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Assessing K-12 Leaders' Level of Critical Consciousness and Social Justice Predisposition in an Effort to Address Inequity in Suburban School Districts

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological research study was to identify the level of critical consciousness of kindergarten through Grade 12 building leaders (principals and assistant principals) in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. The study also sought to understand the leaders' predisposition toward social justice in an effort to redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse student population. Through nine semi-structured interviews, reflection, and sharing, this study was able to gauge the participants' existing levels of critical consciousness based on their past experiences. The data was coded and interpreted to better understand how the lived experiences of school leaders helped to develop and understand their own critical consciousness. The findings of the study confirmed that the development and understanding of one's critical consciousness is a process and evolves over time based on changing lived experiences. A variety of strategies were utilized by the school leaders to reflect on their experiences to better understand their biases, values, beliefs, power, and privilege. The recommendations of this study include providing—not only school leaders—but all educators, the time and structure, through ongoing professional development, to consistently reflect on and process their experiences. College and university training programs for educational leadership may also consider a similar component to provide future leaders with the opportunity to reflect and learn from their lived experiences.

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Assessing K-12 Leaders' Level of Critical Consciousness and Social Justice

Predisposition in an Effort to Address Inequity in Suburban School Districts

By

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Supervised by

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Dedication

"Anything is possible when you have the right people there to support you."
Misty Copeland

As I reflect on the process of completing this study, I did have the right people supporting me throughout. The listed individuals helped me to first believe in myself, and then they helped me to realize that it was possible to earn a doctorate degree, and I dedicate this study to these people.

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To my advisor, Dr. Quigley, THANK YOU. You have been my sounding board, my cheerleader, my voice of logic and encouragement, and sense of calm. Thank you.

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Biographical Sketch

Lucia Kaempffe is currently an Elementary Assistant Principal in the Webster Central School District. Ms. Kaempffe attended Syracuse University from 1980-1984 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and Business in 1984. She attended Nazareth College from 1987-1989 and graduated with a Master of Science degree in Elementary Education in 1989. She attended the State University of New York College (SUNY) at Brockport and earned a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Educational Administration in 2003. Ms. Kaempffe also completed a Professional Certificate in International Studies for Creativity and Problem Solving from SUNY Buffalo State College in 2008. She came to St. John Fisher College in the spring of 2018 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Kaempffe pursued her research in "Assessing K-12 Leaders' Level of Critical Consciousness and Social Justice Predisposition in an Effort to Address Inequity in Suburban School Districts" under the direction of Dr. C. Michael Robinson and Dr. Loretta Quigley and received the Ed.D. degree in 2020.

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological research study was to identify the level of critical consciousness of kindergarten through Grade 12 building leaders (principals and assistant principals) in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. The study also sought to understand the leaders' predisposition toward social justice in an effort to redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse student population. Through nine semi-structured interviews, reflection, and sharing, this study was able to gauge the participants' existing levels of critical consciousness based on their past experiences. The data was coded and interpreted to better understand how the lived experiences of school leaders helped to develop and understand their own critical consciousness.

The findings of the study confirmed that the development and understanding of one's critical consciousness is a process and evolves over time based on changing lived experiences. A variety of strategies were utilized by the school leaders to reflect on their experiences to better understand their biases, values, beliefs, power, and privilege. The recommendations of this study include providing—not only school leaders—but all educators, the time and structure, through ongoing professional development, to consistently reflect on and process their experiences. College and university training programs for educational leadership may also consider a similar component to provide future leaders with the opportunity to reflect and learn from their lived experiences.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

By 2044, the United States Census Bureau projects that no one race, or any one ethnic group, will be greater than 50% of the total population (Colby & Ortman, 2015). School district leaders for kindergarten through Grade 12 (K-12) are becoming more aware of the educational implications of this projected shift in racial/ethnic demographics in student populations (Brown, 2018). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was the catalyst that launched the discussion of diversity and proficiency in public education. Specifically, the NCLB Act expanded the parameters of reporting from graduation rates to reporting test scores in English language arts (ELA) and math (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). The dissemination of this assessment data was done through multiple demographic points, including race and ethnicity (Public Broadcasting Service, 2002). As a result, achievement gaps were identified among various ethnic and racial groups, furthering the identification of low- and high-achieving schools within districts. Additionally, the NCLB Act directed all states in the United States to develop and implement challenging academic standards in ELA and math, with the expectations of reaching proficiency of the required academic standards set by the respective states, including the New York State Education Department (NYSED, 2019a). Approximately two decades later, in 2020, disparity among racial and ethnic groups continues to create a need for inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students in K-12 public schools (Brown, 2018). Students who experience culturally responsive learning environments feel included because academic concepts are connected to the everyday

lives of the students. "Teaching methods that connect with students' real lives and interests and promote understanding of their own culture are associated with better academic outcomes" (Byrd, 2016, p. 7).

For all students to experience learning environments that are inclusive, Brown (2018) contended that culturally responsive teaching practices are key. Culturally responsive learning environments include, but are not limited to, teachers utilizing cultural knowledge, teachers' prior experiences, and knowing the learning styles of diverse students to make learning engaging and effective (Brown, 2018). Through targeted professional development, teachers can begin to increase their awareness of the varied cultural environments that students are immersed in at home (Brown, 2018). Continued, targeted professional development also provides teachers with the tools to help understand the lived experiences of their students as well as to develop instructional strategies to ensure culturally responsive classrooms (Brown, 2018).

Culturally responsive instructional strategies can include student-relevant prompts and language as well as images and resources that are diverse (Brown, 2018). Brown (2018) described a professional development event where the speakers and facilitators utilized attention signals, response expectations, discussion strategies, and metaphors that were consistent with African American and Latino cultures. Overall, the feedback from the experience was positive, but some teachers shared how uncomfortable the professional development course was for them (Brown, 2018). Brown (2018) indicated that, for the participants, "rarely are educators put into learning situations inconsistent with their own cultural norms" (p. 101), but every day, many of the students attending public schools experience classrooms that are unlike their home environments. Student-

relevant prompts take into consideration the cultural background and experiences of the students in the class (Krasnoff, 2016). Through observation and discussions with students, Brown (2018) witnessed various levels of engagement when students of different races and cultures noticed their race or culture was not part of the curriculum. Higher levels of engagement of students in their learning may be the catalyst for decreasing the achievement gaps. To facilitate this degree of demographic and social change in an educational setting, transformative leaders must be identified and developed (Shields, 2010).

This study utilized the transformative leadership theory. Transformative leadership, as advanced by Shields (2010), has an emphasis on deep and equitable change in social conditions through the awareness and a critical analysis of self. Deep and equitable change was referenced by Shields (2020) as "change that is permanent and not easily undone" (p. 1). Shields (2010) advanced the notion that transformative leaders must reflect on their life experiences, including where they live and work, to analyze and assess systems, policies, and structures, to identify and to address disparities. The reflection process for transformative leaders is ongoing, but it often begins with the analysis of their personal background (Shields, 2010). This analysis can be done individually or through specific reflection structures. The reflection process may begin with baseline data including the demographics of the students and staff, what extracurricular activities students participate in, and overall student achievement. After the collection of the baseline data, a *strengths*, *weaknesses*, *opportunities*, and *threats* (SWOT) analysis can be completed (Shields, 2020). Critical analysis perpetuates the identification of transformative leadership characteristics, such as courage and the

conviction to take action, which impact academic, social, and civic systems (Shields, 2010). As such, these transformative leaders strive to ensure that all students are successful in learning, and all students are developing into contributing members of society through equity and inclusion opportunities (Shields, 2010). Equity and inclusion are also the foundational tenets of social justice leadership (Shields, 2010).

Social justice is an international and multifaceted issue that pursues the equal distribution of opportunities, rights, and responsibilities, despite differences in physical traits, beliefs, and/or behaviors of all individuals (Pachamama Alliance, 2019). Rasinski (1987) described social justice as an attitude or belief based on social values, such as fairness and respect, relative to specific social groups that encompasses equal rights, equal opportunity, and equal treatment. Transformative leadership is connected to social justice leadership, because both forms of leadership require a mindset that puts into action processes and systems to address inequities and confirms inclusion throughout all aspects of a system (Goldfarb & Grinberb, 2002). Transformative leaders are concerned with all social justice issues within various systems (Shields, 2018).

Becoming a transformative leader who champions social justice is a conscious, cognitive, and evolutionary process constructed by the close examination of personal leadership beliefs (Bell, 1997). These beliefs must include "a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable, and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure" (Bell, 1997, p. 3). According to Noble (2015) "to be critically conscious, one must maintain an active and dynamic awareness of how diversity exists and operates within a particular society" (p. 114).

In order to develop critical consciousness, a process of reflection must be followed by action (Freire, 1970). This process is known as conscientization (Freire, 1970). Originating with Freire (1970, 1993), conscientization focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of the world, allowing for the perception and awareness of social and political contradictions. Gallavan and Webster-Smith (2012) described conscientization as the process of increasing one's awareness of the world, the variables that affect one's life, and the ability to change the world through one's action(s). According to Freire (1970), when working through the process of conscientization, four different stages of maturation are experienced, namely: (a) intransitive consciousness, (b) semi-intransitivity or magical consciousness, (c) popular consciousness, and (d) the development of one's critical consciousness.

The first two stages of conscientization, intransitive consciousness and semi-intransitivity, generally occur during childhood. Children are concerned with basic needs, and they have little comprehension of individual sociocultural factors or the combination of social and cultural factors that exist within their milieu (Freire, 1970). In the first stage of intransitive consciousness, one is concerned with his or her own basic needs, and individuals have little understanding of their or others' personal sociocultural location (Freire, 1970). During the second stage of semi-intransitivity, or the magical consciousness stage, the individual, still in childhood, thinks that sociocultural status is predetermined and will remain the same throughout time (Freire, 1970).

By adulthood, most people have transitioned into the third stage, popular consciousness. The popular consciousness stage of the development of one's critical consciousness sees one's circle of exposure and influence increasing through critical

conversations and by questioning sociocultural status and norms (Freire, 1970). As one's self-confidence increases, so, too, does the circle of his or her exposure and influence (Freire, 1970). At this stage, adults are thinking, questioning, and analyzing at deeper levels, resulting in increased self-confidence, which is demonstrated through the willingness to take risks that include implementing actions and making changes in a responsible manner (Freire, 1970).

The fourth and final level of maturation, the development of one's critical consciousness, creates a sense of urgency that leads to critical action that involves a commitment to act against oppressive conditions with the development of a critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). The cognitive process of using the existing knowledge of one's sociocultural environments to create new knowledge enables one to evaluate systems through the lenses of individual, community, and institutional structures from which notions of privilege and oppression may occur (Noble, 2015). The trajectory of conscientization often leads to an understanding of social, political, and economic power systems. It is these evaluations that the fourth level of conscientization, known as critical consciousness, is achieved.

The development of critical consciousness propels one to think and question at a deeper level, to interpret problems and their effects, to demonstrate risk-taking along with self-confidence, and to initiate actions and change with responsibility (Gallavan & Webster-Smith, 2012). Critical consciousness continues to evolve throughout life based on new experiences and continued reflection (Freire, 1970, 2006).

Problem Statement

As the United States becomes a more diverse nation, so, too, does the composition of the student demographics in K-12 educational settings (NYSED, 2019a). This demographic change demands the critically conscious leader to take on the task of ensuring educational equity for all racial and ethnic groups (Colby & Ortman, 2015). As diversity in K-12 schools increases, leaders are reviewing curriculum, policies, and systems to ensure equitable distribution with every facet of the curriculum (Brown, 2018).

Inequalities may still exist in districts with high graduation rates such as suburban K-12 schools (NYSED, 2019a). Social inequities are present, as evidenced in the existent gaps in the graduation and academic success rates. According to the NYSED (2019a), disparities beyond race and ethnicity also exist. Yearly, NYSED reports student proficiency on the NYS ELA and math assessments. Although Monroe County, New York, proficiency for 2019 is not optimal for any racial or ethnic group, the Black and African American and Hispanic or Latina students are not achieving at the same proficiency as other cohort groups.

The projected increase of the diversity in the student population of school districts in Monroe County, New York and the achievement gap between different racial and ethnic groups reveals the need to further understand the critical consciousness and predisposition of school leaders toward social justice in an effort to redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse student population. Table 1.1 represents the data for the NYS ELA and math proficiency for Grades 3-8 for 2019 in Monroe County, New York, demonstrating the gap in

achievement among racial and ethnic cohorts of students. New York State's proficiency

ranking is based on students receiving a score of 3 or 4 on these assessments.

Table 1.1

2019 Monroe County ELA and Math Proficiency Assessment Percentages Disseminated

by Race/Ethnicity, Grades 3-8

Race/Ethnicity	ELA (%)	Math (%)
All Students	37	42
Multiracial	45	51
American Indian or Native Alaskan	31	42
Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	49	60
White	52	60
Black or African American	18	18
Hispanic or Latina	21	23

This study explored the problem of the limited understanding of suburban school

leaders of their personal critical consciousness level, and the impact of this understanding

as they identified, addressed, and worked to remediate socially unjust practices. Leaders'

existing personal and professional lenses of their experiences may impede the

implementation of practices that are socially just (Shields, 2018). Through critical

examination and reflection, leaders cannot only identify perceptions and attitudes that

inhibit inclusion and equity in unconscious ways, but they can also identify the need to

alter their mental models and mindsets (Shields, 2018). This new awareness and

development of a leader's critical consciousness may help other leaders to identify their

implicit biases, as well as help those leaders to possibly adjust or transform their personal

and professional lenses through which they have impeded equity and inclusion.

Theoretical Rationale

Transformative leadership theory is the theoretical framework that guided this study. The term *transformative* has been used in a variety of settings with a myriad of meanings. Foster (1989), an early transformative leadership scholar and writer, noted that leaders must identify and reflect on the conditions where these leaders live and work. These reflections should act as a catalyst for change (Foster, 1989). Weiner (2003) described transformative leadership as "an exercise of power and authority that begins with questions of justice, democracy, and the debate between individual accountability and social responsibility" (p. 89). Grounded in Freire's (1970) development of conscientization, transformative leadership is a critical approach to leadership. Once conscientization is developed within an individual, critical reflection, analysis, and action against injustices can take place (Shields, 2018). According to Shields (2018), critical awareness, critical reflection, and action are the hallmark traits of a transformative leader.

According to Shields (2018), transformative leadership focuses on leadership that is not "business as usual" (p. 11), meaning that transformative leaders lead differently by incorporating the practice of critical reflection. Whereas Burns (1978) placed leadership into two categories, namely transactional or transformational, the evolution of becoming a transformative leader in education begins with a process of critical reflection of one's experiences that develops into a keen awareness of critical consciousness of self, and an awareness of the leader's strengths, weaknesses, and challenges within society (Shields, 2018). As the concept of critical consciousness is applied to a school system, the transformative leader analyzes the systems, policies, beliefs, and values to determine the need to change to ensure equity and inclusion for all students (Shields, 2018).

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Three theories: transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and transformative leadership, are closely related. Much of the early thinking around these three leadership theories began with Burns in 1978. Specifically, transactional leadership, according to Burns (1978), focuses on the exchange of things (i.e., ideas, issues, factors) or, as a reciprocal transaction, transactional leadership focuses on the leader-follower relationship (Shields, 2010).

Transformational leaders possess the fundamental values that focus on liberty, justice, and equality (Shields, 2010). A transformational leader strives to develop a common purpose among all involved, to develop organizational goals, and to identify resources to ensure that the organizational goals concentrate on effective change (Shields, 2010). Shields (2010) advanced the notion that transformational and transformative leadership both have the foundation of transforming or changing something. Transformational leadership focuses on the effectiveness of organizational change while transformative leadership aims for individual, organizational, and societal transformation (Shields, 2010). Both the transactional and transformational leader accentuate the improvement of the organization and work to create valuable change.

The transformative leader seeks to address the individuals who constitute the organization (Shields, 2010). Shields (2010) implied that the transformative leader has "the most promise and potential to meet both the academic and social justice needs of complex, diverse and beleaguered education systems" (p. 5). Transformative leaders challenge the abuses of power and privilege that create or perpetuate inequity and injustice (Shields, 2010). Liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice are the bedrock tenets of the transformative leadership theory (Shields, 2010). The goal of

transformative leadership is "individual, organizational, and societal transformation" (Shields, 2010, p. 6). The transformative leader requires both moral courage and a sense of activism as transformative leaders are often living in a continuous state of tension and challenge (Shields, 2018). However, if the transformative leader can persevere through tension to promote change, this leadership style can become a catalyst toward educational leadership and institutional reformation. Ideals, including equity, democracy, and justice, are the desired outcomes of transformative leaders for which no specific path or prescriptive formula has been established (Shields, 2018). Transformative leadership, as articulated by Shields (2018), consists of eight tenets:

1. The desire to effect deep and equitable change;

2. The deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge frameworks that lead to inequity and injustice;

3. Addressing the inequitable distribution of power;

4. A focus on the individual and collective good;

5. A focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice;

6. A focus on interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness;

7. Balancing critique with promise; and

8. Demonstrating moral courage. (Shields, 2018, p. 20)

Tenet 1: The desire to generate deep and equitable change. Leaders must determine what kind of change is needed based on the identification and understanding of inequities and unjust practices within their system of interest. In an educational setting, the transformative leader might be concerned with reviewing and creating policies and procedures that ensure an equitable, inclusive, and socially just school (Shields, 2018).

These deep and equitable changes are so embedded into an organization, that these adjustments become the standard foundational bedrock to the sustainability of social justice practices (Shields, 2018).

Tenet 2: The deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge frameworks that lead to inequality and injustice. Transformative leaders may find the second tenet to be challenging given the need to uncover or to understand how people think and to "attempt to change mental models and mindset" (Shields, 2018, p. 39). Shields (2018) provided two ways to begin the process of deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge frameworks. The first suggestion is to challenge and eliminate deficit thinking (Shields, 2018). Deficit thinking, as defined by Shields (2018), assumes that the *problem* is with an individual or a group rather than with an organization or the norms created by a society. Secondly, Shields suggested that the deconstruction and the reconstruction of knowledge frameworks requires others within the organization to engage in difficult conversations. These conversations explore personal mental models and mindsets that were created through others' various life experiences (Shields, 2018).

Tenet 3. Addressing the inequitable distribution of power. The transformative leader must look outside of one's organization for the needs and desires of the community to understand "how the current culture of power continues to marginalize and exclude" (Shields, 2018, p. 62). As such, leaders must first acknowledge their own personal power and privilege (Shields, 2018). Finally, transformative leaders will need to have the courage to challenge these newly discovered inequities (Shields, 2010).

Tenet 4. A focus on the individual and collective good. Shields (2018) described the private good as the outcomes that help to increase the confidence and

competence of an individual, whereby pursuing various opportunities, individuals may achieve specific levels of desired success. Shields (2018) referred to the public good as the outcomes that positively affect society.

Tenet 5. A focus on emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice.

