Exploring the Nature of Race-Related Guilt

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In a hermeneutic phenomenology study, the main purpose of which was to explore how White graduate students made meaning of being White, race-related guilt was found to be a prominent emotion. This article explores race-related guilt and suggests liberation therapy as a counseling tool to transform guilt to positive action.

En un estudio interpretativo y fenomenologico que tuvo por propósito estudiar como estudiantes graduados crearon significado de ser Blancos, se encontro que la culpa racial fue una emoción prominente. Este artículo explora la culpa racial y sugiere a la terapia de liberación como una herramienta para transformar la culpa a la acción positiva.

Throughout history, societies have constructed salient identifiers by which people were divided into groups. Religion, nationalism, wealth, gender, and caste have been but a few of the identifiers that have controlled whether a group or individual has influence or is deemed marginal. The concept of race, another salient identifier, was constructed through Western educational, religious, and political traditions (Hannaford, 1996; Jones, 1972; Kovel, 1984). According to Hannaford, racial thought is almost entirely an invention of Western writers. Sowell (1994) stated that "race as a social concept is a powerful force uniting and dividing people" (p. 6). Yet, in the United States, Whites have only recently begun to consider themselves racial beings (Helms, 1993; Terry, 1975). Traditionally, only "others" had a racial designation. Although Whites constructed the social significance of race, it was considered something attributable to only individuals who were not White. As the dominant race in the United States, Whites considered themselves "normal." Heidegger, however, wrote "That which is presumably 'closest' is by no means that which is at the smallest distance 'from us'" (1927/1962, p. 141), meaning that assumptions about others may in fact provide important insights about ourselves. Efforts to assist Whites in realizing that they are racial beings and to contend with the emotions that accompany this realization must be undertaken to eliminate oppression from society. Once Whites realize their own "racialness," the threat or misunderstanding of the racial "other" can dissipate (Helms, 1993). Eliminating racism will require Whites to connect with their race, to make meaning

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of that connection by understanding the accompanying emotions, and to move on to take positive actions. "One wishes that Americans–White Americans– would read, for their own sakes, this record and stop defending themselves against it. Only then will they be enabled to change their lives" (Baldwin, 1965/1998, pp. 320–321).

This study was part of a larger study, the purpose of which was to explore how 6 White graduate students who were soon to enter the counseling and student affairs professions and who were concerned about racism made meaning of their Whiteness. Specifically, this article explores participants' struggles with race-related guilt and offers means by which counselors and educators can help White people come to terms with and learn from guilt.

literature review

There are a myriad of studies in the literature on the complex construct of race and racism. This literature includes, but is not limited to, that which validates the existence of racism (Axelson, 1985; Ezekiel, 1995; Griffin, 1996; Hacker, 1992; Hannaford, 1996; Kovel, 1984), defines race (Banks & Banks, 1989; Katz, 1978; Phinney, 1996), describes the effects of racism on people of color (Garrod & Larimore, 1997; Grier & Cobbs, 1968/1992; Haley, 1964; Morrison, 1970; Schoem, 1991), explores the effects of racism on White people (Bowser & Hunt, 1996; Ignatiev, 1995; McLaurin, 1987; Terry, 1975), illuminates racial issues in business and organizations (Graves, 1997; Reed, 1997) and in education and counseling (Sue, 1981; Tierney, 1993), explores within- and between-racial group oppression (Berman, 1994; Harvey, 1995; Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Keith & Herring, 1991), examines racial and biracial identity (Carter, 1997; Chiawei O'Hearn, 1998; Funderburg, 1994; Helms, 1992, 1993, 1995; McBride, 1996; Reddy, 1997), critiques the social construction of racism and how it is perpetuated (Burr, 1995; Cose, 1997; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996; Omi & Winant, 1994; Sleeter, 1996), and offers suggestions for eliminating racism (Banks, 1991; Katz, 1978; Kivel, 1996).

In this literature, there are many definitions of *racism*. Many authors, however, acknowledge racism as "power plus privilege" (Helms, 1993; McIntosh, 1989, 1992; Tatum, 1996). Racism is made up of individual acts, institutional advantages, and cultural practices (Grande, 1993; Jones, 1972). Whites, as the dominant group in the United States, "collectively have power" (McEwen, 1996, p. 193) to oppress other groups. In general, racism is a White phenomenon acted on non-Whites for the benefit of Whites.

