the participants' counterstories by applying theory to the participants' data rather than waiting for theory to "emerge" from the data. CRT established research value in the participants' counterstories of success. And critical theory motivated a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and participants, asking the participants to become co-researchers, as both the researcher and participants jointly troubled the "achievement gap problem" by telling the "other side of the story." Collectively, within this eclectic array, I concluded in the findings of the study that present throughout each participant's counterstory was recognition of race as a permanent and endemic component of U.S. society (not as a sign of submission, but as an act of ultimate defiance) and recognition of himself as a discursive formation who could, and did, as a *self*-empowered subject, accommodate, reconfigure, or resist hegemonic sociocultural discourses as a means to subversively repeat his constituted "raced" self. (See Table 1 for a summary of concepts and methods).

Table 1

*Summary of Theoretical Concepts and Methods and How Understood and Applied in Study*

Concept	Poststructural Theory	Critical Race Theory	Critical Theory
<b>Ontology</b>	Questions all claims of the existence of things (e.g., knowledge, truth, reality, reason, science, progress, subject, etc.); opposes foundationalism, essentialism, and realism (i.e., The Enlightenment)	Centers claims of existence within The Enlightenment; supports, but also critiques, human rationality (e.g., all human beings are free, human rationality is universal, and the true forms of all things can be discovered)	Centers claims of existence within The Enlightenment; supports, but also critiques, human rationality (e.g., all human beings are free, human rationality is universal, and the true forms of all things can be discovered)
<b>Epistemology</b>	Knowledge as discursive formation, a formation subjected to and limited by historical and sociocultural assumptions, conditions, and power relations	Knowledge as "race" struggle (i.e., White vs. non-White), a struggle that facilitates subjugation of non-Whites; knowledge is critiqued through counter-storytelling, exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege	Knowledge as class struggle (i.e., proletariat vs. bourgeois), a struggle that highlights hegemony and false consciousness; knowledge is critiqued through class analysis, uncovering asymmetrical power relations, motivating self-empowerment and emancipation

<b>Subjects (i.e., participants)</b>	Subjects are discursive formations, subjugated—but not determined—by the sociocultural structures and discourses that constitute them	Through counter-storytelling, Subjects are those who know and act, in contrast to objects that are known and acted upon	Through self-empowerment and emancipation, Subjects are those who know and act, in contrast to objects that are known and acted upon (Freire, 1970/2000b)
<b>Data Collection</b>	Interviews (structured and narrative), delineating the construction of self-identity, while noting the indeterminacy of doing and interpreting interviews	Interviews (structured and narrative), motivating counter-storytelling of success in school and mathematics, while maintaining “race” in the foreground	Interviews (structured and narrative), critiquing existing theoretical explanations of African American male students and schooling, while providing means for self-reflection, understanding, and action (e.g., participatory action research)
<b>Data Analysis and Representation</b>	Poststructural Theory is applied as a way to honor the data; no “true” or “authentic” interpretation is sought; data representation is a collective collage to refuse simplifying and essentializing experiences	CRT is applied as a way to honor the data; race is in the foreground; no “true” or “authentic” interpretation is sought; data representation is a collective collage to refuse simplifying and essentializing experiences	Critical Theory is applied as a way to honor the data; self-empowerment and emancipation is in the foreground; no “true” or “authentic” interpretation is sought; data representation is a collective collage to refuse simplifying and essentializing experiences

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### Likely Objections to Study

Before I conclude the article, I would like to respond to likely objections to my study; a study that attempted to produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently. First, and most important, was the study, which contained elements from more than one theoretical perspective, an ontological and epistemological failure? I think not. Kincheloe and McLaren (1994), in their survey essay summarizing critical theory conjoined aspects of critical theory and postmodern theory (as previously noted). They argued that engaging in a postmodern critical theory does not abandon the concepts of empowerment, class struggle, asymmetrical relations of power, and so forth from the research process. On the contrary, within a postmodern critical theoretical framework these concepts from critical theory become objects of critique, while providing postmodern theory a normative foundation that precludes it from being perceived as nihilistic or inactive. Or simply said, the synergism between critical theory and postmodern theory “involves an interplay between the praxis of the critical and the radical uncertainty of the postmodern” (p. 144). They concluded, stating,