Emancipation, democracy, equity and justice are foundational concepts. Shields (2018) purported that "emancipation requires, not just the exercise of individual rights, but the need for the removal of all the barriers constituted by prejudice and discrimination" (p. 89). Democracy, according to Shields (2018), will only occur in schools when all children do not fear the possibility of rejection because of their perspective or ideas. Additionally, equity and justice require that each child be treated with fairness (Shields, 2018). The transformative leaders in education work to redesign the structures that continue to marginalize students. Part of the work for the transformative leader in Tenet 5 is to assist students in developing a healthy self-identity (Shields, 2018). As a result of a healthy self-identity, students are better able to understand how each fit into society and the world (Shields, 2018).

Tenet 6. A focus on interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness. Shields (2018) stated that an essential first step of transformative leaders is to ensure that each student is offered a "social justice education" (p. 96), which helps develop the interdependence, interconnectedness, and global awareness of each student. Shields (2018) defined social justice education as one where "the learning environment, organizational structures, and educational opportunities experienced by students offer equity of both access and outcomes to all students" (p. 97).

Tenet 7. Balancing critique with promise. Transformative leaders work to refrain from engaging in criticism of the current situation. Instead, the focus should be working toward engagement through implementing the action, leading to effective change (Shields, 2018).

Tenet 8. Demonstrating moral courage. The moral courage of transformative leaders is demonstrated by doing the right thing—even in the light of the opinion of the public, which may not always be supportive (Shields, 2018). Transformative leaders, who demonstrate moral courage acknowledge and critique existing inequities, work to advance a better future for all (Shields, 2018).

All eight tenets of transformative leadership are important in identifying and pursuing social justice. Although transformative leaders need to determine how to implement the eight tenets to meet the needs and goals within their specific setting and context, their first step is to develop their personal critical consciousness (Shields, 2018).

For the purpose of this study, Tenets 1, 3, and 8 are the focus. Tenet 1 is transformative leaders' desire to generate deep and equitable change (Shields, 2018). Tenet 3 requires leaders to understand their own power and privilege and begin to address the inequities of power within their organizations (Shields, 2018). Finally, Tenet 8 highlights leaders' ability to have moral courage to do the right thing when public opinion may not be supportive (Shields, 2018). Tenets 1, 3, and 8 are most closely connected to the research questions of this study and they provided a foundation for the development of the interview questions. In this study, the goal of was to identify like-minded, critically conscious educators in suburban districts.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological research study was to identify the level of critical consciousness of K-12 school principals and assistant principals in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. The study sought to understand these leaders' predisposition toward social justice in an effort to redesign and implement educational structures to attend more holistically to a diverse student population. A qualitative approach was utilized because this approach allowed the participants to share their lived experiences (Wertz et al., 2011). The design of a qualitative study focuses on the context of critical consciousness and what emerges, while also being interpretive, meaning that the data can be co-constructed between the participants and the researcher. A qualitative study design considers the interpretations and perspectives of the participants and the researcher of the identified phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. In what ways do suburban K-12 leaders (principals and assistant principals) describe their understanding of critical consciousness?

2. What life experiences have informed K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals of their level of critical consciousness?

3. What have been the experiences of K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals who have attempted to implement change of a social justice nature?

Potential Significance of the Study

The potential significance of this study is threefold. First, by assessing the critical consciousness of K-12 leaders in suburban districts, the identification of transformative leaders with social justice proclivities may provide a core group of leaders who can take action to formulate a pathway to provide educational equity and inclusion for all children. Second, with the transformative leaders taking action to create deep and equitable change, social justice policies may be identified, developed, and implemented toward a more equitable achievement on the New York State ELA and math assessments for Monroe County districts. Third, more children may then have the opportunity to achieve at higher levels throughout their educational career, coupled with a healthier self-identity, and a better understanding of how each child fits into society and also into the world (Brown, 2018).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 discussed the rapidly changing demographics of the United States, and the implication of the NCLB Act of 2001 as paramount indicators for the need to create equity and inclusion in suburban K-12 districts in Monroe County. Leaders who become more critically conscious are able to understand how personal experiences and biases may impact decision and policy making (Shields, 2018). The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological research study was to identify the level of critical consciousness of K-12 school principals and assistant principals in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. The study also sought to understand the leaders' predisposition toward social justice in an effort to redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse student population. Through nine

semi-structured interviews, reflection, and sharing, this study was able to gather the participants' existing levels of critical consciousness based on their past experiences.

Chapter 2 examines the literature that is related to leading for social justice. Specifically, the literature review is categorized by the following topics: social justice, transformative leadership, critical consciousness, and critical consciousness measures. The review includes studies on the understanding of one's critical consciousness in various settings as well as the development of tools to measure critical consciousness.

Chapter 3 provides an in-depth description of the research design, data collection, and analysis process. Additionally, the consent process is described along with measures for safeguarding the study participants and their information. Finally, supporting documents will be placed in the appendices.

Using the participants' own words as the primary data source, Chapter 4 disseminates the results of the research. The data is shared through categories and themes relating to the development and awareness of one's critical consciousness.

Chapter 5, the final chapter, discusses, summarizes, and interprets the results to describe the implications of the findings, address the limitations of the study, and to offer recommendations for future research and actions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the entire dissertation.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

  The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive, phenomenological study sought to identify the critical consciousness of K-12 building leaders in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. This study also sought to understand the leaders' predisposition toward social justice in an effort to redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse student population. This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to social justice leadership, transformative leadership, critical consciousness, and critical consciousness measures. The review includes studies as well as literature focused on literature reviews.

Social Justice Leadership

  Theoharis (2007) conducted a qualitative, autoethnography study with seven principals from urban schools in an unidentified area of the Midwest. An autoethnographic study includes the researcher as part of the study. As a member of the study, the starting point for the researcher is to explore broader social issues. Theoharis (2007) stated that by "including myself enabled me to make this work more personal and reflective" (p. 225). The purpose of the Theoharis study was to examine a subgroup of principals, who were leaders for social justice, and to see how they guided their schools to transform the culture, curriculum, pedagogical practices, atmosphere, and school-wide priorities to benefit marginalized students (Theoharis, 2007). Theoharis (2007) defined social justice leadership as "the principals that make issues of race, class, gender,

disability, sexual orientation and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership, practice and vision" (p. 223).

Theoharis (2007) interviewed seven participants and established a description of the ways in which principals demonstrated social justice leadership, the resistance each faced, the personal toll on the leaders, and the strategies they employed to sustain their social justice work. Besides the leaders' commitment to equity and justice, each worked to create stronger environments within their respective schools. Stronger environments were realized by raising student achievement, improving school structures, recentering and enhancing staff capacity, and improving the culture of the school and community to focus on equity.

One principal participating in the study reported significant gains on the statewide reading tests. For example, the percentage of African American students who scored proficient or advanced in 2000 was at 33%, but rose to 78% in 2004. Hispanic students, who scored proficient or advanced in 2000 and were at 18%, and rose to 100% in 2004. Students in poverty also demonstrated gains in their reading with 40% at the proficient or advanced level in 2000 and rising to 78% in 2004 (Theoharis, 2007). To recenter and enhance the staff capacity, the leaders addressed issues of race; staff development was focused on equity; the leaders developed the investment of the staff in social justice, hiring, and supervising for justice; and created opportunities to empower the staff (Theoharis, 2007). Each principal in the study worked to establish a more welcoming and warm school climate for the students and their families. One principal reported, to establish a warmer school climate, the school began by changing the way the parents and families were greeted and welcomed into the school (Theoharis, 2007).

To create socially just schools, the leaders did face resistance within the school and immediate community as well as in the district (Theoharis, 2007, p. 240). The Theoharis (2007) study demonstrates that social justice leadership is a process, and it is often met with a myriad of challenges and often with resistance. The daily demands of being a school leader, the desire by staff and families not to challenge the status quo, the occurrences of deficit or obstructive attitudes of the staff, and the privileged expectations by the parents in the community, were examples of the challenges and the resistance faced by the school leaders (Theoharis, 2007). Challenging the status quo was met by staff and families stating that the school had worked *this way* for many years, so they wanted to know why they needed to change things? (Theoharis, 2007). Additionally, within the district and outside of the district, the resistance was surfaced through:

- unsupportive central office administration (district leaders and directors);
- intimidating bureaucracy with reporting structures that were unclear;
- uninspired colleagues that don't have the same drive for equity and justice in the system;
- lack of resources, which was due to budget cuts, that included staff; and
- harmful state and federal regulations (Theoharis, 2007).

The participants/leaders also identified the negative impact on their personal well-being and the constant state of discouragement experienced on a daily basis (Theoharis, 2007).

The leaders also shared proactive and coping strategies that were developed to sustain the social justice work. Proactive strategies included approaching daily work differently by communicating in a purposeful and authentic way with students, staff, families, and the community (Theoharis, 2007). A supportive administrative network,

within and outside of the district, and relationships were established to work together for change, sharing ideas, and maintaining the vision of equity for all. Coping strategies included prioritizing life outside of school and engaging in regular physical exercise.

Rivera-McCutchen (2014) conducted a case study exploring the perspectives of four New York City secondary urban school principals using vignettes involving teacher prejudice. Interviews were conducted and recorded as part of the data collection. The principals were given and asked to respond to two vignettes that presented hypothetical scenarios involving prejudiced behavior of teachers. The findings of the study suggest that school leaders who enter a leadership position with a predisposition for equity and fighting injustice may be better able to handle situations involving prejudice that will advance the goals of social justice (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). A common theme shared by the participants indicates that social justice was applied as a guiding principle in the concept and design for their schools. As a result, the participants/principals defined their roles as stewards of social justice. Three strategies were identified and implemented, which included communicating openly with staff, setting and maintaining the values of the school, and staff development toward social justice orientation to create socially just school communities in their buildings. This study provided further evidence of the steps or processes that leaders embrace to promote social justice in their schools. The results of the Rivera-McCutchen (2014) study also revealed universal definitions of social justice with a focus on equitable access to resources and opportunities and fighting injustice.

Galloway, Ishimaru, and Larson (2015) conducted a mixed-method study to examine the perspectives of educational leaders on their equitable practices with a focus

on visionary leadership and instructional improvement. Invitations were sent to 180

administrators (principals, assistant principals, superintendents, and central office

administrators), teacher leaders, and state and higher education leaders who were

currently serving in their assigned roles. All of the potential participants attended the

2010 fall institute for the Oregon Leadership Network. Of the 180 leaders invited, 114

participated in the study. Principals and assistant principals made up 54.3% of the

participants while 36% were central office administrators, and 9.6% were superintendents

(Galloway et al., 2015). Galloway et al. (2015) asked participants to complete rubrics,

but they were also asked to describe the evidence to support the rating that they gave on

the rubric. Participants were asked to complete the Leadership for Equity rubrics, which

focused on the standards of Visionary Leadership for Equity and Instructional

Improvement for Equity. The Galloway et al. (2015) data reflected the responses of the

participants for each rubric. Responses from the participants ranged between 71% and

89% for being proficient or above in three standards: vision development, creating an

equitable school culture, and providing inclusive and effective instruction. However,

after reviewing the data, a question arose: If over 70% of the educational leaders were

really proficient or better on the practices of inequities, why are there still inequities in

schools? The study found that many of the educational leaders identified they were

further along in their equity work, but the descriptions of the evidence provided

suggested that the leaders were more at the *emerging level* of equitable practice as

defined by the rubrics (Galloway et al., 2015). The researchers concluded from the study

that leader self-assessments may not provide an accurate view of one's own practice, so

the suggestion for a next step was to have teachers, parents, students, community

members, and supervisors also complete the rubrics. The 360-degree use of the rubrics might provide more reliable perceptions on which to base an assessment of the practice of a leader (Galloway et al., 2015).

Wang (2018) also studied how principals promote social justice to address marginalization and inequity in schools. The purpose of Wang's qualitative study was to better understand how principals positioned themselves as social justice advocates. This descriptive study used semi-structured interviews, based on social-constructivism, defined as "the view that reality is created by individuals interacting with their social world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6).

The Wang (2018) study consisted of 22 principals from elementary and secondary schools in Toronto, Canada who were identified through purposeful sampling and networking technique. As such, through the use of professional networking, some participants later referred like-minded colleagues, who identified as advocates for justice and equity, to the researcher (Wang, 2018). The referred like-minded colleagues represented a purposeful sampling because the individuals had the common characteristic of self-identified advocates for justice and equity (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003).

The interviews provided the 22 principals with the opportunity to share how each embodied and advocated for social justice values in a school setting. Additionally, participants identified a variety of obstacles, such as resources (money, time, and personnel), deficit thinking of stakeholders, middle-class values (conformity, compliance, and blind acknowledgement of hierarchy), and lack of time for their commitment to social justice leadership (Wang, 2018). Conclusions of the study include that leaders following social justice agendas demonstrate courage and the willingness to disrupt

systems, structures, and practices that are unjust, engaging all stakeholders and producing other leaders for social justice (Wang, 2018). The Wang (2018) study provided further explanation of the methods that social justice leaders utilized to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Ozdemir (2017) conducted a quantitative study investigating the relationship between social justice leadership, attitudes toward school, and school engagement through a convenient sampling method. The purpose of the study was to examine the connection between social justice leadership behaviors of school principals and student engagement, according to the opinions of the participants, who were high school students. High school students from 11 schools, within seven school districts, in the province of Ankara, Turkey participated in the study. The students were asked to complete the Scale for Social Justice Leadership (SSJL), Scale for Attitudes toward School (SAS), and Scale for School Engagement (SSE).

The findings of the Ozdemir (2017) study show that there is a moderate relationship between social justice leadership and student engagement. The moderate relationship means that as the perceptions of the students on social justice leadership goes up, student engagement in school also increases (Ozedmir, 2017). However, if the leader does exhibit social justice leadership, the needs of the disadvantaged students may still not be met (Ozedmir, 2017). Restrictions, such as limiting the authority of the school leader, imposed on school principals by district-level administrators, were one explanation offered as to why these students' needs are not addressed. These restrictions may have caused the leaders to hesitate in demonstrating social justice behaviors (Ozedmir, 2017). Another finding of this study defines social justice behaviors of

principals as significant predictors of school attitudes and school engagement. The social

justice behaviors included: understanding their personal critical consciousness; building a

supportive, inclusive environment for all students; and to support and satisfy the needs of

all students (Ozedmir, 2017). The study concluded that social justice leadership is a

significant indicator of the attitude of students toward school and their engagement in

school. Ozdemir's (2017) study added to the literature additional evidence of the

importance of social justice leadership in the success and attitudes of students.

Buyukgoze, Sayir, Gulcemal, and Kubilay (2018) stated that schools have the

responsibility to not only prepare students for academic success but also to produce

responsible and productive individuals in society. The comparative, quantitative study by

Buyukgoze et al. (2018) explored the relationship between the social justice leadership

behaviors of the principal and the level of student engagement. Using a convenient

sampling method, the target population was identified as high school students, studying

during the spring semester of 2015-2016, located in states in Turkey with populations

greater than 200,000. The Social Justice Leadership Scale (SJLS) was completed by 968

high school (Grades 9-12) students.

In the Buyukgoze et al. (2018) study, the researchers considered three dimensions

of the social justice leader. First, the social justice leader works to provide equitable

access to education for the socioeconomic, political and socially-disadvantaged groups of

students. The second dimension of a social justice leader utilized in this study is the

development of critical consciousness by the school leader to analyze and evaluate their

personal beliefs and values but also those of the changing outside world. The critical

consciousness of the leader should be accompanied by lifelong development and self-

reflection. The third and final dimension is to ensure that all students have access to a quality education. The inclusive education of students encompassed working together, building strong relationships and encouraging the participation in all aspects of school and aim for success.

The SJLS and the Student Engagement Scale (SEC) were voluntarily completed by 968 high school students for analysis. Demographic data included gender, type of high school, place of residence, income, and education level of the mother. Support from the school leader, critical consciousness, and participation of the leader were the social justice leadership variables. Students who completed the scale originated from two different types of schools in Turkey: Anatolian ($n = 488$) and Vocational ($n = 480$) high schools. Anatolian schools in Turkey are public school, whereas the vocational schools focus on training for a specific trade. The results of the Buyukgoze et al. (2018) study indicated that the social justice behaviors of the leader have an impact on student engagement (mean score: 3.38/5.00). It was found that there was a significant positive relationship between the behaviors of the social justice leaders and the perceptions of the students ($r_{SJSLoverall * SECoverall} = .560, p < .01$). A medium-level relationship was determined to be between social justice leadership and support of students and the critical consciousness of the school leader ($r_{critical consciousness * SECoverall} = .518, p < .01$). The correlation between the participant dimension and student engagement was low but significant ($r_{participation * SECoverall} = .379, p < .01$). The data indicate that there is an important significant relationship between social justice leadership and engagement, meaning that if there is strong social justice leadership, the engagement of the students will be at higher levels.

In conclusion, the results of Buyukgoze et al. (2018) determined: (a) high school students feel a moderate level of engagement based on perceptions; (b) school principals' attitudes toward social justice behaviors were moderate; (c) there were positive and significant relationships between the social justice behavior of the principal and the school engagement by students; (d) gender and income levels were significant predictors of student engagement; (e) support, critical consciousness, and participation of social justice leaders were significant predictors of student engagement; and (f) all of the variables (demographic and social justice leadership variables) were all found to be significant predictors of the engagement of students. The demographic data included gender, school type, income, and the level of education for the mother, while the social justice variables included support and level of critical consciousness (Buyukgoze et al., 2018). As stated in other studies, such as Ozdemir (2017), Buyukgoze et al. (2018) found that the principal is expected to create a school environment that helps to improve engagement within an organization—not only for students but staff as well. The findings of the Buyukgoze et al. (2018) support the results of the Ozdemir (2017) study that there is a strong relationship between the behaviors of the social justice school and the school engagement of the students.

Transformative Leadership

Through a qualitative study, Shields (2010) explored how transformative leadership practices were presented in the routines of two educational leaders. The purpose of the Shields (2010) descriptive, qualitative, phenomenological study was to assess how using transformative leadership theory guided the practice of the leaders to impact not only educational change but broader social change as well. Shields (2010)

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used a set of predetermined criteria to select the two principals from a wider study of educators' pedagogical conceptions of social justice. The interviews were conducted by Shields (2010) with two principals from the state of Illinois, as well as with others involved in their educational settings, and by direct observations. The transformative leadership practices included balancing critique and promise, effecting deep and equitable change, and the deconstruction and reconstruction of social/cultural knowledge frameworks that generate inequity. Acknowledging power and privilege; emphasizing both the private and public good; focusing on liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice, as well as demonstrating moral courage and activism, were also practices of the two leaders.

Shields (2010) found evidence from the practices of both leaders that connected to transformative leadership practices. An example of how one participant demonstrated the practice of the deconstruction and reconstruction of social/cultural knowledge frameworks to generate equity was the school leader scheduled staff visits to low income and more "dangerous" housing areas. The second participant demonstrated moral courage and activism by "challenging the superintendent regarding language used at meetings and took difficult stands and resisted explicit resistance of staff, community and other principals" (Shields, 2010, p. 17).