Several authors have argued that racism is a form of mental illness or a state of unhealthiness (Dennis, 1981; Katz, 1978). Whites who acknowledge their individual and group membership and their responsibility for racism can solicit feelings of guilt often referred to as race-related guilt (Baldwin, 1965/1998;

Helms, 1993; Howard, 1993; Seldon, 1993; Tatum, 1994). This guilt response, however, can be a step toward accepting responsibility for racism and then acting to dismantle it.

Guilt has been defined as an emotion that surfaces when personal value systems have been violated (Cavanaugh, 1989). Guilt is brought about by a personal experience that one has control over. Cavanaugh noted that guilt is often confused with shame. Contrary to guilt, shame is a general negative feeling influenced by the opinions of others. Guilt maintains that "I have done something bad;" shame maintains that "I am bad." Furthermore, Cavanaugh wrote that anger is often used to camouflage shame and that the emotions of anger, shame, and guilt are often intertwined.

Guilt as it relates specifically to racism has been explored in educational, psychological, and counseling literature (Helms, 1993; Howard, 1993; Seldon, 1993; Tatum, 1994). These authors noted that race-related guilt is a prevalent emotion for White people. In her extensive work on racial identity development, Helms (1993, 1995) described the emotion of guilt as an aspect of the process by which Whites come to abandon racist attitudes and behaviors. According to Helms, White people begin to recognize the moral dilemma of being White. They appreciate and enjoy its privileges, but realize those privileges are not extended to all people, and in particular are denied (overtly and covertly) to those who are not White. Howard noted that guilt comes as a result of cognitive dissonance, "conflicting realities that do not fit together easily in our conscious awareness" (p. 38). Tatum (1994) noted that the failure of our educational systems to highlight White role models who work to eliminate racism adds to the general negative feelings and specifically guilt feelings many White people feel in regard to their race.

The results of this hermeneutic phenomenology study further illuminate the lived experience of race-related guilt and demonstrate that the negative feelings of race-related guilt can be transformed into positive action.

methodology

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a research methodology to study the nature of lived experience. Phenomenologists seek greater understanding into a phenomenon as it is experienced, not as it is conceptualized (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the essence of the phenomenon is assumed to be veiled or implicit and must be explored to be better understood. Just as Hermes interpreted the Greek gods to mortals, the researcher's role is "to come to a deeper understanding of what persons go through as they conduct their day-to-day life in the language of everyday life" (Hultgren, 1989, p. 50). Hermeneutic phenomenology brings implicitness to explicitness through phenomenological

deconstruction, reflection, and hermeneutic recovery. The researcher, as the interpreter, is not an objective observer but an active ingredient in the research process and as such is referred to in the first person.

Unlike structuralists who believe that underlying structures are the truth about the world (Burr, 1995), hermeneutic phenomenologists believe that through reflection, exploration, and the examination of language at work, a phenomenon as it is lived can be better understood "just as it is itself" (Gutman, 1963, p. 221). Standards for interpretive research require that the participants confirm the researcher's interpretation. Steps for conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological study are (a) turning to a phenomenon to which the researcher is seriously committed, (b) investigating experience as it is lived rather than how it is conceptualized, (c) reflecting on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon, (d) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting, (e) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon, and (f) balancing the research context by considering the parts within the whole (van Manen, 1990).

Participants were first- and second-year White graduate students enrolled in a college student personnel program at a large research university in a mid-Atlantic state. Eight out of 20 agreed to participate. Because of time limitations of 2 of the participants, 6 were selected to participate in the study. Three were first-year students, and 3 were second-year students; 2 were male, and 4 were female. I gave them the pseudonyms Kurt, Joan, Alice, Ann, William, and Elizabeth. I met with them five to six times individually from September 1993 to February 1994. Each meeting lasted 45 to 120 minutes. I recorded and then transcribed the conversations.

At the first and third conversations, I requested that participants bring with them a reflection piece (something that would illuminate their lived experience to me). Reflection pieces included pictures, written reflections, poems, a doll, and a soccer ball. During the first conversation, I also asked each participant to "tell me your story," then to "tell me what is important to you," and finally "tell me your thoughts on race." During subsequent conversations, I asked the participants to discuss their ethnicity and its meaningfulness to them; the racial climate at work and at school; whether they were proud or glad to be White, or both; and White privilege and what a world without oppression would look like. If more than one participant initiated a discussion on a topic, I asked the other participants to discuss it too. These topics included the influence of race on the journey to and from school and race-related guilt. During the first conversation, 3 participants brought up race-related guilt without being prompted. I then later brought the topic up with the other participants.