To engage in critical postmodern research is to take part in a process of critical world making, guided by the shadowed outline of a dream of a

world less conditioned by misery, suffering, and the politics of deceit. It is, in short, a pragmatics of hope in an age of cynical reason. (p. 154)

Nevertheless, since the mid-to-late 1990s there has been an unfortunate, stormy separation of scholars into either-or camps: either critical theory or postmodern theory (lead, in part, by McLaren, see, e.g., Hill et al., 2002). This “intellectualized” dichotomous posturing, held by some scholars, of two significant theoretical paradigms, I believe, has obstructed the possibilities that both theoretical perspectives could have in contributing to the development of more equitable and just public schools for all children. Lather and St. Pierre (2005, see Lather 2006, p. 37; 2007, pp. 164-165) noted that there is a “break” between “critical” theories and “post” theories, in that, the latter deconstructs all major ontological, epistemological, and methodological concepts, including the concepts of self-empowerment and emancipation. Talburt, however, provided a caveat; she suggested that the break might not be so clean, given that even in the process of deconstruction, post theories, similar to critical theories positioned within *The Enlightenment*, still often reify a belief in the rational subject (S. Talburt, personal communication, spring semester, 2006). Therefore, similar to Sfard (2003), who suggested the need to use the dichotomized education theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, to better understand mathematics teaching and learning, I suggest the need to use the currently dichotomized theories of postmodern theory and critical theory to better understand the school and mathematics success of historically marginalized students. In other words, I believe that poststructural theory assists me in “getting smart” about the possibilities and limits of critical theory (Lather, 2006).<sup>10</sup> The recent dichotomizing of these two theoretical perspectives, I believe, has been motivated by scholars who have forgotten what I argue should be the chief purpose of education research: To assist in the development of a more equitable and just schooling experience for every child.

Second, did I begin the research study with the conclusions in hand? In a manner of speaking, I did. My 5 years of astute reflective observations of, listening to, and learning from my successful African American students provided the motivation for conducting the study. Through my experiences, I concluded that these students effectively negotiated the hegemonic, White, middle-class, patriarchal ideology prevalent in U.S. schools. It was these very experiences that inspired the initial title for the study, *Why “Smart” Black Boys Are Smarter Than “Smart” White Boys*. This title, however, did not pass muster with my closest friends; it was therefore never presented to my doctoral advisory committee. But through my own experiences as a “smart” White boy, I can distinctively recall that the positive discourses of possibilities that surrounded me as a White, middle-class, Christian, and (presumed) heterosexual boy throughout my schooling were unbounded. In other words, most every discourse that was presented to me through the structures of school, community, and society in general illustrated an endless possibility of positive choice. Or said in another way, the discursive formation of

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<sup>10</sup> Lather (2006), in her book, *Getting Lost: Feminist Efforts Toward a Double(d) Science*, characterized her earlier book, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/In the Postmodern* (1991), as a book that “dealt much with the fundamental tensions between the Enlightenment and postmodernist projects... Located at the site of emancipatory research and pedagogy, the book argued that both the seductions of and resistances to postmodernism can help us to ‘get smart’ about the possibilities and limits of critical praxis” (p. viii). Lather’s book *Getting Smart* has been most influential in my work as a social scientist.

the White, middle-class, Christian, heterosexual, male child is undeniably the most privileged formation found in schools, and in U.S. society generally. This constant stream of positive discourses, however, was not, and is not, afforded to all students, specifically not to African Americans, Latino/as, female students in general, and so forth. So as Black boys are having to master (i.e., learn?) the curriculum valued in school, just as White boys do, they are also having to learn how to negotiate the hegemonic, White, middle-class, patriarchal ideology that has framed the structures of school, including the very curriculum that they must master, thus, making them smarter.

Consequently, based on my own experiences as a successful, White, male student and my experiences as a high school mathematics teacher of successful African American students, I state explicitly that the study was not an interpretive analysis in which I intended to conclude that successful historically marginalized students negotiate the structures of school. Rather, it was a critical postmodern analysis in which I intended to illustrate that successful historically marginalized students must negotiate the structures of school, and society, *differently*, and with more of a conscious effort, than those students from the dominant culture.