The Shields (2010) study determined that transformative leadership is not only possible but that the practices of the transformative leader can help create deep and meaningful change in the educational setting. The two leaders who were studied had the courage to challenge the status quo and areas of social injustice and implement changes in their schools that resulted in greater equity and more social justice experiences for all

students. These changes included structural changes, changes in the culture of their schools, and pedagogical practices resulting in improved test scores (Shields, 2010).

Wilson (2016) conducted a qualitative study to highlight the interconnection of critical care with transformative educational leadership through a self-identified transformative school leader in the state of North Carolina. Because this participant devoted the majority of her educational career in schools that serve impoverished African American youth, a definition of critical care was developed. Wilson (2016) defined critical care as embracing and exhibiting values, dispositions, and behaviors connected to empathy, compassion, being an advocate, systematic critique, perseverance, and calculated risk-taking to ensure equity for all students and improving schools. Both critical care and transformative leadership involves risk-taking. According to Wilson (2016), leaders demonstrating both critical care and the practices of a transformative leader have a "willingness to explicitly discuss and confront racism, classism and other forms of oppression and bias" (p. 561) with a deep care about students and justice.

Wilson (2016) utilized narrative data from one self-identified transformative education leader through a counter-storytelling process to identify the participant. The chosen participant was credited with leading a school that had increased student test scores on standardized test for 6 years. Data was collected through seven, in-depth, in-person, conversational, and semi-open interviews with the participant. Time was also spent observing the principal, reviewing school records, district documents, and newspaper articles about the school that provided background information. The interview data were the primary source of information.

After using iterative analytical methods to code and identify themes, the data identified themes directly connected to Research Question 1: How have transformative leaders in urban schools highly impacted by poverty implemented successful turnaround strategies? The practices demonstrating how to successfully turn around a school included: understanding childhood poverty, challenging the biases of teachers about students, handling poverty contexts with compassion, staying committed to transformative leadership, standing ground when criticized, and keeping spiritual faith (Wilson, 2016). Throughout all of the practices identified, a focus on student learning and achievement, as well as the demonstration of critical care, was maintained.

The participant in the Wilson (2016) study shared "that her sensitivity and empathy towards her students shaped her strategies for improving her schools' organizational culture" (Wilson, 2016, p. 566). She worked to "get the right people on the bus and to help her staff to not feel sorry for the student and to raise their expectations for the student" (Wilson, 2016, p. 566). These two pieces of data illustrate how the participant labored to not only understand the poverty of her students but also to work with her staff to change their deficit thinking about the abilities of the students. The data also revealed an alignment between philosophies of educational care and the beliefs of transformative leadership, which are directly connected to how a leader conceptualizes transformative leadership. Wilson (2016) conceptualized the core traits of the transformative leader, which include promoting trust with honest dialogue, so everyone feels safe, being open to new ideas, being honest with feedback, and being willing to be a change agent (Wilson, 2016). The data also revealed that consistently self-reflecting

raises awareness of the inequities affecting African American students experiencing

poverty in society and the educational system (Wilson, 2016).

Finally, Wilson's (2016) data indicate that acknowledging power dynamics,

staying committed to advocacy and resistance, and challenging the racial and

socioeconomic biases may prevent equity for all students. Data also supported that

critical care and transformative leadership are connected and the implementation of both

can lead to the success of students. Finally, the narrative captured the emotional,

financial, and/or professional costs experienced for risk-taking by the leader (Wilson,

2016). Advocacy also was demonstrated by the participant to challenge the perceived

inequities in the educational system (Wilson, 2016).

The purpose of the case study by Shields and Warke (2010) was to understand the

realities of homeless families and to identify the barriers to positive school-family

partnerships. Shields and Warke (2010) also wanted to determine whether transformative

leadership might provide a useful lens through which to better understand and address the

educational needs of homeless children and their families. Given the varied definitions of

homelessness, the study utilized the legal definition from the NCLB Act. Homelessness

as defined by the act is "individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime

residence" (Shields & Warke, 2010, p. 725).

Three-hour interviews were conducted for the collection of data with three

homeless participants who volunteered to be part of the study, and the principal of an

elementary school who led the school the children attended. The principal participating

in the study was also the co-author of this study. From a review of the data, Shields and

Warke (2010) looked at five of the major tenets of transformative leadership that might

lead to developing new understandings of how to work with homeless families, community agencies, and policy makers. The five tenets included deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge frameworks; emancipation, democracy, equity and social justice; interdependence and interconnectedness; balancing critique and promise; and the need for moral courage.

The statements provided by the participants demonstrated to Shields and Warke (2010) the need to deconstruct the current *knowledge* and biased perceptions that people have about homeless children and their families. School leaders need to refrain from assumptions and conclusions. These assumptions and conclusions included how itinerant people look, what the homeless do or not do, the academic abilities of the displaced children, and not blaming these children or their families for their current situation. Last, the review of the data revealed that the basic task of the school leader was to challenge stereotypes and balance identified stereotypes with a realistic view that is connected with the tenets of emancipation, democracy, equity, and social justice (Shields & Warke, 2018).

The tenet of interdependence and interconnectedness was recognized through the participants' sharing of frustrations with the fact that the different support people, groups, and organizations seemed to work in isolation from one another. Participants were challenged to coordinate available services and supports. Shields and Warke (2010) concluded that it is important for the leaders and staff in schools, as well as members of society, to understand that furnishing services is not just about providing food, clothing, and homework support, but also "promoting a mutually beneficial, interdependent society" (p. 812). While balancing critique and promise, the data presented many

criticisms and the impact of policies and practices on homeless children and their families. Although the challenges seemed overwhelming, the participant continued to engage in conversations focused on the challenges presented to these families. Policies, procedures, and teaching strategies were reviewed toward improvement to better support the success of the homeless students. Open dialogue continued with the teachers to help create deeply inclusive classrooms, including forbidding any criticism, which could prevent the students' progress with analyzing policies, structures, understanding of other staff members, teaching strategies, and finally, taking appropriate action to make the necessary changes.

The final tenet discussed in Shields and Warke's (2010) study was the need for moral courage, as demonstrated by the participants, to address the needed changes from a moral point of view. Shields and Warke (2010) also concluded from an analysis of the data that the use of modeling effective involvement in procedures is an important component of transformative leadership. This effective involvement might be direct and supportive communication with the families of homeless students or helping to ensure transportation of the students experiencing homelessness to and from school. Shields and Warke (2010) demonstrated that the implementation of the tenets of transformative leadership can support the work for socially just schools.

Critical Consciousness

Hooper (1999) described the development of critical consciousness as a process called *consciousness raising*. Consciousness raising includes learning to see reality in a new critical way that uncovers existing structures of inequity and one's place in those systems. The process of developing critical consciousness may begin with sensemaking.

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Utilizing sensemaking theory, DeMatthews (2015) used a qualitative case study of an elementary school principal's experiences in an urban setting and how she worked to create a more inclusive school. Sensemaking as defined by Weick (1995) is a social process where leaders understand, interpret, and create a sense for themselves of their changing organizational context and surroundings by constructing and reconstructing meaning.

Interviews occurred over the span of the 2010-2011 school year and extended for the following school year. The findings of the DeMatthews (2015) study established that an inclusive school not only required skill and perseverance but time. Additionally, the social justice orientation of the school leader was not enough to sustain meaningful, long-term change. Effectiveness of the leader was not about the lack of social justice orientation, hard work, or vision but the lack of expertise, experience, and confidence (DeMatthews, 2015). Self-awareness/critical consciousness is a component that can further support the development of a social justice leader.

The instrumental case study by Carpenter, Bukoski, Berry, and Mitchell (2017) looked at the role of social justice identities for 12 assistant school principals in persistent low-achieving schools in urban settings. The assistant principals perceived themselves as allies for social justice, but the success of these leaders to create equity in their schools was still in question. When reviewing the literature, the researchers looked at a variety of categories with one being *social justice leadership*. Carpenter et al. (2017) utilized the definition of social justice leadership as principals who advocate and lead but continue to work on the practices and issues that keep historically marginalizing conditions for individuals in the United States.

The Edwards (2006) model of aspiring social justice ally identity was utilized in the Carpenter (2017) study. The model provides details for three aspirations for social justice leadership: self-interest, altruism, and social justice. These leaders are motivated by the self-interest view that the world is a fair and just place, and they understand oppression through the lens of those who are close to them. A self-interest leader finds access to problems through individuals, not systems.

Leaders with an altruistic perspective, view the world as a system of oppression and privilege, but they have not worked through their internalized guilt over being a member of the dominant group (Carpenter et al., 2017). The altruistic perspective leaders see themselves as the hero or rescuer of those who are victims of oppression. The framework, when utilized, helps the leaders to engage in the process of developing their critical consciousness (Carpenter et al., 2017).

After analyzing the data, Carpenter et al. (2017) presented three narratives. One of the narratives was social justice identity development, where Carpenter et al. (2017) found that many of the assistant principals positioned themselves as self-interest or altruistic allies. These leaders focused on creating relationships to help students find success. Finally, the study determined that the analysis of social justice leadership deserves more attention in the field of education because the data showed that the assistant principals claimed to have a social justice identity, however, they were challenged to create lasting change for equity within their schools.

The action research case study conducted by Murray-Johnson and Guerra (2018) took place on the campus of an elementary school located in the outskirts of a fast-growing metropolitan area in the United States. The total student population of the

school was 300 students, and it was composed of 24% Hispanic, 16% Black, 6% Asian, and 54% White students (Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018). These researchers focused on how the leadership team, composed of the school principal and the assistant principal, approached the phenomenon of deficit thinking in this school (Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018). The study, which included surveys and focus groups, presented a lack of cultural responsiveness in practice concerning the Black and Hispanic students. The focus group participants consisted of teachers, parents, and students from the elementary school community. The exact number of participants who completed the survey and participated in focus groups was not explicitly stated in the study.

Action research in education emphasizes the investigation of issues in schools and/or classrooms. The leadership team worked to establish a collaborative action research team (CART) to help with the implementation of the study by Murray-Johnson and Guerra (2018). The CART team gathered and analyzed preliminary data to narrow the focus of the study. Anecdotal comments were also collected from meetings, hall conversations, and various locations around the school.

After the review of the data and discovering that the achievement gap for the Hispanic and Black students was close to 20%, the CART team began a literature review to see if other schools were experiencing the same challenges and what could they learn. An instrument was developed by the CART team to collect target data from teachers, students, and parents to determine the perspectives of each group. The CART team also created an observation tool, utilized focus groups, and utilized other types of data such as race/ethnicity and placement of students in various courses. Although the school had worked to create a more inclusive environment, there were inconsistencies in the data that

indicated that deficit thinking had a strong presence on the campus along with ineffective instructional practices (Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018).

The leadership team uncovered personal, unexpected emotions in response to the data and the responses by staff. One question that the leadership team needed to address was: How can the administrative team lead for social justice with these feelings? This question established the need for the leaders to develop their critical consciousness. Additionally, when the data was shared with staff, the leadership team learned that they were not prepared for the tough discussions and how to facilitate these conversations (Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018). The identification and managing of their own fears, anxieties, and other feelings, when confronted with resistance, became part of their critical consciousness development (Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018).

Todd, McConnell, and Suffrin (2014) examined the links between attitudes toward White privilege, religious beliefs, and social justice interest and commitment. Specifically, the researchers examined the understudied area of factors that predict personal interest and commitment to social justice among White, Christian religious groups. The 500 undergraduate participants from DePaul University were asked to respond to four scales: the Social Issue Questionnaire (using the Social Justice Interest subscale), the White Privilege Attitude Scale, the self-identification to assess religious conservation, and the Sanctification of Social Justice Scale. Means and standard deviation were utilized as well as the correlations among study variables to analyze the data. The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) indicated significant gender differences for social justice and White privilege. The social justice variables used in the Todd et al. (2014) study were social justice interest and commitment, religious

conservatism, sanctification of social justice, willingness to confront White privilege, White privilege awareness, cost of addressing White privilege, and White privilege remorse (Todd et al., 2014).

Tests revealed that women had significantly higher levels of social justice interest, more willingness to confront White privilege, and more White privilege remorse than men (Todd et al., 2014). Additionally, the data showed that social justice variables indicated no religious affiliation differences, while the White privilege attitudes indicated significant religious affiliation differences.

Two distinct patterns evolved from the Todd et al. (2014) study that included a willingness to confront White privilege, which was positively connected to social justice interest and commitment, and White privilege awareness that was negatively associated with religious conservatism. However, religious conservatism was positively associated with social justice interest and commitment. Todd et al. (2014) suggested a possible area of research might be to examine what is similar and different among religious and nonreligious students and the connection between White privilege and social justice. Additionally, Todd et al. (2014) suggested areas for future studies would be to replicate the study with participants representing other areas of Christianity as well as using public and private colleges as samples.

Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (2006) conducted a meta-synthesis study of 72 pieces of social justice literature. The purpose of the literature review and study was to propose one possible framework for conceptualizing the preparation of leaders for social justice. Research questions for the study included: How are the common themes in the literature and research on preparing leaders for social justice? Only 11 out of the 72

reviewed articles provided suggestions for preparing leaders for social justice. The recommendations were categorized to develop the proposed framework.

Six domains were identified through the Capper et al. (2006) literature review that developed into the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the proposed framework. The three horizontal dimensions were critical consciousness, knowledge, and skills with the vertical dimensions being curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Capper et al. (2006) stated that school leaders need to have a social justice consciousness within their belief systems or values. This critical consciousness includes "needing to possess a deep understanding of power relations and social construction including White privilege, heterosexism, poverty, misogyny and ethnocentrism" (Capper, 2006, p. 213). The proposed framework could be utilized by faculty in leadership preparation programs to gauge how the program measures the critical consciousness of future leaders.

Critical consciousness was established as a method to foster Brazilian peasants' critical reading of inequality and sense of empowerment to change social conditions that were inequitable (Diemer & Li, 2011). Diemer and Li (2011) examined the contextual antecedents of critical consciousness (composed of sociopolitical control and social action) and its consequences for 665 marginalized youths' (ages 15-25) voting behavior using the Civic and Political Health Survey (CPHS). For the purpose of their study, the definition for marginalized youth was the poor and working-class youth, and the youth of color who "experience socioeconomic or racialized forms of domination and marginalization" (p. 1815). The two components of critical consciousness utilized in this study were critical reflection and critical action.

Diemer and Li (2011) made the distinction between critical consciousness, critical reflection, and critical action for the study. Diemer and Li (2011) believed that critical consciousness represents how oppressed individuals critically *read* and react or act to change their social conditions (Freire, 1973, 2002). Diemer and Li (2011) recommended critical reflection and critical analysis of structural oppression, such as social, economic, and social conditions, which limits access to opportunity for success. Finally, critical action may proceed through the perceived ability by individuals and collective action initiatives to effect social and political change.

The study by Diemer and Li (2011) found that parental and peer sociopolitical supports assist in the perceived capacity of marginalized youth to effect sociopolitical change, take sociopolitical control, and participate in self-reported social action. It was also determined that sociopolitical control and social action were predictive of the marginalized youths' voting behavior.

Two findings were presented from the data of the Diemer and Li (2011) study. The data suggest that racial and ethnic minority youth are more likely to participate in social actions like protests, marches, or demonstrations. It was also noted that younger youth were more likely to say they would vote than the older youth who actually voted (Diemer & Li, 2011).

Connecting to the educational setting, the teacher sociopolitical support had no effect on the voting behaviors of the participants. The suggestion was made that parental and peer sociopolitical support affects the critical consciousness development of the youth more than a teacher's sociopolitical support. Participants in the study shared that teachers provided the opportunity to develop their own opinions on racism and other

social issues. However, the participants did not feel that racism and other social

injustices were regularly emphasized in the classroom. Diemer and Li (2011) discussed

two possible explanations for teachers not having a greater impact on the development of

critical consciousness with this group of youth. One explanation might be that teachers

did not regularly enact critical pedagogy in their classrooms. The second possible

explanation is that the teachers' sociopolitical support may only affect the critical

reflection, which was not part of the CPHS data. Diemer and Li (2011) suggested that

future research might review how educational practices and policy impact the critical

reading of marginalized youth regarding sociopolitical inequality and participation in

social action.

Diemer and Li (2011) discussed the limitations of the CPHS tool, which does not

contain variables that measure critical reflection. Therefore, the understanding of how

youths' critical awareness of inequality might be affected by teachers, peers, and family

members could not be predicted. Also, with the lack of the measure for critical

reflection, the researchers were unable to make any predictions regarding how critical

reflection might predict sociopolitical control, social action, and voting behavior.

Thomas et al. (2014) also constructed a study to assess the critical consciousness

in youth and young adults. The purpose of the quantitative survey research was to assess

the critical consciousness development in youth utilizing a new scale, the Critical

Consciousness Inventory, that included components to measure not only critical

consciousness but also sociopolitical development and social perspective. Sociopolitical

development includes four stages, which include the precritical stage, beginning critical

stage, critical stage, and, finally, the post-critical stage. It is in the precritical stage where

issues of inequity and oppression are not yet recognized. The beginning critical stage is the point in time when individuals start to recognize oppression and inequity. The critical stage begins as individuals have a solid sense of critical consciousness; and, last, the post-critical stage is when some form of personal or social action occurs in response to oppression or inequity (Thomas et al., 2014).

The results of the Thomas et al. (2014) study indicate that the youth who participated varied in their critical consciousness. Based on the mean score of the entire sample of 2.86 ($SD = .45$), the data suggest that a majority of the participants were between the beginning and critical stages of critical consciousness. The team utilized a one-way analysis of variance to determine if there was a difference between White youth and youth of color. The African American youth were more likely than other groups in the study to receive racial socialization. Racial socialization is a unique process where African American families raise their children to have positive self-concepts in an environment that may be racist and hostile (Hughes et al., 2006).

Thomas et al. (2014) shared that today's youth will be living in a world that will require more active civic engagement and participation in activities to promote social justice. Critical consciousness is linked to sociopolitical development and civic engagement. Utilizing the Critical Consciousness Inventory may assist social scientists to not only help youth in their development as well as create supportive programs for the youth.

McGirr and Sullivan (2017) explored the consciousness-raising practices available to domestic violence survivors housed in domestic violence shelters. Domestic violence advocates endeavor to implement the component of critical consciousness to

empower the survivors of domestic violence. The practice of empowerment works to promote the interpersonal and social power of individuals through increasing their knowledge, skills, beliefs, and access to resources (McGirr & Sullivan, 2017). These practitioners attempted to raise the critical consciousness of the survivor concerning the dynamics of domestic violence as well as the oppression the survivor may encounter from the systems with which these survivors interact (McGirr & Sullivan, 2017).