Transcripts were read several times, and I began to grasp emerging themes. Van Manen (1990) described themes as elements that occur frequently in the text. They are not stand-alone elements, but rather strands woven together throughout the fabric of the phenomenon. After the fourth reading of the written transcripts, I was sufficiently familiar with them to expose many examples of the identified

themes. I then convened a group of six student affairs professionals who engaged in a "human science dialogue" for collaborative analysis (van Manen, 1990, p. 101). After reading many of the transcripts, the student affairs professionals confirmed the trustworthiness of the emerging themes and added insight into the meanings that lay inherent in the lived experience of the participants.

Next began the essence of the hermeneutic phenomenologist's interpretations—the writing and rewriting of the exposed themes (van Manen, 1990). Veiled meaning was unveiled as I wrote and rewrote about the themes. With each writing, a layer of the lived experience became more clearly exposed and better understood.

A draft of the analysis was given to each participant. I met with each participant to assess whether my interpretations were accurate. They all agreed my analysis made clearer the meaning of their life experiences.

results and discussion

The overarching theme of these participants' lived experience of being White was that of meaningful connections (contrary to the myth of the independent individual). These participants described being connected to family, place, race, people of color, and a career goal. Words denoting connections were found frequently in the transcripts. They included "bridging," "close to," "common ground," "bonding," "joining," "unity," "cementing," "dependent," "gripped together," and others. Though this theme of connection might be expected from the female participants (Gilligan, 1982), the men also described their lives in these terms. This theme of connection was not valid for all relationships, however. It was found that the more the participants connected to people of color, the more they had to disconnect from racist friends and family members and segregated institutions. They also experienced a disconnection from a positive sense of self in the form of race-related guilt, the concern of this article.

Although only 3 participants discussed race-related guilt before I asked them about it, all participants agreed that race-related guilt was a prominent aspect of their lives. The fabric of race-related guilt for the participants was manifested from varied intersecting causes: having White privilege, something they individually had done, and something their ancestors had done. Participants also noted that race-related guilt brought them increased insight.

white privilege

Guilt was felt in response to participants' acknowledgement of being privileged, for having advantages based solely on the color of their skin. It was a general feeling that was always "at the back of my mind," yet was exacerbated through interactions with people of color.

Elizabeth was the first to mention race-related guilt. In a reflection piece she gave me during our first conversation she wrote,

> So, I feel like a light bulb has gone on for me. I grew up not having to think about being White very often. . . . Today I think about being White all the time. Sometimes I feel guilty, sometimes I feel thankful. Then I feel guilty for feeling thankful.

Elizabeth also described an incident at a baseball game where a White man yelled out, "Are you Chinese? Why don't you just go home," to an Asian American classmate. She responded by feeling incredibly angry: "I just wanted to punch him." She verbally confronted him and later felt guilty that people of color are not immune to such insults.

In describing his experiences at a large urban research institution and in a class in African Resistance Movements, William stated,

> I got a better sense of just what it must be like to not be represented in society. That gave me too [the realization of] the privileges in life that I am represented, that history is my history. I guess in some way that makes me feel guilty. Guilty that for so long I had no idea that all these people felt a different way.

As a reflection piece, William brought in photos of a work group and was appalled that the faces of the African Americans in the group were unrecognizable. William asked, "Is this on purpose? Is technology White technology?"

Ann struggled with the notion of race-related guilt in this way:

> To me feeling guilty about being White is a wasted exercise. Why should I feel guilty over something I don't have any control over? But there are times when I look at White majority society and I really do feel disturbed that I'm part of that oppression whether [or not] it is conscious on my part. I don't think I am actively going out of my way to oppress anyone, but I know as part of the culture that I may be unconsciously upholding things that are oppressing other people.

In discussing her displeasure with the "pedagogy" of her high school Alice stated,

> I think a lot of it is my own guilt. I was angry at a school system when really I was still privileged. . . . I think the kind of White guilt that I feel on a regular basis is more like a discomfort for the fact that I have something that other people don't.

There was significant reflection and conversation surrounding whether race-related guilt was appropriately named. Alice brought forth the concept of guilt in a written reflection on an undergraduate English class that went to hear a Native American poet. The poet stated that she did not want White people to help her people because it was not sincere. After hearing that, Alice wrote that she felt angry and then guilty. I asked Alice to speak more about what she felt. She paused and then stated,

> I think guilt is a poor word to use for it, maybe discomfort, White discomfort, I don't know. I feel White guilt, but if I sat down and actually tried to define what I felt, then guilt wouldn't come to terms. White guilt is a societal term that I use to express how I feel. But if I were to take away the societal term and just put how I feel into words, guilt wouldn't come in.