Third, did the participants see themselves as having developed a double-consciousness and negotiating the hegemony of U.S. schools, or did I? To answer this question, I state explicitly that within a critical postmodern theoretical perspective I was bringing theory to the field, not waiting for theory to “emerge” from the field. In other words, I was not building theory in the current study *per se*. What I attempted to do was to illustrate how various theories existed (or not) in the schooling experiences of academically successful African American male students, and how the participants accommodated, reconfigured, or resisted such theories. My *a priori* theoretical perspective, based on my 5-year experience in teaching academically successful African American students who held secure racial identities, was that they possessed a double-consciousness that facilitated their effective negotiation of the hegemony of U.S. schools. So my analysis of the data did not require the participants to use the “vocabulary” of poststructural theory, CRT, or critical theory in their conversations, but rather allowed for the possibility of applying concepts from these theories to the language used by the participants. Their counter-storytelling provided such possibilities.

Fourth, did the inconsistencies and contradictions present in the participants’ counterstories “invalidate” the data? Within a critical postmodern theoretical framework the person is understood as a *discursive formation*, not as a static individual (as previously noted). The concept discursive formation acknowledges that persons are fragmented selves juxtaposed against the unified self of humanism. For this reason, inconsistencies and contradictions were expected, and, in fact, welcomed. In a manner of speaking, the inconsistencies and contradictions validated the data: It demonstrated that the participants were attempting to articulate their fragmented lived experiences rather than deliver the “correct” responses to the questions asked.

And fifth, did providing the participants with literature to read, reflect on, and respond to “corrupt” the data? The methodological procedure of engaging the participants in the historical and current literature is, I believe, a crucial component of participatory action research. Not only did this procedure provide the participants and me with a common vocabulary to discuss their schooling experiences, but also it motivated deeper reflections about their own schooling experiences. Developing deeper reflections and

understandings of how one functions or operates within a historical and sociocultural context, among participants and researcher alike, is another important component of participatory action research. And, likewise, developing deeper reflections and understandings of how one's experiences and actions are subjected and limited by the discourses within a historical and sociocultural context is an important component of research within a critical postmodern theoretical framework. Therefore, engaging the participants in the literature did not corrupt the data, as might be perceived by some researchers, but achieved the noted important components of participatory action research within a critical postmodern theoretical framework.

### Why a Critical Postmodern Theoretical Framework

I positioned my study within this eclectic critical postmodern theoretical framework because of my own experiences of being designated as the "Other" by the dominant culture. I am a White man who has enjoyed, participated in, and benefited from the power, privilege, and agency that these two characteristics bring an individual who has been reared in a society that unjustly values these characteristics first and foremost. I hold no remorse or guilt for this possession; it made life easier. (I also acknowledge that socioeconomic class and religion are key factors in differentiating and dividing; again, I am on the privileged side of these binaries). Nevertheless, being "gay" excludes me from nearly all social institutions such as education, family, government, industry, religion, and so forth. Only small portions of these institutions have acknowledged my existence and value as a contributing member of society and citizen of a democracy (e.g., the U.S. Supreme Court has only recently *de-criminalized* my private intimate adult relations, see *Lawrence and Garner v. Texas* 2003). I am not equating my experiences as a gay man with those of other marginalized subjects; however, I do believe that when one has been "Othered" one becomes better equipped to see how dangerously pervasive the unjust hegemonic discourse of White, patriarchal ideology operates within U.S. social structures and discourses.

To say that my marginalized status is different from others is very true. Just as I will never "know" what it is like to be a woman, Black man, Jew, or Mexican migrant worker, and so forth, these individuals will never know what it is like to be a southern, middle-class, White, Christian (?), queer,<sup>11</sup> gay man. But even as we grow to understand oneself and others, as having fragmented and subjected multiple identities, we also need to understand, to do so is not to imagine that we have many distinct identities, but rather to get away from understanding ourselves and others in terms of identity (Rajchman, 2000). Through my fragmented identities, however, I have become aware of the perverseness of U.S. hegemonic ideology. This awareness brought about an understanding how my African American students of Keeling High School might endure a dark veil (Du Bois, 1920/1999). Furthermore, I believe that I had a particular understanding of this veil, given that I wore a "white veil" as one of their mathematics teachers. In that, the school system in which I worked, adhering to the policy most often