Through the use of subscales from the Empowering Practices Scale and the Empowered Outcomes Scale, 98 women, with an average stay of 40 days in a shelter program, completed the scales. McGirr and Sullivan (2017) explored to what extent domestic violence practitioners worked with the residents in implementing programs designed to raise consciousness. Using descriptive statistics, it was determined that less than half of the participants said they participated in critical consciousness activities. An analysis of variance, ANOVA, revealed a significant difference between the samples representing the two different shelters. The average score for Shelter 1 (45 participants, $M = 1.43$, $SD = 1.09$) was significantly lower than those of Shelter 2 (53 participants, $M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.09$). From the perspective of the survivors, the practitioners of Shelter 2 engaged in more domestic violence consciousness-raising activities than in Shelter 1 (McGirr & Sullivan, 2017).

To test the hypothesis that participants in the McGirr and Sullivan (2017) study, who reported greater development of domestic violence critical consciousness, would report greater development of generalized self-efficacy, the participants' self-efficacy scores were analyzed in relation to their critical consciousness scores. The domestic violence critical consciousness scores significantly predicted self-efficacy ($b = .743$,

t (96) = 10.582, *p* < .001). Again, the data supported the hypothesis that the women who reported greater development of domestic violence critical consciousness did report greater development of self-efficacy. The self-efficacy helped survivors increase their confidence and their self-reported ability to accomplish their life goals. The McGirr and Sullivan (2017) study further adds to the literature describing the different settings that critical consciousness can be used and how the individuals engaged in the process of developing critical consciousness cannot only benefit themselves, but they could also become advocates for a more socially just society.

Critical Consciousness Measures

Although there was a wide range of scholarly articles written on critical consciousness, the approaches to conceptualize and measure critical consciousness have been disjointed and not direct (Diemer, Rapa, Park, & Perry, 2017b). To study critical consciousness more effectively, Diemer et al. (2017b) developed the Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS). Critical consciousness is composed of two subcomponents: critical reflection and critical action. Critical reflection includes reflecting on the inequalities in society, while the critical action component includes individual or group efforts to create change for inequalities (Freire, 1993, 2006). However, the CCS has three subscales: critical reflection-perceived inequality, critical reflection-egalitarianism, and critical action-political participation.

The initial structure of the tool included 46 items to measure the components, but after a pilot with graduate students, the statements on the tool were reduced to 22 (Diemer et al., 2017b). Initially, the 46 items were developed at a 10th-grade reading level because the tool was originally designed to be used with youth or young adults.

A 6-point Likert-type scale was used for the critical reflection items, while a 5-point behavioral frequency scale was utilized for the critical action items.

Other tools exist to measure critical consciousness, but they vary in what is measured. The Critical Consciousness Inventory (CCI) (Thomas et al., 2014) is one-dimensional to measure critical consciousness. The CCI consists of nine items. The measure of Adolescent Critical Consciousness (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016), which utilizes 10 items to assess critical behavior and critical agency, is a two-dimensional tool. The Sociopolitical Consciousness Measure has seven subscales. The seven subscales assessed with 35 items are: sociopolitical awareness, global belief in the world, collective responsibility to the poor, equality and rights, belief in collective action, localized community efficacy, and problem-solving efficacy (Baker & Brooks, 2014). A 19-item, one-dimensional tool that measures critical reflection is the Contemporary Critical Consciousness Measure (CCCM) (Shin, Ezeofor, Welch, Smith, & Goodrich, 2016). The validating populations for all of the critical consciousness tools were youth and young adults except for the CCCM. However, the CCI and CCS measures have been utilized by researchers with adults (Froh Tyrrell, 2019; Simmons, 2019).

Chapter Summary

Given the changing demographics of the student body within high-performing suburban school districts, leading for social justice will be important (Furman, 2012). This chapter outlined the importance for school leaders to demonstrate equity and inclusion with all students. One's understanding of their personal critical consciousness can assist leaders in their school district to model social justice to ensure fairness and presence for all students. Chapter 2 also discussed the development of different tools to

measure critical consciousness. The literature does not provide evidence of a model for

existing leaders in high-performing districts to utilize to develop an understanding of

their personal critical consciousness. The process and design of this study is explained in

Chapter 3. Through the design of this study, the lived experiences of K-12 school

principals and assistant principals, who worked in suburban school districts, and the

development of their personal self-awareness to promote social justice will be explored.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological research study was to identify the level of critical consciousness of K-12 school principals and assistant principals in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. The study also sought to understand the leaders' predisposition toward social justice in an effort to redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse student population. Through the use of the qualitative, descriptive phenomenological approach, the researcher was able to gather raw data that were used to explore and describe the lived experiences of the participants (Giorgi, 2009).

In Monroe County, New York with a total population of approximately 741,000 people, the suburban school districts in this county have a majority of the student population performing well on standardized assessments, accompanied by high graduation rates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). However, there is a consistent achievement gap of approximately 30 to 40% (NYSED, 2019a) between different races/ethnicity groups on the ELA and math state assessments. The need to analyze beliefs, values, policies, and systems for inequities has become more of a priority for educational leaders due to the achievement gap of different races/ethnic groups, but the analysis begins with reflection of self (Brown, 2018). An examination of this topic revealed that the current literature does not address how school leaders, specifically in suburban districts, work to

assess their critical consciousness and use this knowledge to ensure equity, inclusion, and an understanding of the diversity of their student population (NYSED, 2019a).

A qualitative approach was utilized in this study because this approach allowed the participants to share their lived experiences (Wertz et al., 2011). The design of this descriptive, qualitative study focused on the context of critical consciousness and what themes emerged, meaning that the data were co-constructed between the participants and the researcher. Descriptive phenomenology "documents and describes the phenomenon of interest" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 78). The researcher used descriptive phenomenology to explore and describe the lived experiences of the participants through the collection of raw data (Giorgi, 2009). Through a descriptive approach, the data collection and analysis were conducted under the "assumption that nothing is trivial" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 5). Every piece of raw data had the potential of being a clue that might provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Utilizing a phenomenological approach helped the researcher understand the participants' experiences connected to a particular event, phenomena, or activity (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2017). The phenomenological approach allowed for the K-12 leaders in this study to share their experiences within the school or district setting regarding the promotion and/or challenges connected with implementing a social-justice-focused environment and curriculum.

A phenomenological approach seeks "to explore, to describe, and to analyze the meaning of individual lived experiences" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 17). This study

used a qualitative, descriptive, phenomenological methodology to gather data in answering the following research questions:

1. In what ways do suburban K-12 leaders (principals and assistant principals) describe their understanding of critical consciousness?

2. What life experiences have informed K-12 suburban principals and assistant principals of their level of critical consciousness?

3. What have been the experiences of K-12 suburban principals and assistant principals who have attempted to implement change of a social justice nature?

Research Context

This study took place in suburban school districts in Monroe County in New York State. Monroe County proficiency for 2019 is not optimal for any racial or ethnic group, the Black and African American and Hispanic or Latina students are not achieving at the same proficiency as other cohort groups. At the time of this study, the suburban school districts were composed of 18 districts, 12 of which have a graduation rate of 90% or above (NYSED, 2019a). Within the 12 districts, there are approximately 165 principals and assistant principals. A minimum of six participants were needed for this study but nine participated (Morse, 1994).

The school districts included in this study were schools in good standing as defined by New York State (NYSED, 2019b). According to New York State, schools in good standing are not identified as schools needing Comprehensive Support or Improvement (CSI) or Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI). CSI schools are identified as those with a graduation rate of less than 67% of all students for a 4-year graduation rate total. Scoring less than proficiently on standardized tests and meeting

different scenarios for one or more of the accountability groups (racial/ethnic groups, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English language learners), are also part of the identification of CSI schools (NYSED, 2019b). Different scenarios include a review of the achievement of the accountability groups on state assessments. Indications of low performance by the combination of multiple accountability groups is achieving at a Level 1 or 2 on the assessments. High levels of achievement on the assessments are Level 3 or 4 (NYSED, 2019b). TSI schools are identified based on low performance for 2 consecutive years, based on CSI/TSI identification criteria (NYSED, 2019a).

Research Participants

The researcher identified the participants for this study by utilizing professional and personal networking connections. Morse (1994) recommended at least six participants. Nine participants were identified for the semi-structured interviews. The participants were school principals and assistant principals from the identified suburban school districts in Monroe County, New York. The districts represented in this study were the Webster, Pittsford, Penfield, and West Irondequoit Central Schools. The participants were identified by purposeful sampling and the personal connections of the researcher. Gliner et al. (2017) defined a selected sample as "the smaller group of participants who are selected by the researcher from the larger accessible population to participate in the study" (p. 139). The researcher also used the sampling strategy of snowballing to recruit participants. The snowballing method involves individuals making suggestions of others who might be willing to participate in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The potential participants were contacted through email. The risk of

participating in this study was minimal. The researcher followed these steps in the

sampling process to identify qualified participants:

1. Target or theoretical population: participants who are of interest to a

   particular study.

2. Accessible population or sampling: participants for whom the researcher has

   access.

3. Selected sample: smaller group of participants selected by the researcher

   from a larger population.

4. Actual sample: participants that actually complete the study, whose data is

   used in the data analysis, and part of the report of the results of the study.

   (Gliner et al., 2017)

From the accessible population of participants, the researcher provided the

targeted population with a letter of introduction and access to the CCS for completion

after approval was received from the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board

(IRB). The eligibility criteria to qualify for participation in this study were:

- The participant worked in an identified suburban district in Monroe County,

  New York.

- The participant completed the CCS tool.

- The participant had been in a school leadership role for at least 2 years.

An email, serving as a letter of introduction, was sent to potential participants

(Appendix B) asking for their willingness to participate in this study by taking the CCS

survey, and by stating their willingness to participate in an interview. Included in the

initial email, the individuals were asked to share the contact information of colleagues

who might have been eligible to participate in this study. Based on the responses to the emails, a letter of intent to participate (Appendix C) was sent to the individuals interested in participating in this study. From those who responded with their willingness to participate, they were asked to complete the Qualtrics XM Survey that contained the critical consciousness measure (Appendix D). Qualtrics (XM), a web-based survey tool, was used by the researcher for participants to complete the CCS measure as well as to provide their interest in the second stage of this study, which was semi-structured interviews. Eligibility to participate in the interviews was the completion of the CCS measure with scores of 4, 5, or 6 on a Likert scale on a majority of the items in either the critical reflection-perceived inequality subscale or the critical reflection-egalitarianism subscale, or if they had indicated various points of action in the third subcategory of critical action-sociopolitical participation. The responses of the participants to the three categories of the CCS measure helped to guide the additional questions/conversations during the semi-structured interviews (Appendix E).

Instruments Used in Data Collection

School principals and assistant principals in this study were surveyed utilizing the CCS measure. The American Psychological Association (APA) PsycTests (APA PsycNET, 2019) CCS was used to identify leaders with a high level of critical consciousness followed by semi-structured interviews of those who stated their willingness to participate in the interviews. Semi-structured interviews helped to facilitate in-depth discussions of the life experiences of the participants to connect to their initial assessment of their individual existing levels of critical consciousness (Giorgi, 2009).

The CCS was retrieved from PsycTests (APA PsycNET, 2019). The PsycTests

website states that the test can be reproduced and used for noncommercial research

without seeking written permission (Appendix A). The APA PsycTests is a database that

provides information about psychological tests and measures, as well as providing full-

text tests. The tool was used to identify suburban school leaders' level of critical

consciousness with no further quantitative analysis of the data.

The subscales of the 22-item tool are critical reflection-perceived inequality,

critical reflection-egalitarianism, and critical action-political participation (Annalakshmi,

Rakhi, Jutish, & Venkatesan, 2018). Through eight items in the subcategory of critical

reflection-perceived inequality, the critical analysis of perceived social inequalities, such

as racial/ethnic, gendered, and socioeconomic constraints on educational and

occupational opportunity, are revealed (Deimer et al, 2017). The second subcategory,

critical reflection-egalitarianism, of the CCS tool has five items that measures one's

endorsement of societal equality that all groups should be treated as equals within

society.

A Likert scale is utilized in the CCS tool. The Likert scale is used to allow

individuals to express how much they agree or disagree with a particular statement, and it

is used to measure peoples' attitudes, opinions, or perceptions. Each item on the scale in

the first two categories of critical reflection-perceived inequality and critical reflection-

egalitarianism has six response options. The options included in the Likert scale are

strongly disagree, *mostly disagree*, *slightly disagree*, *slightly agree*, *mostly agree*, and

strongly agree with the responses scored as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 respectively (Annalakshmi

et al., 2018). All items are positively scored except for item 9. Item 9 is reversed scored,

meaning the scoring scale runs in the opposite direction. For example, a score of 6 corresponds to strongly disagree and strongly agree correlates with a score of 1.

Critical action-sociopolitical participation, the third subcategory, with nine items, measures one's level of participation in social and political activities to change perceived inequalities. A Likert scale was also used to measure the responses of the participants in this third subcategory, however, a different scale was utilized. The options included in the Likert scale for the third subcategory were *never did this*, *once or twice last year*, *once every month*, *at least once a month*, and *at least once a week* with the responses scored as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively (Annalakshmi et al., 2018).

Diemer et al. (2014) indicated that higher scores on each CCS subscale reflect a greater degree of critical reflection or critical action, depending on the subscale. Each of these subscales are distinct and, therefore, a total score of the responses should not be calculated. The higher score in each subcategory indicates a higher level of critical consciousness. A score is created for each subcategory by adding up the responses to each item in each category. As such, the responses of the participants to the three subcategories helped to guide the questions/conversations in the semi-structured interviews. Questions, such as why a participant took part in different social-political action, were asked based on the responses within the subcategory.

In addition to the scale, minimal demographic data (current role and years in school leadership role) were collected to ensure that the participants met the criteria to participate in this study. Criteria included working in a suburban district located in Monroe County with a graduation rate of 90% or above, and being in a school leadership role for at least 2 years. The survey included a section that identified the willingness of

the respondent to participate in a semi-structured interview. In addition to the imported CCS tool, additional demographic data and future participation inquiry questions were added to the Qualtrics survey. Qualtrics is a web-based survey tool used to conduct research. The Qualtrics questionnaire had three parts: an introduction that included a consent to participate (if participants did not consent, the survey could not be completed), the standard CCS tool questions, and a section asking the participants for their willingness to participate in the interviews. The final section of the Qualtrics tool asked the respondents for their willingness to participate in the semi-structured interviews, provided they received a second confirmation from the researcher with their understanding of the whole process.

Additionally, Diemer et al. (2017b) suggested that the CCS be used in conjunction with qualitative research. The additional qualitative data were suggested to help provide information on conditions where critical reflection led to critical action (Diemer et al., 2017b). Therefore, additional qualitative information was gathered through semi-structured interviews, and the participants' reflection and sharing regarding their past experiences revealed their existing levels of critical consciousness.

Qualtrics was used to administer the CCS and identify the proper individuals to participate in the interviews. Through the use of Qualtrics, additional questions were added to the survey, and the tool included an overview of this study, the informed consent form, demographic data, the CCS tool, and a section that asked for the respondent's name and contact information if the respondent was willing to participate in a semi-structured interview to further explore the lived experiences that might inform their critical consciousness.

The CCS (Diemer et al, 2017b) was initially developed to provide a measure for oppressed or marginalized people to give them the ability to analyze their personal social and political conditions, look for societal equality, and lead to action to change the inequities. At the onset, the tool was developed to be utilized with youth, but it has since been used with adults (Diemer et al., 2014). Froh Tyrell (2019) and Simmons (2019) used the CCS tool to measure adult critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is composed of two subcomponents: critical reflection and critical action (Freire, 1973, 2002). Initially, the tool contained 46 items. The researchers conducted a pilot test with graduate student reviewers. After completing the pilot test, the graduate students were asked to (a) rate the clarity and readability of each item; (b) rate how well each item appeared to measure critical consciousness; (c) suggest revisions; and (d) provide additional item suggestions (Diemer et al., 2017b). Utilizing the feedback from the pilot test, the measure was reduced to 22 items including critical reflection-perceived inequality (eight items), critical reflection-egalitarianism (five items), and critical action-political participation (nine items) (Diemer et al., 2017b).

Face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were the second instrument utilized for this study. Semi-structured interviews are a mixed form of interviewing, meaning that the interview questions are flexible in nature (Vogt & Johnson, 2016). During the semi-structured interviews, some of the questions were closed-ended, requiring a very limited response. However, other questions were open-ended and unstructured, evoking deeper responses from the participants (Vogt & Johnson, 2016). Vogt and Johnson (2016) noted that the ordering of various interview questions can be

structured at some point during an interview, while other questions can arise during the interview process.

The preplanned interview questions were aligned with the research questions (Appendix F) as well as the tenets of the transformative leadership theory. This study focused specifically on Tenets 1, 3, and 8. Tenet 1 is the desire to effect deep and equitable change. Tenet 3 addresses the inequitable distribution of power. Finally, Tenet 8 highlights the transformative leader demonstrating moral courage. For example, the third subcategory, critical action-sociopolitical participation, asked the participants to respond regarding actions such as if they have participated in a civil rights group or organization.

Gliner et al. (2017) described interviews as an occasion where "the researcher verbally asks the questions of the participants" (p. 225). The interview questions were asked through videoconferencing (Zoom) due to the COVID-19 world health crisis. Questions asked during the hour interview were preplanned but open-ended to allow the participant to provide more detailed answers and to allow for follow-up questions from the researcher to clarify or explore, at a deeper level, any information that had been shared. The interviews were scheduled with the participants who completed the CCS and responded that they were willing to participate in an interview. All of the planned questions were asked in each interview. Follow-up questions were part of the interview based on the participants' responses on the CCS. In the final follow-up phase, the participants were asked to review their transcripts of their interviews to ensure accuracy.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

A review of the CCS scores for each participant was the first step in the data analysis process, looking for individuals with scores of 4, 5, or 6 on a majority of the items in either the critical reflection-perceived inequality or critical reflection-egalitarianism subscales, or individuals who indicated various points of action in the third subcategory, critical action-political participation. From the results and responses for willingness to participate in the interviews, the participants were contacted. Before beginning interviews with the identified participants, the researcher conducted a pilot interview with a school leader who was not part of this study. The predetermined questions were asked during the pilot interview. The recording feature on the Zoom platform was also utilized. As a result of the pilot interview, the predetermined questions were used as planned with the participants in this study, and the interviews were conducted within the time frame of 60 minutes.

The responses from the participants were audio recorded by the recording feature in Zoom. The researcher obtained permission from the participants to audio record the interviews and affirmed their consent at the beginning of the interviews (Appendix G). Field notes were maintained to capture any nonverbal communication, as well as to be used for a bracketing technique to assist the researcher in setting aside personal experiences, biases, or personal connections about the research topic. Field notes are a record, which is usually written, of the events that were observed by the researcher during the interview (Vogt & Johnson, 2017).

A professional transcription service, descript.com, was used to transcribe the recordings from the interviews, after a confidentiality agreement was signed by each

participant. The confidentiality agreement states that the records of this study will be kept private and the identity of the participants will be protected and not disclosed to a third party. The transcripts were reviewed by the researcher numerous times and by each participant to ensure accuracy and understanding. The only edits on the transcripts were specific names of towns, cities, or schools. Once the review of the transcripts for accuracy was complete, the researcher moved to the next step of the analysis process of coding. The process of transforming information collected during a qualitative study to a set of meaningful categories is the definition of coding (Allen, 2017).