SOMETHING I DID

Guilt also was a response to an act (or a failure to act). Elizabeth discussed two incidents in which she failed to confront the racist remarks of friends and felt guilty for not doing so. One incident was at a wedding of a friend.

> Not only was she bad, her boyfriend was worse. I didn't say anything and I really wrestled with it. Do I challenge her? Do I challenge this guy I just met? I didn't say what I was thinking. I didn't say anything because I was worried that it would ruin the time for everyone. I came back here and was upset that I didn't. I was mad, because it was important. . . . I felt awful. I don't want to be friends with her anymore. . . . You know, just get away from me. I just can't deal with her. But on the other hand I didn't say anything.

Alice compared general race-related guilt feelings of being White with guilt because of having done something.

> At first I thought I had no control over it. I feel more guilty when I am not aware of the situation. But then, when I realize afterwards, I think I feel more guilty when I do something. "Oh my God, I did this horrible thing" than just for the sake of being White.

Later, she explored with me different nuances of the experience of race-related guilt.

> I have spent a lot of time in the last couple of years with issues of diversity so in some ways that has swayed my guilt a little bit, but feeling guilty for just being born. . . . I think guilt is something you feel, for something you did or said and shouldn't have.

WHAT MY ANCESTORS DID

Two participants experienced race-related guilt for the acts of ancestors. When I asked Joan if she considered herself connected to an ethnicity, she said no and responded, "How can I make sense of ten different things?" Yet, she cited two examples of experiencing guilt related to her being White, one related to her ethnicity. One was while touring Hiroshima, Japan.

> I am a White person and look what happened to these Japanese. How are they looking at me? Gosh, I was a part of this. [I was] trying to make sense that I didn't actually go through it but that was a part of my race. I wondered how much they were attributing things of the past to me currently.

She also described feeling race-related guilt when she visited Israel.

> I was going through a Holocaust exhibit . . . and I don't know if that would be considered race, but being Christian and German, I felt some guilt in that.

For Joan, connecting to her ethnicity only came in the form of guilt.

Ann described her experiences and thoughts regarding race-related guilt in this manner:

> After my grandmother died (she was a pack-rat, saved everything), an aunt was going through her things and found a receipt for the sale of a slave. $200. This was an im-

mense shock to my family. That really disturbed me. . . . I called into question my mother's family. Yet, I was trying to find some compassionate reason for them doing that. . . . I didn't purchase the slave, you see that's the key I think. I didn't but I think I did feel guilty. I think I felt ashamed, probably ashamed. We always thought of ourselves as dirt poor farmers. Before, our poverty kept us from being looked [on] as slave owners. But I felt ashamed, it was like gosh you know, here we believed all our lives that we had never been a part of this system of oppression even though we were from Southern roots. All of a sudden here we are a part of this history of oppression.

USING GUILT TO SPUR GROWTH

Participants believed that race-related guilt was also seen as a part of a process of becoming more aware about racial oppression and thought that the topic deserved more thorough exploration. In this vein, Ann stated,

When I think of guilt I think of an initial stage of White racial development. Is there another level of guilt though? It's one of those terms where it's easy to say and it's become a part of our language in talking about racial identity development. It's one of those things that there is some understanding of, but can we make it clear for others also?

All of the participants noted that the pain of race-related guilt stimulated learning, growth, and change, not only because it would alleviate the pain but also because it was the right and just thing to do. William stated, "Now, [guilt] is motivation for me to try and change at least what I do and challenge people around me."

Baldwin (1965/1998) wrote "No curtain under heaven is heavier than that curtain of guilt and lies behind which [White] Americans hide" (p. 323). How might counselors assist clients to no longer hide from guilt and lies but to learn from and to be motivated by their race-related guilt? Liberation therapy offers a guide for counselors in empowering clients to learn from race-related guilt.

implications

Many counselors work with multicultural support groups that explore multicultural issues or issues of oppression. In addition, many counselors provide diversity training. Although it is rare that a White client would seek individual counseling to deal with overwhelming race-related guilt issues, it is conceivable that a client with presenting issues related to work, career transition, or interpersonal relationships might be struggling with race-related guilt. In such work with White people, the intense nature of race-related guilt must be recognized. To assist Whites in understanding the meaning of and to learn from their guilt, Ivey's (1995) liberation therapy can be a fruitful intervention. Liberation therapy "focuses on helping clients learn to see themselves in relation to cultural/contextual influences" (p. 53). Liberation therapy seeks to move a client from acceptance of oppression to naming oppression (the feeling of guilt), to reflection and redefinition (learning from guilt), to multiperspective

integration (to act on what one has learned from guilt). In addition, I believe forgiveness plays a role in multiperspective integration. I will use conversations with Elizabeth as an example of how liberation therapy can motivate White people to take positive action as a result of their guilt.