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<sup>11</sup> "'Queer' can function as a noun, an adjective, or a verb, but in each case is defined against the 'normal' or normalizing" (Spargo, 1999, pp. 8-9).

found within school systems across the nation, informally enacted a “Don’t ask, Don’t tell” policy regarding its gay and lesbian faculty, which I heeded; hence, the white veil.<sup>12</sup>

Ladson-Billings (2000), drawing from the work of Wynter, argued, however, that for the benefit of moving toward social justice, marginalized groups must acknowledge their differences while recognizing their common perspective advantage, and enter into dialogue with one another, including those from the dominant group. Dialogue is a loving, humble, hopeful, trusting, critical, and horizontal relationship between persons, a “relation of ‘empathy’ between two ‘poles’ who are engaged in a joint search” (Freire, 1969/2000a, p. 45, see also 1970/2000b).

My study was a joint search. But this joint search presented an ethical dilemma, what with me being a White, privileged male doing research on Black, male adolescents. And even as I acknowledged an end to innocence (Van Maanen, 1995), and a crisis in representation (Marcus & Fisher, 1986) in qualitative research, and wrote at length about my researcher subjectivity (Glesne, 1999; Peshkin, 1988), I was not satisfied that I would meet the ethical responsibilities of the researcher that are owed to the research participants. The eclectic theoretical framework and subsequent methodology discussed in the article, I believe, assisted in resolving this dilemma, however.

First, in viewing my participants as discursive subjects with developed doubled-consciousnesses, and not as individuals, who could, and did, subversively repeat their constituted raced selves, I no longer worried (at least, not as much) about the ethics of “do you have to be one to know one” (Fay, 1996). The study was not about the schooling experiences of four African American male students in U.S. schools, but about how four academically and mathematically successful African American male students with developed doubled-consciousnesses understood themselves, and their schooling experiences, as discursive formations.

Second, acknowledging that race is a permanent and endemic component of U.S. society and culture altered the ethical obligation of examining the numerous negative consequences of slavery, segregation, racism, and discrimination (i.e., White supremacy) on the schooling experiences of my African American participants. The study was not about the continued real consequences of such injustices on the schooling experiences of African American students (cf. Kozol, 1992), but about how my participants, through counter-storytelling, demonstrated that they could accommodate, reconfigure, or resist such injustices in their pursuits of school, academic, and mathematics success.

And last, the goal of critical research, to blur the distinctions between research, learning, and action by encouraging reciprocity between researcher and participants, aided in transforming the researcher-participant relationship and in answering the question, *Why conduct research?* Through using participative inquiry, the researcher-participant relationship was transformed from one of doing research *on* to a more ethical relationship of doing research *with*. During this transformation, the participants, like me, came to understand the need to contribute their often absent stories of success to the literature. It is my hope and belief that providing a space for the participants to tell their counterstories of success will result in participant, researcher, and education community *conscientização*.

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<sup>12</sup> See Bonauto, 1994; Eckes & McCarthy, 2008; Eisenmenger, 2002; Varona, 1998; and Yared, 1999 for details of and strategies to combat, the unjust, undemocratic, and unethical treatment of gay and lesbian public and private school teachers.

To conclude, it was only through a thorough (but still, merely an initial) examination of the philosophical underpinnings of different theoretical paradigms that I was able to piece together the eclectic theoretical framework and subsequent methodology of my study. During this examination, I perceived differences found in theoretical perspectives and methodological procedures as complementary and/or incommensurable rather than incompatible. This perception resulted in an eclectic theoretical framework that provided not only the scholarly language to articulate how I understand the world, but also ethical methodological possibilities to conduct research with the “Other.” Moreover, it refused, I believe, the folk theories about groups in the human family (Lee, 2003), particularly those folk theories about African American male adolescents and provided for a “*cultural praxis*” methodology, which offered “a nonlinear overlapping polycentric approach with simultaneous, multiple centers of activity that, like jazz music, combine discipline, improvisation, and individuality (Woods, 1998)” (King, 2005, p. 16). But even as I settled on an eclectic, polycentric approach, theoretically and methodologically, I understand that my eclecticism too is dangerous. I am, however, in good company. Foucault (1983/1997) said,

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to hyper- and pessimistic activism. (p. 256)

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