Coding provided the opportunity to organize and group data that is similar into categories or families (Saldaña, 2016, p. 10). Similar codes were grouped together because they shared common characteristics, or they began to show the development of a pattern. In qualitative inquiry, a code is a word or phrase that is a symbol to assign meaning to language-based or visual data (Saldaña, 2016). Once the data were organized into groups of similar codes, themes or categories began to emerge. Saldaña (2016) described a theme as the outcome of the categorizing of the codes. These themes are not coded. The data coding involved two cycles, descriptive and axial, which connected to the research and the interview questions.

During the first cycle of coding, descriptive coding was used. When using descriptive coding, a word or short phrase was assigned to label a specific passage of the transcript (Saldaña, 2016). The labels utilized were often in the form of a noun, word, or phrase, and they provided information for the emerging themes or categories.

The axial coding process was used during the second cycle of coding, to "link the categories with subcategories" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 244). Axial coding provided a structure

to begin to define the characteristics or dimensions of the identified category (Saldaña, 2016). The second cycle of coding was to develop additional categories or themes. The codes established during Stage 1 of the coding were reorganized to create fewer and more selected, but broader, themes (Saldaña, 2016).

A qualified qualitative scholar read and discussed the data and coding to identify any biases on the part of the researcher. The researcher established strategies to eliminate personal bias from the analysis of the data. Bracketing was utilized through field notes during the interviews to allow the researcher the opportunity to set aside biases, personal experiences, and connections. The field notes were captured on a separate piece of paper for each interview and they were separated by the research questions. Through the multiple reviews of the transcripts for each interview, memo notes were also captured in the margins of the document. Bracketing was important given the fact that the researcher worked in the same school district as some of the participants.

Lastly, to ensure confidentiality in this work, the participants are not referenced within this publication by name nor are their places of employment revealed, but rather both their names and locations were assigned pseudonyms. To provide anonymity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym of "P," indicating "participant" and assigned a number of 1 through 9. The findings are reported with the help of pseudonyms for both the participants and their employers. All material is being stored in an unmarked box in a locked cabinet at the home of the researcher for 3 years. Electronic materials have been encrypted, will be stored for 3 years, and 3 years after the publication of this study, all materials will be destroyed.

Summary

An overview of the general perspective and research content were provided in Chapter 3. The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive, phenomenological research study was to identify the level of critical consciousness of K-12 school principals and assistant principals in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. The study also sought to understand the leaders' predisposition toward social justice in an effort to redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse student population. Through nine semi-structured interviews, this study identified the participants' existing levels of critical consciousness based on their past experiences. The process and design of this study helped to understand how the lived experiences of school leaders of suburban school districts helped to develop and understand their own critical consciousness and the promotion of social justice.

Chapter 4 shares the findings of this study regarding the lived experiences of K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals that have led to their existing levels of critical consciousness at the time of this study. An explanation of the data analysis and a presentation of the findings provide evidence for answering the research questions of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological research study was to identify the level of critical consciousness of K-12 school principals and assistant principals in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. The study also sought to understand the leaders' predisposition toward social justice in an effort to redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse student population. Through a survey and semi-structured interviews, this study identified existing levels of critical consciousness of participants based on their past experiences. The survey included the CCS and was distributed through Qualtrics (XM), a web-based survey tool with the link embedded in an email to the participants.

This study included nine participants selected through professional networking connections and snowballing sampling. The participants worked in the suburban school districts in Monroe County, New York with graduation rates of 90% or above. Each participant completed a CCS survey, along with a basic demographic questionnaire, as well as indicating their willingness to participate in semi-structured interviews. The one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom due to the COVID-19 world health crisis. Interview questions were preplanned but open-ended, which provided the participants with the opportunity to share their lived experiences. This chapter includes the results of this study including the research questions of this study, the data analysis, and the findings with a summary of the results.

Chapter 4 is organized by the research questions, along with the categories and themes that emerged. The four categories and 13 themes included:

- Social justice – Category 1, which contains four themes: (a) equity/equality, (b) access, (c) inclusion, and (d) reflective (thinking deeply).

- Understanding and developing critical consciousness – Category 2, contains three themes: (a) reflection, (b) awareness, and (c) learning from experiences.

- Experiences – Category 3, contains the four themes: (a) family, (b) education, (c) work, and (d) sports.

- Challenges – Category 4, contains two themes: (a) personal and (b) work related.

A summary of the categories and themes that were the result of the coding process are provided in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Summary of Categories and Themes for the Research Questions

Category	Theme
Social Justice	Equity/Equality, Access, Inclusion, Reflective
Understanding and Developing Critical Consciousness	Reflection, Self-Awareness, Learning from Experiences
Experiences	Family, Education, Work, Sports
Challenges	Personal, Work Related

The findings from the analysis of the responses to the interview questions established the categories and themes. Understanding how school principals and assistant principals work to develop and understand their critical consciousness was the overall focus of this study.

Research Questions

The findings of this study were guided by an inquiry into three research questions:

1. In what ways do suburban K-12 leaders (principals and assistant principals) describe their understanding of critical consciousness?

2. What life experiences have informed K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals of their level of critical consciousness?

3. What have been the experiences of K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals who have attempted to implement change of a social justice nature?

The data emerged as categories and themes based on the lived experiences of the participants.

Data Analysis and Findings

The nine participants in this study met the criteria established for participation, which included school principal or an assistant principal in a Monroe County suburban district with a graduation rate of 90% or higher, in their respective leadership roles for at least 2 years. Of the nine participants, six were school principals (four elementary; two high school), and three participants served as assistant principals (two elementary; one middle school). Of the nine participants, six were male, and three were female and all were White. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym of "P," indicating participant, and each participant was assigned a number 1 through 9.

Table 4.2 provides a summary of the categories and themes which were a result of the coding process based on the interview questions for Research Question 1.

Table 4.2

Research Question 1, Categories, and Themes

1. In what ways do suburban K-12 leaders (principals and assistant principals) describe their understanding of critical consciousness?	

Categories	Themes
Social Justice	Equity/Equality, Access, Inclusion, Reflective
Understanding and Developing Critical Consciousness	Reflection, Self-Awareness, Learning from Experiences

Category 1: Social justice. Throughout the literature review, a common definition of social justice was not evident. For this study, the researcher did not provide a definition of social justice to the participants; therefore, the responses of the participants reflected their own definition of social justice. The five themes identified under Category 1, social justice, include (a) equity/equality, (b) access, (c) inclusion, and (d) reflective.

Equity/equality. Transformative leadership, as advanced by Shields (2010), has an emphasis on deep and equitable change in social conditions through awareness and a critical analysis of self. Deep and equitable change is "change that is permanent and not easily undone" (Shields, 2020, p. 17).

Participant 1's definition of social justice included many of the identified themes: "I think of it as a couple of different tiers. Equity for all; access, living a life of respect, and no one is excluded." Participant 7 also talked about an equal playing field for equity in outcomes: "As an educator, it's an opportunity for us to try to promote equity in outcomes for all students." Participant 9 struggled in defining such a big topic: "That's a big topic to define. Everyone has the same opportunities; however, things are just not equal."

Participant 2 defined social justice as: "The distribution of equality or fairness or privilege or wealth. Equal." Participant 5's definition of social justice was "Everyone is on an equal platform for being able to share their thoughts and ideas. People have equal ground, able to share thoughts and concerns. My definition has evolved over time but to promote equity in outcomes."

Access. Participant 1 provided a definition that focused on access: access to a good life, health, fitness, education, support, love, and whatever anyone needs. Participant 6's definition of social justice discusses access to opportunities and other services, and the definition crosses over to the previous theme of equality.

> I define social justice as having equal access and opportunities within our social
> systems. That means, if a family or an individual needs access to medical,
> counseling, education needs, or materials—that they are able to access them with
> little difficulty.

Inclusion. Furman (2012) stated that educational leaders work to create more inclusive practices within their schools to address social justice and marginalization issues. "Authentic participation" was seen by Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) as the foundation for social justice work.

Participant 1's definition of social justice contained the word inclusion. "Inclusion means no one is excluded. I want you to know that this is your home, this is your community. You are part of it. You have a role in it and a responsibility." Participant 4 also discussed inclusion:

> I have a hard time with that because it's a label instead of just being a good
> human. I hope that I live and breathe with my soul. I need to do my part, but I

don't need a label to tell me to do so. It should be something as a good human that we're all doing. I want to have an impact on others that can help them feel included, but also that they're entitled to the right to learn.

Reflective. Reflective practice refers to what an individual has learned from an experience and the meaning that the experience has developed for that individual. Participant 3 shared, "I think it's [social justice] very different for all of us. I think it's very individualized because we look through our unique lens. Wrongs can be potentially righted or at least identified." Participant 8 not only talked about equity but included reflective thoughts. "Equity. Consequences across the board. Seeking to understand. It's an injustice to people if you're assuming you know their plight versus having substantive conversations, understanding, reflecting, and doing the right thing."

Category 2: Understanding and developing critical consciousness. Freire (1970) stated that critical consciousness begins with the awareness of self, and of the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of our society. Category 2 contains three themes: (a) reflection, (b) self-awareness, and (c) learning from experiences. Many of the participants described lived experiences that provided them with the opportunity to further understand and develop their personal critical consciousness.

Reflection. Tenet 3 of the transformative leadership theory addresses the inequitable distribution of power. To begin, leaders must first acknowledge their own personal power and privilege (Shields, 2018). The transformative leader needs to have the courage to challenge these newly discovered inequities (Shields, 2010). The participants in this study reflected on their lived experiences and how those experiences

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helped to create an understanding and awareness of their critical consciousness as well as their understanding the need to have courage to take action for change.

Participant 1 shared (a) about being a reflective practitioner, (b) about being a learner, and (c) about an experience with a student and the action taken to support the student:

> Be a reflective practitioner. Teach me. How can I navigate this differently? I really step back and say "Why did I make the choice I did? What in me helped me to make that choice?" We all have biases. I need to understand the cultures of others. I remember my work with an African American student as a teacher. I don't know if she saw herself in the classroom, because I was working so hard to make sure that all kids were treated equally or what I thought was equal. She wasn't, I think she was feeling that she wasn't seen. I had to work hard to reflect on that because I wanted to make sure that in my attempt to make sure that everyone feels part of the classroom and had a voice. I was going to hold every student accountable for their voice. I wasn't going to let kids hide.

Participant 1's action to support this marginalized student, as well as others, was a reflection on the classroom practices that were being utilized and that needed to be changed to put strategies into place to communicate with students and their families.

> I really needed to look at how I was interacting with her. My questions: "Some of the students in my class were having a hard time, was it because of me?" "Did they feel like they weren't seen?" "Was the way I was brought up different, and was I bringing that into my classroom?"

As a leader, Participant 1 incorporated the lessons learned as a teacher when supervising teachers.

> I walked into a classroom during the lunch/recess period, and there were children in the classroom. The kids were working and [asked the teacher] to tell me about what the children were doing. [Teacher responded] "they didn't do their homework last night, so they're sitting and doing it now." [Response to teacher] "Remember, we are here to help and support children, and I don't want it to be punitive, and we really need to understand what their home life is like or their background." I was trying to help her [the teacher] start to open her perspective and how to best support the children.

> Participant 3 practiced daily reflection, but the participant also shared the

awareness learned from a job experience as a preteen:

> Time to reflect—day to day. I also reflect on the bigger experiences that I have had like when you look back at different situation or jobs. One of my jobs that I had as younger person that has given me perspective today was working as a farm hand. I started when I was 12. We lived across the street from a big farm. It was the hardest work that I have ever done in my life. There was a large migrant population of people that worked on the farm. I realized that I had the privilege to only work 3 or 4 hours a day, but the migrant population worked hard from sunup to sundown.

Participant 6's reflections included faith and the use of mindfulness to further understand personal biases, judgements, and self-awareness. Freire (1970, 2006) posited that critical consciousness continues to evolve throughout life based on new experiences and

continued reflection. The responses of Participant 6 demonstrate that the development of one's critical consciousness is a process and continues to develop as an individual reflects on life experiences. This participant responded:

My faith, the practice of Christianity, has helped me to welcome all people and to just love other humans as much as possible. The practice of mindfulness provides me the opportunity to look inward and just be aware of the judgements that are impossible to stop.

Participant 6 described an experience from graduate school that helped the participant to better understand personal biases:

The male instructor showed up dressed as a female. The students in the class were asked to connect with their internal response to an unexpected situation. My administration program also provided conversations with people from different backgrounds and experiences. These conversations helped me to reflect on my own personal biases.

Participant 7's reflections of a childhood family structure included the following:

This has evolved for me over time. I come from a divorced family with parents in two different socioeconomic situations. Traveling between the two households, I experienced the privilege and opportunities available in a wealthy, suburban community/district versus fewer opportunities in a rural community/district. The experiences have also provided the recognition of what it means to be a White male in society. I think that it comes through courses that I have taken over the last couple of years and readings that I have done, so it's evolving [understanding of the privilege of being a White male in society].

Self-awareness. A finding by DeMatthews (2015) indicated that self-awareness is a component that that further supports the development of a social justice leader. The participants shared experiences that supported their awareness of the development of their critical consciousness. Participant 2 shared thoughts focused on awareness of personal background:

> I have a sense of awareness based on how I was raised. I am very aware and grateful of my background and aware of the fact that my background has given me a leg up compared to someone who didn't have my background. My parents raised me to be very thankful for everything that [I] have. Sports provided awareness by having teammates [referenced a teammate who grew up in extreme poverty in a rural setting] that came from different walks of life and spending a lot of close time with teammates. As a teacher, I really gained a lot of awareness of different abilities, needs of kids, and different family situations and dynamics. I am a compassionate person, and I care to listen to their story.

Participant 5 also reflected on the impact of family on the understanding of self:

> I am going through different role models in life. My parents were first. I was raised in a Catholic family. Parents taught about treating people nicely and politely and being a good person. Just the upbringing from my parents, by their modeling and their verbiage, and they talked about people. I can't think of a negative tone or statement that they made about a person because of their color, their wealth, or lack of wealth, or even religious beliefs. That's where I got my foundation.

Participant 9 explained his awareness of privilege:

> I'm probably in a very privileged position being a White male who's 6 foot, 5. I
> don't think I've been denied many opportunities. I educate myself to further
> understand my privilege through listening and conversations with different groups
> of people.

Learning from experiences. Participant 4 discussed learning from experiences.
"Experiences have allowed me to explore my privilege. The learning has been based on
experiences and being open to experiences. Childhood experience of living in poverty
provided perspective." Action for Participant 4 began with, "I have to be a good listener
and not to talk all of the time." Participant 4 continued to describe the need to learn and
understanding early experiences: "If you haven't had the experiences, you haven't been
an outsider, or haven't had the early experiences to shape you, it could be something that
needs to be taught to those that have never had those types of experiences."

Through a volunteer experience during high school, as an ambassador on a farm
where many migrant workers were employed, Participant 4 learned about the limited
access of many of the migrant families to a variety of experiences. Participant 4 took
action to provide the experiences to these families. This volunteer experience also
provided Participant 4 with a foundation for entering the field of education.

> One of my roles [on the farm] was to be an ambassador to welcome families. I
> would schedule social functions for them because they were kind of alienated on
> the farm by themselves. We would have several clubs after school for the
> children. I started to say that education was for me. I wanted to try to have an

impact on others that can help them feel include, but also that they're entitled to the right to learn.

Participant 6 described how the use of data in the work setting helped him to take action in providing learning opportunities for himself as well as the school staff with a focus on diversity and equity. The data reflected discipline referrals based on demographics such as gender and race.

I also love to collect data. We collect data for every child that comes to my office. And one of those data points is gender. We haven't communicated this bias yet to our staff, but there is a very heavy and strong bias for office-related behaviors (reasons for student being referred to the office) for boys within the elementary school. I can't remember the exact data, but it's in the 90%. More than 90% of our students who come to the office are boys.

Participant 7 shared the following when asked about the understanding of personal beliefs, biases, values, power, and privilege based on the interview question: How have you created an awareness of your personal critical consciousness? The development and understanding of personal biases, beliefs, values, power, and privilege. Participant 7 replied, "I would say that this has evolved over time. As I reflect today, I was far less aware of privilege earlier. Parents were divorced and recognized that they were in very different economic places."

Participant 8 described how his personal perspectives changed based on interactions with extended family members with diverse backgrounds.

I seek to understand the perspectives of others and accepting them for who they are. I am a person who wants to understand their world. I have five stepbrothers

and sister from the second marriage of my mom. They are all Italian and Jewish. Interestingly enough, each of them married African American spouses. So, we have a very diverse and mixed extended family. I've learned a lot from them [participant's extended family].

Participant 8 learned from his extended family members that:

The struggle is real. You know, at first, my attitude was—to be blunt—get over it [the struggle]. These things [struggles and challenges] happened generations ago. But the struggle is real, and I've come a long way in understanding.

In answering the first interview question that asked about defining social justice, the responses presented common themes of equity, equality, access, inclusion, and reflexive. However, the participants used equity and equality interchangeably, which may indicate a lack of a clear understanding of both terms. The varied definitions of social justice by the participants is constant with the current literature in that a variety of definitions for social justice already exist in the research. Participant 4's response to the interview question summarizes the general pattern that emerged from the data: "I think it's very different for all of us. I think it's very individualized because we look through our unique lens."

Two interview questions, asking participants about their understanding and development of critical consciousness, also provided data to answer Research Question 1. A theme that emerged in a variety of ways was learning from experiences. The participants described experiences from their childhood, educational experiences, work experiences, involvement in sports, as well as interactions with individuals with different backgrounds, and what was learned from each experience. The responses of the

participants confirmed that the development and understanding of critical consciousness is a process and individuals are always learning from their experiences and the impact on themselves. The data also confirmed the need for school leaders to have the time to reflect on their experiences, what was learned, and the action that needs to be taken to support not only the marginalized populations of students but all students.

Table 4.3 displays Research Question 2 and the corresponding categories and themes based on the responses to the interview questions correlating to Research Question 2.

Table 4.3

Research Question 2, Category, and Themes

2. What life experiences have informed K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals of their level of critical consciousness?	
Category	Themes
Experiences	Family, Education, Work Experiences, Sports

Category 3: Experiences. The four themes identified under Category 3 included (a) family, (b) education, (c) work, and (d) sports. One of the themes that emerged from the responses to the Research Question 1 included learning from experiences, and experiences are also part of the themes for Research Question 2. The participants each described a variety of experiences that supported the development of their understanding of their personal critical consciousness.

Family. The nine participants grew up in intact single-family homes. One participant experienced the divorce of parents as a youngster. Participant 1 explained the

expectations in her family structure that impacted her approach to developing respect and ensuring that each student is valued.