NAMING OPPRESSION

Counselors should begin by asking clients to describe the precipitators of guilt so that the client can name or admit the oppression. When do you feel these emotions? Who are you with? Describe any race-related guilt you feel now. Tell a specific story that led you to feel race-related guilt. Describe your emotions when retelling the story. In this study, acts of guilt were described as a "knife stabbing pain," "feeling upset with myself," "feeling awful," "beating myself up," and "[saying to myself] I have no backbone." Clearly, these are descriptions of a loss of a positive sense of self. For the participants, this is lived as "I know better but did not do better." Heidegger (1927/1962) described guilt as a voice that discloses that which we actually are.

I believe that this "knife stabbing pain" of guilt is a moment of grief, an emotional response to a loss. The loss here is the loss of a positive sense of self. Guilt is the consequence of not acting congruently with our values and self-expectations. Obviously, a White person who believes that it is appropriate to tell a racist joke will feel no guilt for having done so. Before there can be a response to guilt, there must be "the connection of individuals characterized by some affective awareness in the other" (Noddings, 1989, p. 184). In other words, before there can be a response to guilt, there must be care. What is significant here is what one who feels guilt decides to do with the emotion of guilt. Some may deny or pretend it does not exist, some may find the guilt pathological and be unable to move from it, and others may learn from the voice of guilt (Helms, 1993; Howard, 1993; Morgaine, 1992; Seldon, 1993). Elizabeth and I realized that although she felt guilty at not confronting racist remarks of friends at a wedding, she did confront racist remarks of a stranger at a baseball game. Why at a baseball game, but not at a wedding? Why a stranger, but not a friend?

REFLECTION AND REDEFINITION

Counselors should ask clients to reflect on what caused their guilt and to distinguish between attitudes and contradictory behavior. Has your culture or family influenced your behavior? Describe behaviors that are yours versus behaviors that are not truly yours. Describe internal and external forces that influence your behavior. Describe inconsistencies in your attitudes and behaviors.

Strobe and Strobe (1992) wrote that the grieving process is "the cognitive act of redefining self and situation, and . . . [the] reshaping [of] internal representation models to align them with changes that have occurred" (p. 7). Reflecting

on the fact that although there was a time when she did not confront racism, there was a time when she did, Elizabeth came to realize that perhaps she was not such a "bad" person. Although other people she knew, who served as role models for her, could have confronted racist remarks at a wedding, according to Helms's (1993) racial identity development theory, Elizabeth was not at that time in a developmental place where she could. Developmentally, she found it easier to confront the racist acts of strangers rather than those of her friends. She was unwilling to risk losing long-term friendships and knew she risked little in confronting a stranger. Knowing this, she now has insight to change her behavior to be congruent with her attitudes and to increase her sense of self.

MULTIPERSPECTIVE INTEGRATION

This step seeks to integrate clients' nonracist attitudes with consistent nonracist behaviors. Explore with clients whether other emotions have replaced their guilt. Have clients describe what they have learned from guilt. How are you different because of your guilt? If a similar situation were to occur tomorrow, what might you do differently? What behaviors can prevent your guilt from returning? What does your insight now call you to do? What can we do to ensure that happens?

Elizabeth has now realigned her expectations of herself and considers strategies for confronting racist acts of people she knows. Should she confront the racist acts of friends at a wedding? She decided that she should. How might she do that next time? How can she visualize herself doing that in the future? What words would she use? By answering these questions, Elizabeth has responded to the voice of guilt. She has realigned the realistic expectations of herself, has decided on an approach she will take during subsequent incidents, and feels more confident of her role in eliminating oppression. She stated,

> It is like a redefining process. . . . I feel that I am not as authentic. [My friend] does not know me. . . . [The commitment of eliminating oppression] is a piece of me. That was the part that was so difficult because I am not really used to censoring myself. . . . [Now] I would never want to set up a person of color, gay, or lesbian to be possibly hurt.