> I was raised in a household where we [the children] were very valued. But, if you were told to do something, it needed to be done and needed to be done the first time. Because everyone in front of you modeled that, you did it. So, when I went out and became a teacher, it was all about getting to know my students as individuals. And if we fostered a respectful relationship, then we had respect in the classroom.

Participant 2 described a childhood that was "charmed" and demonstrated the development of personal critical consciousness by understanding the difference between a charmed childhood and the background of others who may not have had the same experience.

> I grew up in a middle- to upper-class family with both parents in the home and both worked. As a child, I lived in California and New York. I lived a charmed childhood. I was raised with good values and my family never struggled.

Participant 3 explained growing up in a suburb of Rochester, New York and the characteristics of the immediate family:

> Growing up in Webster, especially back in the 90s, it certainly wasn't a very diverse place. It seemed that everyone that I knew was White, Italian, and Catholic. This was the demographic of the people that I knew and grew up with.
>
> ***Education.*** The participants shared varied experiences regarding their

educational journey. The educational experiences included moving from an urban setting to a rural setting or participating in different clubs, all of which helped to create an

understanding of their critical consciousness. The data reflect the responses to the interview question asking participants to describe their background.

Participant 1's educational journey included attending a Montessori school, which was started by the individual's parents. Montessori education is based on self-directed activity, hands-on learning, and collaborative play. Participant 1 explained, "I grew up in the Rochester area, in a suburb. I went through the same district 1-12th. Preschool and kindergarten were through Montessori. My parents started the Montessori with a group of parents. I had that experience—amazing." Participant 3 shared the perspective of growing up in a White suburb and attending a more diverse college:

> Growing up in [a] suburb of Rochester in the late 90s, it certainly wasn't a very diverse place from my lens as a student. Culturally, I know there was some diversity. Going to Ithaca College was a big change for me. Ithaca is not necessarily all that diverse, either, except from a religious standpoint. It certainly had a large Jewish population. Every one of my roommates in college were Jewish; I was the only Catholic in our group of friends, which was interesting. I certainly learned a lot about other religions.

Participant 4 shared experiences of growing up and attending an urban school and moving to a suburban school. The participant articulated the impact and importance of positive relationships between teachers and students, and the action the participant had taken to ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn.

> I was the only Caucasian kindergartener in my class. Yes, I had the hand-crocheted, orange and white prim and proper dress and the Caucasian with blonde ringlets in kindergarten. They tried to kick me out early because I was a reader

and wanted to read and otherwise created chaos in the classroom. I had academic interest at an early age. Relationships were important. Started third grade in a suburban setting. I received a D in social studies. An amazing third-grade teacher, for when you're transitioning from an urban culture to a suburban culture my first semester, and I was beyond devastated; crumbled. She said it can define you or you can be defined by it and decide to persevere and grit and bull your way through this. So, that's what I did. I think it started right then and there, how much a teacher could have an impact on you.

Also, while in high school, one of my roles was to be an ambassador to welcome migrant families working on the large farms. The farms were three roads over from me, so I rode my bike over, and we would do gatherings. I would schedule social functions for them because they were kind of alienated on the farm by themselves. We had several clubs after school. I want to try to have an impact on others that can help them feel included but also that they're entitled to the right to learn.

Participant 6 shared experiences gained from participation in a high school club.

[I] participated in Outdoor Activity Club (OAC). That was one that I did walk away with a kind of larger world view and understanding of people. It was a very small group, and it was a group of people that I had never associated with. I probably, in my mind, had judged them wrongly. They were not participating in sports and not part of that sports group of friends and weren't taking Advanced Placement, AP, classes. I knew them by face and name and no other way. I associated them with probably bad choices. Group was run by soccer coach. So,

participated in Adirondack backpacking trips and cross-country skiing trips. It

was such a fun group that loved life, loved talking and being outside, exploring

and getting exercise. Made me realize that you can't judge someone based on

what you see—there are some amazing people that you would maybe never have

talked with. It is important to give people an opportunity.

Work. Eight of the nine participants shared experiences from existing and past

employment opportunities that further developed their understanding of self.

Participant 1 described the experiences obtained from a variety of job experiences that

included learning about diverse cultures and norms:

After many summer jobs, such as lifeguarding and working with the public, I

went to school in New York City at the Fashion Institute. While in New York

City, I worked in the apparel and garment industry. Worked with different

companies in New England but was brought back to New York City and worked

for a manufacturing company that went on to be bought by Oshkosh B-Gosh. I

started working with a lot of people in the Far East including India. So, you forge

different relationships, and I was impressed with the level to which they wanted to

do business with the Americans and to be self-taught in the English language.

Fun to learn the cultural norms of the different countries.

Participant 3 described a work experience from Sarasota, Florida and then Fairfax,

Virginia that impacted the development of personal critical consciousness:

Teaching in Sarasota was a great experience, and I had a variety of roles. The

roles included teacher, department chair, and team leader. The demographics of

Sarasota included extreme wealth and extreme poverty. Wealthy beyond belief

and as poor as you can get. From a cultural standpoint, Sarasota was very segregated with an interesting mix of students. Two high schools—one—high-poverty and the other high school—extreme wealth—the only thing dividing them was a set of railroad tracks.

Moved to Fairfax, Virginia and worked in a massive, massive county-based system with 110,000 students. I did grow a lot there. It was diverse in a very different way. I worked in a magnet school, and it attracted a very different population of students. I worked primarily with Korean, Indian, and Japanese students. Large population of Korean students, and everybody else was a minority. It was very different and very different expectations from families. I learned to work with students who were profoundly gifted and intelligent but also on the autistic spectrum. We had to learn to make accommodations to help them thrive. Our school also had a population of deaf and hard-of-hearing students. I learned the difference between American Sign Language and cued speech. It was really neat and interesting school to work in.

When [I] returned to the Rochester area, [I became a] principal of a school where the diversity at this school was totally different. [There were] many different student populations with a large refugee population. Students [were] coming from challenging home situations, but families wanted more for their children. Like every other experience I had before, it does open your eyes up to things that you don't think about or see.

Participant 4 shared an experience of teaching English in Korea:

> I think my childhood experiences in the city, my culture shock of going into a
> suburban district and then trying to find a way to include everyone in the farming
> community helped with the Korean experience. I get off the plane, and I was
> definitely on display—they had not seen a female with blonde hair. I couldn't
> even speak the language. We had 2 weeks to acclimate and ingrain ourselves in
> the culture and try to understand. What are certain things that you shouldn't say
> or do? What's a sign of disrespect? What is a sign to show gratefulness? It was
> a life-changing experience.

Participant 5's reflection of working in a rural district and the action that needed to be
taken to look at resources and budget from a different perspective included the following:
It was a different culture with high poverty. I realized what poverty meant. Transitioning
cultures [suburban to rural], I had to look at things differently from resources to budget,
etc.

Participant 6 described experiences of working with students with a variety of needs and
the different perspectives the experiences provided:

> I found it really satisfying to work with students who have a variety of needs and
> need a high level of differentiation and individualization to help them integrate
> with the general education peers and overcome challenges. I often heard
> statements like "You teach the special students. You have the handicapped
> group." I wanted all of our kids to be kids. I don't care what class they're in. We
> all have special needs. There are many students that just don't learn the way we
> teach, and they have amazing talents.

Participant 7 shared the experience of working in the South during the early 90s that

provided the perspective of working in an affluent all-boys boarding school:

> I was down there from 1990-1992, right at the start of the Gulf War, so it was
>
> definitely interesting. There was a much higher percentage of people in the South
>
> that tended to go into the military. It was an era where there still [was] a lot [of]
>
> people who flew the Confederate flag around. But that isn't all—I worked in a
>
> very well-off all-boys boarding and day school.

Participant 8 described the experience of being a White male teaching in an urban setting:

> Being a White teacher in a predominantly African American school in the city.
>
> That was tough. I had to earn my standing because I was told by many parents—
>
> "you can't be a male role model for my son because you haven't lived it." There
>
> was a feeling of mistrust because I wasn't immersed in the neighborhood and in
>
> culture of the way of doing things. There was a little bit of mistrust and barrier
>
> there.

Participant 9 reflected on the experience of the school closure due to the COVID-19

world health crisis: "We have socioeconomic gaps within our student population. It was

shared with the faculty of the school—'With this closure, the difference between the

haves and have-nots is going to be more evident than ever.'"

> **Sports.** The participants shared a variety of experiences connected to sports that

provided opportunities to further develop and understand their critical consciousness.

Participant 1 shared the role sports played in life from a young age:

> I also worked and was very much involved in gymnastics as my father ran a
>
> recreation program. So, at a very young age, I had the opportunity to engage in

working out through gymnastics and the trampoline and working with a lot of

people from around New York State to New Jersey to Ohio. So, as a young child,

I was very much exposed to a variety of different children and different

experiences. My father taught his professional career in the Rochester City

School District. My father started a gymnastics program for students in his

school. I saw a pathway to good health and a good life, and it was modeled. My

dad modeled different skills to facilitate small groups to help kids problem solve

and break down skills. It was a great foundation to grow up in and have the

opportunity to meet kids from the Tri-State area and Canada. My dad had friends

from all over, so he brought teams in from suburban and urban settings.

Participant 2 also spoke about the impact of participating in sports: "I played

basketball and that helped with my leadership. In college, I was the captain of the team

and had to work with different kinds of people [people with a variety of backgrounds].

Nothing in this world prepared me more than playing basketball." Participant 3 shared

the impact of sports:

I played soccer, participated in track and skiing throughout [my] educational

career. Playing sports certainly exposed me to other groups of people that I

wouldn't have met. I met students from other towns and areas. I met a wider

group of people through sports.

Participant 4 also shared the impact of sports: "I was the captain of my college swim

team. It provided experiences with different groups of people." Participant 5 shared

experiences with coaching in sports.

I played sports in college but actually got mono in my sophomore year, so I stopped. I just couldn't recover and recuperate but was still involved with coaching then and now. Thinking about the diversity piece, I coached in college like in rec leagues and high school sports. Then, I went to Virginia, and I started coaching. My ratio of Junior Varsity players was eight African American athletes to four White athletes. Then, when I came up to Upstate New York, Rochester, Monroe County, it was 2-3 African American athletes to eight White athletes. So, a flip-flop of numbers. Here it was a suburban setting and outside of Richmond— just a different population.

Participate 5 described the awareness created from participation in sports:

Playing sports also exposed me to people from all walks of life, all socioeconomic status and races. I also had an experience when I was living in Virginia and group of us were going to play golf. The golf course that was chosen to play on did not permit Black people to play on the course. One of the members of our group was Black and a co-worker. I made the choice not to play that day, which also created an awareness of my privilege and what my friend experienced on a daily basis.

The interview questions asking the participants to describe their background, as well as personally experiencing a social justice situation, provided supporting data to answer Research Question 2: *What life experiences have informed K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals of their level of critical consciousness?* Again, each experience, whether it emerged through the theme of family, education, work experiences, or sports, provided each participant with insight and an understanding of their personal critical consciousness. When asked about personally experiencing a social

justice situation, upon reflection, the participants who were White men included in their reflection that they began to understand their privilege because their personal experience with a social justice situation was minimal.

Table 4.4 displays Research Question 3 and the corresponding categories and themes based on the interview questions associated with Research Question 3.

Table 4.4

Research Question 3, Category, and Themes

3. What have been the experiences of K-12 suburban principals and assistant principals who have attempted to implement change of a social justice nature?	
Category	Themes
Challenges	Personal, Work Related

Category 4: Challenges. All the participants worked in schools with demographics that reflected predominantly White populations of students. The diversity in their schools was represented not only by race and gender but also by socioeconomic differences. The participants shared personal and professional challenges, as well as what they learned from their experiences, and what they might have done differently after reflection. The two themes identified under Category 4 are (a) personal and (b) work related.

Personal. Participant 1 shared an experience of negotiating for a salary for a new position. The experience provided the perspective of being spoken down to and taking action to structure conversations to provide supportive feedback:

> I had the opportunity to move from one position to another, looked at what I could
>
> bring to the position and to negotiate a respectful compensation. I had a male

colleague, who was helping me, and [I] learned that it is a feasible thing to do—

male colleagues do it all the time—negotiate compensation. So, what happened

when the dream job was presented, was offered the position, and said I wanted to

think about it. It made people upset. I got negative feedback from a peer as to

why I waited a day to lay out strengths and ask for more money [rather than

immediately accepting the position]. I have experienced different things where

you want to speak up, but you are kind of spoken down to. I would have liked the

conversation to go like this: "I really liked the way you thought this through. We

value you."

Participant 2 shared the following:

I feel like I am always on the upside of that situation [personally experiencing a

social justice issue]—not putting anyone down—but I feel like my experiences

and my background, and from growing up how I grew up, that I have this leg up

in this world that other people don't get to have just because they weren't raised

how I was raised—not wanting for anything. I feel like I have lived a charmed

life and haven't had to struggle through social justice issues.

Participant 3 described reflections similar to Participant 2 and the understanding that

because of the participants' privilege, they had not experienced many of the situations

that students with diverse backgrounds had experienced. Participant 3 demonstrated an

understanding of personal critical consciousnesses by reflecting on the fact that they had

not walked in the shoes of many of their students.

I think that I have a lot of privilege in that sense. I have to really think hard to

come up with a moment in my life or my career where I was at a disadvantage.

Possibly being young would be the only thing that I've ever really been at a

disadvantage, where I was trying to do something and, at that point, I was

probably too young. I have had a fairly easy life. It is really hard to connect with

people that have not. I can certainly empathize, but I have not walked in the

shoes that many of my students have. It is much harder for some of my students

to do the simple things that I do without even thinking about it.

Participant 4 shared challenges in the workplace due to physical appearance:

Being blond and a female. There were several times in the past that I wanted to

change my hair color so that it does not come before me. The first couple of years

in education, [I] experienced a male teacher with a superiority complex—I was

just a dumb female, young blonde, and what would I know and be able to bring to

the table. The experience with positional power.

Work related. Participant 1 detailed an experience working with a student and the

family right before the school closure due to COVID-19 and demonstrating the moral

courage to engage in a different process to develop a deeper understanding of the

experiences of a student and the family.

Yes, I did foresee equity, diversity, and inclusion challenges in my setting. I had

a situation, right before school closed, working with a family. I was making a

decision out of good intention and from my heart. However, it was not perceived

that way by the family. I had a good conversation with the family. She

understood where I was coming from, but it forced me to take a step back and say

"What was I thinking and that was not how it was perceived by the family?"

"Why did I make that choice?" "What in me helped me make that choice?"

Anything you do, you bring biases—right? I learned to understand cultures and

be respectful of what makes people unique and how they react.

Participant 2 described a work experience of taking action to challenge the process that had been in place:

No, initially, I did not foresee challenges with equity, diversity, and inclusion

because the building was so lacking in diversity. I was shocked that something

happened. How stupid of me to be shocked and naïve. I was naïve to things

[that] were happening to students of color on the bus and playground. I was

raised to accept people and not really care about race. From the situation, I

learned to listen to parents and students [who] wanted me to understand the

"why" of the situation, why it was not okay. I also learned to listen and

understand that the families weren't immediately ready for a conversation but

needed to follow up. When it comes to race, it is so deeply rooted, and there is so

much more than just one surface conversation or one surface incident. It is so

deeply rooted and brings up so much. There are deep-rooted emotions. This is

one experience in my career, so far, that I have grown single-handedly.

Participant 3 also expected challenges in the participant's current work setting:

Yes, I did expect challenges in my setting. When working with students, I work

to just listen because students may be uncomfortable in some situations. I don't

have all the answers, and they don't necessarily want me to address the situation.

I tell students that I am not a therapist or a counselor, and I am not going to give a

lot of advice, but we can try to figure out the challenge together. As a White man,

I don't know if I hit the mark or not with guidance and advice. I don't know what

it's like to walk in the shoes of some of our students, especially our African

American students. I can be an advocate, and I can try to make things as easy as I

can for my students.

Participant 4 spoke of connecting when working with students:

I think that communication is number one. I have had some pretty, what others

would say—uncomfortable or sensitive conversation—very easily because they

are coming from the heart, and I want to learn. I have learned that I have a lot to

learn. I have a ton to grow. I only know what I have been exposed to and

experienced. I don't have the experiences that many of my students have had.

For example, just because I have worked with students with gender orientation,

doesn't mean that I am going to be any more prepared the next time. Your needs

or wants or communication styles can be very different than the next person that I

meet—may be a similar conflict but different feelings and experiences. I always

want to listen and recognize the need to continue to listen, learn, and grow.

Participant 5 shared reflections of doing things differently based on experiences and the

action of utilizing restorative practices to work through challenges with students:

I think everything I do, I would do differently next time. Reflections on working

with students in poverty—they tell you how it is, accept the consequences—there

is no wiggle room—cut and dry. Today, I would have used restorative practices,

but I did not know about those practices then. Reflecting a statement from a

student, "When Assistant Principal X was hired as an assistant principal, a student

of color shared with me, 'Assistant Principal X—now there's somebody I can

look up to.'" This was a powerful statement from a student.

Participant 6 shared two leadership experiences and reflections:

> I am very aware of the fact that the two leaders of my building are male and leading primarily a staff of females. I am not ignorant that there's two White males leading a building of mainly female teachers. I want them to understand that I am there for them, no matter my gender, or whatever privilege I am bringing to the system.

> While working through a disciplinary situation, I used the term "uncomfortable" to describe how others felt as a result of this situation. During the meeting with the family, they shared that they feel uncomfortable everywhere they go and make others uncomfortable just by existing. This is where mindfulness came in. No matter what my intent, that was not her feeling. Mindfulness came in very strongly where I disconnect myself from herself because my experiences are my feelings, not hers, so I can control myself, and I tried to do this, so I could be receptive to her and her feelings. I changed the way that I describe student behavior and then go into what the next steps will be. How do I restore and repair relationships and take feedback from parents?

Participant 7's experiences with changing perception and intent versus impact provided the opportunity to take action to help students feel more welcomed and help staff to understand how different perceptions can be based on personal experiences.

> I am dealing with perceptions of our urban/suburban students and their families and how to help these students feel more accepted. One possible solution is to better connect with these students and families. I also had another situation with a class project by one teacher that the intent did not match the outcome. Worked

with staff to do quality control checks of student projects for accuracy and have a

revision and feedback portion for each project. Our school was the first school to

do hidden bias training in the district and work with staff on how things are

perceived.

Participants 8 and 9 both shared a similar reflection. As White males, there were not

many situations where they were denied opportunities. Both participants shared

additional thoughts around a challenge in their school and the changes and actions taken

to create more equitable learning experiences for their students. Participant 8 shared an

experience when working with inclusion students. Inclusion classrooms in the

educational setting provide students with disabilities the ability to engage in learning

experiences in the general education classrooms alongside their unchallenged peers.

> I am dealing with what inclusion is for students with disabilities. I walked into a
>
> classroom where inclusion students were part of the class. The inclusion students
>
> were sitting at a table by themselves in the back of the room. This is not
>
> inclusion. I started a buddy club for the older kids to work with younger students
>
> with disabilities on things like social skills on the playground. Also, [I] provided
>
> professional development to staff on inclusion.

Participant 9 shared working to provide access for students in Advanced Placement (AP)

classes:

> I have worked on access to AP classes for all students. Now at 60%, but AP
>
> classes have little diversity. We have to work to get more students in AP past
>
> those who are White and live in town. Also, from a past experience with a

situation with a student and teacher, my own focus changed—started having lunch

with different groups of kids to learn more about them and their experiences.

The participants were asked if they anticipated any issues around equity, diversity, or

inclusion in their setting. Only one participant stated that they did not foresee these

issues in their current school. The category that emerged from the data was challenges

and those challenges included personal and professional challenges. Through the

personal and professional challenges, participants shared that they learned to listen more

and talk less. When working with marginalized students, listening and understanding the

experiences and perspectives of the students was even more important because the school

leader, personally, had never walked in the shoes of the student. Many of the participants

developed a deeper understanding of their personal privilege as well as their biases.

The school leaders all described what they learned from each experience and how

they might approach the situation differently the next time. Again, they saw the

importance in taking the time to reflect on experiences, what was learned, and what

action might be taken to better support all students in their school setting. Participant 9

demonstrated taking action to provide more students with the opportunity to participate in

AP classes. Although the percentage of the students participating in the classes was

almost 60%, the diversity of the students in the classes was still limited. Participant 9

understood that there was still work to do to provide all students with diverse

backgrounds with this opportunity.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological research study was

to identify the level of critical consciousness of K-12 school principals and assistant

principals in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. The study also

sought to understand the leaders' predisposition toward social justice in an effort to

redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse

student population. The participants shared their lived experiences, both personal and

professional. The experiences included those from childhood, family structure, living

and working in different communities, participation in sports, volunteer work, strategies

to reflect and learn from experiences as well as actions taken to better the educational

experience for marginalized populations of students. The participants answered the

interview questions that are presented in Appendix E.

This qualitative study adds to the body of knowledge of critical consciousness to

better understand how principals and assistant principals in suburban districts can

develop and recognize their own critical consciousness based on lived experiences. The

four categories and 13 themes that were the result of the coding process, emerged from

the data, and were shown in Table 4.1 previously in this chapter, are duplicated here to

again illustrate again the breakdown of the categories and themes.

Table 4.1

Summary of Categories and Themes for the Research Questions

Category	Theme
Social Justice	Equity/Equality, Access, Inclusion, Reflective
Understanding and Developing Critical Consciousness	Reflection, Self-Awareness, Learning from Experiences
Experiences	Family, Education, Work, Sports
Challenges	Personal, Work Related

Although the data analysis provided specific data for each research question, the lived experiences described by the participants overlapped and provided data for multiple categories and themes. Through the responses on the CCS tool, all of the participants indicated high levels of critical consciousness. The findings support the research questions of:

1. In what ways do suburban K-12 leaders (principals and assistant principals) describe their understanding of critical consciousness?

2. What life experiences have informed K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals on their level of critical consciousness?

3. What have been the experiences of K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals who have attempted to implement change of a social justice nature?

The findings of this study suggest that the participants understood that the development and understanding of their personal critical consciousness was a process, which is consistent with the literature. This understanding will continue to change as each participant has more lived experiences both personally and professionally. The findings also indicate that the participants understood the importance of developing strategies to reflect on each experience, identify what was learned from an experience, and what action might be taken based on the learning to ensure an equitable education for all students. The participants revealed that to create change, the action may begin in small steps such as learning to be a better listener or taking the time to understand and learn about the experiences of others with diverse backgrounds.

Chapter 5, the final chapter of this study, provides a further summary of the findings, the limitations, and the recommendations for stakeholders and researchers.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

By 2044, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that no one race, or any one ethnic group, will be greater that 50% of the total population (Colby & Ortman, 2015). As the diversity of the student population changes in school districts, school leaders are becoming more aware of the educational implications of the increased diversity. School leaders who strive to be transformative leaders must first start by understanding their personal critical consciousness to create a learning environment where all students can find success. This study explored the problem of the limited understanding of suburban school leaders of their personal critical consciousness level, and the impact as they identified, addressed, and worked to remediate socially unjust practices.

School leaders' understanding of their personal critical consciousness will guide them in their decision making as they work to ensure an equitable education for all students. This research provides insight into providing the time and the structure to reflect on one's lived experiences, both personal and professional, and the impact on the understanding and development of one's critical consciousness. As the demographics of student populations continue to change, it is essential that school leaders understand how their personal biases, beliefs, values, power, and privilege may impact their decision-making and, ultimately, the educational experiences of a diverse population of students.

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological research study was to identify the level of critical consciousness of K-12 school principals and assistant

principals in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. The study also

sought to understand the leaders' predisposition toward social justice in an effort to

redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse

student population. The qualitative research study examined three research questions

through semi-structured interviews:

1. In what ways do suburban K-12 leaders (principals and assistant principals) describe their understanding of critical consciousness?

2. What life experiences have informed K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals of their level of critical consciousness?

3. What have been the experiences of K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals who have attempted to implement change of a social justice nature?

The research questions explored the personal and professional experiences of

school principals and assistant principals. Through the interviews, data was generated

that provided insight into the development and understanding of one's critical

consciousness through reflection and analysis of life experiences to help ensure

educational equity for all racial and ethnic groups. Four categories and 13 themes were

identified through the data analysis:

- Category 1, social justice, with four themes: (a) equity/equality, (b) access, (c) inclusion, and (d) reflective.

- Category 2, understanding and developing critical consciousness, had three themes: (a) reflection, (b) awareness, and (c) learning from experiences.

- Category 3, experiences, had four themes: (a) family, (b) education, (c) work, and (d) sports.

- Category 4, challenges, had two themes: (a) personal and (b) work related.

The findings of this study begin to address the research problem and research questions. However, the research problem and the research questions were not fully addressed and answered because the understanding and development of one's critical consciousness continues to develop and change with each new lived experience. Through the analysis of the data, the importance of providing time for school leaders to reflect on lived experiences was evident. Reflection time for leaders regarding personal and professional experiences is essential for them to have a deeper understanding of their critical consciousness in the continued effort to ensure an educational experience that is accessible to all students.

This chapter discusses the implications of the findings, which present the lived experiences of the school leaders and how their lived experiences impacted their understanding of their personal critical consciousness. The limitations of this study, recommendations for improved practices, policy analysis and development, and further studies are presented for consideration.

Implications of Findings

The results of this study may provide school leaders with strategies to continue to develop and understand their own critical consciousness to ensure educational equity for all racial and ethnic groups. The findings from this study could also help school and district leaders with the development of professional learning agendas to help their teaching staff to better understand their own critical consciousness and the impact of this

learning on the students. The systems, policies, and procedures in schools will not change until school and district leaders understand their own values, beliefs, biases, privilege, and power, and how these elements impact their decision-making and perspectives. The intent of this study is not only to provide insight into critical consciousness for leaders but ultimately to impact the push for educational success for all students.

Furman (2012) shared that social justice is "an umbrella term with multiple meanings" (p. 193). Although common themes came from the data defining social justice, each participant shared a definition that was unique to that individual, and they often stated that social justice is hard to define. The participants also shared that their definition has changed over time based on their lived experiences. School leaders must first develop their own definition of social justice. However, when working with their staff, it is essential to create a common understanding and working definition of social justice.

In response to asking the participants to define social justice, the findings indicate that there is not a common understanding of many of the terms utilized in the discussions of diversity and equity. The participants used equity and equality interchangeably, so a clear understanding of the difference between equity and equality has to be developed. The differences in the understanding of terms such as equity and equality have implications for school leaders when providing professional development in the area of diversity for their staff. In order for school leaders to lead in a school setting that provides an educational experience where all students can find success, the staff needs to

have a common understanding of the variety of terms used in the discussions around diversity.

Diemer et al. (2014) shared with the guidelines for use of the CCS that the tool should be utilized with a qualitative study. This study confirmed this suggestion. The responses of the participants in the subscales of critical reflection-perceived inequality and critical reflection-egalitarianism indicate high levels of critical consciousness. However, without the semi-structured interviews as part of this study, there would have been little insight or explanation for the existing levels of critical consciousness for each participant. Therefore, the implication for school leaders who desire to lead to provide an educational experience where all students find success, leaders need to build time into their busy schedules to reflect and analyze different lived experiences. The structure of this time should include reflection on what was learned from the experience and what action might be taken to critically analyze school policies, procedures, and systems to ensure a holistic learning experience for each student. Also, the implication for future studies utilizing the CCS tool should consider including a qualitative component to the study.

Hooper (1999) described the development of critical consciousness as a process called consciousness raising. Hooper defined consciousness raising as learning to see reality in a new critical way that uncovers existing structures of inequity and one's place in the system. The responses from all the participants confirmed that one's understanding of critical consciousness is a process, and it continues to evolve with each new experience. Although the participants indicated high levels of critical consciousness on the CCS tool completed before the interviews, this does mean that the process of

understanding and development is complete. The participants shared their continuous learning, changes in perspectives, and constant reflection of self.

As previously stated, the participants shared that their personal definition of social justice has changed over time as did their understanding of personal privilege. One participant wondered if social justice can ever be achieved. The responses of this participant on the CCS tool indicated high levels of critical consciousness, however, this statement suggests there is continued learning and reflection. The implications are for school leaders to understand that the awareness and development of critical consciousness as a process is key—for not only their personal understanding but also to support the development of critical consciousness within their staff and students.

Reflection was a key theme that emerged from the data gathered from the interviews. Theoharis (2007) shared that leaders describe proactive and coping strategies that they develop to sustain social justice work. Again, each participant shared one strategy that was important to them for sustaining the work. Reflection was a key strategy. Examples of the reflections shared by the participants included asking a set of questions after making a decision. These questions included: (a) Was this a rational decision? (b) Was the decision based on the knowledge of the content or an expert? and (c) Was the decision made on pure emotion? The participants reflected on experiences when working with families and realizing that their personal perception of a situation was different than that of the family and/or student. Many of the participants discussed that the structure of their work day does not provide the opportunity to reflect on different experiences. The findings of this study establish that school leaders need to have time to

reflect, not only on the day-to-day events, but also to reflect on the bigger events that they experienced throughout their personal and professional life.

Another strategy presented in the data was the use of mindfulness to reflect and work through the challenges that were experienced. An unexpected finding from the data was the use of mindfulness as a coping and reflection strategy used by the leaders. The value of the practice of mindfulness was described as providing the opportunity to look inward and being aware of one's thoughts and judgements. The implication for school and district leaders from this study is to build in time and space to reflect and potentially learn through the structure of mindfulness.

The participants of the study, through the reflection of varied lived experiences, also indicated the development of a consciousness of the broader world. The participants shared experiences of working in diverse settings and how those experiences provided insight into the broader world. The data provided reflections on the experience of being a leader in a very rural community and learning how families in extreme poverty work through challenging situations that are different from the experiences of the leader. As evidence of changing perspectives and continued development of one's critical consciousness, the leader indicated that if the tools, skills, and structures that are accessible today were available during this experience, the response to this population of people would have been different. The understanding of the broader community can continue to impact the decision-making of school leaders and ultimately the success of each student in their schools.

The Buyukgoze et al. (2018) study considered three dimensions of the social justice leader. The development of critical consciousness by school leaders to analyze

and evaluate their personal beliefs and values is one of the dimensions, but also those of the changing outside world is the second dimension of the Buyukgoze et al. study. Additionally, the critical consciousness of a leader should be accompanied by lifelong development and self-reflection (Buyukgoze et al., 2018). This current study asked participants to describe their background, childhood, education, and the path to becoming a school leader. The analysis of the data indicated the development of critical consciousness is a lifelong process based on self-reflection and varied experiences of the participants. Implications for all individuals interested in developing their understanding of critical consciousness is to continue to be aware that it is lifelong process. With each lived experience and reflection on that experience, a deeper understanding and development of one's critical consciousness occurs.

Theoharis (2007) affirmed that social justice leadership is a process, and this form of leadership is often met with challenges. This study confirmed the findings of Theoharis (2007) that social justice leadership includes challenges. Each participant shared challenges in their role as a building leader or as an individual in society; what was learned from the challenges, personally and professionally; and how the challenges might be handled differently in the future. The leaders shared that each experience provided growth and the ability to look at a situation or experience through a different lens. Various situations created an awareness and understanding of the deep emotions and experiences that individuals from different backgrounds and races encounter on a daily basis. This awareness contributed to each participant's understanding of their own critical consciousness.

Galloway et al. (2015) found that many educational leaders identify more progress in their equity work than the data indicated. This current study showed otherwise. The participants stated throughout the interviews, just how much still needed to be learned and how each new lived experience provided the opportunity for more insight and deeper learning. The analysis of the data indicated progress in the understanding of the participants' personal critical consciousness, but the analysis of the data also indicated with clarity that the development of one's critical consciousness is a lifelong process.

Social justice leadership ensures that all students have access to a quality education. Part of ensuring this access to a quality education is to review systems, policies, and procedures through the lens of equity and diversity. As one continues to develop and understand their personal critical consciousness, action needs to occur when inequities are presented. Implications for school and district leaders based on the findings of this study is to take appropriate action based on the learning from various experiences to create an equitable learning experience for all racial and ethnic groups.

Transformative leadership theory was the lens through which this study was conducted. Shields (2010) shared that transformative leadership has an emphasis on deep and equitable change in social conditions through the awareness of and a critical analysis of self. Transformative leaders must reflect on their lived experiences, including where the leaders live and work, to analyze and assess systems, policies, and structures with which to identify and address disparities (Shields, 2018). The data gathered throughout this study demonstrate how each individual reflected on many lived experiences to better understand themselves through the lens of social justice. As Sheilds (2010) stated,

transformative leaders strive to ensure that all students are successful at learning and are developing into contributing members of society through equity and inclusion opportunities.

Wilson (2016) conceptualized the core traits of transformative leaders. The traits include promoting trust and honest dialogue to create a safe environment, being open to new ideas, giving honest feedback, and being willing to be a change agent. The data revealed that the participants did engage in challenging conversations. These conversations were described as hard but honest and provided the opportunity for future conversations. The willingness to engage in these challenging conversations contributed to the continued development of the leaders' critical consciousness.

Data gathered from the participants provided evidence of the three tenets of transformative leadership that were the focus of this study. All of the participants shared experiences and challenges that indicated their desire for deep and equitable change (Tenet 1). The lived experiences shared by the participants also indicated their work to acknowledge and understand their own personal power and privilege (Shields, 2018). This understanding of personal power and privilege is the beginning step of addressing inequitable distribution of power (Tenet 3). Many of the challenges faced by the participants demonstrated their moral courage (Tenet 8), such as entering into challenging conversations or deciding to ensure a quality and equitable education for a student, which may not have been supported by the adults involved in the situation.

The findings of this research study contribute to the understanding and development of critical consciousness. Previous studies on critical consciousness focused on adolescents and different groups of adults such as teachers of English as a

second language. This study further advances the knowledge of critical consciousness with the focus on principals and assistant principals in suburban school districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. The study examined the lived experiences of principals and assistant principals who provided the opportunity to understand and develop their critical consciousness. Reflections of the participants provided insight into how the experiences impacted the understanding of their personal biases, values, beliefs, power, and privilege.

Limitations

While all of the participants met the necessary criteria, the researcher leveraged personal relationships to recruit seven of the nine participants. These preexisting relationships helped increase trust during the interviews and may have led to the participants being willing to be more vulnerable and share more personal experiences. The personal relationships may have also led to inflated responses on the CCS tool. The participants may have responded in a manner to reflect the researcher's thoughts and perspectives rather than their own.

All of the interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom. Through the use of virtual platforms to conduct the interviews, there were limitations to what could be observed from body language and from an authentic person-to-person connection.

An additional limitation to this study was that all of the participants were White. The perspective of a school leader who is a person of color may have provided more diverse experiences and perspectives to add to the body of data.

Recommendations

Critical consciousness has been studied with a range of different groups, such as youth and their likelihood to vote or take part in sociopolitical actions, racial and ethnic minority groups, school leaders in urban settings, Christian groups, and teachers of a second language. But critical consciousness has not been specifically studied with school principals and assistant principals who lead in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. The results of this study lead to recommendations for professional development for educators, improved practice, and further research.

Recommendations for improved practices. The findings of this study indicate the importance of providing not only school leaders, but all educators, with the opportunity and time to reflect on their personal experiences to better understand their personal critical consciousness. This effort will help all educators to better identify their values, biases, beliefs, power, and privilege to provide all students with the opportunity for an equitable education. The deeper awareness of their own critical consciousness will provide a foundation to analyze current curriculum and classroom practices in order to create a culturally responsive educational experiences for all students. To provide the opportunity for continuous reflection of lived experiences, the plans for professional learning experiences should be developed with long-term goals and agendas. The learning experiences need to be provided to not only building administrators but all district leaders, directors, superintendents, assistant superintendents, and teachers in the recognition of what develops their critical consciousness.

Professional development, specifically, needs to focus on providing the time and structure for individuals to reflect on their lived experiences. Reflections should be

focused on how those experiences have created an awareness and development of critical consciousness and how those biases, values, beliefs, power, and privilege may impact all aspects of their role as an educational leader. This understanding will help to identify the impact on leaders' decision-making that may influence marginalized populations of students and staff and help with interactions with individuals from different races, cultures, and experience, as well as to help with the review of the curriculum that is currently being used within their settings. School leaders are often not provided with the structure and time to reflect on all of their lived experiences. Additionally, college and university training programs for educational leadership should consider this component of the development and understanding of one's critical consciousness as part of the coursework for future leaders.

Recommendations for policy analysis and development. A potential area for policy analysis and development based on the findings of this study is in the area of human resources. Specifically, it is recommended that school districts develop a policy that has a consistent interview protocol that is utilized across all departments and buildings within the district. As a best practice, the interviews should include questions focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additionally, the candidates might be asked questions specifically focusing on the work and process to identify their personal biases, beliefs, values, and the understanding of their power and privilege.

Recommendations for further studies. There are implications for future research in the area of critical consciousness not only within the educational field but in other areas as well. Eight of the nine participants in this study shared the impact of participation in sports, whether as an athlete, coach, or both, on their understanding of

individuals with different backgrounds and their lived experiences. The finding of sports as a key element in understanding one's critical consciousness was unexpected in this study. Future research could focus on the impact of participation in sports as an athlete or a coach on the development and understanding of one's critical consciousness.

This study specifically focused on school principals and assistant principals in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. Additionally, the research with a specific focus on all communities, rural, urban, and suburban may provide additional data on the critical consciousness of school leaders based on the setting of schools in different communities.

One participant in the study shared the use of mindfulness to consciously reflect on the events of the day or a specific situation. The use of mindfulness was not an expected response and had not appeared in the research literature on critical consciousness. A potential area of research to further enrich the study of critical consciousness is the use of mindfulness to develop a deeper understanding of one's personal biases, values, beliefs, power, and privilege.