Thus, responding to the voice of guilt has moved Elizabeth from a sense of loss of positive self to a sense of hope and confidence. She described this process as "liberating." Part of what makes this possible is Elizabeth's ability for self-forgiveness. What role does forgiving and apologizing play in learning from race-related guilt?

FORGIVENESS

According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, the study of forgiveness is an emerging field (Heller, 1998). Several recent trends have encouraged this emerg-

ing interest. The first of these is the reconciliation efforts on the part of conflicting factions in South Africa, Rwanda, and Ireland. Second, the increasing recognition of the role forgiveness may hold for some in the healing process from sexual abuse (Bass & Davis, 1988). Authors who write about forgiveness stress that forgiving is a moral choice and does not condone the immoral act (Bass & Davis, 1988; Flanigan as cited in Heller, 1998; Tobin, 1993). An important part of the healing process for a victim is acknowledging one's innocence, in effect forgiving oneself. If the victim decides to forgive the perpetrator, that decision must be for the benefit of the victim. For perpetrators, acknowledging one's responsibility in hurting others opens up the possibility of being forgiven. "Forgiveness requires acts of regret and penitence on the part of the offending person. These acts must be genuine and continuing, and not just done for the purpose of being forgiven" (Gardner as cited in Heller, 1998). In relating forgiveness to guilt, a school counselor wrote,

> There is a forgiveness that absolves us of guilt and seems to lessen our part in a certain event. There is also a deeper quest for forgiveness where we extend ourselves to another in requesting forgiveness. On a superficial level, asking for forgiveness may benefit only the asker. Forgiveness has a truer and deeper meaning that should be treasured by both the person asking for forgiveness and the forgiver. Granting forgiveness is very difficult and complex as it demands a surrender and vulnerability that is often necessary to begin to rebuild relationships. (Truckenmiller, 1994, p. 1)

Forgiveness is possible when good action (not just sincerity of attitude) diminishes the intensity of the bad act for both the asker and forgiver. Regarding race-related guilt for what ancestors did, White persons are the beneficiaries of such racism but also the victims. Many Whites are acting out what family and society have taught them. But once realizing their privilege, guilt emerges. In this instance, White people must "forgive themselves" of the misteaching they have learned, but they must also become responsible for behaving consistently with new attitudes. For White people who experience guilt for having committed a racist act or failing to intervene when witnessing racism, a gesture of asking for forgiveness is necessary to heal the guilt and to assist in eliminating oppression. This gesture can and should be asking for forgiveness of a wronged person by doing one's part to eliminate oppression. One such gesture is committing oneself to an open dialogue. Baldwin (1965/1998) wrote that if White people do not enter dialogues "we will perish in those traps in which we have been struggling for so long" (p. 323). According to Baldwin, for White people this dialogue must "become a personal confession—a cry for help and healing" and for people of color a "personal confession which fatally contains an accusation" (p. 323). Counselors and educators must create opportunities, facilitate, and assist clients in making meaning of such dialogues.

For Elizabeth, self-forgiveness and asking for forgiveness were evidenced not in words (she never spoke the word *forgive*), but in her tone (she was less agitated) and less self-condemning. It is hoped that her espoused plan and

motivation will provide her opportunities to behave in ways consistent with her moral attitudes, to work to eliminate oppression, and metaphorically to ask for forgiveness from those wronged. Certainly, Elizabeth will feel guilt, but, it is hoped, not for the same wrong and with more skill to respond to guilt's lesson.

conclusion

Certainly, the most destructive people to the efforts of creating a just world are those who feel no guilt at having committed oppressive acts or for being the beneficiaries of such acts. This study, however, explored the nature of race-related guilt and found that it can be a prominent emotion for White people and that it emerged as a response to White privilege, for something one's ancestors did, and in response to something the individual did or failed to do. In addition, what people may name as race-related "guilt" ("I did this bad thing") may actually be "shame" ("I am bad because of my privilege and/or because of what my ancestors did"). This study calls for counselors and educators to explore feelings of race-related guilt so that it can be turned into positive action. One tool for counselors to use in accomplishing this is liberation therapy.

   The methodology used in this study, hermeneutic phenomenology, is a method of the possible not the general (these participants' experiences are possible rather than probable experiences for other White persons). Caution should be taken in that the participants in this study (middle-class, White, and educated) might be considered ones of "convenience" (Reid, 1993). Yet, this study brings insight into the prominent emotion of race-related guilt for Whites. Assisting clients and participants to name their guilt, to realign their expectations of themselves with new behaviors, and to integrate these new behaviors into the self can move the world to be healthier and more just.

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