Conclusion

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2044, the projection is that no one race, or any one ethnic group, will be greater than 50% of the total population (Colby & Ortman, 2015). School and district leaders are becoming more aware of these changing demographics and the educational implications (Brown, 2018). In order for school leaders to effectively address these changing demographics and ensure an equitable education for all students, they need to begin with the understanding and development of their personal critical consciousness.

The development and understanding of one's critical consciousness is a process that continues to develop and change over time based on experiences. This understanding is the beginning for transformative leadership to lead for social justice in the suburban school districts with changing demographics of the student population. According to Shields (2010), transformative leadership recognizes the need to begin with critical reflection and analysis. The participants in this study demonstrated through their responses, the importance of reflecting and analyzing personal and professional experiences to develop a deeper self-awareness. Next, the transformative leader moves through enlightened action to change wrongdoings and to ensure that all members of an organization are provided with "as level of a playing field as possible" (Shields, 2010, p. 15). This level playing field is not only in regard to access but to academic, social, and civic outcomes (Shields, 2010).

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological research study was to identify the level of critical consciousness of K-12 school principals and assistant principals in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above. The study also sought to understand the leaders' predisposition toward social justice in an effort to redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse student population. Nine school leaders (six school principals and three assistant principals) representing four districts in Monroe County, New York participated in semi-structured interviews. This study adds to the knowledge base of the studies of critical consciousness by exploring the lived experiences of leaders in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above and how those experiences contributed to their existing level of critical consciousness. The participants in this study, through the reflection and

descriptions of their lived experiences, were developing and understanding their critical consciousness, which included understanding their privilege, values, belief, biases, and power. The findings of this study were derived from the following research questions:

1. In what ways do suburban K-12 leaders (principals and assistant principals) describe their understanding of critical consciousness?

2. What life experiences have informed K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals of their level of critical consciousness?

3. What have been the experiences of K-12 suburban school principals and assistant principals who have attempted to implement change of a social justice nature?

Many categories and themes emerged from the data. The four categories relating to the development and understanding of one's critical consciousness were: (a) social justice, (b) understanding and developing critical consciousness, (c) experiences, and (d) challenges. The themes represented a range of lived experiences of the participants that impacted the development and understanding of their critical consciousness.

The first category, social justice, emerged as a category that presented multiple definitions and understandings of social justice when the participants were asked to define social justice. The four themes identified under this category were (a) equity/ equality, (b) access, (c) inclusion, and (d) reflexive.

Through the data analysis, the second category that emerged was understanding and developing critical consciousness. The themes identified in this second category were (a) reflection, (b) self-awareness, and (c) learning from experiences. The third category that emerged from the data was experiences that contributed to the development

and understanding of critical consciousness. The three themes of this third category were (a) family, (b) education, and (c) work experiences. One unexpected theme that emerged in this third category was sports. This theme of sports included participating as an athlete as well as coaching. The fourth and final category was challenges with the themes of personal and professional.

The limitations of this study relating to (a) the researcher utilizing personal relationships and connections to recruit the participants, (b) all of the interviews were conducted virtually, (c) the researcher held the same position as some of the participants as well as working in the same district, and (d) lack of racial diversity in the individuals who participated in the study. As a result of these limitations, it is recommended that future studies include a more diverse population of participants in an effort to gain varied perspectives on the development of one's critical consciousness as well as conducting the study in rural and urban settings.

The results of this study suggest that each experience of an individual impacts their understanding of their critical consciousness. The recommendations include providing the opportunity and time for all educators to reflect on their personal experiences in an effort to better understand their values, beliefs, power, and privilege. This consistent time for reflection will assist leaders to be better prepared to provide all students with opportunities for an equitable education. The study addressed the problem of the limited understanding of one's critical consciousness on part of school leaders. However, based on the findings from this study, the perspective of the researcher changed from a *limited* understanding of one's critical consciousness by school leaders to a *true* understanding that this development and awareness is truly a process.

Upon the completion of this study, the intended next step is to develop a professional development model for educators in the area of critical consciousness. This model would be developed for long-term learning as a result of the findings of this study. The findings indicate that each new experience of an individual provides a new opportunity for reflection, learning, and taking action for change. College and university training programs for educational leadership should also consider a component to provide candidates with the opportunity to reflect and learn from their experiences to develop an understanding of personal critical consciousness.

One's understanding of self is crucial—not only for educational leaders—but for all educators, especially as the demographics of the student populations continue to change. The changing demographics of the student population throughout the United States will require educational leaders to critically analyze all systems, structures, curriculum, and procedures within their educational settings to ensure that all students have access to equitable education and a successful future.

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Appendix A

PsychTest Critical Consciousness Scale Use Approval

Dear Critical Consciousness Scale User,

A formatted copy of the *Critical Consciousness Scale* (CCS) is publicly available for your use. A couple of notes may help guide your use of the measure.

1. All items are positively scored except for item number 9. Item number 9 should be reverse scored.
2. The CCS is comprised of three subscales:
    i. *Critical Reflection: Perceived Inequality* (Scale items 1-8). This subscale measures youths' critical analysis of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and gendered constraints on educational and occupational opportunity.
    ii. *Critical Reflection: Egalitarianism* (Scale items 9-13). This subscale measures youths' endorsement of societal equality - all groups treated as equals - within society.
    iii. *Critical Action: Sociopolitical Participation* (Scale items 14-22). This subscale measures youths' participation in social and political activities to change perceived inequalities.

    These subscales correspond to the factors detailed in Tables 2 & 3 of the original manuscript.

3. Higher scores on each CCS subscale reflect a greater degree of critical reflection or critical action, depending on the subscale in question. Total scores for the CCS should **not** be calculated, because the three CCS subscales are relatively distinct.

Thank you for your interest in the CCS. If you have any questions regarding the measure or the article, please feel free to contact the first author, Matthew A. Diemer, either by phone at ___-___-____ or by email at _____@msu.edu

Sincerely,

Matthew A. Diemer, Ph.D.

Appendix B

Email -Letter of Introduction to Potential Participants

Dear (Name of principal or assistant principal),

My name is Lucia Kaempffe, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Doctorate of Executive Leadership in Education Program at St. John Fisher College.

My dissertation is entitled: **Assessing K-12 Leaders for Their Level of Critical Consciousness and Social Justice Predisposition in an Effort to Address Inequity in Suburban (Public) School Districts.**

My dissertation focuses on **suburban** school districts in Monroe County, New York, and as such, I am seeking principals and assistant principals from suburban (public) school districts to participate in this study.

Participant Qualifications: Participants must be K-12 building leaders in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above and in the role of a building leader (principal or assistant principal) for at least two years.

Purpose of this Study: The purpose of this study is to identify the critical consciousness of K-12 building leaders (principals and assistant principals) in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above and to understand their predisposition toward social justice in an effort to redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse student population.

This study has two parts:
1. An online assessment of critical consciousness (up to 15 minutes) and
2. An in-person or video conference (up to 60 minutes)

If questions exist, you may contact me at: (___) ___-____ or email me. at: _____@sjfc.edu.

If you are willing to participate, please respond to this email, simply stating your intent to participate. Also, if you have fellow principals or assistant principals who might be interested in participating in this study, please include their name and email address in your response to this email.

Thank you for your consideration!
Sincerely,
Lucia Kaempffe, Doctoral Candidate
Doctorate of Executive Leadership in Education Program, St. John Fisher College

Appendix C

Letter of Intent to Participate

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Doctorate in Executive Leadership program in the School of Education at St. John Fisher College (SJFC) in Rochester, New York. As part of conducting research for my doctoral dissertation, I am interested in learning about the critical consciousness of K-12 principals and assistant principals in suburban districts in Monroe County in New York State. The purpose of this letter is to ask for your participation as a principal or assistant principal in a suburban district in Monroe County in New York State, by being a participant in the study.

To participate in the study, you will be asked to complete a 22-item Critical Consciousness Scale, which measures your critical consciousness in three subcategories. At the end of the Critical Consciousness Scale, you will be asked for your willingness to participate in a semi-structured interview. The interview will last no more than 1 hour and will be held in a location that is convenient for you. To be considered for participation in the study, please provide your name and contact information at the end of the survey. There are no risks to you. Even if you agree to participate, you may withdraw at any time. There will be no identifying information reported and no contact will be made with your school district.

Thank you for your willingness to consider participating in this important research. Your experiences and insights are valuable and could assist future school leaders.

Lucia Kaempffe
Doctoral Student: St. John Fisher College

Appendix D

Qualtrics XM Survey/Critical Consciousness Scale

Thank you for your interest in this study.

By responding to the information contained in this document, you provide consent for the information to be used in a research study entitled "Assessing K-12 Leaders for the Level of Critical Consciousness and Social Justice Predisposition in an Effort to Address Inequity in Suburban School Districts."

Critical Consciousness Scale

Instructions: Please respond to the following statements by circling how much you agree or disagree with each statement. For each statement, choose "Strongly Disagree," "Mostly Disagree," "Slightly Disagree," "Slightly Agree," "Mostly Agree," or "Strongly Agree."

Strongly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6

1. Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get a good high school education

1	2	3	4	5	6

2. Poor children have fewer chances to get a good high school education

1	2	3	4	5	6

3. Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get good jobs

1	2	3	4	5	6

4. Women have fewer chances to get good jobs

1	2	3	4	5	6

5. Poor people have fewer chances to get good jobs

      1   2   3   4   5   6

6. Certain racial or ethnic groups have fewer chances to get ahead

      1   2   3   4   5   6

7. Women have fewer chances to get ahead

      1   2   3   4   5   6

8. Poor people have fewer chances to get ahead

      1   2   3   4   5   6

9. It is a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom

      1   2   3   4   5   6

10. It would be good if groups could be equal

      1   2   3   4   5   6

11. Group equality should be our ideal

      1   2   3   4   5   6

12. All groups should be given an equal chance in life

      1   2   3   4   5   6

13. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally

      1   2   3   4   5   6

Instructions: Please respond to the following statements by circling how often you were involved in each activity in the last year. For each statement, choose "Never did this," "Once or twice last year," "Once every few months," "At least once a month," or "At least once a week."

Never did this	Once or twice last year	Once every few months	At least once a month	At least once a week
1	2	3	4	5

14. Participated in a civil rights group or organization

    1   2   3   4   5

15. Participated in a political party, club, or organization

    1   2   3   4   5

16. Wrote a letter to a school or community newspaper or publication about a social or political issue

    1   2   3   4   5

17. Contacted a public official by phone, mail, or email to tell him/her how you felt about a particular social or political issue

    1   2   3   4   5

18. Joined in a protest march, political demonstration, or political meeting

    1   2   3   4   5

19. Worked on a political campaign

    1   2   3   4   5

20. Participated in a discussion about a social or political issue

    1   2   3   4   5

21. Signed an email or written petition about a social or political issue

    1   2   3   4   5

22. Participated in a human rights, gay rights, or women's rights organization or group

    1   2   3   4   5

The second stage of the research study is face-to-face, phone, or video conferencing interviews. If you are willing to participate in the second stage, please fill in the information below.

First and Last Name

Email Address

School District

Current Role

Number of Years in Current Role

Age   Gender

Appendix E

Preplanned Interview Questions

- Questions to gather background information: Where participant grew up?
  Description of path to become a district or school leader.

- How do you define social justice? Diversity?

- Describe the student population in your school/district.

- Have you personally ever experienced a social justice situation? If so, can
  you describe that experience?

- How have you created an awareness of your personal critical consciousness:
  the development of your understanding of personal biases, beliefs, values,
  power and privilege?

- Did you foresee any equity, diversity or inclusion issues in your setting? If so,
  how did you respond to those challenges? What did you learn? What did you
  learn about yourself? Would you have done anything differently? Why?

- Follow-up questions will be developed based on responses on the CCS.

Appendix F

Alignment Between the Research Questions and the Interview Questions

Research Questions, Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Question
1. In what ways do suburban K-12 leaders (principals and assistant principals) describe their understanding of critical consciousness as it relates to addressing inequities in the school setting?	1. How do you define social justice? Diversity? 2. Describe your understanding of critical consciousness? 3. How have you created an awareness of your personal critical consciousness: the development of our understanding of personal biases, beliefs, values, power and privilege?
2. What life experiences have informed K-12 suburban principals and assistant principals of their level of critical consciousness?	4. Describe your background. Childhood, education, path to becoming a school leader. 5. Have you experienced a social justice situation? If so, can you describe that experience?
3. What have been the experiences of K-12 suburban principals and assistant principals who have attempted to implement change of a social justice nature?	6. Describe your school and community population. 7. Did you foresee any equity, diversity or inclusion issues in your setting? If so, how did you respond to those challenges? What did you learn? What did you learn about yourself? Would you have done anything differently? Why?

Appendix G

Informed Consent Form

ST. JOHN
FISHER
COLLEGE

St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board

Statement of Informed Consent for Adult Participants

Assessing K-12 Leaders' Level of Critical Consciousness and Social Justice
Predisposition in an Effort to Address Inequity in Suburban School Districts

SUMMARY OF KEY INFORMATION:
- You are being asked to be in a research study of understanding the lived experiences. As with all research studies, participation is voluntary.
- This study seeks to identify the critical consciousness of K-12 principals and assistant principals in suburban districts with graduation rates of 90% or above and to understand their predisposition toward social justice in an effort to redesign and implement educational structures that attend more holistically to a diverse student population.

  The research questions of the study are:
   - In what ways do suburban K-12 leaders (principals and assistant principals) describe their understanding of critical consciousness?

   - What life experiences inform K-12 suburban principals and assistant principals to their level of critical consciousness?

   - What have been the experiences of K-12 suburban principals and assistant principals who have attempted to implement change of a social justice nature?

- Not less than six people will take part in this study. The results will be used for the completion of the doctoral dissertation in Executive Leadership.

- If you agree to take part in this study, you will be involved in this study in the following manner: 1. Completion of the Critical Consciousness Measure (approximately 10 minutes); and 2. Potentially a one hour-face-to-face, phone or video-conferencing semi-structured interview.
- This study is believed to be minimal risk. You will be seated for approximately 10 minutes to complete the CCS measure and approximately one hour for the one-on-one interview.
- As a participant in this study, your experiences may contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of critical consciousness of K-12 suburban principals and assistant principals and their predisposition for engaging in social justice work within the school setting. You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study, will help advance the knowledge and understanding of critical consciousness of school leaders.

DETAILED STUDY INFORMATION (some information may be repeated from the summary above):

You are being asked to be in a research study of the critical consciousness of K-12 suburban principals and assistant principals. This study is being conducted at a private location convenient to yourself to ensure confidentiality and comfort. This study is being conducted by Lucia Kaempffe, a St. John Fisher College Ed.D. executive Leadership student under the supervision of Dr. Linda Hickmon Evans at St. John Fisher College.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are a K-12 principal or assistant principal in a suburban district in Monroe County.

Please read this consent form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be in the study.

PROCEDURES:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:
1. Completion of the Critical Consciousness Scale.
2. The interview will take approximately one hour.
3. During the interview, the researcher and you will be seated throughout the duration of the session. You may request to stand at any time if you feel more comfortable.
4. During the one-on-one interview in person, on the telephone or via video-conferencing, you will be asked question to solicit your lived experiences around critical consciousness, your understanding of critical consciousness and its impact in the school setting and the experiences with implementing social justice changes or initiatives. The researcher, Lucia Kaempffe, may ask for details of your experiences or follow-up questions to gain better insight into your lived experiences. The questions may solicit uncomfortable feelings. You may stop the interview at any time.
5. The interview will take place in a private location that is convenient for you and to ensure confidentiality.
6. Your responses are confidential and identifying information such as your name, address and workplace as well as specific details of your experiences will not be share with anyone. When presented in writing or otherwise, it will be in the aggregate to maintain your anonymity.

7. If you decide to withdraw and stop the interview at any time, you will not be questioned, punished or penalized and the information will not be used in the study.
8. You will only be requested to complete the Critical Consciousness Scale and participate in 1 one-on-one interview.
9. During the interview, your audio responses to questions will be digitally recorded, and handwritten notes will be taken by the researcher. You may be asked to clarify your responses or to provide more details of your experiences.
10. You will be informed prior to beginning the interview that digital audio-recording will be used for which you must consent.
11. You will be given the choice to agree to the audio-recording at the end of this form.
12. The digital audio-recording will be transcribed by the researcher using transcription software for later analysis.
13. The digital audio-recording and transcription is not required to participate in this study.
14. You may opt out of the recording and still participate in the study. Handwritten notes will also be conducted by the researcher. Identifiable research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

COMPENSATION/INCENTIVES:

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The records of this study will be kept private and your identity will be protected. In any sort of report the researcher(s) might publish, no identifying information will be included. The only exception to maintaining confidentiality would be if you indicate that there is immediate and serious danger to the health or physical safety of yourself or others. In that case, a professional may have to be contacted. We would always talk to you about this first.

Identifiable research records will be stored securely and only the researcher(s) will have access to the records. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office or on a password protected laptop of the researcher. All study records with identifiable information, including IRB documents, tapes, transcripts, and consent forms will be destroyed by shredding or deleting after 3 years.

Interviews will be recorded or handwritten. Should you agree to be recorded, you will be assigned a number to identify you. Recordings will be sent to Rev.com for transcription. No personal identifying information will be sent to the transcription company. Transcripts from recorded information will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. Actual recordings will be stored in an external drive that will also be stored in a locked file cabinet. Both paper transcripts and electronic recordings will be destroyed after three year.

The data collected in this study as well as the results of the research can be used for scientific purposes and may be published (in ways that will not reveal who you are). An anonymized version of the data from this study may be make publicly accessible, for example via the Open Science Framework (osf.io), without obtaining written consent. The anonymized data can be used for re-analysis but also for additional analyses, by the same or other researchers. The

purpose and scope of this secondary use is not foreseeable. Any personal information that can directly identify an individual will be removed before data and results are made public. Personal information will be protected closely so no one will be able to connect individual responses and any other information that identifies an individual. All personally identifying information collected about an individual will be stored separately from all other data.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:
Participation in this study is voluntary and requires your informed consent. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. John Fisher College. If you decide to participate, you are free to skip any question that is asked. You may also withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

CONTACTS, REFERRALS AND QUESTIONS:
The researchers(s) conducting this study: Lucia Kaempffe. If you have questions, **you are encouraged** to contact the researcher(s) at _____@sjfc.edu or ___-___-____. The chairperson overseeing the research is Dr. Linda Evans at _____@sjfc.edu.

The Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study/or if you feel that your rights as a participant (or the rights of another participant) have been violated or caused you undue distress (physical or emotional distress), please contact the SJFC IRB administrator by phone during normal business hours at (___) ___-____ or irb@sjfc.edu.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT:

I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understood the above information. I consent to voluntarily participate in the study.
Signature:_____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

Retain this section only if applicable:
I agree to be audio recorded/ transcribed _____ *Yes* _____*No If no, I understand that the researcher will [explain alternative to audio recording, if any. If no alternative, state this clearly]*.

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

Please keep a copy of this informed consent for your records